

Have You Ever Wondered
WHY



Mawlānā FEIZEL CHOTHIA

" YOU HAVE NOT TRULY BELIEVED,
UNTIL HAVING QUESTIONED ! "

Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED
WHY



REFLECTIONS ON ASPECTS OF FAITH

COMPILED & EDITED BY
Mawlana FEIZEL CHOTHIA



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' Whosoever is not grateful to people is not grateful to Allah. '

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude in appreciation of the enthusiasm, sincerity and dedication to Islamic re-awakening of the ***Young Muslim Woman's Forum*** without who's support this treatise could not have been accomplished. Special thanks to its co-ordinator, Sister Razina Laher, as well as to my students Sisters Fatima Laher, Fatima Mayet and Faaiza Bhamjee. Their love of Faith is most heartening and inspirational indeed. May Allah, the Exalted, grant them all the best of this world and the hereafter.

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I owe a special debt of gratitude to my wife, Mu'allimah Naeema Chothia, without whose support, encouragement and patience this work would not have been Possible.

Finally, let me add that if this work stimulates a more assertive and active interest in Islamic faith and doctrine amongst young Muslims, I will consider the effort to have been amply rewarded.

Mawlana Feizel Chothia

Mawlana Feizel Chothia has devoted his life to the cause of Islam. Born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1970 he was educated at the *Madrasah Arabiyah Islamiyah* (Dar Al-Ulum Azaadville) institute of traditional Islamic sciences, one of the most well known institutions of Islamic learning in South Africa. He studied under the guidance of the eminent 'Alim (Islamic scholar) Mawlana Hasan Docrat and Shaykh ul-Hadith (Specialist in Prophetic Tradition) Mawlana Fazlur Rahman Azmi and has also acquired a post graduate degree in Islamic Studies under the guidance of the distinguished academic, Prof. Abdur Rahman I. Doi.

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Apart from his formal training and experience, his development as an Islamic scholar within the Western milieu and his intimacy with Western culture and its institutions has served him well in assessing and positively engaging the challenges it poses to Muslims and the Islamic Faith.

He currently lives in Perth where he is engaged in a range of projects in Islamic education, culture, arts and literature.



مَهْدِ

P R E F A C E



All praise is due to Almighty Allah. We praise him and seek his help and forgiveness. And we seek refuge in Allah from shaytan, the Accursed, and from the evil of our own selves and wicked deeds. Whosoever has been guided by Allah, there is none to misguide him. And whosoever has been misguided by Allah, none can guide him. I bear witness that there is no god except Allah, alone, without partner or associate.

And I bear witness that Muhammad [S] is His Servant and Messenger. May Allah, the Exalted, bestow His peace and blessings on Prophet Muhammad [S] , upon his good and pure family, as well as upon all the noble Companions y and upon those who follow them in righteousness until the Day of Reckoning.

Verily, the most truthful speech is the Book of Allah, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad [S] ; while the worst affairs are heretical novelties, for every novelty is a blameworthy innovation. Every innovation (in matters of religion) is misguidance and

every misguidance is in the Fire.

The purpose of compiling this book was to present to the English speaking public an instructive insight into some of the very basic doctrines and principles of Islamic belief in such a manner as may be helpful in removing the doubts and misgivings raised in the sphere of religious belief in these modern, materialistic times in general, and against Islam in particular.

The work of Dr. Mustafa Mahmud has been referred to in no small measure, the contribution of the compiler being negligible indeed. It is hoped that in its new guise it will continue to be of benefit to all.



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ABBREVIATIONS

As a mark of reverence, Muslims are required to invoke the benedictions of Allah upon the Noble Prophets whenever their names are mentioned.

[S] - *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam*
 May the Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him.
 Used whenever the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [S] "ﷺ" is mentioned.

[A] - *alayhis-salam*
 On whom be peace.
 Used Whenever the name of a Prophet is mentioned.

FOREWORD



Who am I? Where do I come from? How did the world and the universe come into being? What am I doing here? Where is here? Where do I go to from here, from this seemingly earth-bound existence? These are existential questions about life and about the meaning and purpose of life. These are questions about the universe and our place in it.

As human beings, we naturally seek meaning? We seek meaning in life, and we seek purpose in existence. Meaning affords our lives value while purpose defines and drives us. It is impossible to be content and at peace, and to be in harmony with the world around us, without satisfying the fundamental need for meaning and purpose.

More importantly, the answers we give to these existential questions shape our worldview - the way in which we see and explain the world around us, and our place in it. Consequently, our worldview not only affects the way we think, but it also determines the way we act and behave, which in turn shapes our circumstances and environment. Our worldview is thus the ultimate determiner of the quality of our life.

However, materialist humanist modernity seeks to ignore these existential questions due to its naïve and self-delusional valorisation of the ego. But the ego (Arabic – ‘Nafs’) has always been known to be skilful in self-deception and deliberately ignoring the ‘terrifying’ reality of being. The ego adopts numerous strategies by which to ignore these existential questions and falsely claim a lordship and an independence it does not

truly possess. The short-sighted strategies it adopts in trying to silence the 'inner voice' (ie. conscience) include : alcohol consumption and drug abuse, consumerism and extravagance, entertainment and sport and media consumption, immersion in literature and academic study for years on end to obtain advanced degrees, even dedicating one's life to family or socio-political causes to the extent that one becomes entirely consumed by them.

Others deceive themselves by assuming that we can never find the answers to these questions, 'hence it is pointless to even try to think about it'. But all these self delusional strategies lead to nothing but disillusionment, depression and spiritual torment.

Even seemingly benign activities like the novel yoga class, or having 'cool' friends, or buying that new car - where the excitement ceases as soon as we take it home and then, almost immediately, turn to something else to fill the emptiness and 'meaninglessness' - these all represent futile attempts by the self deluded ego to snub its' existential dilemma.

The philosopher Socrates rightly concluded so many centuries ago that "An unquestioned life is not worth living!"

This book is an attempt to address those existential challenges in a forthright and balanced manner, to rediscover Islamic religious wisdom and its transcendent truths, and, hand in hand with the reader, celebrate the profound meaning and purpose of a life certainly worth living.





SECTION 1



DID ALLAH CREATE ME ?... IF SO, WHO CREATED ALLAH ?

How do we know that we have been created by some ' God ' ? Is it not possible to explain our origins in some other more logical way?

We also say that Allah (God) does indeed exist. The chief among our proofs is the law of causation which stipulates that every artifact, creature or existent must have been brought into being by a creator, or efficient cause : a piece of fabric points to the weaver, a painting to the painter, an engraving to the engraver. The universe, according to this logic, is the most cogent proof of an All-Powerful Allah who created it. Granted that we believe in this creator, aren't we then entitled, according to the same logic, to ask, " Who created the Creator? Who created that Allah we talk about? " Doesn't our own reasoning and in keeping with the same law of causation lead us to this question ?

Yet another doubt arises. Why do we say that Allah is one ? Why shouldn't there be many Gods sharing the 'work' among themselves ?

Can there be more than one creator with such absolute attributes ?
Can there for example be two absolutely powerful creators?

Lastly, given that Muslims assert that Allah is ‘the’ self evident truth, why then can’t we see Him?



The Origins of the Universe

For everything, like man, that has a beginning in time, there can be only three ways of explaining how it came to be :

- 1) either, it was made, or created, or caused by nothing at all. In other words, it came out of nothing...
- 2) or, it created itself...
- 3) or, it has a creator, cause, or maker outside itself.

*

The first and second explanations are obviously impossible. It is inconceivable for something that has a beginning in time to come out of or be made of nothing at all. It is also inconceivable that it should bring itself into being. The universe and all that is in it, therefore, could not have created itself nor did it come about by chance.

The conclusion then is clear. The universe and all that is in it owes its existence to a Creator or Maker outside itself. You, as a human being, as part of the universe, owe your existence to such a Creator. To say, as many do, that human beings came from or evolved from other creatures or that they originated from water, or that there was a big bang and everything just happened to fall into place, does not really answer the question about the origin of the universe and all that is in it, including human beings. We can therefore conclude that any set of beliefs that denies or does not accept the existence of a Creator of the universe is false.

* Note : To suggest that the universe always was there is a dishonest sophistic deflection and, at the very least, betrays a gross ignorance of even the most basic facts about the origin and nature of the physical universe (see ‘**Science confirms Belief**’ later in this section). For example, it would absurdly imply that the ‘glass of water on the table’ was suspended there through eternity, even before the table and the floor and the earth on which it is located came to be, and even the very physical universe itself.

Who Created the Creator?

Further, regarding the question as to who created the Creator, there is no dilemma or anything of that sort. We admit that Allah is the absolute Creator but then we ask about who created Him, making Him both creator and created in the same sentence, which is a contradiction.

The other side of the question's meaninglessness is that we imagine the Creator as being subject to the laws which govern his creatures. It is Allah who created the law of causation and we cannot consider Him as subject to the law He created. Causation is a law for us who live in space and time. The primary constitutive elements of our universe, which is just one of the innumerable creation of Allah, are matter, time and space. Allah, who created space and time, is necessarily transcendent in relation to both and it is an error on our part to think that he is bound either by them or by their laws. In fact it would be preposterous to ask the question as to what was there before Allah or who created Allah for there existed no time before Allah created time itself, thus the question of 'before' outside time, is not possible.

In our misunderstanding we are like those dolls who, seeing that they move by springs, imagine that the human-being who made them must also derive his motion from the action of springs. If they were told that he is self-moved, they would retort that it is impossible for anything to move spontaneously since everything in their world is moved by a spring. Just like them, we cannot imagine that Allah exists in His own Essence with no need of an efficient cause, for this is because we see everything around us in need of such a cause.

Aristotle followed the chain of causality tracing the chair from wood, wood from the tree, the tree from a seed, and the seed from the planter. He had to conclude that this chain which regresses into infi-

nite time must have begun with an 'uncaused' cause, a primum-mobile in no need of a mover, a creator who has not been created. This is the same thing we assert of Allah.

Consequent Attributes

The Creator is of a different nature from all that has been created. This is because if He is considered to be of the same nature as they are, He will need to have a beginning in time and will therefore need a maker. However we have explained that it is He who has created time itself and is not subject to it. One word for 'to have a beginning in time' is temporal. If the Maker or Creator is not temporal, He must be eternal, having no beginning or end in time.

If the Maker is eternal, He cannot be caused and if nothing caused him to come into existence, nothing outside Him causes Him to continue to exist, which means that he must be self-sufficient, not depending on anyone or anything to exist. And if he does not depend on anything to exist, then his existence can have no end. The Creator is therefore everlasting.

If the Creator is eternal and everlasting, then all His qualities must be eternal and everlasting. This means, for example, that if He is powerful, He must always be powerful. He cannot cease to be powerful. If He is all-knowing, He must always be all-knowing. If He is wise, He must always be wise. If He is kind and just, He must always be kind and just. The Creator then does not lose nor acquire any new qualities. Qualities that do not change and that last forever are absolute attributes.

His eternal and absolute attributes include being 'Creator' (Arabic – 'Khaliq'). And being Creator He fashions creation in wondrous forms. Hence He is the 'Fashioner' (Arabic – 'Musawwir'). These created forms are proportional, symmetrical and imbued with beauty,

making Him also the source of all 'Beauty' (Arabic – 'Jamil'). And a consequence of His Beautiful dispensation is His nurturing care for His creation, making Him therefore 'Rabb', The Cherisher, as well. All the attributes (ie. names / Arabic – 'Asma') of Allah as described in the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet [s], as we can see, proceed logically, one from the other.

The Mind Comprehends only Particulars

Philosophers have realized that the mind cannot comprehend infinite realities and that it is, by nature, fitted only to apprehend particulars.

It is incapable of apprehending such a universal or total existence as that of the divinity. Allah was known by conscience not by reason alone. Just as the new-born baby's thirst for milk is a proof that it exists out there in the vast world beyond its mothers womb, our yearning for justice, for example, is proof to us that a just Being exists 'out there'.

Indeed human beings do have a special gift or power - the power of reason and logic. But we must realise that this power is in itself limited : it is like a precision balance which you might use for weighing gold but you would be vain and foolish to think of using it to weigh mountains. No single person on his own, no matter how clever he is, can give complete, valid and satisfying answers to the questions about the origins of the world and mans place in it, about life and destiny. No group of persons can do so either. For example, all the knowledge of the world and the universe amassed by philosophers and scientists throughout the ages is knowledge of only a small part of reality. However much philosophers and scientists in the future may come to know, there will always be a point where they must say, " We do not know ! ". From the standpoint of science, the universe is like an old book the first and last pages of which have been lost. Neither the beginning nor the end is known. Thus, the worldview of science is a knowledge of the part, not of the whole.

Science a Limited Worldview

Science, as the word is now widely understood, acquaints us with the situation of some parts of the universe; it cannot explain the essential character of the whole universe, its origin or its destiny. The scientist's worldview is like the knowledge about the elephant gained by those who touched it in the dark. The one who felt the elephant's ear supposed the animal to be shaped like a fan; the one who felt its leg supposed it to be shaped like a column; the one who felt its back supposed it to be shaped like a throne and the one who felt its trunk supposed it to be shaped like a serpent. Science, it has been said, is like a powerful searchlight in the long winter night, lighting up a small area in its beam but unable to shed light beyond its border. This is not to pronounce on its usefulness or otherwise; it is only to say that it is limited.

From another quarter, Ibn Al-'Arabi (may Allah shower him with mercy), the Muslim mystic, replied to the question as to who made the creator by saying that it can only occur to a disordered mind. According to him, it is Allah who substantiates existence and it would be erroneous to point to existence or the universe as a proof of Allah. This is the same as saying that light indicates day and it would be a lopsided argument to claim that day proves the existence of light. For everything besides Allah is false and it is Allah who aids in proving and finding, there is no proof leading to Allah. Allah is the proof which is in no need of another proof. He is the self-evident Truth and He is the evidence that substantiates everything.

He is manifest in order, precision, beauty, and regularity; in tree leaves, in the wings of the butterfly, in the fragrance of flowers, in the chanting of the nightingale, in the harmony of the planets and stars which makes up that symphonic poem we call the universe. If we allege that all this came into being by chance, we would be like a person who believes that blowing-up the types of a press into space

can result in their spontaneous assembly into an authorless Shakespearean sonnet. The Qur'an spares us all these arguments with a few expressive words. It says without sophistry and in a decisive clarity :

" Say that Allah is One, the Absolute and Eternal. He begot none nor was he begotten. And none is equal to Him."
(112, 1-4)

Could Allah not be 'Two'?

However, as alluded to in the introduction, yet another doubt arises. Why do we say that Allah is one ? Why shouldn't there be many Gods sharing the ' work ' among themselves ? Can there be more than one creator with such absolute attributes ? Can there for example be two absolutely powerful creators?

This is not possible. Why ?...If a Maker is absolutely powerful, it follows that he is absolutely free to do whatever he wishes. But if another maker with similar powers exists and they differ over the making of something, then one of two things can happen. Either, one will overcome the other, in which case the latter cannot be absolutely powerful. Or, they will neutralise each other, in which case the powers of both are limited.

This is epitomised in the parable of the simple old yarn spinner when she was asked by her skeptical friend, " How do you know that God exists ? " The old lady replied saying, " I am a simple old woman who does not know much. However this much I do know, that when I turn my spindle it moves and when I leave it, it stops. Never does it ever move of its own accord. Thus I see the sun rising in the east and setting in the west, the moon traveling its course, the stars swimming harmoniously through the heavens, the rain falling gently, the trees growing tall and strong, the flowers blossoming exquisitely, the birds

flying by gracefully and I know that there must be some great mover, some great creator of this beauty. " Hearing this her skeptical friend retorted, " Very well ! Admitted that there be some creator, how do we know that he is one God and not many gods ? " The old lady again calmly replied saying, " I am a simple old woman who does not know much. However this much I do know, that if I were to try to turn my spindle in one direction and you were to try to turn it in the other direction then one of three things would happen. Either I would be stronger than you, in which case it would go in one direction, or you would be stronger than me and it would go in the other direction or we would break the spindle in our struggle. Thus, never do I ever see the sun rising in the east one day and in the west the next, nor the moon traveling its course one day and in disarray the next, nor the stars swimming harmoniously through the heavens one day and in confusion the next, nor the rain falling down one day and ascending the next, nor the trees stretching up tall and strong one day and then its branches digging into the earth with its roots piercing the sky the next, nor the flowers blossoming exquisitely one day and then collapsing in on themselves the next; nor the birds flying by gracefully one day and then crawling on their backs in the dust the next, nor do I see this wonderful universe around me in disharmony or destroyed and thus I know that my Lord is One. "

Even if we assume that the two powers agree on everything or complement each other, they cannot both be absolutely powerful because in doing anything one at least will need to assume that the other will not interfere or is not capable of interfering. In other words, one will need to assume that the function of the other is redundant or that the power of the other is limited. The Creator then must be One. There cannot be any other like Him so He must be Unique. The Creator must be all Powerful and must be able to do whatever He wills.

From the above, it is valid and reasonable to assert that the Creator must be Eternal and Everlasting, Self-Sufficient and All-Powerful,

One and Unique. These are some of the qualities or attributes of the Creator that we must have in mind when we use the word Allah. We must also remember that His attributes or qualities are absolute and do not change. There must then be a clear separation between the Creator and the created. It follows that no man can be Allah. Allah cannot have a mother or a father. He cannot have a son or a daughter. The sun, the moon or the stars or any heavenly bodies cannot be Allah. No part of creation whether it be a mountain, a tree or a fire can be Allah and does not deserve to be worshipped as Allah. Any religion or any worldview which regards any human being or any part of creation as Allah or part of Allah must be a false religion or worldview. Also, any religion or any worldview which regards Allah as having human characteristics, for example having a human shape and suffering from tiredness and needing rest and sleep, must be a false religion or worldview.

Nature Declares Allah's Oneness

From yet another perspective we see the open book of nature revealing to us the attributes of its author. Allah is one because the entire universe is built out of one material and according to a unified plan. The ninety two elements in the Mendelev table are built from a single element, hydrogen. All forms of life are built of carbon composites - they are all charred when burned according to one anatomical plan.

The anatomy of a frog, a rabbit, a pigeon, a crocodile, giraffe, and a whale reveals the same anatomical structure in all. The same arteries, veins, cardiac chambers, and bones correspond in all of them. The wing of the pigeon is the foreleg in the frog; the same bones with only a slight variation. The long neck of the giraffe contains seven vertebrae; we find the same number in the hedgehog's neck. The nervous system in all consists of the brain, the spinal cord, and the motor and sensory nerves. Their digestive apparatus contains the stomach, the

duodenum, and the small and large intestines, The genital apparatus has the same components: the ovary, the uterus, the testicles and their ducts; while the urinary system in all consists of the kidney, the uriter, and the bladder. The anatomical unit in each of these creatures is the cell. Whether we are dealing with plants, animals, or humans, we meet with the same features; they all breathe, breed, die, and are born in the same way.

What is so strange, then, in asserting that the creator is one? Does He suffer from a deficiency to need completion? It is the imperfect only who multiply. If there were more than one Allah, they would fall among themselves, each taking his own creation to his side and the universe would be ruined.

Science confirms Belief

Contemporary scientific understanding of the origins of the universe also confirms belief in a metaphysical God ‘Creator’.

Its ‘Big Bang’ theory asserts the temporal nature of the universe suggesting that it came into being 13 billion years ago as a consequence of a tremendous release of power (ie. ‘splitting apart’) preceded by a singularity (ie. ‘firmly joined together’) in which space and time ‘have’ no meaning.

Thus science refutes the ancient pagan ‘steady-state model’ which stipulated an eternal universe (hence the worship of stone) in contrast to ‘the Big Bang’s finite notions of the universe. In other words, the universe had a beginning from nothingness.

But can something be ‘created’ from nothing? Well science says that this is possible provided you have the laws of nature. These laws of nature ‘precede’ the physical universe. These laws of nature are not physical, but they act on the physical. These laws of nature also predate the physical universe (in other words they predate our under-

standing of time). These laws of nature ‘created’ the physical universe from nothing.

So to summarise, contemporary science affirms that the universe came from nothing as a consequence of a :

‘Set of Forces’ (ie. the Laws of Nature) which,

- 1) are NOT PHYSICAL
- 2) ACT on the physical
- 3) CREATED the physical from nothing
- 4) PREDATE the physical

This is exactly how Islam defines Godhood.

Allah is,

- 1) NOT PHYSICAL
- 2) ACTs on the physical
- 3) CREATED the physical from nothing
- 4) PREDATEs the physical

The Holy Qur’an teaches humanity that Allah manifests his absolute Force (Qudrah) through the creation of the universe from nothing.

“The Originator of the heavens and the earth. For when He intends that a thing be, He merely declares, ‘Be’, and it becomes.”

(2,117)

“Do not those who deny the truth see that the heavens and the earth were firmly joined together (ie. ‘singularity’), and that We then split them apart (ie. ‘release of energy’? And that We have made every living thing out of water? Will they still not believe?

(21,30)

Quantum Theory, Consciousness and God

Quantum theory has brought something so immaterial as "consciousness" into the realm of physics. Consciousness has remained for centuries a topic of discussion in philosophy, spirituality and theology. Ironically, modern science finds itself back at square one – Consciousness - the domain of spirituality. Strangely, in our modern era, the enigma of consciousness didn't pop out of neuroscience or any other branch of life sciences. Rather from the foundation of all sciences- Physics.

The study of the natural world is summed up in Biology, which in turn rests on Chemistry, as all biological processes are reduced to chemical reactions, and then the study of chemical reactions necessitates the study of atoms, electrons and so on. This brings us to Quantum Physics - the science of the basic building blocks of the universe. As we will soon discover, something so immaterial, subjective, human and life-like like 'consciousness' somehow affects the quantum world - the lifeless, material building blocks of the entire universe.

Quantum Theory asserts that all matter has a dual nature, behaving as both wave and particle. This was proven through the "Double Slit" experiment . Interestingly, the fundamental particles of the universe are not particles for the most time at all, rather they are waves . ‘Miraculously’, the simple act of conscious observation makes the electron, which acts as a wave, to behave as a particle. This enigmatic ‘consciousness’ affects the material world at a fundamental level. Conscious observation of an entity changes it from being an ethereal wave of possibilities (where an electron can be at any location, all at the same time) to appearing as a particle that occupies a particular place. This is called the "collapse of the wave function".

So, simply stated, when I am not looking at something, it's ‘weird’, but the moment I look at it, it goes back to being normal.

Quantum Mechanics postulates that the universe at the quantum level

is "probabilistic" in nature. Meaning an electron can be here, and there and everywhere, having a probability of being at different locations all at the same time. It is only by means of conscious observation that it occupies a definite place and it appears the way it is.

Therefore, Quantum Mechanics posits the existence of a Conscious Being who, by conscious observation, sustains the entire cosmos and all its dynamic processes. The quantum world and all its phenomena are hard wired to "consciousness".

So we could say that the collective human consciousness accounts for the "collapse of the wave function" with regards to all the quantum phenomena on earth. This collective consciousness transforms the world from waves of probability to solid reality that makes sense.

But what about the deep recesses of the planet - ocean beds, uninhabited forest, islands? What about the solar system? What about the Milky Way? What about the entire Universe? We occupy a very insignificant portion of a vast expanding universe. Quantum phenomena are taking place everywhere in the universe. What 'consciousness' is at play at these remote corners of the universe?

Quantum Mechanics is at the root of our day to day experience. For example, photosynthesis in plants is a Quantum Mechanical process. Who is 'observing' this delicate phenomenon inside the leaves of plants to produce food for the entire planet? Birds! Do you know how birds navigate? Quantum mechanics is there too. Amazingly the Qur'an declares:

“Have they not seen the birds above them, stretching and contracting, what is it that holds them except the Merciful One? Surely He "OBSERVES" everything.” (67,19)

Furthermore, as described earlier, the human brain works Quantum Mechanically. So who is the observer acting inside a person's brain?

An important point to understand is that none of these quantum, nuclear, chemical, even biological processes can occur when matter is just a 'wave of possibilities'. All these phenomena occur when the wave function collapses – meaning, wave turns into particle. And this occurs on conscious observation. So who or what is this perpetual consciousness that is sustaining these cosmic phenomena?

Consider the beginning of the Universe - the Big Bang - when the entire universe was smaller than an atom. Quantum phenomena of high energy photons collide initiating the event. Who is the Cosmic Consciousness that is present at the beginning of time itself? In our own case, we are conscious beings collapsing wave functions everywhere around us, however the very first thing that we are conscious of is our own selves. Hence this Cosmic Consciousness is self conscious to start with – it is a Conscious Being. This conscious Being present at the beginning of time is also observing the present expansion of the universe where quantum phenomena occur at the Horizon of the universe.

So there you have it, a Conscious Being at the beginning of the universe, observing the accelerated expansion of the universe and all the processes in between – the formation of nebulae, stars, black holes, galaxies, planets, and life itself. Who is the Conscious Being observing everything, everywhere, everytime?

This Cosmic Consciousness who is self aware is what Muslims call called Allah, or God in English. This qualitative definition clearly throws out of the window every type of anthropomorphic picture of God in our minds. So Jesus - the man - doesn't fit this description, the old man with a white beard in Michelangelo's artwork doesn't fit this either, nor do Hindu Deities fit. Because consciousness cannot be represented in a picture. Whatever conception of God we all may

have, God is unlike that. As the Islamic axiom in this regards declares, “The inability to comprehend Allah is in fact true comprehension of Allah.”

Two of the names of Allah in the Qur'an are ‘Shahid’ - The Ever Observing One - and ‘Basir’ - The All Seeing One.

“ He it is Who created the heavens (ie. multiverses) and the earth (ie. physical universe) in Six Days (ie. periods), and is moreover firmly established on the Throne (of Authority). 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 you may be. And Allah SEES well all that you do.” (57,4)

So, in conclusion, we can say that Quantum Mechanics necessitates the existence of a Cosmic Consciousness who is:

- 1) SELF AWARE
- 2) Existed BEFORE the Big Bang
- 3) Will exist AFTER the death of the universe
- 4) All the cosmic, geological, biological, etc. phenomena occur because there is ‘someone’ CONSTANTLY OBSERVING them

The universe wouldn't exist had it not been for this Absolute Consciousness - The ‘Shahid’, The ‘Basir’.

Now since we have proved the existence of a Conscious Being behind all of existence, then 'purpose' can never be dissociated from conscious beings. Hence the Universe has a purpose. How do conscious beings communicate their 'purpose' to others for its fulfillment? Through language carried by other conscious beings from generation to generation. Hence, Divine Scriptures and Messengers are a requirement for the Cosmic Consciousness, Allah, to fulfill His cosmic purpose.

Although Quantum Physics is still quite rudimentary and crude in its attempt to describe the enigma of the Divine, it nevertheless represents an interesting negation of materialist denial of God and the spiritual realm.

Why can't we see Allah?

In all of creation there is nothing that is either the like, the equal or the contrary of Allah. Allah is Exalted above all comparison and free of all form.

It is only because existing things have a like or an equal or a contrary that we are able to distinguish them and perceive them. We know what is 'long' only against what is 'short' by comparison or contrast. Similarly, we know 'light' only against what is 'dark'. How then should we distinguish or perceive One who has neither like, nor equal, nor contrary? This is the meaning of the statement that Allah is Exalted above form.

The question of those who ask to directly perceive Allah is but an aspect of the question of those who ask to directly 'think of' or 'know' His Being. But, in truth, we can no more 'think of' or 'know' Allah's Being, than we can 'see' Him. Just as He is beyond all measures of form or quality or quantity, He is also beyond all our powers of conception or reasoning. Whatever conception of Allah we form in our minds, Allah is other than it. Allah is far beyond all our conceptions, and we are surrounded by thousands of veils.

Allah cannot be perceived by human senses nor comprehended by human reason. The only means to knowledge of Him is through the noble prophets of Allah whom He appointed as bearers of His Revelation.

Where perception and reason have no access, we need the guidance of Revelation. To explain why, imagine that we are in a closed room

and hear a knocking at the door of that room. We are now aware of the presence of someone outside and may well form some vague impressions about who is knocking, but we can no more than guess at his attributes. We know for certain only that there is knocking at the door and we would have to go to the door and call out to the stranger outside to reveal his identity or open the door and go out to see for ourselves.

This poor analogy may help us to more usefully approach the question of how to come to know Allah. The fact of Creation, the immensity of it combined with an essential unity of form, the sheer beauty and harmony of it, and its usefulness to us, all make us aware of the existence of the Creator. Creation is the proverbial ‘knocking on the door’ indicating the presence of the Divine beyond. The ‘opening of the door’ is death through which we go out beyond this transient world to ‘see for ourselves’ the truth of the Divine. Which leaves us with only one option while still alive whereby we are able to identify the ‘stranger’ knocking on the door. And that is - calling out to him to ‘reveal his identity’, hoping that he will speak to us or at least ‘slip a note under the door’ with a message indicating his identity and his purposes.

Thus, without assistance from the Creator himself, we can get no further than when, hearing the first knocking on the door, we began to indulge hopelessly vague surmises about who was knocking. By the Mercy of Allah, mankind was blessed with revelation. Through Allah’s message to the prophets and their teachings, Allah reveals his ‘identity and his purposes’. In this way we are able to ‘know’ Him and ‘think’ about his purposes. This analogy highlights the imperative nature of revelation.

Revelation is also necessitated by the fact that the irreducible complexity, symmetry, beauty and harmony within creation indicate the workings of a supreme intelligence. And intelligence implies the capacity to communicate. Therefore the supreme Creator, by

definition, must communicate, and He does so in ways that are commensurate with the ability and nature of the one being addressed. Hence the way in which Allah communicates with the bees as described in Surah an-Nahl:

“And your Lord (Allah) revealed to the bees: Build your hives...”
(16, 68)

is appropriately different to the way in which he communicates with mankind, namely through speech (ie. revelation to Prophets) and books (ie. sacred texts).

Further, if we consider the matter closely, we soon realize that our 'seeing' (or hearing or any other mode of perception) is conditional upon our understanding. We need to have some general ideas about what we 'see' in order to distinguish it and recognize it. If we did not have some idea, however vague at first, of what, for example, a tree is, we would literally be unable to 'make sense' of that object before our eyes which we know as a tree. If our 'seeing' is as limited as it is, and if - even for the objects within creation, and within the reach of our 'seeing' - we need some general prior understanding so that we can 'make sense' of what we 'see', how improper a demand it is, how absurd a demand in fact, to ask why we cannot directly 'see' or directly 'know' the Creator of the whole of being. Technically speaking, even if we were to 'see' Him with our rudimentary physical tools of perception (eyes, brain etc), we would simply not be able to make sense of what we are seeing.

The Qur'an teaches:

“Vision comprehends Him not, but He comprehends all vision.” (6, 103).

After the Prophet Muhammad's [s] ascent to the heavens, his Companions asked him if he had seen Allah. He answered, “What I

saw was the Light. How do I see Him?” And on another occasion, he answered, “I have seen a Light.”

These statements clarify the well-known Prophetic saying, “The light is the limit or veil of Allah.” Between us and Allah is the light which He created. All that we see, we see by that light, within that light - the light is the ground and environment and the limit of our seeing, and that light shields or veils us from Allah. We see but a part of that light of creation, we see but a part of what veils Him. In fact the Prophet [s] declared that, “...thousands of veils veil Allah from His creation. And if even a single veil were to be removed, then all of creation would be destroyed (due to Allah’s overwhelming power)”.

It is by no means possible for any person to comprehend the Divine Essence. In the words of the famous Companion, Abu Bakr as-Siddiq [r], “To comprehend His Essence means to confess that His Essence cannot be comprehended.”

That is why it is said – ‘His Names are known. His Attributes are comprehended, and His Essence exists.’

SECTION 2



WHY HAVE I BEEN CREATED ?

What is the purpose of the creation of Mankind? If the purpose of man is, as Muslims advocate, to worship Allah, as mentioned in the following verse:

"I have created mankind ... that they may worship me."
(51, 56)

...does it then suggest that the Almighty is in dire need of our worship. This, though, would be an obvious contradiction of the Islamic belief in Allah being absolutely Self-sufficient, Independent and Transcendent. If, on the contrary, the answer be no, then it would seem that mankind serves no purpose at all. What then is the purpose of the creation of man?

Furthermore, if man was created for worship then why was he granted the freedom to choose not to do so, and even to deny the very existence of Allah himself?

What then is the essence of man and what, if anything at all, makes him so distinguished given that Muslims proclaim man to be Allah's supreme creation, while history and personal experience seem to suggest the contrary ?

Lastly, how are we to understand the true nature of the relationship between mankind and Allah?



'Everything besides Allah is False!'

The Holy Prophet Muhammad [S] is reported to have said, "The truest words ever uttered are (that), 'Everything besides Allah is False!' " Islamic doctrine informs the Muslim, as its fundamental premise, that everything besides Allah is false. You and I and everything around us does not, of itself, exist. We exist solely by the will and intent of Allah, this divine intent being more than adequate a reason for the creation of all being.

The existence of the world is thus a shadow existence in so far as a shadow cannot exist without the object, which is in itself real and true. The existence of the shadow cannot in any way be denied, but it is contingent on the existence of the object. Or the presence of the world is like the presence of the image of an object in a mirror. The existence of the image too is completely different and separate from the real existence of the object. Similarly, the existence of the world is a 'shadow' existence, different and separate from the real existence of Allah. The important thing that has to be noted in this regard is that the shadow of a thing is not the thing itself. It is different from the object numerically as well as qualitatively.

The world is, in essence, unreal. What imparts to it a shadow-existence, a semblance of reality, and elevates it from absolute nothingness and gives it a permanence and stability, is the reflection of Allah's existence and attributes on it: Allah's decree that it be:

"For when He intends that a thing be, He merely declares, 'Be' and it

Becomes." (2, 117)

Man's Ignorance Disqualifies him

As has been determined in the previous section, to believe in Allah is to believe in the existence of a supreme power; that this unimaginable Power is behind the creation of the universe and that it is incomparable in its scope of knowledge, power, creativity, compassion, punishment and all the other features attributable to the Divine. Once this understanding has taken root in the heart of the believer, he becomes aware of the fact that man should not assess Allah's intent, power and absolute knowledge in terms of his own limited knowledge and physical powers. He understands that he is not qualified to question His authority and ask for reasons or motives, for dialogue is futile and will not serve its end unless those taking part in it possess equal mental ability and logic.

Man's mental and physical limitations make him no match with Allah, no matter how knowledgeable and powerful man may think himself to be. Yet we still meet some unfortunate and vain persons who pretend shamelessly to be qualified to argue with Allah over His intent and knowledge, and the way He has prescribed for mankind.

The recognition of Allah's supreme power and sovereignty over His universe and mankind, and His all-encompassing knowledge, establishes the route through which faith enters mankind's heart where it lodges and grows. But this route does not open without prior contemplation and musing about this universe and the signs through which Allah reveals Himself to us, signs which constitute that glorious symphony we call creation.

Creation is a Spectacular Expression of Allah's Divine Attributes

Creation is a spectacular expression of Allah's Divine attributes. It

has often been described as the veritable artwork of Allah, for through His creation does Allah manifest Himself. He is the artist and creation His glorious artwork. Creation thus exists as a direct consequence of His attributes and His intent to manifest them.

Allah declares in a Divine utterance (Hadith Qudsi) by way of allegory,

"I was as a hidden treasure, and thus I created creation that this treasure be (revealed in its splendour), known, (appreciated and celebrated)."

Allah is the Creator, and creation an expression of his creativity; Allah is the Perfect and so we find that creation too is perfect; Allah is the Fashioner and the Beautiful and creation thus fashioned into the most wondrous, beautiful forms; Allah is the Majestic and indeed creation a most majestic expression thereof; Allah is the Cherisher and creation cherished and caringly nurtured.

In fact, the very first verse of the holy Qur'an alludes to this mystery for out of the 'Beautiful Names' (Al-Asma' al-Husna) of Allah and His attributes of perfection, only two have been mentioned in this introductory verse - namely, 'ar-Rahman' and 'ar-Rahim' - both of which have been derived from the root 'Rahmah' (mercy), indicating the all-pervasiveness and perfection of divine mercy, compassion and love. It points to the fact that the creation of the heavens and the earth and the sustenance of all the worlds has no other motivation other than manifesting Allah's attribute of mercy, generosity and selfless love. He Himself had no need of these creatures, nor could anyone compel Him to create them. It is His very own mercy, generosity and love which has determined the creation and sustenance of the entire universal order.

How aptly this was put by the great mystic poet Allamah Rumi:

"There was nothing - neither our being nor our claim to be; It was Thy mercy that heard our unsaid."

And further a poet states, "...For he loved us even before we knew ourselves, and from this love created us."

Thus Allah is the grand sculptor and creation his wondrous, perfect sculpture - a wondrous declaration of his perfection of being.

The Creation of Man

The question, though, that arises at this juncture is, that since the purpose of Allah (namely that of Divine Manifestation) had been accomplished through the creation of the multitudinous worlds, what then was the need for creating man specifically?

As has been explained, Allah is the grand sculptor and creation his wondrous, perfect sculpture - a wondrous declaration of his perfection of being. Man though has been distinguished by being not only the most wondrous of all creatures, but he has been imbued with perception and freedom. He is to employ these faculties to search for and understand the divine pattern in nature, and in himself, and thus come to recognise the absolute perfection of being of Allah. Attainment by man to cognizance of the Divine, represents a most unique and profound declaration of Allah's absolute perfection of being.

An easy, albeit inadequate, way to understand this principle is in the example of the sculptor and his sculptures. If Michelangelo, for example, were to sculpt the most beautiful sculptures and then were to stand back and declare, "I am the most accomplished sculptor," it would be perfectly in order and his declaration to that effect would be true in so far as the perfection of his work would be an open testimony validating the truth of the claim.

However, how would it be if he was able to create such a sculpture having the capacity to perceive and comprehend, and this sculpture, having been fashioned thus, were to gaze at its wondrous construction and the perfection with which the sculptures around it were created and then, independently, by no duress or compulsion, were to declare that, "Indeed, Michelangelo, you are the best sculptor," this 'independent' declaration by the sculpture of the accomplishments of its sculptor is a greater testimony to the consummate talents of the sculptor. Similarly, man's recognition of the absolute perfection of being of Allah represents a more profound declaration of Allah's absolute perfection of being.

Having recognised Allah thus, man now stands in awe and admiration of the majesty of Allah, the one and only. Consequently he bows, in submission and love, to Allah. His every deed and word is an expression of this loving submission. This is in effect worship, a physical expression confirming an accurate spiritual understanding.

He is now worthy of being honoured with the title of "Khalifatullah fi-l 'Ard", the Vicegerent of Allah, on earth. His duty now is to establish the will of Allah, and to that end join together with the believing servants of Allah. He is to be part and parcel of a society, a society of believers who invite to the truth, forbid falsehood and evil, and join together in the mutual teaching of righteousness and submission. His participation, in that society, will determine his success or failure as a human being. Man therefore becomes a participant in the manifestation of divine will.

Consummate Manifestation of Specific Attributes

Through man alone do specific divine attributes become consummately manifest. Indeed by creating the angels, Allah has manifested His Power, since the fullness of their power indicates the perfection of the might of their Creator. The creation of man, on the other hand,

indicates His perfection of generosity and mercy.

As for the perfection of generosity, this is because there is no relationship between dust and the Grace of the Lord of the Worlds. Allah, by His complete Mercy and Perfect Generosity, has made dust the bearer of Divine illumination and eternal virtue. This is a fact since man, though composed of covetousness, impulsiveness, weakness and blameworthy habits, Allah mercifully overlooks his sinful failings and entrusts his heart with the light of gnosis (divine cognizance), honours his tongue with the recitation of Tawhid (Absolute Oneness and Perfection of being of Allah), makes his eyes a means for witnessing the signs of Allah and his ears an instrument for hearing the speech of Allah.

So through the angels the Power and Wisdom of Allah were revealed, and through man Generosity and Mercy were manifested.

Yet another example is that, only through man do Allah's attributes of Karim (The Noble) and Ghafur (The Forgiving) become consummately manifest. This is so because only he could be said to be truly Noble who gives to those who are least worthy, and indeed Allah bestows immeasurably upon unworthy, ungrateful, apathetic man, the most unworthy. And it is only through the sin committed by man, sin that justly deserves retribution, that Allah's forgiveness and compassion become manifest for "...by the sin of the sinner does the compassion of the most merciful become manifest..." This is born out by the Prophetic saying to the effect that "Had you (O man!) not committed sin, Allah would have removed you from the scheme of creation, and brought in your stead such a creation that would commit sin, and then turn in repentance. And Allah would generously forgive them."

This is not to pronounce on the gravity or otherwise of sin but merely to emphasise the compassion of Allah.

Divine Love

From another perspective, only through man does divine love become manifest. For love to be, there must be lovers, the lover and the beloved, and for this wise end was man imbued with freedom and an aesthetic, appreciative heart. Only man has the capacity to appreciate the perfections of the beloved and to voluntarily express this infatuation through self negation, losing himself in the perfections and overwhelming beauty of the beloved, intoxicated by her charms. Thus, in the love enjoyed by lovers do we come to discover the secrets of divine love.

Importance of Divine Names and Attributes

In all the revealed scriptures, religious systems and holy laws the foremost stress is laid on the Divine Attributes and it is then that the details of worship are set forth and teachings on duties and obligations and social conduct and monetary dealings formulated. The correction of the conceptual tenets and doctrines has been given priority in all Divine faiths over worship, deeds and commandments, and every Apostle [A], in his life-time, has devoted the greatest attention to imparting a true knowledge of the Attributes of Allah and His Purity and Sublimity, and made it the central point of his teachings. The holy Qur'an which is the custodian of all the heavenly scriptures and the Last and Eternal Word of Allah offers a classical case in point. It takes it up for its central theme and returns to it again and again and deals with it in a thousand ways. It is for this reason that the brief Surah Ikhlas in which the Oneness of Allah and His Sublimity has been summed up in a few verses of matchless eloquence and profundity is often described as one-third of the Qur'an.

The holy Qur'an has dwelt upon the glorious Attributes of Allah, His Beautiful Names, His Functions and Authority, His Creativeness and Originality, His Benevolence and Mercifulness, His Love and

Compassion, His Munificence and Forgiveness, His Power to Bestow and to Withhold, His Control over Gain and Loss, His Knowledge and Wisdom and his Nearness and Companionship in such a thorough and authoritative manner that what emerges from it is undoubtedly the ultimate picture of Elegance and Majesty, Perfection and Greatness and Beauty and Beneficence.

Man is a Mixture of Opposites

In the revealed Scriptures one finds a number of observations that throw a flood of light on human psychology and its inner contradictions. There is, without doubt, no one more wonderful, delicate and sensitive among all the created beings than man. At the same time, he is the biggest mixture of opposites. He is weak, yet an adorer of strength; he is poor, yet obsessed over wealth; he is a mortal, yet a seeker of eternity; he is an heir to a hundred ills and ailments and yet in quest of health and happiness. He is fainthearted as well as ambitious; his needs are endless and his desires unbounded. He is more sensitive than a bubble, yet on edge and agitated. His feelings and emotions change from moment to moment. His thirst is unquenchable. He does not rest and is never contented. He is intolerant of the old and covetous of the new. What he has holds no charm for him while what he does not have is always beckoning him, drawing him to itself. This limited world, this fleeting life, is utterly inadequate for the fulfilment of his desires and aspirations.

But in these very contradictions, in the loftiness of his ambition and the restlessness of his soul, lies the secret of man's glory and his elevation to the office of the Vicegerency of Allah on earth. It was this sublime peculiarity of his nature which induced him to accept the forbidding responsibility of trusteeship after the heavens, the earth and the mountains had declined to shoulder it.

"We offered the trust to the heavens, the earth and the hills, but they

shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it."

Man is the seeker of the possessor of all perfection. He seeks the Divine. Love in its most elemental sense is 'the recognition of attributes of perfection & the pursuit of the possessor of perfection'.

Love and Affection

Love is ingrained in the nature of man. His clay has been kneaded with it. Along with the five senses by which man perceives and responds to the material world there is another instinct in him which we call love, affection or attachment. This instinct can be strong as well as weak, manifest, as well as hidden. But if it were to become extinct, it would be a clear proof of the fact that man has lost his intrinsic superiority and worthiness, turned away from his original destiny and entered into the domain of fossils and stones.

Man is both loyal and sensitive. His emotions are excitable and his feelings are delicate. He is drawn irresistibly towards beauty and perfection. He is ready to sacrifice everything, life, liberty and happiness for the sake of the beloved. The memorable stories of lovers, the stirring deeds of all men of faith and suffering and the entire emotional and intuitive literature and lyrical poetry of the world are inspired by the tender passion called love.

Surrender and Submission

Man has been imbued with an instinctive desire to submit and surrender, to pay homage and bow down in resignation. This urge has been present in him at all the stages of his history. He has never been able to overcome it. Man sought the satisfaction of this instinct by prostrating himself before trees, rivers and hills, by worshipping the fire, the sun, the moon and the stars, and by idolizing the saints, the

monks, the ghosts and the angels. He was prone to be overawed by anything that was beyond the scope of his attainment and understanding, and, even today, inspite of all the claims to rationality and progress, he is caught, identically, in the spell of political leaders, ideologies and movements. In these days of 'culture', 'enlightenment' and 'liberalism', he is enamoured, in the same way, by writers, poets artists and inventors and by men of power, wealth and renown. His infatuation is inspired by the same sentiments of love and reverence, simply because by his very nature man is a loving creature and it is inherent in him to love and admire and lose his ' self ' in the adored one. This yearning is a grand idiosyncrasy of his being and he has never lived without it.

Man stands in need of an ideal, an embodiment of excellence or, in the words of the Qur'an, a Sublime Similitude, which can satisfy his inner urge by virtue of being above and beyond his comprehension, by its exceptional beauty and perfection and power and authority.

The Correct Concept of the Bond between Allah and Man

Let us, now, recall to our minds the Immaculate Attributes of the Lord, Allah, His Omnipotence, Magnanimity, Benevolence, Knowledge and Omniscience, and His Elegant Names as revealed in and interpreted by the Qur'an. We may also take note of such of the attributes of man as can be summed up in the two words of indigence and helplessness as well as to his ambitiousness and passion for distinction which has not been granted to any other living being, to his unquenchable thirst and insatiable appetite in both the material and spiritual spheres of his, life - to the never-ending catalogue of his needs and desires, and to the sentiment of love, devotion and submission which runs through every fibre of his existence.

From the above it follows that man should always hold himself in a state of obeisance, loyalty, worship and supplication before Allah

Who is the Supreme Being, the All-powerful, the King of Kings, Who provides for all his needs whether expressed by him vocally or otherwise,

"And He gives you all you ask of Him, and if you would count the bounty of Allah you would not reckon it" (14, 34)

...and Who is aware of his innermost thoughts and feelings and even of desires and aspirations he himself has forgotten or given up out of despair and in respect of which, sometimes, his heart does not tolerate even the participation of the intellect, Who is nearer than the nearest and bears and responds more than any other bearer,

"And when My servants question you concerning Me, then surely I am nearby. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he cries unto Me. So let them hear My Call and let them trust in Me, in order that they may be led aright." (2, 186)

...and Whom man loves, beseeches, and supplicates to for his needs, and to Whom man cries out for help.

Freedom and Love

Remember that Allah is All-Able to compel anyone He wills to do anything He wishes. There is, however, love for Allah for man, which can only be realised by those who willingly and lovingly worship Him - not out of compulsion, but out of love for Him. They worship Him because of their love for Him and they obey Him because they love His obedience. This could not occur unless mankind had full freedom to believe or not to believe, to obey and disobey. This freedom is affirmed by our experience that it is impossible under any pressure to compel the heart to accept anything it does not want to. You can force a woman with threats and beating to undress but no pressure whatsoever can make her love you with all her heart. This indicates that Allah has safeguarded our hearts from all forms of

compulsion and duress and that he created them free, free in order that their be true love.

The human being is then able to say, " ...O Allah ! We love you and therefore we believe in You, not because we are forced to, but out of love ! Lord, we love obedience, so we obey You, without compulsion but out of love. We will carry out Your commands and avoid Your prohibitions. O Lord, though we are able to commit sin, tempted by our passion and by the shayatin (devils) among men and jinn, yet, O Lord, our love for You is much greater than our love for the world and its allurements. All that You want us to do, we love to do, for we love You and love that which pleases You..."

This is the meaning of freedom of choice. Allah does not need a hollow form of submission. He wants man to come to Him with the heart of a lover, for belief is a test of love for Allah in the heart. The greater your love for Him, the greater your belief in His Way. But if your love for Him is weak, you will stray far from His Way.

Does a man adore beautiful women under duress? Does he not find a certain pleasure in such infatuation? Is he not transported into ecstasy when he 'tastes' his beloved's beauty? It is the very same with Allah who is more Beautiful than any being we know or can imagine. If all men knew His Majesty, Beauty, and Exaltedness, they would worship him finding in such reverence the zenith of elation and ecstasy.

Worship

Worship, as we see it, can only be based on knowledge and cognizance. Allah can only be worshipped by being known. Knowledge of Allah is the end of all knowledge and the crowning of a long chain of 'knowing' that starts from birth. The first thing a baby knows after he is born is his mother's breast; it is his first comfort and pleasure. The child, then, becomes acquainted with his parents, his family, his

community, and his environment. He begin to exploit that environment for his own use, turning it into another, new 'breast' providing him with wealth, riches, and pleasures. He extracts gold and diamonds from the earth, pearls from the sea, fruits from nature. Such is his second source of comfort, joy and pleasure in life after his mother's breast.

He then moves from knowing his earthly environment to exploring the heavens. He sets foot on the moon and launches his probes to Mars in a journey to the unknown thus enjoying an even more intense pleasure: that of discovering the universe itself.

That 'navigator' into space turns, however, to ask himself, "Who am I that I have come to know all this?" He thus starts a new journey of knowledge, a journey into his very own being. He sets out to know himself, to control its capacities, and exercise them for his own good and for the benefit of others. This is a third kind of pleasure.

Following that, the summit of knowledge after acquaintance with the self is discovery of He who created that self. With this final sort of knowledge man reaches the culmination of happiness for he comes to meet the Perfect, the Transcendent, the truly Beautiful above any beauty.

This is the pilgrimage of the worshippers to the worshipped on the road of reverence. It is all happiness. If there are hardships in life, it is because thorns must pierce the fingers of the rose pluckers. He who aspires to the summits of the infinite must toil to attain them. More marvelous and wonderful is the attainment by the worshipper to the knowledge of his Allah and the falling of the veils from his eyes. The sufi, clothed in rags, says, "We live in such bliss that kings with swords in hand would fight us for it, if they but knew."

This is the sweetness of sincere worship; it is the worshippers' share.

But Allah is in no need of such worship or of the entire creation. The believers do not adore him because we are enjoined to do so but because we know His Beauty and Grandeur. We do not find repression or humiliation in worshipping Him, but liberation and honour. We are liberated from all the enslavements of the world, from ignoble desires, crass appetites, ruthless ambitions, and consuming wealth. As we come to fear Allah, we are no longer frightened by anyone else and we cower before no creature. Fear of Allah is courage, worshipping Him is freedom, humility before Him is dignity, and knowing Him is certainty.

Such is the nature of worship. We harvest its profits and pleasures. Allah is in no need of anything. He created us so that He may give and not take from us. He created us to invest us with some of his perfections. He is the All-Hearing and the All-Seeing and He gave us hearing and sight. He is the All-Knowing and the All-Cognizant and He gave us mind to take from His Knowledge and the senses to take from His Cognizance.

In a Divine Utterance, Allah says to His favoured servant:

"My creature, obey me and I shall make you divinely-aided saying to a thing 'Be' and it becomes."

Wasn't that, in fact, what occurred to 'Isa [A] (Jesus)? He resurrected the dead, created clay birds that came to life, and healed the blind and the leper - all by Allah's permission and aid.

Slavery to Allah, then, is the exact opposite of enslavement in the human sense. In the latter it means that the master exploits the capacities of the slave in order to promote his own welfare and prosperity, thereby depriving the slave of self-fulfillment and material rewards. Thus the slave tills the fields and the master reaps the crop; he toils and labours so that the master can possess and enlarge his wealth. In

the former, however, it is quite the contrary: it is the Master who bestows endless gifts on His slave and invests him with perfections beyond reckoning.

Thus the skeptic who describes as bondage the believers devotion and submission to Allah, to His divine commands and law's and to religion as another form of slavery is wrong, for although religion is indeed bondage to Allah, there is an immense difference between being a slave to another mortal and being a slave to Allah. Slavery to Allah is meant to enhance the slave's capacity and welfare and increase his share of Allah's bounty, both materially and spiritually, for Allah is Self-subsisting and in no way in need of mankind's assistance.

Slavery to Allah is, therefore, a state of receiving rather than of giving. In it, Allah gives and never takes. He commands us to worship Him, not because He is in need of our efforts or He wishes to exploit them, but rather to make us eligible for His favours and support, and to give us access to His material and spiritual bounties. Slavery to Allah is always favourable to the slave, and is something that is fervently sought by him, because in it lies his security and prosperity and at the same time it is his shield against the hazards and vanity of his material lust and ambition.

Allah has truly promised those sincere believers among his slaves a good and fruitful life. His commands are, therefore, intended for the benefit and welfare of him who believes in this life and in the Hereafter. Man's obedience and submission will not benefit Allah in any way or add to His bounty, nor will his defiance and disobedience detract anything from Allah's kingdom. But a sincere believer who follows Allah's way chooses the good life, not only on the basis of his own potential, but also on the basis of his awareness of Allah's generosity and noble intent.

When Allah says,

"I created mankind ... that they may worship me", (51, 56)

it means in reality that He created men only to bestow upon them love, goodness, dignity, and honour and to invest them with glory and vicegerency on earth.

The Lord Allah, the Absolute, has no need whatsoever of our worship. We need such worship and all the boundless honour, goodness, and gifts it confers. He, of His Grace, permitted us to stand before His Presence at any time we wish. He allowed us to stay in His presence as long as we desire and to call on Him as much as we can. This is realized as soon as we spread the prayer mat (Musalla) and commence our prayers with 'Allahu Akbar' (Allah is Greatest).

We are, then, in His presence and can ask of Him our every desire. Show me any king into whose chamber we can enter without previous notice and in who's audience we can stay as long as we wish.

The lovers of Allah have two beautiful lines of poetry on this divine gift:

"It is honour sufficient for me , that I am a creature,
Welcomed without arrangement , by my Master.
Exalted is He , in His Glorious Holiness,
Yet I meet Him , whenever I so desire."

Love and the Crime of Shirk (Polytheism)

From yet another perspective we come to comprehend, in love, the gravity of shirk, or polytheism.

"Indeed Allah will never forgive the crime of associating partners

with him (ie. worshipping others as equals with him), but He will indeed forgive any other sin, as He so pleases."

(3, 38)

This is so because true love accepts no partners, and the infidelity of the Mushrik (Pagan) is tantamount to the enormity of the infidelity never tolerated by jealous lovers. Treachery of the heart is never forgiven. The similitude of the believer, both righteous and unrighteous, and the disbeliever despite his apparent virtue can be summarized in the following example, that of three devoted men and their wives.

The first loves his wife with all his heart, devoted to her in every way, selflessly providing for her every comfort, expecting nothing in return except her love. She in turn loves her husband dearly, expressing her appreciation in both word and deed, most devout and obedient. But most importantly, the love due to him she never shares with another. As a consequence, the love of the husband for her only increases further, and so too his devotion to her. This is the similitude of the believer in his relationship to Allah. Allah bestows upon him every bounty, including his very being, and the devout believer in turn reciprocates by worshipping and loving Allah alone, never sharing that love and devotion with another.

The similitude of Allah and the unrighteous believer is as that of the second husband, who, very much like the first, loves his wife with all his heart, devoted to her in every way. She, as contrasted to the first, is unappreciative, rebellious, disobedient and obnoxious in her behaviour towards him. However, despite her inadequacies as a wife, she at no time ever shares the love due to her husband with another. She is never unfaithful. Notwithstanding the husbands displeasure, and even anger, he will, nevertheless, still love her. This is the nature of the relationship between Allah and the disobedient believer. Despite his inadequacies as a believer, by virtue of his enduring worship of Allah alone, Allah will indeed still love him, even if he incurs

Allah's wrath and punishment.

The similitude of Allah and the 'righteous' disbeliever is as that of the third husband, who, like the first two, loves his wife and is devoted to her. She is very much like the wife in the first example, polite, courteous, soft spoken and admirable in every way, commendably administering her household duties, a model wife. However, despite her virtues as a housewife, and commendable as her conduct may seem to be, she becomes guilty of the unforgivable sin - adultery. The love and devotion due her husband alone, she shares with another. The anger and pain her husband suffers, finding her in loves embrace with another, will know no bounds and if she were to die in that state, guilty of infidelity and betrayal, sharing the love due to her husband alone with a stranger, he would never forgive her, for '...true love accepts no partners..!' . This is the nature of the relationship between Allah and the 'righteous' disbeliever. Despite his excellence as a human being, his guilt of infidelity, 'sharing the love due to Allah alone', Allah who had blessed him with innumerable bounties and favours, even his very being and existence, with a strange object of worship, whether it be an idol or an ideology, a human or another being, would bring upon him the eternal displeasure and wrath of Allah, for 'true love accepts no partners' and faith, in Islam, is no more or less than a matter of deep love.

This is the great lesson we learn in the stories of the Prophets of old, Prophets like Ibrahim [A] when Allah put him to trial, testing his love and fidelity, by instructing him to slaughter his very own son, the coolness of his eye and joy of his life.

Why does Allah afflict the Righteous with Calamity ?

The jealousy and pride of Allah and His abhorrence of all associates is the wisdom lying behind the loss of the things adored and loved by man. The great mystic, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, summarises it

as follows:

Explaining what is meant by the false objects of worship, the Shaykh says,

"You put your trust in your own self, in others, in your wealth, in your rites and customs, in your trade and business, or in your rulers; but, in whatever object you place your reliance, it becomes, to say the truth, your object of worship. If you fear someone, or expect harm or favour from him, or else deem him as an intercessor with Allah, then he is the object of worship for you."

He goes on to explain:

"You often complain, as you would ever do, that you have to suffer the loss of whatever you set your affections on. The object of your fancy, if it is a human being, either separates or dies. If it is wealth that you care for, you incur losses or are deprived of it altogether.

Then, should I tell you, that Allah is in love with you, and He is jealous too! He has created you for Himself but you want to be enraptured by others! Have you not heard what Allah has said, 'He holds them dear who love Him', and also, 'I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me'. And, are you not aware of what the Beloved Prophet [S] once said, 'When Allah loves anyone, He afflicts him with calamity. If he bears it with endurance and forbearance, Allah then sets him apart for Himself'. Requested to elucidate what he meant by '...setting apart of a man...', the Prophet [S] replied, 'Allah deprives him of his possessions and progeny'. This is so because it is natural for a man to love his offsprings and possessions and thus his love, which should have been for Allah alone, is divided between the Creator and the created, between the Eternal and the mortal.

Allah is, however, extremely Proud and Mighty and therefore He

destroys whatever threatens to become an associate in the love for Him. It is only then that the heart of the man whom He loves attains communion with Him. And, only then, can this man claim to enjoy the distinction of what has been described thus by Allah, 'He holds them dear who love Him'.

It is the stage when the heart of the man is cleansed of all idols and associates such as offspring, riches, pleasures and desires. It has now no yearnings, no longings left - worldly or otherwise, not even those relating to piety and miraculous ability, stations and states, nearness and remoteness; the heart becomes a bottomless vessel in which nothing can be kept.

Allah Almighty, being extremely Proud and Jealous, makes the heart of His beloved incapable of nourishing any other desire; He shrouds the heart of His devotee with His awe and a gasp of admiration, and guards it with His Glory and Might so that nothing can enter this heart; nor can the possessions and riches, family and progeny, friends and relations, piety and miraculous ability do any harm to it. None of these finds a place in the heart of such a man nor, then, does Allah remain jealous of them.

Whatever is granted thereafter to this man is a gift or reward from his Lord so that he may be of assistance to those around him or those who visit him."

Adam [A] and Divine Love

The story of love begins with the very first human being. Adam [A] indeed was not guilty of a sin per-se in the heavenly episode as portrayed so vividly in the Qur'an. It was in fact a lesson for man of the true nature of Divine love and the privilege enjoyed by man with his Loving creator. For in being instructed "...not to approach the tree..." absolute obedience as demanded between true lovers was

intended, for this was the exalted nature of the love man enjoyed with his creator.

The episode goes as follows : Having being instructed to "...eat at leisure whatsoever you desire of paradise..." Allah forbade Adam [A] from "...approaching a tree...". shaytan jealously approached, pretending to be a well-wisher, and invited Adam to eat of the tree forbidden to him by Allah, for by it, he suggested, Adam [A] would attain to eternal life, just like the angels. Adam [A] reasoned that only by eternal life would he be able to justly and adequately worship Allah, praising and adoring Him eternally. The lesson Adam [A] , and in fact all mankind was to learn, is that true love demands absolute devotion to the extent that even the faculty that distinguished man elevating him above all creation, namely intellect and reason, had to be slaughtered at the alter of Divine love. Eternal adoration was indeed a noble attribute of the Angels, but self negation and self annihilation for the object of love was to become the distinctive feature of mankind and, in effect, was to come to represent the greatest form of devotion, a form of devotion even angels would not have the privilege of enjoying, hence the excellence of the martyrs over even the most devout Angels in the highest heavens.

Adam [A] was then banished from the divine presence, not because of a sin, but because of underestimating the demands of Divine love, as with a lover who all too often stands guilty of being remiss and not vigilant enough in love's matters. This separation of lovers, as is between any two lovers, and the consequent painful yearning for communion with the beloved, was intended to develop, to its very fullness, appreciation of the loving relationship enjoyed by Adam [A] with the beloved, namely Allah. It was intended to enhance further the love of the lover for the beloved, for separation is the greatest augmentor of love.

Having repented Adam [A] is reunited with his beloved, but this time

the intensity of love and devotion to the beloved is ever so much greater than before. The anguish of regret and the pain of penance are the greatest tools in forging profundity of love and elevating it to the most majestic heights. Those who repent sincerely,

"...Allah transforms their wrongdoing to virtue..." (25, 70)

for sin in this context becomes instrumental in enhancing spirituality.

Thus, the episode was imperative in enhancing the stature of Adam [A] in the estimation of Allah, and shaytan, in his blind arrogance, unwittingly became the very means by which the stature of Adam [A] and the nature of his love for Allah was elevated. Every human being lives the very same episode in innumerable ways every day of his life, and fortunate indeed are those who understand and take heed.

Conclusion

The least that should be said about this matter is the following :

" Indeed Allah created creation because He is, and He created man for there can be none but Him."

Creation exists of necessity as a consequence of the manifestation of Divine attributes. Man, as a part of creation, too exists as an expression of the very same Divine manifestation. What makes him unique though, is that his existence stands as an open declaration of there being no other but Allah.

Man, having being uniquely imbued with freedom and the opportunity to explore every possibility, the liberty to venture down any path of his choosing, every idea his intellect and imagination could conjure, every deed and act his physical being could be directed towards, even violation of every norm, tenet and decree, the cosmic laws and

indeed the very scheme of creation, what becomes patently obvious is that, at the very end, man cannot but return to Allah and we are forced to acknowledge that there can be no other possibility but Allah, His will and decree.

Through man alone does Allah manifest the absolute truism that 'there can be none but Him',

" La ilaha illal-lah ".

An Irrelevant Question – Why did Allah not Create me Sooner ?

Firstly, the question itself is meaningless. What do we mean by ' sooner ' ? If one wishes to say ' sooner ' in the context of eternity before the creation of time, then the word ' sooner ' has no meaning. Any span of time, whether 1 or 1000 billion years, has no meaning in relation to eternity. Time cannot be conceived within the span of eternity given that eternity exists outside time. Only Allah is eternal. His Essence and His Attributes are eternal. Eternity cannot pertain to anything or any being except Allah.

If ' sooner ' in the question refers to eternity itself, that means being under no limits of time, which is a necessary prerogative of only His Being. That is to say, eternity is not true of anything except Allah. In a Divine Utterance (Hadith Qudsi), Allah says:

" I am Eternity. "

Everything else is but a ' single moment ' in his presence.

SECTION 3



DID ALLAH PRE-ORDAIN MY DEEDS ? ...IF SO, WHY SHOULD HE JUDGE ME ?

It is believed by many that Allah manages everything in His creation with fate and predestination and that he has preordained our deeds. If this applies to me, for instance, in the sense that all my actions have been preordained by Him, why then should I be accountable before Him ? Why should Allah force me to do a certain deed and then hold me responsible ?

Further, are choices truly open before me ? Have I had any choice in my birth, sex, height, build of body, colour, and country ? Do I choose that the sun rise and the moon set ? Is it by my choice that a blow of fate descends on me or that death surprises me ?

Conversely, if it is assumed that I am free and that I have a ' will ' besides that of Allah, wouldn't that be considered a kind of polytheism since one is led to admit the ' multiplicity of wills ' ? Is it then possible for someone to do something that Allah has not decreed ?

Moreover, what can be said to counter the ideas of scientific determinism and historical materialism concerning the ' determinism ' of environment and circumstances as well as the various forms of ' inevitabilities ' that adherents of that philosophy advocate ?



There is, indeed, a lot of confusion and conjecture regarding the concept of 'predestination' and most people who have pondered over the problem have been carried away by fanciful ideas.

Some, for example, think that men are completely determined in whatever they choose or do ; others say that human actions have no concern with the Almighty. A third group takes the middle course, which is the correct opinion.

Allah has indeed imbued the chosen and enlightened with understanding of the secret of predestination and has concealed it from the uneducated folk lest they go astray. It is for this reason that the Holy Prophet Muhammad [S] insisted that discussion and argument about the matter be eschewed by the unenlightened in view of the grave nature of this question which is, so easily, misunderstood.

How are we to understand the issue of fate and predestination in view of the multitudinous facets of the subject at hand ? The following is an attempt to put the issue of ' fate ' and ' predestination ' in its correct perspective by dealing with these various facets one at a time.

It has been reported that once Imam Abu Hanifah asked Imam Ja'far bin Muhammad as-Sadiq (a noble descendant of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [S]) (may God be pleased with them) :

" O, son of the Prophet ! Has Allah entrusted all matters to men ?" He answered, "Allah is far from delegating His Lordship to people." Imam Abu Hanifah next asked, " Does Allah compel men to their actions ? " He replied, "Allah is too just to constrain them to act and then punish them." " How is that ?" Imam Abu Hanifah sought for an

explanation. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq replied, " The truth lies in between - there is neither compulsion nor delegation. Man is neither constrained nor is he given complete power over things."

The Meaning of 'Taqrir '

Because Allah is the All-Wise, He necessarily acts with wisdom. And because He is the All-Knowing, everything in His universe is done with knowledge. Nothing is chaotic, haphazard or happens without coherence.

"...Verily, all things Have We created in ' Qadr ' (proportion and measure)..."

(54, 49)

The word ' Taqrir ' or ' Qadr ' is oftentimes translated as ' predestination '. This is not at all accurate. 'Taqrir ' means ' measure '. Allah creation is not haphazard. Everything proceeds by law, proportion, and measure. Everything has its appointed time, place, and occasion, as also its definite limitation. Nothing happens but according to His law and its due process and every deed, word, and thought of man has its fullest consequences as determined by Allah's universal law - physical, moral, social, economic, etc. (except, of course, in so far as the Grace and Mercy of Allah intervenes).

The true Muslim believes in the timeless knowledge of Allah and in His power to plan and execute His plans. Allah is not indifferent to this world nor is He neutral to it. His knowledge and power are in action at all times to keep order in His vast domain and maintain full command over His creation. He is Wise and Loving, and whatever He does must have a good motive and a meaningful purpose. If this is established in our minds, we should accept, with good Faith, all that He does, although we may fail to understand it fully, or even think it is bad (refer to next section: 'WHY DID ALLAH CREATE EVIL').

We should have strong Faith in Him and accept whatever He does because our knowledge is limited and our thinking is based on individual or personal considerations, whereas His knowledge is limitless and He plans on a universal basis.

This does not in any way make man fatalist or helpless. It simply draws the demarcation line between what is Allah concern and what is man's responsibility. Because we are by nature finite and limited, we have a finite and limited degree of power and freedom. We cannot do everything, and He graciously holds us responsible only for the things we do. The things which we cannot do, or things which He Himself does, are not in the realm of our responsibility. He is Just and has given us limited power to match our finite nature and limited responsibility. On the other hand, the timeless knowledge and power of Allah to execute His plans does not prevent us from making our own plans in our own limited sphere of power. On the contrary, He exhorts us to think, to plan and to make sound choices, but if things do not happen the way we wanted or planned them, we should not lose Faith or surrender ourselves to mental strains and shattering worries. We should try again and again, and if the results are not satisfactory, then we know that we have tried our best and cannot be held responsible for the results, because what is beyond our capacity and responsibility is the affair of Allah alone. The Muslims call this article of Faith the belief in ' Qada ' and ' Qadar ' (loosely translated as ' destiny '). ' Qadar ' or ' Taqdir ' simply means that the Timeless Knowledge of Allah anticipates events, and that events take place in consonance with Divine Cosmic Laws (Qur'an, 18 : 29; 41 : 46; 53 : 33-62; 54 : 49; 65 : 31; 76 : 30-31).

Furthermore, it is Allah who has absolute power in His universe. All the laws and causes of this universe are Allah's creation. Allah is He who created the laws of this universe and it is He who can also alter or abrogate these laws for His Messengers. He made fire, which burns, cool and a means of safety for Nabi Ibrahim [A] (Abr-

aham). He made the sea, which drowns, a refuge and means of rescue for Nabi Musa [A]. He gave Nabi 'Isa [A] (Jesus) the ability to give sight to the blind, heal lepers, and bring the dead to life. Allah gave all these miracles to His Prophets [A] (peace be upon them all) as confirmation that they were conveying the message of Allah, the absolute legislator. However, His might is not confined to His Prophets [A]. Rather, every day we see His power manifest when a weak person defeats a powerful one, or an oppressed man overcomes a tyrant or an underprivileged human being masters people of great influence.

Allah's Foreknowledge of Events

Since Allah is beyond time and space, and since everything is included in His knowledge, He encompasses the past, present, and the future as one point. He knows everything before they are created by Him. No analogy or comparison would be sufficient to explain this concept since our perception is limited.

Your deeds are foreknown to Allah but they are not preordained for you against your will. They are only anticipated in His prescience just as you may foresee, in the light of your personal knowledge, that your son will commit fornication when tempted, for example, or be chaste and he actually goes on to do it. Have you compelled him to it ? Or was it, in fact, a foreknowledge which ' came true ' based on your intimate acquaintance with your son and your comprehension of the situation ?

Similarly, if you see your child not studying and neglecting his lessons you will tell him that he will not pass his examinations. Consequently, he then goes on to fail. Did you know the unseen, or did you simply take stock of the situation and reach a logical conclusion ? If this can happen among Allah creatures, with their limited knowledge and inadequate abilities, can it really be considered im-

possible for Allah, the Almighty, the Most Knowledgeable Creator, to reach accurate conclusions ? We say that this is part of Allah comprehensive knowledge of His universe. His knowledge is infinite, encompassing everything in this world and the next, the manifest and hidden.

One more example may suffice. You are on top of a hill overlooking a flat terrain on which there is a straight road. A car is speeding really fast on the road. Because you are on top of the hill, you can see that there is a barricade on the road ahead. The driver cannot see that. Because of your position, you know that the car will hit the barricade. Eventually, the car does hit the barricade. Even though you knew beforehand, the car did not hit the barricade because you knew

Are Choices Truly Open before Me?

Another confusion is the description by many individuals of ' freedom of will ' as a lie considering the argument that no one has had a say in determining his birth, sex, height, colour, or country and that no one can will the sun to move from its orbit. The cause of the confusion is that the argument here presumes a conception of freedom very different from that which is held by the believer. The skeptic has absolute freedom in mind; therefore, he asks whether he can have a choice in making himself white or black, tall or short or whether he can will to move the sun from its place or stop it in its orbit. Hence, he enquires plaintively, " Where is my freedom ? " He is, in fact, talking about absolute freedom, the freedom to do as he wills in the universe - such a kind of freedom is Allah's alone. Muslims do not hold this view of freedom as we are guided by the Qur'anic verse :

" Your Lord creates whatsoever He wills and chooses freely, but you have no power to choose (absolutely). "
(28, 68)

No one has any choice in matters relating to creation because it is

Allah who creates what He wills and pleases. He will not hold you responsible for your short or admonish you for your long stature, nor will He punish you for failing to stop the sun in its orbit. Allah did not give man unlimited choice - He gave him a choice that is appropriate to his function in existence (refer to previous section: WHY HAVE I BEEN CREATED ?)

The sphere of accountability is the area of Divine Injunction (ie. moral and legal responsibility). Within this area you are free and the argument should be confined inside its compass. You are free to repress your appetites, to bridle your rage, to resist the prompting of your ego, to deter your evil intentions, to enhance your benevolent tendencies - you can be generous with your money and self; you can tell the truth or lie; you can restrain your hand from forbidden gains; you can divert your eye from prying into the sensitive spots of others; you can hold your tongue and refrain from cursing, back-biting, and slander. In this area we are free and it is in this area that we are liable to account and questioning.

Relative Freedom is Real

The freedom we should be discussing is relative and not absolute - it is man's freedom within the sphere of Divine Injunction. This latter kind of freedom is real and the evidence for its reality is our innate, intuitive sense of it. We feel responsibility and contrition for our wrong-doing and we feel relief over our good deeds. We sense in every moment of our lives that we are involved in weighing and choosing from among several possibilities. The primary function of our mind, indeed, is to choose and favour from among alternatives.

We clearly and decisively distinguish between the trembling of our hand as a result of fever and its movement as it writes a letter describing that trembling. We are conscious of the shivering as determined and compulsory and of the letter-writing as free and voluntary. If we were compelled or conditioned in both cases we wouldn't be able to

make the distinction.

This freedom is further affirmed by our experience that it is impossible under any pressure to compel the heart to accept anything it does not want to. You can force a woman with threats and beating to undress but no pressure whatsoever can make her love you with all her heart. This indicates that Allah has safeguarded our hearts from all forms of compulsion and duress and that he created them free. This is why Allah judges according to what the heart harbours and the intentions bear. The believer who is forced to utter expressions of Shirk (polytheism) or blasphemy under duress or torture will not be held accountable for them as long as his heart is steadfast in faith. In the following verse Allah absolves such persons of responsibility :

" Those who are forced to apostasize while their hearts remain loyal to faith shall be absolved. "

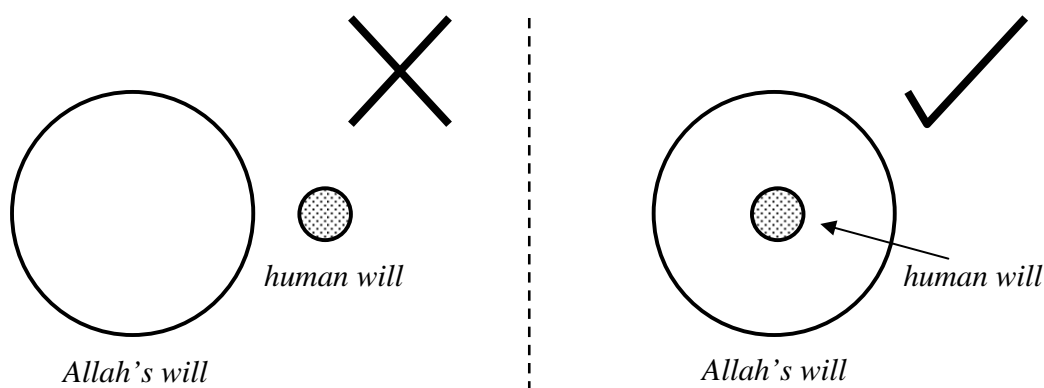
(16, 106)

Thus compulsion removes accountability. So when someone commits a sin by being compelled to do it through no choice of his own, he is not punished, and likewise, someone who performs an act of obedience under compulsion, with no freedom of choice, is not rewarded for it. Even if major sins, such as kufr (disbelief) and adultery, are committed under compulsion, there will be no punishment. The action must be done by employing the capacity created for us by Allah through the intellect and the free will. Thus Allah's justice requires that insane people be exempt from being held responsible, for their intellect cannot direct its capacity towards good or evil through the exercise of their own free will. A mad person cannot distinguish between the harmful and the beneficial. It is the same with a child under the age of puberty, for his mind is too immature to understand the implications of choice.

Does Human Choice Transcend Divine Will ?

A further element of confusion in connection with the question of freedom of will is that some people understand human freedom as implying a transcendence of Divine Will and a management of affairs independent of Allah. Consequently, they accuse the advocates of ' freedom of choice ' of polytheism (Shirk) ... of setting up equals to Allah who bid and dispense like Him.

This view is what was echoed in the introduction about the ' multiplicity of wills '. It is a mistaken conception, for human will does not transcend Divine Will. Man, in his freedom, may act contrary to what satisfies Allah, but he cannot do anything in contradiction to His Will. Allah granted us freedom to transgress against His wishes (ie. we disobey Him) but He gave none the freedom to transcend His Will. Our will is not transcendent to Allah's will but is rather a product of His will. The following diagram illustrates this point:



In fact, we encounter here another facet of the relative nature of human freedom. All our actions are within the sphere of Divine Will and are subservient to it even if they go against Allah's wishes and violate the Shari'ah (Divine law). Our freedom itself is a divine gift that Allah willingly bestowed and it was not forcefully extorted from Him. Indeed, our freedom is exactly what He willed, and this is how we can understand this Qur'anic verse :

" You cannot will but by the will of Allah."
(76, 30)

Our will is subservient to His; it is a grant from Him, a gift of His Kindness and Generosity. It lies within His own Will; there is no duality, opposition, or competition between our will and Allah's Will and Judgment. Understanding freedom of choice in this way does not go against Tawhid (ie. faith in the Oneness of Allah) nor sets up equals to Allah who bid and dispense like Him. Our freedom is precisely what He has willed and decided, and therefore human beings have no free choice in ' free choice '.

Is Taqdir a Compelling of Man to that which is Contrary to His Nature ?

A third point of confusion about the issue of freedom is that some people who have tackled the question of fate and predestination or the controversy of determinism versus freedom have understood ' Taqdir ' as a ' compelling of man to that which is contrary to his nature and bent '. This is an error into which many have fallen. Allah has unequivocally denied that He resorts to compulsion :

" If we wish, we can reveal to them a sign from the heavens before which they will bow their heads in utter humility." (26, 4)

The meaning here is clear enough - Allah could have compelled men to believe by revealing incontestable signs or supernatural occurrences but He did not choose this path because compulsion is not of His laws intended for man :

" There shall be no compulsion in faith. True guidance is now distinct from error."
(2, 256)

" Had your Lord pleased, all the people of the earth would have believed in Him. Would you then force faith upon men ? "
(10, 99)

Rather, the crux of this contention is the unfortunate fact that many people have a weak will and are lacking in good intent. As a consequence they search for excuses and attempt to shift their moral responsibility and, audaciously, even accuse Allah of ill-intent. It is only these who are disposed to claim that ' Taqdir ' is a ' compelling of man to that which is contrary to his nature '.

Compulsion is not part of Divine Law.

Fate and predestination should not be conceived as a forcing of people to what is against their nature; on the contrary, Allah destines each, human being to a fate which corresponds to his intentions - He wills man to what man himself really wills, and He desires for man what man himself desires. There is no duality here. Allah ' preordination ' is identical to the creature's freedom of choice because Allah ' destines ' every man according to his own desires and intentions :

" Whoever seeks the harvest of the world to come, to him We will give in great abundance; and whoever desires the harvest of this world, a share of it shall be his..."

(42, 10)

" As for those who follow the right path, Allah will increase their guidance. "

(47, 17)

" If Allah finds goodness in your hearts, He will give you that which is better ..."

(8, 70)

" There is a sickness in their hearts which Allah has increased. "

(2, 10)

Allah ' ordains ' according to the intentions and heart of man: if these are evil, man will come to evil; if good, good will be his fate. There

is no duality or opposition; predestination is freedom of choice as Allah ' predestines ' us to what we choose with our hearts and intentions. There is no injustice, compulsion, or duress in this regard and there is no subjection to what is against our nature :

" For him that gives in charity and guards himself against evil and believes in goodness, we shall ease the path of salvation; but for him that gives not and thinks himself self-sufficient and disbelieves in goodness, We shall ease the path to destruction. "

(92, 5-10)

An easy example to illustrate this point is that of a wayfarer who comes to a crossroad - the path to the right leading to destination A and the other to destination B. If he chooses the right path, his ' destiny ' will inevitably be point A and if he chooses the left path his ' destiny ' will inevitably be point B. Similarly if a person chooses the path of righteousness his destiny will be heaven, and if he chooses the path of evil his destiny will be hell. Allah destines each, human being to a fate which corresponds to his intentions and choices. If you choose to avoid wrongdoing, deviance and rebellion, you come under the will, or ' destiny ', of guidance. But if you choose the way of rejection and wrongdoing, you fall under His will, or 'destiny ', that there be no guidance for you.

So in neither of these situations are you outside Allah's will, for nothing can happen to you except what He wills for you. Seen from this perspective we discover yet another facet of this intriguing subject, that being, that we cannot escape Allah's will or law, no matter which path we may choose.

Does Allah Guide or Misguide anyone He so wishes to ?

Allah's justice has demanded that man be granted freedom of choice in respect of the path he follows. How, in the face of this freedom, is it then possible to say that Allah guides and leads astray anyone

He wills ? If that be so, do any of us really control anything in the face of the will of Allah Almighty ? Before dealing with this point, we have to understand the meaning of guidance.

Guidance means ' showing someone the way '. When someone asks you about the route to a certain place, you instruct him to go in such-and-such a direction, and he will find the place he is looking for. You have guided him to it. Thus, guidance means showing the way to Allah so that people come to know Allah and to worship and obey all His injunctions. However, there is another meaning, that being the ' help and support given by Allah to His believing servants '. When a person becomes a believer, Allah gives him support and even more right guidance. To this effect Allah says :

" But those who are rightly guided, He increases them in guidance..."
(47, 17)

To elucidate the point, let us consider the following verses which were addressed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad [S] :

" You most certainly guide to a straight path."
(42, 52)

" You cannot guide those you love, rather Allah guides those whom He wills."
(28, 56)

In these verses Allah ascribes guidance to the Prophet [S] in one and denies it to him in the other. How, then, is it possible for the Prophet [S] to guide to the 'Straight Path ' when he was unable to guide those he loved most ? To answer, know that the guidance ascribed by Allah to His Prophet [S] is the guidance of 'direction ', since the Prophet [S] directed people to the way of belief and obedience, and showed them what pleases and displeases Allah and incurs His punishment. The other kind of guidance, which Allah did not ascribe to His Prophet [S]

is the guidance of support, because it is Allah who gives increased guidance only to those who follow the way of guidance, grants them help and support, and makes the faith dear to them. Allah Almighty says :

" ... Allah has endeared belief to you, making it pleasing to your hearts, and He has made unbelief, wrongdoing and disobedience detestable to you. Those, they are the rightly guided."

(49, 7)

Those who follow the way of belief and find the fulfillment of Allah's promise, will realise that Allah's ' will ' has been attained. Those who follow the path of disobedience and rejection and find the fulfillment of Allah's threat, will also realise that Allah's will has been attained. Neither the believer nor the unbeliever can revolt against the will of Allah. Here accountability is fair in both cases, since man has chosen with his own free will the way of belief or disobedience. Allah has shown us those who are not covered by his will of guidance. He says:

" Allah does not guide rejecting people."

(2, 261)

" Allah does not guide wrongdoing people."

Those who believe enter the will of belief - Allah supports them by more guidance and endears belief to them; their final destination is Paradise. Those who disbelieve and associate others with Allah (may Allah protect us) have entered the will of disbelief - Allah does not grant them support nor guidance - the self-evident law of cause and effect.

When Allah says, " ...good and evil are destined by Allah for man...", it means that comfort and hardship, happiness and sorrow, riches and poverty, health and sickness are visited on man by

Allah's orders, and not that Allah inflicts, or gives, these to man without man deserving them. Punishment or reward, whether in this world or in the next, is ordained by Allah, but only as a result of what man chooses and does.

Man is to Intend while Allah is to Enable

" It was not you who smote them; Allah smote them."
(8, 17)

Although this verse was revealed specifically in the context of one of the Holy Prophet's [S] military campaigns it does reveal an important fact in this discussion - it indicates that the strike effected by man and that ' ordained ' by Allah merge into one and the same strike. This is the solution to the puzzle of fate and predestination - man is to intend while Allah is to enable and dispose, good for good and evil for evil.

In the things that are seemingly subjected to your will by Allah, the action is not done except by His permission. The foot will not move a single step unless He gives it the strength and capacity to step forward. The hand will not move unless He gives it the power to move. Whoever might contest this, to him we say, " Look into yourself and to your conscious movements and you will know that they are accomplished by the power of Allah. When you are seated and need to stand up, all you do is to ' want ' to stand up and Allah gives you the strength to do so. If you claim that this happens by your own will and power, tell us how many muscles do you move when you stand up ? How many ligaments and tendons stretch or expand making you able to stand up ? " The answer is that most of us do not know. Only those who have studied the human body and its movements know, and even they do not stand up spontaneously. If a man were to stand up by an act of his own will, he would have to give instructions to certain muscles to contract and to others to expand, and direct each and every individual cell in so many other related biological processes and it would take him a very very long

time, for he would have to order each muscle, in fact each and every one of the millions of cells involved, individually.

The same thing happens when a person wants to walk. He has no knowledge of the movements that take place inside his body when he walks. If he needs to go faster or to run, many more things happen - his heart increases its pulse rate so that the body can get the extra oxygen needed for running, his blood circulation increases, his breathing becomes more rapid, and the muscles move in a different way from when he is walking. All of this happens without any personal choice and is accomplished by the power of Allah who gives the body the capacity to perform all these movements without any direct choice or control at all on the part of man.

These movements, whether voluntary or involuntary, take place at tremendous speed, beyond the scope of human choice to order. This energising ability is granted by Allah and no one can claim it to be automatic, or that it happens by human choice. Allah has placed in you this capacity for movement and given you choice with regards to directing it. You can direct that latent energy created by Allah in the pursuit of good or evil; you can walk to the masjid (place of worship) or to the pub (may Allah protect us !) This walking is not done automatically - it is Allah who gives the strength and ability. What you have done is to direct this capacity to either good or evil.

Your hand can hold a knife to cut something into suitable pieces for your mouth so that you can eat. You can also hold the same knife to murder someone. In both cases, you did not create the capacity in the hand to do this. That capacity is a gift from Allah. All you did was to exploit the capacity given by Allah, in the hand that is created by Allah, to do good or evil. This is the limit of the choice Allah has given you : to use that power for good or evil. This is the boundary of accountability. Allah has willed that choice in us. Had He not created us with that choice, we would not have been able to choose; but

we do have that choice within the limit of responsibility.

We also discern profound benevolence in Allah disallowing us absolute freedom. This is a sign of Allah's all-embracing mercy, for if all things were subject to your will, it would truly be a great misfortune. Imagine that you had to instruct the heart to beat, the stomach to function, the lungs to breathe etc. You would not have the capacity to do all of this. You would not be unable to enjoy any bounty, pursue any profession, progress in life or even implement the laws of Allah, for simply staying alive would occupy all your time and energy. Moreover, you would not be able to sleep, for how would you be able to if the heart was following your orders ? It would stop when you went to sleep. And how would a little child with no knowledge make these complex systems work continually ?

You are, then, under subjugation, in respect of most of your bodily functions. This coercion is exerted by Allah out of His mercy to you - to enable you to live, benefit and strive. They work by compulsion, not volition. They do what Allah wills them to do, and stops when He commands them to stop. If you had freedom of choice in respect of these, you would simply not be able to survive.

Once a man came to the Sayyidina Ali [R], the fourth Khalif , inquiring about predestination. Ali [R] asked him to raise one foot which he promptly did. Then he asked him to raise the other. The inquirer responded that he was unable to do so. " This..." Ali [R] said, "...is the meaning of predestination." Allah has given man the ability to choose to do some things while much is beyond his capability. The choice made is then actualized by the power of Allah, and the ability to choose being a precious gift vouchsafed to man.

Is Human Freedom a Fixed Sum ?

Human freedom is not a fixed sum but a relative potential which is capable of increase. Man can enhance his freedom with knowledge.

By inventing tools, instruments, and means of transportation, he has managed to traverse our planet, to defeat distance, and to overcome the limitations of time and space. Through the study of the laws of the environment, he could control and exploit it for his benefit; he knew how to resist heat, cold, and darkness thus compounding his freedom in the sphere of action.

Knowledge, thus, has been one means of breaking bounds and restraints and of unshackling freedom. Another means to those ends has been true religion: invoking Allah's aid by taking the path leading to Him and receiving Revelation, support, and guidance from Him. This was the way of the Prophets [A] and their followers.

Nabi Sulayman [A] (Prophet Solomon, peace be upon him) utilized the jinn (ie. an invisible creation made of smokeless fire; often translated as ' genie ' or ' demon '), mastered the winds, and spoke with birds by Allah's aid and gifts. Nabi Musa [A] parted the sea while Nabi Isa [A] raised the dead, walked on the water, and healed the blind and the leper, all by Allah's aid and gifts .

We read about the Awliya' (saints & friends of Allah) and the blessed for whom the ' terrain is folded ' and the unseen made known. They attain to these levels of freedom by perseverance in Allah's worship and by endearing themselves to Him. He responds by endowing them with emanations from His hidden knowledge. Once again we encounter knowledge but this time it is ' Ladunni ' knowledge (inspiration from Allah).

Is Man no more than a Product of his Environment ?

Most western philosophers and men of science over the last few centuries have subscribed to the concept of ' scientific determinism ' in which determinism is ascribed to the general pattern of the cosmos as a whole (ie. the faceless laws of nature) rather than to Allah, the Almighty and Omniscient. This view is narrower, more rigid, and

less amenable to the good of mankind than the religious view deducible from the Qur'an.

Scientific determinism teaches that man has no freedom except in the narrowest and most insignificant fields and that this little freedom is relative and is evident only as a practical consequence of social needs, but not from any established scientific or philosophical reality. It is not a principle but a provision. For without some provision for 'freedom of choice', it would be impossible for society to find a basis for its legislation, for the regulations it imposes on all its members under threat of criminal and civil sanction. Men of science and western jurisprudence explain punishment as a response on the part of society to the need for self-preservation, just as an individual would react for his own self-preservation. Sin, on the other hand, is seen as no more than a 'determined', spontaneous reaction to idiosyncratic bio-chemical and environmental factors. Western determinism subjects man to determination by his environment and inheritance from his parents to such a degree that no escape from natural law is possible in their view. It subjects man's will to this determination such that it is impossible for man to change himself.

Materialistic thinkers and 'men of science' commit a grievous error when they conceive of man as a prisoner to historical and class determinism, thus, turning him into a link in a chain of economic and social, laws and movements from which he cannot escape or extricate himself. Man becomes, in their view, a straw blown about helplessly in a violent air-current with no aid to steer himself with. The French philosopher Hyppolyte Taine expressed this view with the dictum, "Man is the product of his environment." Many philosophers and scientists have adopted this view, insisting that if it were possible to know the laws and secrets of human life to the same extent as we have discovered the laws of movement of the heavenly bodies, it would become possible to predict precisely the destiny of every man and nation, just as astronomers predict with precision an eclipse of the sun or of the moon.

Whereas solar eclipses can be accurately predicted to the minute and second and the sun's future movements known for days and years, no one can know what is hidden in a man's intentions or what he will do the next day and the day thereafter. Such human factors can only be known in the form of probabilities or likely causes of action because he, unlike other physical phenomena, has been imbued with the freedom to observe or violate the Cosmic pattern.

All the prophecies of Karl Marx, for instance, have proven wrong : communism did not arise in an advanced country, as he predicted, but in a backward one. The conflict between capitalism and communism did not intensify but both camps were led by rapprochement to a state of ' peaceful co-existence '. Communist countries have even gone so far as to open their doors embracing western capitalism. The sharpening of contradictions that Marx expected to occur in the capitalist society leading to its bankruptcy did not materialize; on the contrary, the capitalist economy flourished while discord and dissention spread among the members of the socialist camp.

Marx's calculations were mistaken in their entirety proving the error of his deterministic system. All this indicates the failure of materialistic thinking to understand man and history and the error of its predictions about the future. The failure resulted from a basic fallacy; namely, the materialistic conception of man as a fly caught in a net of inevitabilities and the total disregard of the reality of man's freedom.

There are, still, the materialist's arguments about the conditioning of man by the environment, society, and circumstances. Man, it is claimed, does not live alone and his freedom is not practiced in a vacuum. In reply to these arguments we say that the influence of the environment, society, and circumstances as factors antagonistic to human freedom confirms the dialectic nature of that freedom and does not negate it. The freedom of the individual can only assert its

existence in the face of an opposing force seeking to displace it. If man moves in a vacuum where no resistance of any kind exists, he will not be free in the logical meaning of the word since there will be no obstacle for him to overcome and thereby manifest and emphasize his freedom.

Is Allah's Knowledge not an Encumbering Interference ?

Some skeptics wonder at that Allah who interferes in every thing big or small, mastering all creatures and even " intimating to the bees to abide in mountains ". " No leaf falls but He knows of it " and no fruit grows out of its bud but He takes count of it. No female conceives and gives birth without His knowledge. It is He who causes the foot to stumble over a hole and the fly to fall in a plate of food. " Don't you keep your god busy ?... ", the skeptic may ask, "... with too many trivial things under such a conception of Him ? "

We, Muslims, don't really understand such skeptics. Would Allah, in their opinion, be more of a divinity if He relieved himself of all responsibility and, turning his back on the world he created, left it unattended to destroy itself ? Is the true divinity, in their estimation, that idle, unconscious being who does not hear, see, or respond to his creatures nor meticulously care for them ?

It is to be further asked, from what quarter do they know that certain affairs are important and serious enough to deserve such attention ? The fly, which appeared to the enquirer so insignificant that it doesn't matter whether it falls into a plate of food or not, can change history with such an ' unimportant fall '. It could thus infect an army with cholera giving victory to the other side and, consequently, totally altering the course of history. Wasn't Alexander the Great killed by a mosquito ? The most trivial premises can lead to the most serious consequences, whereas the most important beginnings can issue in nothing. The Knower of the Unseen alone realizes the value of everything.

It remains to be asked whether our skeptics have set themselves up as trustees over Allah defining his prerogatives. Our Lord is most Holy and High above such a naive conception. The God worthy of divinity is He whose Knowledge comprehends all, Who misses not one atom, neither in earth or sky. He is Allah, the All-Hearing, the Responder, the Mindful of His creatures.

Freedom is Love

Remember that Allah is All-Able to compel anyone He wills to do anything He wishes. There is, however, love for Allah towards man, which can only be realised by those who willingly and lovingly worship Him - not out of compulsion, but out of love for Him. They worship Him because of their love for Him and they obey Him because they love His obedience. This could not occur unless these creatures had full freedom to believe or not to believe, to obey and disobey. These creatures are able to say, " ...O Allah ! We love you and therefore we believe in You, not because we are forced to, but out of love ! Allah, we love obedience, so we obey You without compulsion and out of love. We will carry out Your commands and avoid Your prohibitions. O Allah, though we are able to commit sin, tempted by our passion and by the shayatin (devils) among men and jinn, yet, O Allah, our love for You is much greater than our love for the world and its allurements. All that You want us to do, we love to do, for we love You and love that which pleases You..."

This is the meaning of freedom of choice in the universe. Allah does not need a hollow form of submission. He wants man to come to Him with the heart of a lover, for belief is a test of love for Allah in the heart. The greater your love for Him, the greater your belief in His Way, but if your love for Him is weak, you will wander far from His Way.

The Pragmatism of Taqdir

The efficacy of belief in ' Taqdir ' (the belief that because Allah is the All-Wise and knowledgeable, everything, good or bad, proceeds by law, proportion, and measure; that nothing, good or bad, happens but according to His law and its due process, and every deed, word, and thought of man has its fullest consequences as determined by Allah's universal law; and that nothing is chaotic, haphazard or happens without coherence) is as follows :

- 1) No matter what hardship or misfortune befalls one, it will be accepted without panic and the heart will remain strong in the face of such hardship; the individual being fully cognizant that this has occurred by the wise ' decree ' of Allah. Strong belief in Taqdir will indicate that Allah's Wish is in this occurrence and that the hardship will disappear only when so desired by Allah. Thus the man of Taqdir accepts what comes his way with confidence in the beneficence of Allah. He exerts himself constructively within its sphere, taking the opportunity to evidence his faith and display loving devotion to his creator.
- 2) One who has understood and accepted this conception of Taqdir will not be overcome with frustration at the delay in the passing of the hardship. He will not become despondent and lose hope when the misfortune endures for any length of time. He will banish weakness.
- 3) The adherent of Taqdir will not adopt unlawful ways and means of combating the difficulty, for he knows that the adversity has been brought about by Allah. He understands well that elimination of the hardship is not possible without the Will of Allah. He therefore realizes the futility of his efforts in trying to eliminate what is beyond his power. He will thus not unnecessarily court the displeasure of Allah by the adoption of unlawful measures. In matters which are the affair of Allah alone, why court Allah's Wrath when one's purpose cannot be achieved after having displeased Him?

4) The believer in Taqdir will not rely solely on material and mundane measures, but will resort to prayer and supplication to Allah as well. He believes that nothing can be gained without His Will. He thus derives greater hope and strength by supplicating to Allah. An additional benefit of engaging in prayer is the strengthening of one's relationship with Allah. A strong bond of love and confidence in Allah is the basis of all peace and comfort.

5) The believer in Taqdir will not attribute success, accomplishment, and excellence to his efforts. He will attribute everything to the Will and Pleasure of Allah. He will thus be imbued with humility. Such a man will not be arrogant and haughty.

The summary of what has been said above is : The believer in Taqdir will be grateful in times and occasions of success and prosperity, and he will be patient when failure and adversity overtake him. This is the great advantage which Allah alludes to in the Qur'anic verse :

"... So that you do not lose hope over what you have lost nor do you become elated because of what you have gained..."

The Islamic conception of Taqdir should not be misconstrued and the essential and correct ways and means for worldly affairs should not be discarded on the pretext of resignation to Taqdir. Discarding the lawful means and agencies which Allah has created for worldly affairs is weakness, incompetence and foolishly erroneous.

Has Allah created people for Hell ?

Some skeptics cite the following noble verse of the Holy Qur'an :

" We have created men and jinn for Jahannam (Hell). They have hearts that do not understand, eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear. Such people are like cattle. No, they are even further astray ! Those are the heedless ones." (7, 179)

This verse can be easily misunderstood. Simply stated, Allah has created for such people hearts (ie. the faculty of perception) that can understand, but they do not use these to gain understanding. He has created eyes for them that can see, but it is they who do not choose to see. He created for them ears too, but they do not use them to listen to the truth. They choose to remain heedless and, as such, go far astray. They do not use the faculties so graciously bestowed upon them but rather indulge in vanity and proudly respond with passion and caprice, exactly like those who do not understand, see or hear. It was they who did not employ their senses. Had they used these senses in the correct way, they would have discovered truth & believed.

Further, Allah knows the ' destiny ' of his servants. Can it really be considered impossible then for Allah, the Almighty, the Most Knowledgeable Creator, to know for certain that a number of His creatures will finally end up in Heaven or Hell ? If His creatures can make accurate assessments, can the knowledge of Allah Almighty not reach accurate conclusions too ? We say that this is part of Allah comprehensive knowledge of His universe. His knowledge is infinite, encompassing everything in this world and the next.

Some people, however, hesitate at this noble saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [S]:

" A man can do the actions of someone destined for Paradise, until there is only an armspan between him and it, and then what is decreed overtakes him and he does the actions of someone destined for Hell, and thus enters it."

It can be argued, based on a superficial appraisal of the saying, that reckoning cannot be just when what is ' decreed ' is inescapable, and when being admitted to Paradise or Hellfire is predestined , no matter what the individual's deeds be. This cannot be farther from the truth. The Prophetic saying is simply a warning against self-righteousness and also hopelessness - the Holy Prophet Muhammad

[S] wanted to warn us against the whispering of shaytan (satan) and the promptings of our sordid passions, as well as to open for us the doors of hope forever, so that the believer be vigilant and the disobedient anticipate Allah's forgiveness and have every hope of pardon. He has made it quite clear in the above mentioned saying that a man may do good deeds so as to qualify himself for Paradise, but that shaytan concentrates on tempting the believers and never relents. Similarly, Allah has informed us that shaytan does his level best to entice the believer :

" I will sit in ambush for them. on your Straight Path."
(7, 16)

shaytan does not concentrate his efforts on the irreligious malefactor who indulges in intoxicating drink, gambling, idle amusement and brothels, for those people have already been seduced and they need no more temptation. He concentrates all his efforts on those who are devoted to their Lord, assaulting them from every direction, tempting them.

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, wants to draw our attention to the means of access that shaytan has to man so that we may be mindful. He wants us to know that shaytan will never leave us alone, right up to our last breath. He will never give up, but will continue whispering, saying, for example, that your virtues and devotional practices are more than sufficient and you are sure to enter Paradise. He goes on repeating that until you become falsely convinced that it is so. Then you become neglectful, doing fewer acts of obeisance and righteousness. Then he tempts you to disobedience until your feet slip, one after the other. The result is the road to disobedience, and what is written will overtake you – ie. that which is decreed for the disobedient and those who have left Allah's path, so they are finally deprived of His support and guidance.

Likewise those who commit sin must be aware that the door of repentance is wide open before them, for as long as they live, and will remain so until the pangs of death arrive. Therefore, they must hasten to repentance. When they hasten to it and perform the good deeds of the people of Paradise, then they conform to the will of guidance, and Allah helps them by guiding them, endearing belief to them and making it attractive in their hearts, changing their evil deeds into good deeds, and thus they become among the people of Paradise.

Thus we see that the Prophetic saying does not mean that those who do good deeds will enter Hellfire.

Can Allah Take Away our Freedom ?

Allah Almighty calls our attention to the fact that freedom and choice are given to us in this life by His power, will and generosity. It is a divine gift that Allah has willingly bestowed - it was not forcefully extorted from him. If he wishes to take it back at any time He can, for Allah has given man freedom of choice in the realm of responsibility, and if man shows ingratitude by abusing that gift He can take that choice away partially or completely. This is the message conveyed in Surah Lahab denouncing the Prophet Muhammad's [s] arch rival who sought every opportunity to discredit the message of Islam. After the revelation of this chapter condemning Abu Lahab to hell, all that was required for him to prove the Prophet's [s] message false was to simply feign embracing Islam which would then contradict the Quranic message. Not only was his capacity to choose this strategy taken away but his fate in hell also sealed due to his abuse of the gift of freedom.

Man disobeys as an exercise of his free will, and the continuous exercise of the free will in this way makes his capacity to do otherwise less and less. Then, when man insists on kufr (disbelief, rebellion, evildoing and ingratitude) it is then that Allah takes away from him

the further power to accept the truth. When kufr is continuously asserted by the man, the power of the heart to accept the truth becomes dimmed, and at last lost, and that is what is meant by the warning in the Holy Qur'an that "...Allah makes them deaf and blind...". On the other hand, if man tries to pay heed to the voice of truth, then Allah helps him by giving him an increased capacity to understand, and accept, the truth (Qur'an 10 : 1).

If Allah Knows, Why the Test ?

Man undergoes a practical test so as to become a witness against himself on the Day of Judgement and also to discover something of his own true nature. Thus, he will not be able to say, " Lord, if only you had guided me, I would have been guided." for guidance came to him and he did not follow it. Allah has sent Messengers [A] and he was the first to deny the truth. Thus, on the Day of Judgement, the rebellious ingrate amongst men will become a witness against himself and will not have any argument at the time of his reckoning, because he underwent an impartial, practical test and failed. Allah Almighty will address them on the day of great review :

" Read your book ! Today your own soul will suffice as a witness against you ! "

(17, 14)

This test of faith does not take place because Allah is unaware or wants to know more - Allah has complete knowledge of all things. It comes to pass so that people may come to discover a truth about their own souls, in the same manner and for the same purpose that examinations are held for university students. The university does not, in any way, want to learn from its students, but they test them so that every student will come to realize their true capabilities or lack thereof. If a student presumptuously claims that, " I am most worthy and deserve distinction! " like many amongst men who claim

to be the elect of Allah, they show him his report sheet so that he can see that the truth of the matter belies his claim - he has failed and he cannot dispute it. Hopefully this realization is achieved in this life that he may turn in repentance and reform himself.

Inherent Bias of the Sceptic

Such objections, as have been mentioned, are only repeated by those who have wronged themselves and who are disobedient to Allah. No one ever says the reverse : " If everything is decreed, why then does Allah admit anyone to Paradise to be blessed ? " Strangely, one never

hears that question. All you hear is : " Being held to account for wrongdoing is not fair since everything is decreed by the Will of Allah."

These assertions are frequently repeated by those who have transgressed against themselves and who want to blame others for their sins. It is a an odious symbol of ignorance, impudence and rebellion, described as a distinctive feature of the disbelievers. The Qur'an explains:

" Those who associate others with Allah say, ' If Allah had willed we would not have associated others with Him, and nor would our fathers, nor would we have made anything unlawful '. "

(6, 148)

More often than not their intention is to cause unwarranted doubts about the justice of Allah and to make people despair and abandon their faith and acts of worship. Evil insinuates itself in all sorts of insidious ways so as to sap man's will, which was given to man by Allah. This power of evil may be shaytan or his host of evil ones, or evil men or the evil inclinations within man's own will : for there are "...evil ones among men and jinn, inspiring each other with flowery

discourses by way of deception..." (55, 112). They secretly whisper evil and then withdraw, to make their net the more subtle and alluring. But as long as we search for the truth and trust in Allah, evil cannot really touch us in our essential and inner life.

Quantum Physics and the puzzle of Free Will

Science and the study of Quantum Physics proves that the universe is probabilistic at the base level thus synthesising free will and destiny in a coherent manner. Quantum physics is no more than a new language to articulate an old concept.

Medieval Islamic texts on predestination and free will always have references to Islamic atomism. Muslim atomism had the distinction of quantizing everything - matter, space and even time - 900 years before Quantum Mechanics. Keep in mind that Western science did not accept the existence of atoms up until the early 1900's. In contrast Islamic Science already had concrete atomic theories.

Modern science confirms that the universe is elastic enough to comply with our free will. If the universe is taken as a solid blob of matter and the full history of the universe from the Big Bang to the end is unchanging, etched in stone and deterministic, then even if the human being has free will, what use is that free will? It cannot change anything.

Science has discovered that the universe can fully comply to the exercise of our free will because it has all possibilities and probabilities attached to everything, under the shadow of Allah's foreknowledge.

As mentioned, Qadr is not preordainment. Qadr means 'a measure'. In other words, a measure of all the possibilities pertaining to the existence of that thing.

Allah declares in the Qur'an, “ Inna kulla shay'in khalaqnahu bi Qadar (And all things We have created by measure) ”.

... a measure of all the probabilities, all the possibilities it can realize over time and at any given moment in time. This, in the language of Quantum Mechanics, is what is called ‘ the wave function ’ which is associated with all things - waves of probability or possibility not only in its location, but in other properties as well like speed, spin energy etc., namely, in its entire existence.

‘Something’ within us also has access to the universe at this fundamental level. The physical body is included in the universe because it is made up of the same ‘stuff’ that everything else is. Our essential self, our Consciousness (or spirit) also affects the universe at this fundamentally probabilistic level. And this is the ‘Observer Effect’ of Quantum Mechanics. It is the consciousness of the human being that chooses one option out of the collection of probabilities represented by the wave function.

Individual electrons are also probability waves which strangely fall as point particles on a screen. Why? Because ‘ something ’ in our measurement or observation made it fall like a point particle on the screen. This is called the ‘collapse of the wave function’. The screen and the observer are made up of the same stuff - electrons protons etc. So the electron is a wave, the screen that detects the electron is also made up of the same particles that behave as waves, the observing human beings eye and brain is also made up of these particles that behave as waves. Now, even through common experience, we know that when multiple waves merge it produces a more complex wave or, we could say, more numerous probabilities. This leads us to conclude that there has to be ‘something’ outside the system that is not made up of these particles, something non-physical and non-material, which we know as the Consciousness or Spirit of the human being which chooses reality out of the various probabilities ie. it ‘collapses the wave of possible options’ to assume

a single option. This is what we refer to as the exercise of free will which is non-physical and not part of this universe. It is a product of the soul.

To give a simple example, perhaps you may have seen movies where there are two plots within one movie. There is a breaking point where the actor makes a choice and, depending on that decision, the rest of the movie unfolds in a certain way. Then they go back and show the actor choosing another option and the movie unfolds to reveal the alternative plot. In a manner of speaking, free will works this way.

Destiny and free will are generally understood in the framework of morality. Quantum Biology indicates that our brain, which is made up of atoms (ie. protons, electrons etc.), functions Quantum Mechanically. At any given time, we could have a superposition of electrons inside our individual neurons which corresponds to two different actions like saying 'yes' or 'no' to a morally correct action. The electron at that moment is in a superposition which means that it has a wave function associated to it. The consciousness of the human being will now affect this quantum event, collapsing the wave function of the electron in one way or the other leading to the person saying yes or no. This, in effect, is the consciousness or spirit of the person affecting the universe, thereby exercising the free will which is intimately attached to it.

But how can we reconcile this freedom of choice to Allah's 'foreknowledge' or 'determination' ? Taking the previous example to a cosmic level and knowing how important the observer is in Quantum Mechanics we are left with a model in which there is no time because the ' Observer ' in this scenario is outside the Universe and therefore completely independent of time. This is nothing but the necessary attribute of Allah from the perspective of Islamic theology. From the point of view of this 'External Observer' who is independent of the flow of time, everything that ever happened and

everything that could ever happen, all the possible pasts and all the possible futures exist all together. So from Allah's point of view the universe is 'superdeterministic', but from our point of view we have free choice and both points of view are equally valid.

A Final Word

Among the highest forms of piety is belief in Qadr, due to the fact that through it human beings contemplate the unitary management (al-Tadbir al-Wahid) which integrates the universe. The one who believes in it correctly sets his sites on the divine level, seeing the world and whatever is in it as its shadow. He sees that choice on the part of human beings too arises from the decree of Allah.

As we have seen, Qadr does not militate against natural laws like causality or quantum mechanics and the like, because it immediately establishes an all-embracing coherency in the course of things.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] emphasized, "Whoever does not believe in Qadr, its good and its evil, I am free of him."

SECTION 4



WHY DID ALLAH CREATE EVIL ?

How can one speak of Allah as the Perfect, the Merciful, the Bounteous, and the Loving while He is the creator of all the sorrow, destruction and evil in the world - disease, old age, death, earthquakes, volcanoes, microbes, poison, scorching heat, freezing cold, and the torments of cancer that spare neither new-born baby nor the frail elderly.

If Allah is truly Love, Beauty, and Goodness, how then did it come to be that He created hatred, ugliness, and evil ?



Evil's centrality in the sceptics discourse is no secret. Atheists call the problem of evil the "immovable boulder of atheism".

The Muslim on the other hand has no difficulty with 'evil' seeing in it Divine Wisdom weaving the threads of pain and suffering into a brilliant story; a story that harmonizes mercy and justice; a story that derives happy endings from pain; a story that sees that "immovable boulder" as a building block for mankind's spiritual ascent.

While 'Evil' in the world has always been a dilemma, it has only in

the past few centuries translated into a revolt against God and religion. Why is that? What is different now?

The reorientation of the Western mindset from the “purpose of life” to the “quality of life” was a by product of 18th-century Europe’s so called ‘Enlightenment’ Period. This radical shift of focus, wherein peoples’ means of living displaced the pursuit of transcendent purpose, is what eventually made life’s frustrations increasingly unbearable. When the totality of existence is reduced to this life alone, and life is no longer seen as a means to a greater goal, it can be expected that ensuring immediate pleasure and avoiding pain would become the sole objective - an unattainable objective, for sure.

For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. However, for magic of olden time and applied science of modern times alike, the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men.

It is, therefore, no wonder that Western secular communities in particular, despite their many luxuries and comforts, have had the greatest difficulty grappling with the problem of evil. More people today have the means to live, but no meaning to live for. Meaninglessness is what renders life a prison in which occupants frantically scramble between the walls of life and death, panicking from every sting. In a life without meaning, every pinch is an unexplainable - and unavoidable - random event that can only be classified in terms of energy and matter, and only represents chaos, commotion, and a tragedy.

Allah wants us to be Free

The problem of evil has always been among the most basic questions of philosophy. Opinions have differed and schools of thought split over it.

Muslims, say that Allah is all mercy and goodness and He only accepts what is good. Allah enjoins justice, amity, charity, forbearance, and benevolence. He did not enjoin evil but tolerated its existence for a wise end. But why, then, does He allow the unjust, the murderous, and the thieving to perpetrate their deeds ?

The answer is that He wanted us to be free, and freedom necessitates error - it would be meaningless if it did not allow us the right to trial, error, and right judgment and the unrestricted choice between sin and obedience. Allah was quite capable of making us all benevolent by compelling us to obey him. This, however, would have entailed that He deprive us of the freedom to choose. But in His Plan and Law, freedom with suffering is more honourable to man than slavery with happiness. That is why He let us sin, suffer, and learn. This is the wisdom in His tolerance of evil to exist.

The Question Negates the Contention

Furthermore, atheists who question why evil exists also reveal numerous fault lines in their worldview.

First, asking “why” implies that one assumes there should be an explanation, revealing the subconscious belief of all people that our lives have meaning. Otherwise, we would all just surrender to a nihilism that is indifferent to good and evil.

Second, asking why evil exists reveals that we see ourselves as moral creatures, but this immaterial quality of morality has no place in atheists’ view that only what is tangible is real.

Third, asking why evil exists reveals that one perceives evil as an abnormality and good as the prevalent norm, therefore admitting that goodness is the underlying principle in the universe.

Benevolence is the Rule

Any just and objective consideration of the matter would reveal to us that benevolence is the rule in the universe while evil is the exception.

Health is the rule, disease the exception; we spend most of our life enjoying health and are visited by sickness only for a few days in comparison. Similarly, a total of the times during which earthquakes have struck would amount to only a handful of minutes in relation to the age of our planet, which is measured in many millions of years. In the same reckoning, volcanic eruptions or wars are but short-lived convulsions in the life of nations interrupting long periods of quiet and peace.

Moreover, we can discern a benevolent aspect in almost everything. Sickness bequeaths immunity; suffering engenders hardiness, fortitude, and endurance; earthquakes relieve the pent-up pressures inside the earth preventing its crust from blowing-up and restoring mountains to their places as 'belts' and 'weights' that stabilize the crust; volcanoes spew up minerals and other hidden resources, thus covering the land with rich soil; wars unify and amalgamate nations leading to their gathering in blocks, alliances and councils which serve as universal tribunals where complaints are aired and settled. The greatest inventions were made during wars; penicillin, atomic power, rockets, jet planes and many others came out of the crucible of war. The ancient wisdom still holds true : "...Out of the snake's poison comes the antidote..." Even now we manufacture the serum from the microbe.

Further, if our forefathers had not met their death we would not have attained the positions we now hold. Calamity and tragedy in the universe are like the shaded spaces in a painting; if you come very near to the painting, you will see these parts as defects and faults in it; but

if you draw back to a distance and take a general view of the painting as a whole, you will discover that the shades are necessary and indispensable, fulfilling an aesthetic function within the structure of that artwork.

Resigning oneself to the fact that one can only see pixels while Allah sees the entire picture is a huge test of intellectual humility. Accepting that you are like the ant on the carpet who sees the masterpiece it walks on as a chaotic jungle calls for the greatest dose of humility.

But recent advances and discoveries have deluded many people into assuming that they can fully understand everything in the universe. Western society's attitude towards the universe has taken an anthropocentric turn in modern times. In other words, the arrogant secular person now perceives himself as Master of the Universe, foolishly concluding that whatever his eye cannot see does not exist and that whatever his mind cannot recognize as wise must be foolish.

The Better Question

Given that evil is the exception in a world of innumerable phenomena that are good, orderly, and beautiful, the better question is 'Where does all this prevalent good come from?'

Energy and matter swimming in a world of chaos and coincidence could never produce a world where the default is good. Ironically, scientific empiricism attests to this: the second law of thermodynamics states that the total entropy (degree of disorder or randomness) in an isolated system with no external influence will always increase and that this process is irreversible.

In other words, organized things will always break down and dissipate unless something from the outside pulls them together. As

such, blind thermodynamic forces could never have produced anything good on their own, nor made good as widespread as it is, without the Creator organizing these seemingly random, chaotic phenomena into the marvelous things we experience like beauty, wisdom, joy, and love.

By Evil we Discover Good

From another perspective, could it be possible for us to know health if disease did not occur? Health glitters as a crown on our heads that is only known when we are ill. Likewise, it is impossible to know beauty but for ugliness or to know that which is normal without being acquainted with the abnormal.

This is why it is said that the universe's 'imperfections' are the essence of its perfection, just as the curving shape of the bow is the essential feature of its usefulness since a 'straight-shaped bow' would be unfit for shooting arrows. Calamities are the bows from which we, as living arrows, are sent forth toward that which is more exalted. They are the tools that Allah uses to shape us for better things.

Another use of hardship and suffering is that it sorts out men and reveals their true nature. As an Arabic verse eloquently put it, "...But for hardships all men would rule supreme. Beggars and Kings alike..." These tribulations are trials by which we know ourselves; they are tests which determine our degrees in the sight of Allah.

This world is but one act of a play that has many. Death is not the end of the story but its beginning. It is inadmissible to judge a play on the testimony of just one act or to reject a book because its first page did not appeal to us. The judgment in both cases is incomplete. The entire significance of any such work can only be known at its end.

Good and Evil are Two Sides of the Same Coin

Good and evil are two sides of the same coin, an inseparable cosmic pair that need each other to exist. Valour cannot exist without peril, forgiveness cannot exist without offense, and perseverance cannot exist without an obstacle. The delight of satiety is only known to those bitten by hunger, and feeling quenched is only savoured by those who experience thirst. There must be some manifestations of evil in order to attain the virtue of conquering them. There must be some imperfection to humans, and to their world, to serve as a spark for the flames of good we are meant to kindle around us.

It is said that, “Pain is the Container in which pleasure is delivered”.

Allah’s Wisdom determined that happiness, pleasure, and comfort are not reached except by the bridge of difficulty and fatigue, and that they are not accessed except through the gates of hardship, patience, and enduring difficulties. For that reason, He surrounded Paradise with hardships and Hellfire with temptations. For that reason, He expelled His chosen one, Adam [A] from Paradise despite having created it for him; His wisdom necessitated that he not enter it permanently except after difficulty and hardship. Therefore, He did not remove him from it, except to readmit him to it a more perfect admission. Only Allah knows the disparity between the first entrance and the second. What great disparity exists between the Messenger of Allah’s [S] entering Mecca under the protection of al-Muṭ‘im b. ‘Adi and his entering it on the Day of Conquest. What great disparity exists between the pleasure and comfort of the believers in Paradise after enduring what preceded it, and their pleasure had they been created inside it. What great disparity exists between the joy of someone He relieved after affliction, and enriched after poverty, and guided after being astray, and collected his heart after its dispersal, and the joy of someone who did not taste those bitter pains.

Allah's Divine wisdom predetermined that difficulties are the cause of pleasure and virtue, as He declared in the Holy Qur'an,

“Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you. But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not” (2,216)

A world without evil is like a world without good; neither possesses any meaning which a person would strive to actualize. Hence, when atheists demand a world without evil, they are simultaneously asking for a sterile world void of all good.

If evil were absolute, the creation would be destroyed, and if pure good existed, then the trial of life would end and thinking would cease. With the cessation of thinking would be the absence of wisdom, and once choices vanish, then discernment will also vanish and the scholar will become incapable of verifying, deliberating, and learning. No knowledge would exist at that point, nor would investigating remain possible, nor would harm be repelled, nor would benefit be secured, nor would patience through difficulty and thanks through blessings exist, nor disparity in eloquence, nor competition in ranks. The joy of triumph and glory of conquering would be lost, and no righteous person on earth would find the gratification of being righteous, nor would any wrong person find the humiliation of being wrong, nor would anyone with conviction taste the coolness of certainty, nor would anyone in doubt be plagued with distress and haunted by the unknown. People would no longer hope nor be consumed by ambitions, their souls would be stripped of all purpose, their minds of all their fruits, and all things would lose their value and due right.

People facing adversity and deprivation have at some level a greater reason to be grateful than those spared these trials in life, because

their test was simply to endure their ordeal, and that is far less difficult than the often failed test of appreciating one's blessings.

Arousing the Soul

The wise have said that Allah whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Hardly anything can awaken vigour like tribulation, so He periodically invigorates our lives with some turbulence. Once awakened and revitalized, human beings realize the reality of their existence, and feel propelled with newfound urgency towards living for things greater than themselves. Hence, it is with these "evils" that the seeds of human excellence are planted, and people not only discover their potential and self-actualize, but move on to the profound station of self-transcendence: living with Allah, by Allah, and for Allah in this world and the next.

Moral virtues are frequently shackled by the chains of comfort and complacency and only manifest during disasters and danger. During crises, the values of courage, generosity, fraternity, and altruism appear. People enslaved to their luxuries know nothing about their own humanness but its outermost shell, and are hindered from discovering their potential for anything beyond consumption. Trials have unearthed talents and heroics in so many.

"Soul-making" is the outcome of "encountering evil" in the world. A world without temptation or choices can never be an atmosphere in which human excellence thrives. Those inclined to sin but who patiently adhere to the straight path outperform the sinless angels who do not have the agency to depart from that path. The angels will flock around their blissful palaces in admiration, as Allah declares,

“And the angels will enter upon them from every gate, saying, ‘Peace be upon you for what you patiently endured. And excellent is the final home’”.

(13,23)

Absurdity of the Sceptic

One wonders at the alternative that the objectors to Allah scheme have in mind. Do they, for instance, envisage for us a life without death, sickness, senility, deficiencies, disability, grief, or suffering ? Are they seeking absolute perfection ? But that latter is for Allah alone. The really perfect being is One and cannot be many. Indeed, why should he multiply ? What can he possibly lack in himself to seek for it in others ?

The upshot is that the skeptics will not be satisfied except by becoming God themselves, which is presumption par excellence. Let us, believers, in our turn, mock those who scoff at everything ' Divine '. We ask those who dream of our life becoming a flawless paradise, " What have you done to deserve a paradise on earth ? " Indeed, what services have our friends rendered to humanity so as to set themselves up as Allah, the One, the All-Powerful, Who orders everything to be, and creates all by His decree ?

Good comes from Allah, Evil from Ourselves

My grandmother had more sense. She used to say in all simplicity, "...Good comes from Allah, evil from ourselves..." A terse remark, indeed, but what a true view of the entire matter is contained here in a nutshell. " Evil, really..." she would say, "...is our putting things in the incorrect place ! " Giving her simple, curt examples, she said, "...Is this knife Good or Bad ? Well, if I put it into this tomato, it becomes very useful and good. But if I were to put it into your little tummy, well, I would become the evil, wicked witch who eats little

children, wouldn't I..."

The Human being is the only creature that can commit ' Evil ' by ' putting things in the wrong place '. Mercy, too, can become brutally evil when it is misplaced, for example, by being shown to a remorseless, mass murderer and not to his innocent victims. Human beings are the only ones who can derange the scheme and harmony in the good 'order' of Allah. They are the only ones to whom Allah has granted the freedom to transgress against his wishes and act contrary to what satisfies Him. However, its ill consequences, they come to learn and know.

Allah sends the winds and makes the river flow but a greedy captain may overload his ship with people and goods, and when it sinks, he curses fate and destiny. What is Allah's fault here ? He sent a benevolent wind and caused the river to flow smoothly but greed and avarice turned this good into evil. Indeed, what beautiful and fine words : "...Good comes from Allah, evil from ourselves..."

Pure Evil does Not Exist

One of the most foundational concepts in Islamic belief is that 'pure evil does not exist'. Evil, as an independent phenomenon whereby no dimension of good is involved, has no existence in this world. For instance, sickness harms the body from one angle, while from other angles it tests patience, evokes resilience, and strengthens immunity.

This golden principle stands true both for naturally occurring evils and for evils committed by willful agents (humans and jinn). Allah allows them to exist because the good of their existence outweighs the good of their non-existence.

For naturally occurring evils, consider the previous example of volcanoes not being pure evil because they rejuvenate the ecosystem

which makes life on earth possible to begin with. Without volcanic eruptions and all they release, farming communities would not be able to grow food, certain building materials would not be available, and our atmosphere would not have its oxygen-rich environment.

For evils committed by willful agents, consider how even shaytan's existence is not pure evil because he was not "created to misguide people" but rather he arrogantly rebelled by using the free will he was given. Allah's making us capable of acting freely is good, while its manifestation in the case of shaytan was evil and ugly.

Evil and Self Reformation

"Evil" can also generate in people that alertness and desire for repentance and reform.

Consider a person dying a slow and painful death from a terminal illness. Most would judge this at face value as utterly tragic. However, hidden in the crevices could be Allah's greatest gift to that person: the gift of desperation.

The medicines failing his body, and the loved ones streaming tears at his bedside, finally might bring forth a humility and brokenness in his spirit that qualifies him for salvation. As the Prophet [S] said, "No one will enter Paradise in whose heart is a speck's weight of arrogance."

In the concluding moments of his stay on earth, Allah insisted that he discover what he would never have voluntarily looked for without this illness.

Tasting powerlessness becomes more priceless than his legacy, his monetary gains, and his accomplishments because he now comes to understand that all this would soon crumble along with his bones at

life's end. The 'evil' of sickness, in this example, is the ultimate blessing in disguise that might just grant the him Allah's Love and Company forever. In that vein do we understand the Prophet's [S] statement, "When Allah loves a people He tries them."

Calamity and Spiritual Elevation

Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani says,

"When the servant is tested with a trial, his first impulse is to cope with it in and by himself. If his own efforts get him nowhere he looks for help from other human beings, such as people in power, important officials, men of influence and means, or medical experts where diseases and physical ailments are involved. If he still obtains no relief, he then resorts to his Lord through prayers of supplication, humble entreaty and offering of praise. As long as he finds it possible to manage on his own, he will not turn to other people, and while human help is available he will not turn to the Creator.

Having finally applied to Him, only to find no help forthcoming from the Creator, he throws himself down in His presence, incessantly begging, pleading, entreating, offering praise and submitting his needs in fear and hope. But the Creator (Almighty and Glorious is He) now renders him incapable of supplication, and ignores him until he has reached the end of his tether. Only then does he experience the effect of the Lord's decree and the action of His work, and so this servant passes beyond material needs and behavior, to survive as spirit alone.

Since he now sees nothing but the Truth in action, he becomes, of necessity, a totally convinced believer in the divine Unity affirming that in reality there is no agent but Allah, no dynamic or static force apart from Allah, and no good or evil, no loss or gain, no giving or withholding, no opening or closing, no death or life, no honor or disgrace except in the hand of Allah. His status comes to resemble that of a suckling babe in its nurse's arms, of a corpse in the hands of a

washer of the dead, or of a ball on the receiving end of a polo-player's mallet - rolled and spun and knocked around, though inert in itself and imparting no motion to other bodies.

Gone forth from his own self, out into his Master's work, he now sees nothing but that Master and His work, and neither hears nor comprehends from any other source. If he perceives at all, if he does hear and learn, His speech is what he listens to, and His knowledge is what he comes to know. His favor he enjoys, through His nearness he prospers, through His proximity he is graced and honored, by His promise he is pleased and reassured. With Him he feels at peace, and in His discourse he takes delight, while from all others he recoils and shrinks away. In remembrance of Him he finds refuge and support. In Him, the Almighty and Glorious, he puts his faith and in Him he places his trust. By the light of His awareness he is guided, as he wraps and clothes himself therein. Strange marvels of His science he discovers, and of the secrets of His power he is apprised. To Him he listens and from Him he learns, then for all this he offers praise, gives thanks, and turns to prayer.”

Evil and the Hereafter

“And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter—that is the (true eternal) life, if only they knew.”

(29,64)

When sizing up our transient lives in this world, measuring them against the life of the hereafter, the problem of evil and suffering disintegrates. What are 70 years of supposed misery measured against, not 70 trillion, but endless years of unimaginable bliss? Conversely, reducing our existence to this life alone is what negatively amplifies our perception of life's “unfair” moments.

It is common to find atheists aggregating the incidents of evil in the world, piling them together to evoke the emotions of their audience, attempting to persuade people to anger against Allah. By appealing to emotion, they seek to highlight these pains and sufferings as if they were not exceptions but the rule. However, even if these manipulative tactics went unnoticed, a Muslim's evidence-based convictions in a hereafter would still suffice to counteract them.

For instance, the Prophet [S] said in a profound tradition, "The most devastated person in this world - from the people of Paradise - will be brought forward on the Day of Resurrection and dipped a single dip in Paradise. Then it will be said, 'O son of Adam, have you seen any hardship? Did you experience any distress?' He will say, 'No, by Allah, my Lord! I did not experience any distress; I did not see a single hardship.'"

This person will not be lying but will forget all prior difficulties with that single dip in ecstasy. In a flash, this person who was disadvantaged, pitied, and "wronged" in the world will become the object of intense admiration for billions of previously "privileged" onlookers. The Prophet [S] said, "On the Day of Resurrection, when people who had suffered affliction are given their reward, those who were spared will wish their skins had been cut to pieces with blades when they were in the world."

Human suffering, misfortunes faced by the innocent, and the claim that "life is unfair" are all legitimate grievances, but only if belief in the hereafter is denied.

The Prophet [S] would invoke Allah for that piercing insight, praying in many gatherings to be granted "...Certainty through which You would ease for us the calamities of this world."

Although a mindful Muslim sees the problem of evil as making this

life more meaningful, and hence remains immune to nihilism and apathy, he or she simultaneously sees the problems of life as seeds to cultivate their true life in the hereafter.

“So be patient with gracious patience. Indeed, they see it as distant. But We see it as near”.
(70,5-7)

A Final Word

When considering “the problem of evil” as presented by atheists, one realizes that the demands of atheists are actually quite simple.

First, they seek a populist god that serves the masses; a god that is undecided since the masses constantly fluctuate in their determinations of what is desirable and undesirable; a god that has no autonomy whatsoever except the capacity to fulfill wishes and serve the masters He created. In that sense, atheists reject believing in God unless He stops being God, and accepts not equality with man but subservience to man.

Second, atheists seek a human being that lacks the faculty of being human: agency - one that cannot do right because they cannot do wrong; a human being that functions like the clock’s gears and robot’s arms; a human being that is reduced to a doll whose human emotions are as mechanically simulated as traffic lights.

In the atheist’s “ideal world,” there is no joy since there is no sadness, nor is there success since there is no failure. People would know beforehand the outcome of their actions, leaving no sweetness to triumph since there was never any possibility of defeat. No person would be deprived of anything, and so nobody would ever anticipate the future with excitement again. No person would be disadvantaged in any way, which means everyone would be molded identically,

with no distinctive features among them in their health, wealth, beauty, reputation, and intelligence.

Interestingly, people living in the greatest luxury today, with the smallest margin of difficulty in their lives, are those who usually find life meaningless and resort to suicide. Similarly, elders who stop working at retirement and collect their pensions often find life utterly tasteless, once working hard to accomplish things and being driven by insecurity are a thing of the past.

Hence, the “ideal world void of all evil” which the atheist demands is a world that is silent, dead, and empty; a world that is more tragic than all of this world’s suffering (a world we praise Allah for only allowing in the atheist’s imagination).

A Muslim, on the other hand, reflects on the universe to find that all of it points to Allah’s Greatness and Wisdom while being cognizant that a finite creature like the human being can never fully comprehend the Greatness of Allah nor His Wisdom.

A Muslim does not deny Allah’s Wisdom precisely because they have the humility to accept that they cannot fully comprehend Allah’s decrees.

SECTION 5



WHAT ABOUT THOSE UNREACHED BY THE QUR'AN ?

What can be said about the fate of a person whom the Qur'an or, for that matter, any other revelation or Prophet [A] did not reach?

What fault can he be guilty of and what will be his fate on the Day of Judgment? For example, an Eskimo in a far away polar region or a Negro deep in the jungle, what will befall such a person at the hands of Allah on Judgment Day?



Every Nation has been sent a Prophet

It is imperative, first of all, to correct this common erroneous view of the issue at hand. The primary question has been based on a false premise. Allah has informed us in the Qur'an that He deprived no one of His Mercy, Revelation, Words, or Signs:

"For there is no nation that has not been warned by a messenger."

(35, 24)

"We raised a messenger in every nation."

(16, 36)

The prophets mentioned in the Qur'an are not all whom Allah sent. There are thousands of others about whom we know nothing at all. Concerning those messengers, Allah says to his Prophet Muhammad [S]:

"Of some you have already heard, of others we have told you nothing."
(55, 78)

Allah Deprives None of Guidance

Allah, in fact, sends intimations to everything; to bees, for instance:

"Allah inspired the bees, saying, 'Build your homes in the mountains, in the trees, and in the thatchings men make '."
(16, 68)

This inspiration may be a Revelation, a Book delivered by Jibra'il [A] (Angel Gabriel), or an illumination inspired by Allah in a person's heart. It can be a state of relief in mental disposition, an insight into truth, or an understanding of things. Again, it can take the shape of reverence towards and fear of Allah as well as an attitude of piety.

Indeed, no one that ever 'tunes up' his heart and common sense will be deprived from receiving the favour of guidance from Allah. Those, however, who block their ears and hearts will not benefit from any number of books, messengers, or miracles.

The Fearful Glance

Allah says that he "...blesses whomsoever He wills of his creatures with His mercy and that He is accountable before none for His deeds..." For a wisdom known only to Him, He may send warnings

to some but not to others so that these latter may be excused in His sight and the slightest indication of faith accepted from them.

We can really never know. A mere fearful glance at the sky by that primitive negro may be more redeeming with Allah and acceptable to Him than all our prayers. Nevertheless, a closer consideration of the creeds of such 'primitive' negroes reveals that they had messengers and revelations, very much like our own.

Common Belief, Common Origin

We know, for instance, that the Kikuyu tribe believes in a single God it calls 'Ngai' and describes him as a single being that was neither begotten nor begets and that has no equal or like. This divinity is invisible and only known by his deeds and effects. He is a creator, a donor of livelihood, a bestower, and a compassionate being who heals the sick, relieves the distressed, sends the rain, and hears prayers. According to tribal lore, lightning is that deity's dagger and thunder the sound of his footfall.

Isn't this 'Ngai' almost the same as our own Allah? From what quarter did those tribesmen receive such a conception of divinity unless a messenger and a revelation came to them at some period of their history? As usual, this message must, with the passage of time, have fallen victim to superstitions that corrupted its original purity.

We similarly know that the Azande people believe in a single divinity they call 'Mbole' who, according to their sayings, moves everything in the jungle, visits the evildoers with thunderbolts, and rewards the virtuous with livelihood, blessing, and security.

The Shilluk tribe, we also know, believes in Juok, a single deity whom they describe as both invisible and manifest. He abides in the sky and everywhere and he is the creator of everything.

The Zulu people refer to God by the traditional name Umvelinqangi. This Name means 'He Who brings into being that which is not there until He creates it'. Another translation of this word is 'The Mysterious Being Who brings about all that exists and that happens in nature'. This word when properly articulated in its own dialect sounds similar to the Arabic word 'Walla-hu-ghani', meaning "And Allah is Bounteous". It also sounds like "Allegany" of the Red Indians of North America. Ask any Zulu who or what this Umvelinqangi is and he will surely explain to you, in Zulu, almost a word for word translation of Surah Ikhlas, Chapter 112 of the Holy Qur'an:

“ He is a pure and Holy Spirit, He does not beget and He is not begotten, and there is nothing like Him." Every African tribe, South of the Zambesi River in Southern Africa, have given different names to the Almighty - Tixo, Modimo, uNkulunkulu, etc., and each and every African language group will take pains to explain the same pure and holy concept as the Zulu.

The Xhosa believe in a God called Qamata Katayi and Qamata Umdali which means 'God the Greatest Who is the Creator of Everything'. Out of a sense of awe and reverence, however, they, like the Zulu, usually refer to Him as Umdali, the Creator.

The Dinkas believe in a single God, Nhialik, whose name literally means 'he who is in the sky' or the sublime. By what name other than Islam can we call such creeds? What else can they be but messages delivered by prophets who came to those peoples?

In all the tribes of Australia too, without exception, there exists a belief in one Supreme Power, who is the first cause of all creation. Their descriptions differ on minor points and their terminology varies slightly, but they all believe in the existence of the ulti-

mate first cause called 'High Gods'. The term 'High Gods' is not plural as it appears. In Aborigine terminology it invariably refers to a Single Supreme Creator. It is out of respect that He is referred to in plural. They believe in the eternity of the Creator and the fact that the earth and whatever it contained did not eternally coexist with the Supreme Creator.

"Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does what is right, shall be rewarded by their Lord. They have nothing to fear or to regret."
(2, 62)

Even the Sabaeans, or those among them who worshipped the sun as one of Allah signs and believed in the Oneness of Allah, in resurrection, in Judgment, and performing good deeds, will have their wages from Allah.

Belief and Disbelief Do Not Hinge Upon Miracles

It is well-known that Allah mercy varies in how it is bestowed. There are those born blind and others who enjoy sight. Some have lived in the age of Musa [A] and saw him with their very own eyes parting the sea with his staff; others have lived in the time of 'Isa [A] (Jesus) and witnessed how he raised the dead. As for us, we only know of these miracles by hearing about them. Receiving a report of something is surely not equal to seeing it with the eye; for to see is other than to hear of a certain event. Nevertheless, belief and disbelief do not hinge upon miracles. Obdurate non-believers witness wonders from the prophets sent to guide them but have no more to say of these miracles than describing them as 'fabricated sorcery'.

Why Does Allah's Mercy Vary ?

The following question , though , does arise : "Why does Allah's

mercy vary? Why also should Allah reveal his signs to some while others know of them only through reports? "

We reply, by observing that revealing miracles to some may not be a blessing but a temptation. For didn't Allah warn the companions of Christ [A] who asked for a tablespread of food to descend among them from heaven?

"Allah said: 'I am sending one to you. But whoever of you disbelieves hereafter shall be punished as no man has ever been punished.'
(5, 115)

The reason for this warning is that the coming of miracles is always accompanied by an increase in responsibility and accountability as well as in the severity of punishment for those who disbelieve after seeing them. Happy indeed are those who believe from hearing of revelation without witnessing any miracles. And "...woe to those who see them but persist in disbelieving..."

The Qur'an we have with us is a witness against us and a warning for us. On the Day of Reckoning it will not be a mercy, but the contrary. Sparing the Eskimo of the polar regions such an irrefutable witness may be a sign of mercy, pardon, and alleviation on the Day of Judgment. A look at the sky from this ignorant Eskimo even once in his life may be sufficient for Allah to accept him as a true believer.

As for the reason why Allah shows more mercy (ie. revelation) to some than to others, it is a dispensation he bases upon his knowledge of hearts:

"He knew what was in their hearts. Therefore He sent down peace upon them and rewarded them with a speedy victory."
(47, 18)

Allah knowledge of us and of our hearts precedes our creation in the wombs; it goes back to when we were spirits around His Throne. Some of us were attracted to His Light and were completely absorbed in it, while others directed their attention away from Him to enjoy the spectacle of the universe (malakut) shunning the splendour of their Creator. Ever since that time immemorial the latter have deserved the lower degree and were 'destined' to perdition. Thus said those who 'see' (Ahl al-Mushahahadah).

What we experience in our short life on earth is not everything that there is. Knowing the wisdom behind every suffering and privation is something that belongs only to the Omniscient. If we were asked why Allah created the pig in the shape we know, we can only reply that Allah chose for it a 'piggish' form because its nature or 'self' is swinish. It was right and just that this animal be created in that shape we are so familiar with.

All the dispensations we see around us are just but realizing the all-encompassing wisdom and discovering that hidden justice is a task that is not within our ken. It is for this that the Last Day was decreed; when the "...scales will be set up and the Omniscient tell us of everything regarding which we disputed..."

"Nor do We punish a nation until We have sent forth a Messenger to warn them."

And now, to set our hearts to rest with a decisive argument on this question. Allah says in His Book that He will punish only those whom He warned beforehand through His messengers:

"Nor do We punish a nation until We have sent forth a messenger to warn them."
(17, 15)

Have our fears thus been quietened? Further, the most peculiar aspect of this question is the deceptive pretense of the skeptic who poses the question of pity for the poor negro deprived of the light, mercy, and guidance of the Qur'an. It is a question designed more for inveiglement and subterfuge and runs contrary to the skeptic's own inner conviction. And lastly, the skeptic endeavours to persuade us of an argument to which he personally does not have any proof.

Belief in a Supreme God

The idea of a Supreme God, the Creator, prevails in many tribal religions of Africa and even Australia, as has been stated, and among people as far apart as the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego and the Arctic. Strikingly, they have very sound ideas about creation and a Supreme Ruler whom they do not represent through images.

Zoroastrianism, named after Zarathustra whose history is somewhat ambiguous and who lived between 500 or 2500 BCE, has many ideas and doctrines which are familiar to other faiths. Zarathustra is said to have first encountered an angel as an emissary from God, called people to have faith in Him alone and to believe in Judgement after death. He has also left behind scriptures attributed to divine origin.

Even in Hinduism, so extensively polytheistic, one can find the idea of a single God under all the layers of shirk. In Hinduism, many of the "attributes" of God were apparently transformed into images and there is a suggestion that Rama and Krishna were messengers of Allah who were turned into gods incarnate in the same way that 'Isa [A] was in Christianity.

How did True Religion come to be Overlaid by Polytheistic Elements?

For various motives such as power, prestige or economic gain, peo-

ple created objects of worship or set up themselves as supreme beings to be revered and obeyed. Other people, out of fear or feelings of group solidarity, also worshipped these objects, sometimes in addition to the One Allah. Some also regarded their leaders as divine or as having Divine powers.

Eventually all it took was the passing of a generation for such attitudes and habits to be accepted as normal and right simply because "...we found our fathers and our forefathers..." engaged in such worship and practices. This was the state for example in which the young Ibrahim [A] found his people.

Periodically Allah sent guides or prophets to every people to bring them back on course, to the Straight Path of acknowledging and worshipping the One and Only Allah. Some people followed the prophets and reformed their ways. Many people, through habit, devotion to their ancestors or their version of what their ancestors did, or through vested economic or political interests or plain stubbornness, stuck to their old misguided ways. Some even went further and persecuted the Prophets [A] and their followers.

All true prophets maintained that they were not seeking power, fame or wealth or any favours for themselves but that they had the genuine interests of the people at heart. Some people, realising their need, accepted the leadership of the prophet sent to them, but when their need was fulfilled, they turned their backs on the prophet's instructions. This was the case with the Israelites and their need for the leadership of Prophet Musa [A] to deliver them from the Pharaoh of Egypt. After leaving Egypt, some of them forsook Allah and turned to the worship of a calf they had made with their own hands. Many other peoples, before and since, have adopted these strange practices of idol worship and polytheistic practices even after accepting and following Divine guidance.

After the departure of a prophet, often ironically out of devotion to

that prophet, some people would add to or alter his message. They would attribute capabilities and powers to the prophet such as he himself never claimed. This is in keeping with people's propensity to exaggerate or embellish a story more and more with each telling. This is evidently what has happened in the case of Prophet 'Isa [A]. It is suggested that this was also the case with Rama and Krishna in the Hindu tradition.

In this way a new religion is formed. It may contain some of the original truths taught by the prophet side by side with new-fangled myths, legends and practices. Lacking any firm point of reference, this new religion keeps on changing from one place to another and from one epoch to another. This has been the case with Christianity.

In time, using their reason, some people find themselves in all honesty, being unable to accept the fantastic claims that are made of a religion or they see that these religions are unable to provide adequate or satisfying answers to the many aspects of life and human relationships. They reject this religion and because this is the only religion they know, they think that all religion is the same and so they reject religion as such altogether and the belief in Allah altogether. This is how atheism, humanism and secularism have arisen in the West and under its influence spread to different parts of the world.

True Religion is Essentially One

From the beginning of mankind, true religion or guidance from Allah has always been one. People have strayed from or corrupted this guidance. True prophets have sought to renew and purify this guidance. But the various peoples to whom these prophets were sent often created their own mixture of religion. To the extent that they took from what is true, we have similarities in the various 'mixtures' or new-fangled religions. To the extent that they added their own corruptions, we have differences in these mixtures or religions.

The one true religion has always taught belief in and obedience to One Allah and this is what Islam literally is. According to the Qur'an, true religions (in the plural) do not exist; true religion (in the singular) exists. All the Prophets [A] summoned us to one religion, to one primary course and goal.

"Allah has ordained for you (O Believers) that religion which He enjoined on Nuh (Noah), and that which We inspire in you (O Prophet Muhammad), and that which We enjoined on Ibrahim, Musa and 'Isa; uphold the religion and do not be divided therein. "
(42, 13)

True religion or Islam has always been essentially one thing in all times and all places. A statement like "Islam was the last of the revealed religions" is therefore erroneous. All true Prophets were Muslims which literally means those who submit to the One Allah I. Their message was the same - Islam: to call men to worship and submit to One God. Adam [A] was a Muslim, Ibrahim [A] was a Muslim, Musa [A] was a Muslim, 'Isa [A] was a Muslim. Zarathustra, if he was a true Prophet, was a Muslim. Rama, if he was a true Prophet, was also a Muslim.

This reasoning, that true religion is one, is based on the worldview that sees man as a single species with the same natural needs. It is only when people deviated from true religion and set up their own factions and sects that the unity of mankind was split asunder, each one exulting in its own sect, faction or 'religion'. What then should be the relationship between the upholders of the true religion and the followers of other religions and ideologies? There are three main positions which can be adopted.

The first is based on the fact that Allah created man with a free will, with the freedom to choose correct guidance or not. If Allah had

wished, he could have made all human beings submit to His will, like angels. This freedom of choice, although it carries its own responsibilities and burdens for the individual, must be respected. No one can be compelled to believe or disbelieve. The Qur'an clearly states, "There is no compulsion in religion" even as it emphasizes that Truth and right guidance provided in Islam has been made distinct from error.

Tolerance of Other Faiths

The initial position of a Muslim to other faiths is thus one of tolerance. More than this, the protection of freedom of belief and worship for followers of other religions has been made a sacred duty of Muslims. Remarkably this duty was fixed at the same time when the duty of Jihad was ordained:

"Permission (to fight) is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged, and verily, Allah has indeed the power to assist them: those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, 'Our Lord and Sustainer is Allah!

For, if Allah had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, monasteries and churches and synagogues and masjids - in which Allah name is abundantly extolled - would surely have been destroyed."

(22, 39-40)

The above verses gives precedence to the monasteries, the churches and the synagogues over the masjids in order to emphasize their inviolability and the duty of the Muslims to safeguard them against any desecration or abuse, and protect freedom of belief.

Indeed, Islam requires that protection be given to people who do not

believe in revealed religion at all, provided they refrain from molesting the believers. The Qur'an declares:

"And if any of the idolaters seek your protection (O Muhammad), grant him protection so that he may hear the Word of Allah, and afterwards convey him to a place of safety; for they are people who do not know the truth."

(9, 6)

The second position is based on the knowledge that even after he has erred or gone astray man has the chance and the capacity to return to his good nature and the Straight Path. Man often needs to be helped in this process by being reminded of his nature and his purpose in life. This process of reminding or inviting others to truth and justice is what is referred to as Da'wah. As a result of Da'wah, people may choose to return to their naturally good state and become Muslim in which case they accept all the obligations and rights of Muslims and are welcomed wholeheartedly into the community of believers. Alternatively, they may choose to remain in their religion. In this case their right to do so is respected. They are guaranteed freedom of worship and autonomy in their institutions. They have the right to manage their own affairs and the obligation to live in peace and co-existence with others.

A third position arises when people have not only strayed but actively rebel and commit evil and injustice despite calls on them to give up their evil ways. Such people, whether they belong to a religion or not, cannot be left alone but need to be confronted, in battle if needs be, in the interests of security and to protect such values as life, honour and freedom.

SECTION 6



COULD MUHAMMAD [S] BE THE AUTHOR OF THE QUR'AN?

It is acknowledge, by non-Muslims too, that the Qur'an is a worthy book. But why couldn't it have been compiled by the Prophet [S] himself?

It would not be out of the ordinary if a man as great as he was should write a book as valuable as the Qur'an. This, certainly, would be a more logical explanation than the claim that the Qur'an was revealed by 'Allah'.

How does the Muslim respond to the accusation that the Qur'an is Muhammad's [S] work. How can it be proven - objectively and rationally, without appeal to religious texts - that it is Allah, not Muhammad [S], who is its source?



Authorship of the Qur'an : The Challenge

With its form, phrases, and even letters, and with the knowledge, sci-

ence, mysteries, stylistic beauty, and linguistic precision it contains, it is impossible to conceive that any man is capable of composing the Holy Qur'an. Add to this the fact that the Holy Prophet Muhammad [S] was illiterate; he could not read or write, he was not schooled in any discipline, and he did not travel extensively outside the Arabian Peninsula nor was he thoroughly acquainted with any civilization. To doubt the source of the Qur'an is indeed impossible. Allah, in fact, challenges disbelievers who alleged, in the Prophet's [S] time, that the Qur'an is of human authorship:

"Say: 'Then bring a chapter like it, and call (for help) on all you can besides Allah, if you are truthful.'
(12, 38)

Allah challenges them to enlist the help of the geniuses among men, even the angels and the jinn, to compose even one chapter similar to that of the Qur'an. That challenge is still standing and no one has yet produced anything to meet this challenge.

The Possibilities

Concerning the source of the Qur'an, there are three possibilities.

- Possibility A : it is the work of Muhammad [S].
- Possibility B : It is the work of the Arabs.
- Possibility C : it is from another, unknown source, which we may call X, and which we must seek to discover.

Let us consider each of these in turn.

Possibility A : It is Muhammed's [S] work. This can be disproved in at least eleven different ways :

- 1) First : The question of style. As every scholar of

the Qur'an knows, there is a world of difference between the style of the Qur'an, and Prophet Muhammad's [S] own style. Comparing Muhammad's [S] sayings - compiled in the books of Hadith (Prophetic Sayings) - with the Qur'an, differences in every respect - style, subject matter - are immediately evident. The sayings of Muhammad [S] are conversational, expository, didactic and oratorical, of a kind the Arabs were already familiar with. By contrast, the style of the Qur'an is quite unlike any then known to the Arabs.

2) Second : The impression made upon the reader. Reading the books of Hadith, one feels oneself in the presence of a mere human being, full of humility and dread, and a sense of his own weakness before Allah. With the Qur'an, how very different! The reader of the verses experiences the divine Presence of Allah, the Creator of all things, in all His might, justice, wisdom and mercy - a mercy which has nothing of weakness in it, even where mercy is displayed. Were the Qur'an of Muhammad's [S] own making, its style would match that of his Hadith. For is it not a commonplace of literary criticism that one person cannot have two styles, each of a radically different nature?

3) Third : The well-known fact of Muhammad's [S] illiteracy. The Prophet [S] never went to school or took a teacher, never studied under a master of any kind. Is it reasonable to suppose that such a man could have conceived this wondrous body of law, all - embracing and free from any inconsistency, its greatness acknowledged far and wide, by Muslim and non - Muslim alike, recognised, moreover, as a major source of even European Law? How could an illiterate have forged the Qur'an, with all its uniqueness of style, and its social, economic, political and religious legislation, not to mention scientific, spiritual and moral instruction?

4) Fourth : The intellectual content of the Qur'an. The view of the universe, life, thought, human transactions, war, marriage, worship, business and so on embodied in the Qur'an is perfect, symmetrical and comprehensive. Had all this come from Muhammad, [S] it would no longer be possible to treat him as a

mortal being. For even a whole bevy of committees, their members combining international culture with deep specialist knowledge, would experience the utmost difficulty in creating such moral and legal codes - no matter how many reference works and learned studies and research findings were placed at their disposal, for no matter how lengthy a period of time. No one man, however profound his genius and wide his education, could be capable of devising such solutions to any one of the problems that habitually confront mankind; so what shall we say when we take into account their complexity, their multitudinous diversity? How could a mere illiterate conceivably be the originator of all this?

5) Fifth ; The issue of the author's personal glory. For what motive would Muhammad [S] have written the Qur'an, then attributed it to another author? This glory would have been far greater, had he produced a work of his own to make the whole world marvel, at something they themselves were quite incapable of producing. This would have raised him to a rank far above the rest of humanity. What interest or benefit could Muhammad [S] have had in composing the Qur'an but giving the credit to others?

6) Sixth : The Qur'an's factual content. In the Qur'an are recorded facts about the ancients that were unknown to Muhammad's [S] contemporaries. In scores of verses we find reference to the scientific wonders of the universe and of life, to medicine, to mathematics. Could an illiterate have been responsible for such insights? How could Muhammad [S] have told that the earth is in fact ovoid ? How could he have known the theory of the expanding universe? How could he have told that the elements of matter that make up the universe are all of the same kind that the density of air decreases with altitude so that breathing becomes difficult and how the sun and moon proceed in fixed orbits through space ? The Qur'an abounds in such instances. How could the unlettered Muhammad [S] have got to know of scientific facts that have come to light only recently with the aid of highly sophisticated laboratories and satellites?

7) Seventh: The Qur'anic censure of Muhammad [S]. In many passages of the Book, the Prophet [S] is subjected to reproof. The chapter entitled "He frowned" is perhaps the best - known instance: "He frowned and turned his back, for that there came to him a blind man!" (53,1). Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, a poor blind man, once interrupted Muhammad [S] while he was in conversation with Walid and others of the Quraish chiefs. The Prophet [S], engaged in deep deliberation, took no notice of him, the blind man raised his voice and earnestly begged for religious instruction, but Muhammad [S], annoyed at the interruption, frowned and turned away. This passage is a reproach to the Prophet [S] for his conduct on the occasion. And there are a number of other such instances in the Qur'an (9,115; 43,23-24; 33,37; 64,1) Is it reasonable to suppose that Muhammad [S] is the author of a Book in which he himself is held up to censure? There are incidents in which Muhammad [S] acted in a certain way, but the Qur'an explicitly rebukes his behaviour and draws attention to the error he has committed. Muhammad [S] felt no embarrassment in recording such occasions. Had he been the author of the Qur'an, would he not have altered the record by simply omitting them, or by modifying them to reflect favourably upon himself?

8) Eighth : Sometimes a Qur'anic verse would contradict what the Prophet [S] had been doing or thinking and even revoke a measure of the Prophet's [A]. Having decided to deal leniently with the chieftains of the pagan Quraish tribe after the battle of Badr, Allah revoked the Prophet's [S] decision, after he had consulted with his Companions [R]:

"A prophet may not take captives until he has fought and slain (the enemies of faith) in the land. You (the Prophet's followers) seek the chance gain of this world, but Allah desires for you the world to come. He is mighty and wise. Had there not been a previous sanction from Allah, you would have been sternly punished for that which you have taken."

(8, 67-8)

9) Ninth : Sometimes the Qur'an commands the Prophet [S] to communicate to his followers that which he could not have possibly said if he had been the author of the Qur'an:

"Say: 'I am no bringer of a new fangled doctrine among the prophets; nor do I know what will be done with me or you.'" (46, 9)

No false prophet would, of his own accord, inform his followers that he does not know what will happen to him and to them or that he cannot bring benefit or ward off harm either with regard to himself or to them. They would desert him, if he did so. In fact, the Jews took advantage of the above verse to justify their charge that the Holy Prophet [S] was really a 'useless' man for he did not know what will be done to himself or to his followers. If the Prophet [S] had been the author of the Qur'an, such disparaging verses could not have been found in that book.

10) Tenth : The time lag between Muhammad's [S] desire to speak and the revelations he communicated. At times, Prophet Muhammad [S] felt an urgent need to comment on certain situations, or to give instruction on how to act in them. Yet he would wait for days and nights on end for revelation to be revealed to him before making these things known to others.

11) Eleventh: If Muhammad [S] had really been the Qur'an's author, he would have expressed his own sentiments in it. He would have, for instance, voiced his grief in it. In one and the same year, his wife, Khadeejah [R], and his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, died. They were his strongest supports in life, and the loss he sustained in their departure was incalculable. Yet no word is mentioned in the Qur'an about them. The Qur'an also remains silent about the death of Ibrahim, the Prophet's [S] only son at the time, over whom he grieved a great deal. The Qur'an is, in fact, totally separate from the Prophet's [S] self.

We pass now to possibility B, that the Book is the work, not of one

man, but of a people, the Arabs. As is well known, the Arabs possessed an innate love of poetry and literature, of rhetoric and oratory. Regular celebrations and festivals were held, at which their poets and orators competed with one another. On the battlefield, they were urged on to feats of valour by the eloquence of verse and speeches which exhorted their own tribes and poured scorn on their enemies and disheartened them.

Now, the miracles performed by the prophets of Allah were phenomena limited in time and space, and were of benefit to those who were on the spot to witness them. It is part of the accepted wisdom that the miracles of Musa [A] (Moses) were of the 'sorcery' variety, magic being widely practiced at the time. Thus Musa [A] was able to outdo the magicians of his day, to beat them at their own game, so to speak.

Similarly, the miracles performed by 'Isa [A] (Christ) were in the sphere of medicine, then a flourishing art, so that the challenge facing him was to outdo the physicians of the day.

By the same token, the Qur'an was a miraculous phenomenon revealed to a people who were wont to boast of their powers in the field of literature, but who were now to be far outshone in their own chosen field of pre-eminence. How, then, could the Qur'an possibly be the work of the Arabs? Especially when the Book actually challenges them to imitate it by composing just one comparable chapter or even verse. Its inimitability stood as eternal as time itself. Had the Arabs been capable of writing a (Qur'an) of their own, they would not have hesitated to do so, especially in order to protect the worship of idols that was denounced in the Qur'an. There can be no shadow of doubt that the Qur'an did not come from the Arabs, since they themselves were astounded at its style and its eloquence and at the law it promulgated - to the extent that they surrendered to it totally and embraced the religion of Allah. This they did because they themselves were incapable of producing an imitation of the Qur'an!

So the challenge posed in the Qur'an is everlasting; the inimitability of the Qur'an is self-evident; the Qur'an cannot be the work of the Arabs.

We will turn now to the third and last of our possibilities, possibility C, that of an unknown source. If the Arabs, the native speakers of the language, were incapable of answering the challenge of which we have been speaking, is it at all reasonable to suggest that the Qur'an was written by others of a different tongue, who were ignorant of Arabic? Could it have been the work of the Persians, the Byzantines, or the Abyssinians? If it emanated neither from the Arabs, nor from their neighbours, where was it from? If the Arabs stood mute before it, then must it not issue, without doubt, from a source above mankind and beyond their creative capacities?

Claims that he [S] Composed the Qur'an helped by Jewish and Christian Sources

We come now to an oft-repeated charge, namely that the Prophet [S] composed the Qur'an either with direct help from others, after reading books (despite the constantly reiterated fact of his illiteracy), or after being taught by someone of Jewish or Christian background. Like those other charges previously mentioned, these particular ones were again reiterated in the Middle Ages as well as more recently. Once more, it has to be pointed out that far from being original to this period these assertions were actually levelled by infidels in the lifetime of Muhammad [S] as reported in the Qur'an itself in which they are challenged. (10:38; 11:13; 16:103).

The Prophet [S] was assumed to have been instructed on Christianity and Judaism either during his travels or while staying in Mecca or Medina. He did travel to Syria twice, when aged thirteen and twenty-five, but this was long before his mission and consequently consti-

tutes no justification for Bodley and others to describe him as "a man who spent most of his time on the road"; nor for "his vast travels" to have been described as a major source of his accumulated knowledge. "Dry Arab history", according to Sale, "records that Muhammad's first journey to Syria was made at the age of thirteen, with his uncle Abu-Talib. They had a brief meeting with a certain monk called either Sergius or Buhaira." Not only was this encounter too brief but it occurred too early to favour the surmise of the monk's assistance with the revelations, which began about thirty years later. However, let us take the opportunity to consider the various facets of this argument in detail :

Before proceeding there is one small issue which needs to be addressed : that of the monk's identity. For what do we find, but that the very name of this man who allegedly gave Muhammad [S] the stories of the Qur'an, is not a matter of general agreement at all, but differs from one critic to another. Thus in the Christian sources, he appears at one time as Sergius or Bahira, at another as Waraqah bin Nawfal; whilst if we turn to a Jewish source such as Bidrodi Alphonso, the author of the Qur'an becomes an unknown Jewish rabbi. So, even the orientalist who raise this objection, are in some confusion regarding their very own criticism.

Now, to proceed to the refutation of the claim:

- 1) First : The contradiction between the stories as to who Muhammad's [S] teachers were, is by itself sufficient to refute this charge.
- 2) Second : When Muhammad [S] accompanied his uncle, Abu Talib, to Syria, he was no more than nine years old. Is it reasonable to suppose that a boy so young could comprehend what is dictated to him? On his second trip to Syria, when he was twenty - five years of age, there are no reports of any encounter with any type of monk or teacher. On this occasion he was engaged in a trading venture on behalf of Khadijah [R], whose servant was with him, and who

related many incidents of which he was the witness and absolutely no mention was ever made of Muhammad [S] ever seeing, let alone meeting monks or teachers. Why should there have been any need of something like a business trip to act as a cover for the supposed mission, that of learning the Qur'an from Bahira? What connection was there between Bahira and Muhammad [S]? Why would Bahira have selected Muhammad [S], an illiterate, whether the boy of nine or the young man of twenty five, to be the recipient of such a work of legislation? Why did he not select for this mission a son of his own, or a relative, or at least a fellow countryman? Finally, why would he have conceded all the glory and renown, the power and the everlasting fame, together with all the good it was to bring mankind, to a mere unknown boy, whilst denying it to himself? Is not the credit due to Bahira, rather than to Muhammad [S], Abu Talib's orphan?

3) Third : Muhammad's [S] meeting with Bahira (while still a boy) was of brief duration and took place in the presence of a large number of his fellow tribesmen. So the time element is critical. How could an illiterate boy of nine comprehend the Qur'an of Bahira - even partially, let alone in full - in so short an interval? And furthermore, if he had indeed taken the Qur'an from Bahira, his tribe, the Quraish, would surely have accused him of this, no sooner he announced his prophethood. For it would have been a trump card in the Quraish's hand. How would Muhammad [S] have dared to deny taking something, even years before, when it had been done with his own fellow tribesmen as witnesses? Yet this point was never even mentioned by the Quraish in their fierce propaganda campaign against Muhammad [S] and the Qur'an, although they left no stone unturned in their attempts to discredit both Prophet and Book.

4) Fourth : Previously we totally refuted - on objective and rational grounds - the idea that the Qur'an could have been devised by a human being. So there is no way Bahira, Waraqah or the' rabbi of the Jewish orientalist Alphonso, all of them mere mortals, could have been the authors of the Qur'an, even had Muhammad [S] stayed with them for thousands of years.

5) Fifth : Neither Bahira nor the others were contemporary witnesses of the series of events related in the Qur'an, having died years and years before, how, then, could they have answered the questions that were put to Muhammad [S] decades later as recorded in the Qur'an ? Even had they been endowed with great wisdom, neither they nor anyone else could have foretold such events and instructed Muhammad [S] as to how to respond to them.

6) Sixth : There are in the Qur'an a number of verses which call for absolute belief in the oneness of Allah, and these are of course in contradiction to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. How, might we ask, could Bahira or Waraqah make Muhammad [S] propagate something so much at odds with their own faith? Likewise there are verses that allude to the misdeeds of the Jews; could they have been written by a rabbi?

7) Seventh: Are the monks Bahira and Waraqah liars? How can we accept that these men of religion, who had spent their entire lives as hermits, in the worship of Allah and the pursuit of divine gnosis, would utter untruths which would be degrading to an ordinary human being, let alone a man of Allah? How could either of them make Muhammad [S] say that the Qur'an is a revelation from Allah unto himself, when all along it is no more than their own work? Does the orientalist Norman Daniel for example, accept that a paragon of the noble teachings of Christianity like Bahira be called a liar? What good does he do to his own reiligion by laying such a charge?

A further postulate was that Muhammad [S] had a close acquaintance with Christianity while in Mecca through what he might have heard from bishops and monks. These men, stationed as they were on the Syrian borders of the Arabian desert could have conducted missionary activities in the vicinity. Both Bodley and Gibb have referred to bishops who used to preach Christianity from camelback during the fairs held annually at Uqadh near Mecca, naming Qiss as one of them. While it is historically correct that Qiss bin-Sa'idah and anoth-

er bishop called Asad bin-Ka'b did deliver many sermons to the Arabs during these fairs, the unfortunate fact regarding the theory of their influencing the Prophet [S] is that both bishops died over a century before Prophet Muhammad's [S] birth.

In addition to the bishops and monks, two Christian sword-smiths were alleged to have taught Muhammad [S] - both by his disbelieving contemporaries and much more recently by Zwemer at the turn of the present century. Jabir and Yasir were Abyssinian slaves who had accepted Islam; their master, a member of the Bani-Hadramy, used to beat them saying, "You are teaching Muhammad!" They would protest, "No, by Allah! He teaches us and guides us!". It seems that Zwemer favoured their master's opinion.

Meanwhile Menezes, and Gardner postulated a completely different teacher for the Prophet. They maintained that Salman, a Persian, had helped in writing the sacred Book. This Salman, who had been a Zoroastrian before accepting Christianity in Syria, later moved on to Medina where he met the Prophet and embraced Islam. Salman's life is documented in Islamic history, notably as the very first person to propose digging a trench for the defence of Medina when the city was threatened with invasion by the Meccan disbelievers and their allies. His bright suggestion, coupled with violent wintry gales, successfully repelled the enemy.

It is well known to Muslims that the greater part of the Qur'an, i.e., about two thirds of it, was revealed in Mecca before the Prophet [S] migrated to Medina, where Salman met him. Furthermore, the Book's literary style is so sublime that even born Arab linguists who have tried over the years to imitate it have not been successful - to say nothing of a Persian.

Sometimes Muhammad [S] was simply accused of learning from an unknown teacher, the charge being levelled in general terms such

as "The long rambling accounts of Jewish patriarchs and prophets [in the Qur'an] correspond in so much detail with the Talmud that of their, essentially Jewish origin there can be no doubt." More recently Rodinson, following the same trail, naively alleged that Muhammad [S] merely arabized Judaeo-Christianity on the basis that it had already attracted his countrymen because of its association with higher civilizations.

But against these assertions Bell wrote, "Of any intimate knowledge for the Prophet of either these two religions or the Bible itself there is no convincing evidence. The Surah 'Al-Ikhlās of the Qur'an is sometimes quoted as an early rejection of one of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity." Bell's theory was recently corroborated by the striking contrast between the Qur'an and the Bible as shown by Bucaille in his treatise, 'The Bible, the Qur'an and Science'.

As it is, the drastic difference between the Qur'anic and biblical concepts of Allah, the contrasts between the biblical legends and the Qur'anic records, not to mention the extremely unfriendly attitude of the Jewish community of Medina towards the Prophet [S] must surely furnish convincing evidence against the conjecture that Jews or Christians helped him. Further objective proofs were provided by Bucaille.

Less recently, it was argued that by the application of the principle of higher criticism it became clear that, "Muhammad had been gathering, recasting and revising in written form the material planned to issue as his book." In making these claims it should be pointed out that the writers concerned have overlooked certain important facts. Among other things is the fact that the Prophet [S] was illiterate. Secondly, the sublime style of the Qur'an remained the same throughout the entire period of its revelation. No mortal author could maintain such perfection of style, persistently, for so long. Not a Surah, not a verse, not even a word was revised, as is recorded in history.

Thirdly, the Arabs of those generations excelled in accurate memorizing of their history. The records of events used to be relayed by word of mouth verbatim from one historian to another down the generations. The science of Isnad relating to this subject was developed by the Arabs long before the art of printing appeared upon the scene. This science includes the grading of historians according to their knowledge, upbringing, way of life, the kind of friends they used to have and their accuracy in recording events. Isnad also discusses the way the same events are reported by various channels or chains of narrators and accounts for any discrepancies.

With the safeguard of the science of Isnad, as it flourished in Arabia, not one Arab historian was quoted to have mentioned that Muhammad [S] ever sat down to learn from anyone; nor that he used regularly to counsel with friends except after he became a Prophet. Arab history records every detail of Muhammad's [S] life from his birth to the moment of his death.

Finally, Prophet Muhammad [S], before reaching the age of forty, never preached, nor could he utter a passage of the Qur'an which is clearly distinct even from his own speeches and sayings.

Had Prophet Muhammad [S] in fact learnt from a Christian monk, a bishop, a Jewish person, or even from Christian slaves, the following might have happened:

- 1) Prophet Muhammad [S] would never have denied it because he was legendary all his life for both preaching and telling the truth.
- 2) He could never have preached a faith so radically different from Christianity and Judaism, particularly with respect to their basic creeds.
- 3) Under the circumstances, and considering the climate of antagonism existing between him and those who did not believe in his message, particularly the Jews and polytheists, his teacher's name

could scarcely have remained unknown throughout all the years of the Prophet's mission.

4) Whoever taught him would surely have written a book or at least a chapter similar to the Qur'anic revelations.

5) The Jews, referred to in the Qur'an as "The people of the Book" had been persistently cross-examining him, defying him and hiding their books from others. How then could they have taught him at the same time? If they had taught him anything would they not have been the first to declare it in order to disprove his prophethood? It is difficult to believe that they would not also have been careful to suppress the uncomplimentary references to them contained in the Qur'an.

6) Had Muhammad [S] not been sincere in his prophethood and honest in delivering his revelations his friends and followers would never have been so devoted to him, nor would they have clung to his teachings despite devastating hardship and persecution. It is a remarkable tribute to the character of Prophet Muhammad [S] and to those of his friends and followers that not one of them ever betrayed him.

7) The Qur'an confirms certain biblical records of previous prophets. Since the historical events in the Bible were originally revealed by Allah to Musa [A] and other prophets [A] why could not this confirmation be a sign that the source is one, and divine?

8) If divine authorship has never been claimed for the Bible by a Christian why should Muhammad [S] have risked additional persecution from his enemies by claiming the Qur'an to have been revealed by Allah if this were not so?

Other Orientalist Claims about the Authorship of the Qur'an

Orientalists have also claimed the Prophet [S] to be a poet, a philosopher, an epileptic or simply bewitched, in addition to the claims of having relied on Jewish and Christian sources in composing the Qur'an. As a matter of fact, most of these notions are not exclusively

the Orientalists' inventions, being promulgated originally by tribal chiefs among the disbelievers in the Prophet's [S] own time. Naturally, such antagonistic contemporaries were prepared to use any means to discredit his prophethood, discerning in it a cardinal threat to their supremacy as leaders of the community. Their assertions and accusations against the Prophet [S] have come down to us in the vivid terms of the Qur'an:

"When it was said to them: There is no Allah save Allah, they were scornful and said: Shall we forsake our gods for a mad poet? Nay, but he brought the Truth and he confirmed the messengers before him."
(52: 29-34)

"And when our revelations are recited unto them they say: We have heard, if we wished we could say the like of it, this is nothing but fables of the ancients."
(8:31)

Is it not strange to note how when modern Orientalists echo these accusations made fourteen centuries ago, they merely phrase them anew?

Claims that the Prophet [S] was a Poet

This claim was put forward by Stobart about a hundred years ago, was reiterated by Bell in the 1920s, and was echoed much more recently by Rodinson. After reading the Qur'an in translation, Stobart asserted that it could have been written by any Arab who is "acquainted with the general outline of the Jewish history and of the traditions of his own country and possessed of some poetic fire and fancy". Bell differed slightly when he described the Prophet as a poet, "but not of the ordinary Arab type," because his themes of religion and righteousness were hardly touched by other poets. Rodinson could not appreciate the Qur'an except as a poem stored up in Muhammad's

unconscious mind.

Readers familiar with Arabic poetry realize that it has long been distinguished by its wazn, bahr, 'arud and qafiyah - exact measures of syllabic sounds and rhymes, which have to be strictly adhered to even at the expense of grammar and shades of meaning at times. All this is categorically different from the Qur'anic literary style.

Claims that the Qur'an resulted from his Imagination

In the 1960s Anderson and Watt came up independently with almost the same theory. Anderson described the Qur'an as "the result of wishful thinking" assuming that words, thoughts and stories which various external or internal stimuli summoned from the Prophet's [S] subconscious mind came to constitute the Qur'an. Watt, applying modern methods of literary analysis, came to the conclusion that he may have been mistaken in believing the Qur'an to be a divine message: "What seems to a man to come from outside himself may actually come from his unconscious." Hence he described the Book as "the product of creative imagination".

But this theory of Anderson and Watt collapses under the weight of the mere fact that no other "imagination" - no matter how "creative" - has ever been able to produce a similar master piece or indeed even a part of it.

The contents of the Qur'an and its miraculous nature will be discussed in the following chapters. It may just be mentioned here that this theory of Anderson and Watt is furthermore unoriginal, since it was also referred to in the Qur'an as one of the claims put forward against the Prophet by the disbelievers who used the term, "muddled dreams" instead of "imagination" (21:5).

Claims that he was an Epileptic

San Pedro and other Orientalists of the Middle Ages and later have asserted that the Prophet [S] was an epileptic or possessed by demons, in an attempt to explain the divine revelations. Much more recently Rodinson dubbed it as 'auditory visual hallucination.' But this baseless claim has been ruled out by objective and rational writers. Daniel, for example, commented that "...epilepsy as applied to the Prophet was the explanation of those who Sought to amuse rather than to instruct."

The question may well be asked: Has epilepsy - this sad and debilitating disease - ever enabled its victim to become a prophet or a law-giver, or rise to a position of the highest esteem and Power?

How could it, when such a disease is scientifically known to lead eventually to mental deterioration in the form of defective memory, diminishing intelligence or irregularities of temper? On the physical side, as is well known, the effects of the epileptic attacks are often shattering on both sufferer and spectator. There have been no signs of this in any of the details of the Prophet's life which have come down to us through the centuries. "On the contrary, he was clearly in full possession of his faculties to the very end of his life. Moreover, Muhammad was a man whose common sense never failed him - nor his physical strength. Had he ever collapsed under the strain of battle or controversy or fainted away when strong action was called for, a case for epilepsy might have been made out. As it is, to base such a theory of epilepsy on a legend which on the face of it has no historical foundation is a sin against historical criticism".

In conclusion of this discussion it may be appropriate to reflect on the Qur'anic verses relevant to the subject of its authorship:

"Say: the Holy Spirit (Jibrail [A]) has revealed it from your Lord with

truth that it may confirm those who believe and as guidance and good tidings for those who have surrendered (to Allah).

And we know well that they say: Only a man teaches him. The speech of him at whom they falsely hint is outlandish and this is manifest Arabic speech.

Lo! Those who disbelieve the Revelations of Allah, Allah guides them not and theirs will be a painful doom.

Only they invent falsehood who believe not Allah's Revelations and (only) they are the liars."
(16: 102-105)

The Literary Miracle

If we examine the style of the Qur'anic phrase, we will find that it is completely new and unique in its syntax or structure. It is quite different from anything that came before or since in Arabic literature. We can almost go to the extent of dividing everything extant in Arabic into poetry, prose, and Qur'an. This latter is a kind apart neither poetic nor prosaic. For rhythm in poetry is the outcome of meter and rhyme. The Qur'an is neither prose nor poetry for it does not follow the rules of the former nor the meters of the latter. It has its own innate music. This contrast is seen, for example, in a line of poetry by Ibn al-Abbas t:

Akfara min ahlihi 'Ubayd
(Ubayd has lost all his kinsmen)
Falaysa yubdi wala yu'id.
(He can no longer initiate nor settle matters).

The rhythm in this line derives from its division into two hemistich-

es rhyming together with a long 'd' sound. It is, in fact, what is called 'externally induced rhythm'. The Qur'an's rhythm or music, on the other hand, is internal:

"Wad-duha, wal-layli idha saja"

(By the morning hours, and by the night when most still)

(93,1)

There are no hemistiches or rhyme in this straight forward phrase, but it is redolent with rhythm. From whence did such rhythm come? It is internal music.

Listen to the following verses:

"My Lord! Lo! My bones wax feeble and my head is shining with grey hair. Yet, never, Lord, have I prayed to you in vain."

(19,4)

"Taha. We have not revealed unto you (O Prophet!) the Qur'an that you should be distressed. But as a reminder unto him who fears. A Revelation from him who created the earth and the high heavens. The Beneficent One, Who is established on the Throne"

(20,1-4)

If the topic dealt with is a threat the sentence structure and morphology become like chunks of flint stone and its rhythm produces a sort of metallic screeching that pierces the ears:

"On a day of unremitting woe we let loose on them a howling wind which snatched them off as if they had been trunks of uprooted palm-trees."

(54, 19-20)

Words like 'howling' and 'uprooted' strike our ears with their sounds

in Arabic, like pieces of rock.

If Qur'anic verses report a major event, like those that speak about the end of the Flood, their sentences become very short as if they were Morse Code signals. A verse in its entirety becomes like a pithy telegram with a momentous impact :

"A voice cried out: 'Earth swallow up your waters; heaven, cease your rain! The floods abated and Allah's will was done.'"

(11, 44)

Such varying effects in word morphology, syntax, and the concordance of rhythms with meanings and feelings reach to the very summit in the Qur'an. They are always achieved in a smooth and easy manner without any artificiality or affectation.

Thirdly, if we further pursue this line of analysis, we will discover a meticulous accuracy and staggering adequacy. Every letter is in its precise place neither advanced nor retarded. You cannot substitute one word for another, nor put one letter in place of the other. Every word has been chosen from among millions by a very sensitive act of discernment.

We shall presently encounter such accuracy as has never been equalled in composition. Examine, for example, the word 'fertilizing' in the following verse:

"We let loose the fertilizing wind"

(15, 22)

It was in the past understood in a figurative sense to mean that the wind stimulates the clouds causing them to rain; the rain would then 'fertilize' the soil, that is, make it productive. Nowadays, however, we know that the winds drive positively-charged clouds into negatively-

charged ones causing lightning, thunder, and rain. In this sense they 'fertilize' the clouds. We also know that winds carry the pollen from one flower to the other thus literally fertilizing them. Hence, we are before a word which is true figuratively, literally, and scientifically. It is, moreover, aesthetically superb and rhythmically pleasing. This is what we mean by meticulous accuracy in the choice and placing of a word.

Let us also consider the following verse:

"Do not usurp each other's property by unjust means, nor bribe judges with it in order that you may knowingly and wrongfully deprive others of their possessions."

(2, 188)

The Arabic word used for 'bribe' here is 'tudlu' which literally means to 'lower' something or send it down. This may seem a strange use keeping in mind that the judge or ruler to whom the money is given is in a higher not a lower position vis-à-vis the givers. The Qur'an, however, effects an appropriate correction with this use: the hand that accepts bribes is a lower hand even if it is the ruler's or the judge's. This is how the expression "...lower it down to the judges..." comes in an unequalled stylistic adequacy to convey the meanness and degradation of those who receive bribes.

In a verse about jihad or holy struggle we read:

"O, Believers, why is it that when it is said to you: 'March in the cause of Allah', you are bowed down to the ground with heaviness."

(9, 38)

The Qur'an uses the elided form - ith-thaqaltum - of the verb tathaqtum ('bowed down to the ground with heaviness') to vividly express the cowardice of some who cling and stick to the ground in terror

when they are called upon to fight. The elision of the 't' sound found at the beginning of the original form of the verb and its merger into the 'th' sound eloquently conveys the sticking of the cowards to the ground for dear life.

The Qur'an speaks about the killing of children for fear of poverty in two similar verses which only differ in a significant respect:

"You shall not kill your children because you cannot support them. We provide for you and for them:"
(6, 151)

"You shall not kill your children for fear of want. We will provide for them and for you."
(17, 31)

The underlined difference in word order is not haphazard but calculated. When the killing of children is motivated by actual want, by the poverty of the family at that time, the Qur'anic emphasis is on Allah's succour of the parents; hence, they are mentioned first (in the first verse). If, on the other hand, the killing is impelled by fear of expected want, of the future possibility of poverty, the Qur'an delivers its assuring message by placing the children (the future) before the family as recipients of Allah's provision (in the second verse). Such minutiae can hardly occur to the mind of any human author.

Similar cases in the Qur'an of advancing or retarding words are always meaningful. In the verse which lays down the punishment for theft the male thief is mentioned before the female whereas in that which speaks about fornication the fornicatress is mentioned before the fornicator. The reason behind such ordering is quite obvious: in cases of theft man is always more daring and the initiator, but in fornication it is usually the woman who initiates the train of events; she lays the snares for the intended man from the very moment she stands

before the mirror making her face up, wearing her perfume, or selecting a revealing dress. Thus, the Qur'an:

"The adulteress and the adulterer, scourge you each of them a hundred lashes."

(24, 2)

"As for the thief both male and female, cut off their hands in punishment for their deeds."

(5, 38)

In more than sixteen places in the Qur'an, 'hearing' is mentioned before 'sight' when both come together:

"...and gave you ears and eyes and hearts; so that you may give thanks..."

(16, 78)

"...and gave them ears and eyes and hearts...."

(46, 26)

"...hear and see them on the Day they come unto Us..."

(19, 38)

"...the hearing, sight, and heart of man shall be questioned..."

(17, 36)

"...you did not hide yourselves, so that your ears and eyes and skins could not observe you..."

(41, 22)

Hearing, as we can see from the previous verses, invariably comes first. It is unquestionable that the sense of hearing is more sensitive and developed than sight. The prophets heard the words of Allah and spoke with Him but none of them saw Him. The Prophet Muhammad [S] received the Qur'an through hearing. The mother can distinguish the voice of her child crying even when it is lost in a crowd of people. Hearing in human beings stays active even during sleep when the

eyes are resting. Anyone who undertakes an anatomy of the hearing system will find it more sensitive and exact than sight.

The Qur'an employs a similar technique of word order with regard to wealth and offspring:

"The day when wealth and children will avail nothing and when none shall be saved except him who comes before his Lord with a pure heart."

(26, 88)

"Your wealth and children are but a temptation. (but) Allah's reward is greater."

(64, 15)

"Neither their riches nor their children shall in the least protect them from His scourge. They are the heirs of Hell, and there they shall remain for ever."

(3, 116)

"Do they think that in giving them wealth and children we are solicitous for their welfare? By no means! They cannot see."

(23, 55)

"Let neither their riches nor their children rouse your desire. Through these Allah seeks to punish them in this life, so that they shall die unbelievers."

(9, 55)

There are many more verses keeping the same order of mention, the secret behind this is that those who are slaves to their passions and this world cherish wealth more dearly than their very own offspring.

Subtle and exact stylistic touches in the Qur'an extend to word inflections. In the verse:

"If two parties of believers take up arms against each other, make 'peace between them."

(49, 9)

the two parties are referred to first in the plural mode: the verb 'iqtatalu' - fought among themselves - is used. But later on they are spoken of in the dual mode: in the word 'baynahuma' which means 'between the two of them'. There is a very subtle and fine touch here. For in the thick of fighting the two parties will merge into each other becoming a 'host' or 'pluralism' of striking arms, but if at peace they will separate again into two (the dual mode) groups each sending an envoy for talks. Hence, the precision of the Qur'anic manner of expression.

Even propositions and conjunctions are employed in (or are absent from) the Qur'anic text for weighty considerations and according to a precise and accurate calculation. An example of this method is afforded by a repeated Qur'anic structure based on the phrase, 'they ask you':

"They ask you about what they should give in alms. Say: 'What you can spare'."

(2, 219)

"They ask you about the phases of the moon. Say: 'They are timings for people and pilgrimage'."

(2, 189)

"They ask you about the Spirit. Say: 'The Spirit is of the matters of my Lord'."

(17, 85)

The word 'say' (qul) comes invariably as an answer to the question introduced by the phrase, 'they ask you'. An exception, however, occurs when a verse speaks about the condition of the mountains on Doomsday:

"They ask you about the mountains. Then say: 'My Lord will crush

them to fine dust'."

(20, 105)

Here the word 'say' comes in Arabic in the form 'fa-qul' or 'then say' instead of 'qul'. The reason is that all previous questions have already been put to Prophet Muhammad [s], but no one had as yet asked him about what happens to the mountains on Doomsday. Furthermore, this is one of the secrets of that future day. Thus, Allah is in effect saying to him: if you are asked about that subject, '...then say...' such and such a thing. The prefix 'fa' (then) is not superfluous but semantically functional in a calculated manner.

In another verse we read:

"If My servants ask you about Me, I am near."

(2, 186)

The word 'say' is absent here because the question concerns the essence of Allah and it is He only who can 'say' anything about that subject.

A similar subtlety is manifest in the Qur'anic uses of the pronouns 'I' and 'We' in relation to Allah. For Allah speaks in the plural 'We' when referring to a divine act in which all His attributes are a factor such as creation or the revelation and preservation of the Qur'an:

"We have revealed the Qur'an and We shall ourselves preserve it."

(15, 9)

"We created you, will you not believe."

(56, 67)

"We revealed the Qur'an in the night of Qadr."

(97, 1)

"Behold the semen you discharge: did you create it or We?"

(56, 59)

"We created them and endowed them with strong limbs and joints; but if We please, We can replace them by other men."
(76, 28)

The pronoun 'We' in these examples expresses the unison of divine attributes as they act in a profound original invention such as creation. If, on the other hand, the verses deal with a situation in which Allah speaks to a creature of His, as in His talk with Moses, the individual pronoun 'I' is employed:

"I am Allah. There is no god but Me. Worship Me, and establish prayer for My remembrance."
(20, 14)

Allah uses 'I' because it is His Essence that is the focus here and because He wishes to lay stress on His Oneness and on monotheism in worship.

Still pursuing the meticulous accuracy of Qur'anic expression, we find two identical verses about patience that differ only in an 'L' letter added to a word in the second of them. In the first verse Luqman [a], the Wise, says to his son:

"Endure with fortitude whatever befalls you, for this is will-power."
(31, 17)

In the second verse we read:

"Whosoever endures and forgives this truly is will-power."
(42, 43)

Patience in the first verse is "...min 'azm il-umur..." (will-power) while in the second it is "...la-min (truly) azm il-umur..." The secret behind the emphasis with 'la' in the latter construction is that the patience involved in this case is doubly more demanding than the endurance exhorted in the first verse. It is patience vis-à-vis an

aggression by an opponent and the person advised is required not only to endure but to forgive. This is certainly more difficult than the endurance of unavoidable divine fate.

The same emphatic occurs once more to add significance to two similar verses about the sending of rain and the growth of plants:

"Consider the water which you drink. Was it you that poured it from the clouds or We? If we please, We could turn it bitter."
(56, 69)

"Consider the seeds you sow. Is it you that give them growth or We? If We pleased, We could turn your plants into chaff."
(56, 65)

The Arabic word for 'could turn' in the first verse is "ja'alnahu" while in the second it is "laja'alnahu". The emphatic 'la' in the latter word is necessitated by the fact that there will certainly be someone to claim that he can destroy the plants turning them into chaff just as the Creator can. With regard to the former case, however, no human dare allege that he can draw down salt water from the clouds. There is no need for emphasis here.

The same accuracy of expression is found when Ibrahim [A] describes Allah :

"Who will cause me to die and bring me back to life hereafter."
(26, 81)
"He who gives me food and drink"
(26, 79)

The word 'He' is brought in the second verse to emphasize divine agency when the provision of food is mentioned because anyone can easily claim that he is the provider of food and drink. No one, how-

ever, will claim the ability to cause death and resurrection as Allah did with Ibrahim [A].

The same eloquent precision is seen when the Qur'an addresses the Muslims in the following terms:

"Remember Me, then, and I will remember you."
(2, 152)

The Qur'an, however, speaks differently to the jews:

"Children of Israel remember that I bestowed my favours upon you"
(2, 40)

The reason behind this is the materialistic bent of the jews who remember Allah only in circumstances of benefit, interest, or favour. The Muslims are spiritually more elevated and understand what it means to remember Allah for His own sake and not for an expected favour from Him.

In the same vein, Allah addresses the elite among the knowledgeable and wise:

"So fear Me, you that are endowed with understanding."
(2, 197)

But when the Qur'an speaks to common men, it has this warning:

"Guard yourselves against that fire whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for the unbelievers."
(2, 24)

Ordinary men can only be deterred by the threat of Hell-fire but the elite know that Allah is infinitely more powerful than any fire and

that, in fact, He can in fact make such fire cool and harmless for whomsoever He pleases.

Accurate choice of words in the Qur'an is exemplified in iblis's (satan) oath to tempt humanity:

"I swear by Your Exaltedness that I will seduce all men,"
(13, 82)

In swearing by Allah's Exaltedness in particular, and by no other divine attribute, shaytan proves his knowledge and cunning; for this particular attribute declares that Allah is absolutely in no need of His creatures: hence, those who believe or disbelieve are perfectly free to pursue the course they have chosen. Their actions would not affect Allah at all since He is the Transcendent Almighty who does not need His creatures or, for that matter, the entire universe.

In a Divine Utterance (Hadith Qudsi), Allah says:

"Those who are in Hell, it is of no significance to Me; And those in Paradise, it is of no significance to Me."

This follows from divine Exaltedness and it is the only 'loophole' through which shaytan can justify his assault on mankind. He can misguide and insinuate evil to them because Allah, by His Exalted Self-Sufficiency, will not compel any one who preferred infidelity to become a believer. This is why the devil swore by Allah's Exaltedness when he declared his design to seduce men.

The devil also reveals his intelligence when he says:

"I will waylay your servants as they walk on Your straight path, and spring upon them from the front and from the rear, from their right and from their left,"

(70, 16)

He mentions four directions of attack on men but neglects two: from above and from below. This is significant; above men there is divine Lordship and below them there is creaturely humility. Anyone who is devoted to worship and serve the Exalted Allah will be immune against the insinuations of the devil.

Iblis specifies that his chosen seat of seduction will be on the straight path, on the road to the good, on the prayer mat for example. That person who neglects prayers, gets drunk, or is addicted to lechery has no need of a devil to lead him astray; his own soul has already done the trick. He has become a ruined human being and Iblis is a sharp thief who does not relish wasting his time over ruined houses.

Instances of eloquent Qur'anic accuracy of expression are inexhaustible. We find yet another one in the way the mention of forgiveness and mercy precedes that of punishment and wrath. Allah is first spoken of in the Fatiha (Opening verse of the Qur'an) as the Compassionate and the Merciful and then as 'the King of the Day of Judgment'. He is invariably described as pardoning whomever He pleases and then punishing whomever He wills. Forgiveness, thus, always comes before punishment except in two verses. The first concerns the amputation of the thief's hand:

"He punishes whom He wills and forgives whom He pleases."
(5, 40)

This punishment takes place in the worldly life but is followed by forgiveness in the hereafter.

The second verse narrates Jesus's ('Isa [A]) address to Allah on Judgment Day about the polytheists who worshipped him rather than Allah. He says to his Lord:

"They are your bondsmen: it is for you to punish or to forgive them. You are the Mighty, the Wise One."

(5, 118)

'Isa [A] does not address Allah as the Forgiver and the Merciful out of deference and he mentions punishment before forgiveness to indicate the gravity of the transgression committed.

Qur'anic precision reaches the summit in the treatment of time. The Creator speaks about future events in the past tense. All the happenings of Doomsday are described in the past tense:

"The Trumpet was sounded"

(18, 99)

"The sky was rent asunder on that day, frail,"

(69, 16)

"Hell was revealed to the erring."

(26, 91)

"They were ranged before thy Lord."

(18, 48)

The reason for this treatment is that all events past and present have already taken place in Allah's Prescience; Allah is not limited by time so that the future can be veiled from Him. He, the Exalted, is transcendent to both space and time. That is why we find certain Qur'anic phrases speaking simultaneously in two tenses in what appears to be a contradiction:

"The Judgment of Allah has come: do not seek to hurry it on."

(16, 1)

The Judgment, according to the tense of the first clause, has already occurred in the past; Allah, nevertheless, orders men not to hurry it on

as if it were still an event expected in the future. The secret behind this, as explained, is that the Judgment has, in fact, occurred and ended in Allah's Prescience but has not yet unfolded before men's knowledge. There is no contradiction here but accuracy, precision, resourcefulness, and truthfulness in the rendering of profound meanings. These are deep mysteries that need to be studied.

All the previous examples illustrate the precise structuring and extreme accuracy of Qur'anic expression. The words are meticulously chosen and even the letters are meaningfully used. No addition, elision, advancing, or retarding occurs but by careful design. This approach is unequalled in any human composition. It is only found in the Qur'an.

As for the scientific hints and allusions to the wonders of natural phenomena that we find in the Qur'an and that reveal secrets and mysteries discovered only in our own age but quite unknown to Muhammad [S] we shall devote another discussion; for this is a lengthy matter, indeed.

The Scientific Miracle

Modern astronomy, biology, anatomy, and atomic research was certainly non-existent when the Qur'anic verses were revealed more than one thousand four hundred years ago. Notwithstanding, there appear numerous verses dealing with the sky, the earth, the stars, the planets, the development of the embryo, and the creation of man in a manner that corresponds with the latest discoveries of the sciences of our time.

The Qur'an did not tackle these subjects in the detailed approach of a specialized scientific text because it was primarily revealed as a book of creed, ontology, a way of life, and legislation. Had it dealt

elaborately and expressly with such topics, it would have shocked the Arabs of its time with things they could not comprehend. It resorted, therefore, to suggestions, hints, and intimations leaving them to be explained hundreds of years later by the sciences and discoveries of the future and to manifest their real nature one generation after the other as miracles and signs which prove that the Qur'an is indeed from the one and only Allah.

Allah says in His Book:

"We will show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own selves, until they clearly see that this is the truth."
(41, 53)

Since those addressed were not satisfied with Allah's own testimony to the truth of the Qur'an, it became necessary that He prove it to them with manifest signs. The Qur'an continues day after day to uncover more of these amazing signs before our astonished eyes.

The Earth

To begin with, The Qur'an mentioned, in unequivocal terms, the roundness of the earth employing, in the following verse, the verb 'yukawwir' (to round) twice to describe how the night and day 'slide upon' each other as two halves of a ball:

"He causes the night to succeed (yukawwir) the day and the day to succeed the night."
(33, 5)

Consider also in the same connection the verse which speaks about the 'spreading' of the earth where the verb 'dahaha' is used to express this fact:

"After that, He spread the earth (dahaha)."
(79, 20)

Daha is the only word in Arabic that means to spread something and to make it oval at the same time. The earth, as is well-known, appears to those who live on it spread flat but it is, in reality, round or, to be exact, oval in shape.

One of the striking things in the Qur'an is the frequent mention of the 'simultaneity' of night and day which co-exist in time from the beginning of creation to its end without each of them preceding the other:

"The sun is not allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day."
(36, 40)

This clearly hints to the roundness of the earth. Night and day started simultaneously together since the beginning of creation as 'hemispheres'; if the earth had been flat, day and night would have succeeded each other by necessity. This suggestion is emphasized by another verse which speaks of the occurrence of Doomsday while the earth is, as it ever has been since its creation, passing through night and day at the same time:

"When the earth has taken on its ornaments and is embellished, and its people deem themselves masters of it, Our commandment comes by night or by day and We make it waste as if it had not flourished yesterday."
(10, 24)

The phrase 'by night or by day' brings out that simultaneity of the two which can only be explained by the fact that one half of the planet is hidden from the sun and is, therefore, dark while the other half faces the sun and is lighted by its rays. If the earth had been flat, it would

have been in one condition only at a time.

Linked to this observation is the mention, in the Qur'an, of the multiplicity of 'rising' and 'setting' points. Allah is described as the,

"Lord of the rising-places and the setting-places."
(70, 40)

and the

"Lord of the two Easts and Lord of the two Wests."
(55, 17).

If the earth had been flat, there would have been only one rising-point or 'east' and one setting-point or 'west'. On the Judgment Day, man says to the devil who accompanied him throughout his life:

"Would we were as far apart as the two horizons (literally, the two Easts)."
(43, 35)

The Arabic text can be interpreted to indicate that the sun's setting in one area or horizon (west) can be the point of it rising in another area (east). This is only possible if the earth is round.

From another perspective, it is observable that there are two points at which the sun rises which are farthest apart from each other, one in winter, the other in summer. The same is true of its setting; hence the "...two easts and the two wests...". In the northern hemisphere (in summer), the sun will be vertically above the Tropic of Cancer, whilst in the southern hemisphere (in winter) it will be vertically above the Tropic of Capricorn. When the sun is vertical with one Tropic it is at an angle with the other. Thus the sun rises in two distant places in summer and winter, appearing vertical at one and inclined at the

other. Also, during the year the sun appears at successive points between the two Tropics, so we can call each point an east with a west opposite it. In this sense, there are indeed a number of 'east and west'.

There are 'east and west' on other planets too, so praise be to the Lord of the 'east and west'.

We read, in the Qur'an, another clear hint to the effect that the mountains 'swim' in space which, consequently, implies that the earth moves in space since both it and the mountains are one mass:

"You see the mountains deeming them firm while they pass away like clouds."
(27, 88)

This means that the mountains which appear solid and inert really 'float' in space.

The Nature of Matter

The Qur'an often likens mountains, the most ostensible physical object in our day to day experience, to clouds which contains an important suggestion about the 'fragile' structure of matter which, as we know today, is really composed of atoms just as the clouds are composed of droplets.

When the Qur'an was revealed, the smallest known unit of matter was the atom described as an individual, indivisible entity. The Holy Book came to speak of even more minute units into which the atom can be divided. It was, indeed, the first book ever to mention something smaller than the atom:

"Not an atom's weight in heaven or earth escapes Him; nor is there

anything smaller or greater but recorded in a Book Glorious."

(34, 3)

Prior to the Qur'an, philosophers thought that the atom was the smallest indivisible component of matter. However today we know that this is false. Atoms are composed of electrons, neutrons and protons. Those neutrons and protons are made of quarks, and lately those quarks turned-out to be made of strings. However 1400 years ago the Quran set right the common misconceptions of the time, it stated that the atom is not the smallest part.

"It is Allah Who splits the grains and the nuclei. He brings the living from the dead, and He brings the dead from the living. Such is Allah. So how could you deviate?"

(6,95)

Nucleus In Arabic means "Nawat". Its plural nuclei in Arabic is "nawa". So the Qur'an says that Allah splits the nucleus. This means that the atom is not the smallest particle.

"Nothing is hidden from your Lord (so much as) the weight of an atom on Earth nor in heaven, not less than that nor more but is (written) in a clear record (on the Preserved Tablet)".

(10,61)

The atom is not the smallest part of an atom. Today we know from String Theory that the smallest mass is the mass of a string.

The vibration of the string determines its mass. This was known recently, however this was portrayed in the Quran 1400 years before. The Quran says that the smallest particle is a 'wick' (ie. like the string of a candle).

"Have you not considered those who claim purity for themselves? Rather, Allah purifies whom He wills, and they will not be wronged by a wick."

(4,49)

“Fatil” means wick. The smallest thing therefore is a wick.

The wick in the Qur’an looks exactly like the string in ‘String Theory’.

From String Theory we know that the smallest mass is the mass of a string. The vibration of the string determines its mass. However this was portrayed in the Quran 1400 years before as well. The Qur’an says that the smallest mass is a ‘pluck’.

“But whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, and is a believer, those will enter Paradise, and will not be wronged by a pluck.”

(4,124)

“Nakara” means ‘pluck’ or ‘plucking the string of a musical instrument’. “Nakir” therefore means ‘vibrations of a string’. In this verse “Nakiran” means a single vibration of a string. So in the Quran the smallest mass is the single vibration of a string.

In this verse the smallest mass is a ‘pluck’ and in the previous verse the smallest particle is a ‘wick’. Both verses are describing the same smallest particle, ‘a vibrating string’, something only recently discovered by modern science.

Mountains

Mountains have underlying roots. These roots are deeply embedded in the ground, thus, mountains have a shape like a peg. This is how the Qur'an has described mountains.

"Have We not made the earth as a bed, and the mountains as pegs?"

(78: 6-7)

Modern earth sciences have proven that mountains have deep roots under the surface of the ground and that these roots can reach several times their elevations above the surface of the ground. So the most suitable word to describe mountains on the basis of this information is the word 'peg,' since most of a properly set peg is hidden under the surface of the ground. The history of science tells us that the theory of mountains having deep roots was introduced only in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Mountains also play an important role in stabilizing the crust of the earth. They hinder the shaking of the earth. Allah has said in the Qur'an:

"And He has set firm mountains in the earth so that it would not shake with you."
(16:15)

Likewise, the modern theory of plate tectonics holds that mountains work as stabilizers for the earth. This knowledge about the role of mountains as stabilizers for the earth has just begun to be understood in the framework of plate tectonics since the late 1960's.

Even more remarkably, researchers have recently discovered that

within the earth itself is a complex, rich and dynamic inner landscape. The mantle appears to be layered like an onion, with major transitions 250 miles, 410 miles and 600 miles down. At the 410-mile level, researchers recently identified tremendous internal mountain ranges, with peaks even taller than Mount Everest, up to 40 km high, that slow the motion of the ductile layer above it and stabilise it. However this was portrayed in the Quran 1400 years ago,

“And We placed in the earth mountains, lest it sways with them, and

We placed therein broad pathways, that they may be guided.”
(21:31)

How could the Prophet Muhammad [S] have known these remarkable facts? Modern science has confirmed the truth of these Qur'anic verses.

Seas and Rivers

Modern Science has discovered that in the places where two different seas meet, there is a barrier between them. This barrier divides the two seas so that each sea has its own temperature, salinity, and density. For example, Mediterranean sea water is warm, saline, and less dense, compared to Atlantic ocean water. When Mediterranean sea water enters the Atlantic over the Gibraltar sill, it moves several hundred kilometers into the Atlantic at a depth of about 1000 meters with its own warm, saline, and less dense characteristics. The Mediterranean water stabilizes at this depth. Although there are large waves, strong currents, and tides in these seas, they do not mix or transgress this barrier.

The Holy Qur'an mentioned that there is a barrier between two seas that meet and that they do not transgress. Allah has said:

"He has let free the two seas meeting together. There is a barrier between them. They do not transgress."
(55: 19-20)

But when the Qur'an speaks about the divider between fresh and salt water, it mentions the existence of "a forbidding partition" with the barrier. Allah has said in the Qur'an:

"He is the one who has let free the two bodies of flowing water, one sweet and palatable, and the other salty and bitter. And He has made

between them a barrier and a forbidding partition."
(25: 53)

One may ask, why did the Qur'an mention the partition when speaking about the divider between fresh and salt water, but did not mention it when speaking about the divider between the two seas?

Modern science has discovered that in estuaries, where fresh (sweet) and salt water meet, the situation is somewhat different from what is found in places where two seas meet. It has been discovered that what distinguishes fresh water from salt water in estuaries is a "pycnocline zone with a marked density discontinuity separating the two layers." This partition (zone of separation) has a different salinity from the fresh water and from the salt water. This information has been discovered only recently, using advanced equipment to measure temperature, salinity, density, oxygen dissolubility, etc. The human eye cannot see the difference between the two seas that meet, rather the two seas appear to us as one homogeneous sea. Likewise, the human eye cannot see the division of water in estuaries into the three kinds: fresh water, salt water, and the partition (zone of separation).

Deep Seas and Internal Waves

On Deep Seas and Internal Waves Allah has said in the Qur'an:

"Or (the unbelievers' state) is like the darkness in a deep sea. It is covered by waves, above which are waves, above which are clouds. Darkesses, one above another. If a man stretches out his hand, he cannot see it..."
(24: 40)

This verse mentions the darkness found in deep seas and oceans, where if a man stretches out his hand, he cannot see it. The darkness in deep seas and oceans is found around a depth of 200 meters and

below. At this depth, there is almost no light. Below a depth of 1000 meters there is no light at all.' Human beings are not able to dive more than forty meters without the aid of submarines or special equipment. Human beings cannot survive unaided in the deep dark part of the oceans, such as at a depth of 200 meters.

Scientists have recently discovered this darkness by means of special equipment and submarines that have enabled them to dive into the depths of the oceans.

We can also understand from the following sentences in the previous verse, "...in a deep sea. It is covered by waves, above which are waves, above which are clouds...", that the deep waters of seas and oceans are covered by waves, and above these waves are other waves. It is clear that the second set of waves are the surface waves that we see, because the verse mentions that above the second waves there are clouds. But what about the first waves? Scientists have recently discovered that there are internal waves which occur on density interfaces between layers of different densities. The internal waves cover the deep waters of seas and oceans because the deep waters have a higher density than the waters above them. Internal waves act like surface waves. They can also break, just like surface waves. Internal waves cannot be seen by the human eye, but they can be detected by studying temperature or salinity changes at a given location.

Clouds

Scientists have studied cloud types and have realized that rain clouds are formed and shaped according to definite systems and certain steps connected with certain types of wind and clouds.

One kind of rain cloud is the cumulonimbus cloud. Meteorologists have studied how cumulonimbus clouds are formed and how they produce rain, hail, and lightning.

They have found that cumulonimbus clouds go through the following steps to produce rain: 1) The clouds are pushed by the wind: Cumulonimbus clouds begin to form when wind pushes some small pieces of clouds (cumulus clouds) to an area where these clouds converge. 2) Joining: Then the small clouds join together forming a larger cloud. 3) Stacking: When the small clouds join together, updrafts within the larger cloud increase. The updrafts near the center of the cloud are stronger than those near the edges. These updrafts cause the cloud body to grow vertically, so the cloud is stacked up. This vertical growth causes the cloud body to stretch into cooler regions of the atmosphere, where drops of water and hail formulate and begin to grow larger and larger. When these drops of water and hail become too heavy for the updrafts to support them, they begin to fall from the cloud as rain, hail, etc. Allah has said in the Qur' an:

"Have you not seen how Allah makes the clouds move gently, then joins them together, then makes them into a stack, and then you see the rain come out of it..."

(24: 43)

Meteorologists have only recently come to know these details of cloud formation, structure, and function by using advanced equipment like planes, satellites, computers, balloons, and other equipment, to study wind and its direction, to measure humidity and its variations, and to determine the levels and variations of atmospheric pressure.

The preceding verse, after mentioning clouds and rain, speaks about hail and lightning:

"...And He sends down hail from mountains (clouds) in the sky, and He strikes with it whomever He wills, and turns it from whom ever He wills. The vivid flash of its lightning nearly blinds the sight."

(24: 43)

Meteorologists have found that these cumulonimbus clouds, that shower hail, reach a height of 25,000 to 30,000 ft (4.7 to 5.7 miles), like mountains, as the Qur'an said, "...And He sends down hail from mountains (clouds) in the sky..." This verse may raise a question. Why does the verse say "its lightning" in a reference to the hail? Does this mean that hail is the major factor in producing lightning? Let us see what the book entitled Meteorology Today says about this. It says that a cloud becomes electrified as hail falls through a region in the cloud of supercooled droplets and ice crystals. As liquid droplets collide with a hailstone, they freeze on contact and release latent heat. This keeps the surface of the hailstone warmer than that of the surrounding ice crystals. When the hailstone comes in contact with an ice crystal, an important phenomenon occurs: electrons flow from the colder object toward the warmer object. Hence, the hailstone becomes negatively charged. The same effect occurs when supercooled droplets come in contact with a hailstone and tiny splinters of positively charged ice break off. These lighter positively charged particles are then carried to the upper part of the cloud by updrafts. The hail, left with a negative charge, falls towards the bottom of the cloud, thus the lower part of the cloud becomes negatively charged.

These negative charges are then discharged as lightning. We conclude from this that hail is the major factor in producing lightning.

This information on lightning was discovered recently. Until 1600 AD, Aristotle's ideas on meteorology were dominant. For example, he said that the atmosphere contains two kinds of exhalation, moist and dry. He also said that thunder is the sound of the collision of the dry exhalation with the neighboring clouds, and lightning is the inflaming and burning of the dry exhalation with a thin and faint fire.' These are some of the ideas or meteorology that were dominant at the time of the Qur'an's revelation, fourteen centuries ago.

The Nature of the Atmosphere

We find in the Qur'an references to paths or ways in the skies:

"By the skies full of paths."

(51, 7)

We also find significant allusions:

"By the sky with its returning (of rain)."

(86, 11)

The sky, that is, returns all that rises to it from the surface of the earth back again to that surface: it sends back the water vapour in the shape of rain, it holds rising bodies back by the force of gravity, it bounces back radio signals by deflecting them in the ionosphere, and it similarly deflects infra-red rays back to the earth's surface warming it at night.

Just as the sky returns and returns, or deflects back all that rises to it from below, it also returns or deflects, absorbs, or scatters away all that is directed to it from space thus protecting the earth's surface from bombardments of the deadly infra-red or 'cosmic' rays. It acts exactly as a 'roof':

"We spread the sky like a canopy and provided it with strong support,"

(21, 32)

"We have built the heaven with Our might, and We expand its vastness".

(51, 47)

The last words describe what is now known as the theory of the progressive expansion of the universe.

Origin of the Universe

For thousands of years, astronomers wrestled with basic questions concerning the universe. Until the early 1920's, it was believed that the universe had always been in existence; also, that the size of the universe was fixed and not changing. However astronomers discovered that the galaxies were moving away from each other at huge velocities supporting the expanding-universe theory.

Yet, astonishingly well before telescopes were even invented and the Qur'an stated that the universe is expanding.

“And the heaven We created with might, and indeed We are expanding it.”
(51:47)

That the Qur'an mentioned such a fact at a time when there was primitive knowledge in science is certainly remarkable and clearly points to its divine origin. This is more so inexplicable considering that, like many people in his time, Muhammad [s] was illiterate and simply could not have been aware of such facts by himself.

Modern astronomers went on to discover that the universe came into existence from one single extremely hot and dense point, and that something triggered the explosion of this point that brought the universe into being. The universe, since then, has been expanding from this single point. Remarkably, it is mentioned in the Qur'an:

“He (Allah) is the Originator of the heavens and the earth...”
(6:101)

“Is not He who created the heavens and the earth Able to create the likes of them? Yes; and He is the Knowing Creator. His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.”
(36:81-82)

The above verses prove that the universe had a beginning, that Allah was behind its creation, and all that Allah needs to do in order to create is to say “Be,” and it is. This is the Qur’anic explanation as to what triggered the explosion that brought the universe into being?

The Qur’an also mentions:

“Have those who disbelieved not considered that the heavens and the earth were a joined entity, then We separated them, and made from water every living thing? Then will they not believe?”
(21:30)

In the previous verse, the Arabic words ‘ratq’ and ‘fataq’ are used. The word ‘ratq’ can be translated as an “entity joined together” or “closed up”. The verb ‘fataq’ is translated as “We unstitched”, “We clove them asunder”, “We separated” or “We have opened them”. These meanings imply that something comes into being by an action of splitting or tearing apart. The sprouting of a seed from the soil is a good example of a similar illustration of the meaning of the verb fataq.

With the introduction of the Big Bang theory, it soon became clear that the details mentioned with regards to the theory go identically hand in hand with the description of the creation of the universe in verse 30 of chapter 21 of the Qur’an. The theory states that all the matter in the universe came into existence from one single extremely hot and dense point; that exploded and brought about the universe, matches what is mentioned in the Qur’anic verse that the physical universe was once joined together, and then split apart. Once again, the only possible explanation is that Muhammad [s] had truly received divine revelation from Allah, The Creator and Originator of the universe.

The End of The Universe

According to modern science, there are three possibilities as to how the universe could end: Big Rip, Big Crunch or Big Chill. The last scenario is the favoured theory which predicts that the Universe would eventually stop expanding and collapse in on itself (Big Crunch).

Interestingly, the Qur'an describes the end of the universe in these terms,

“On that Day We will roll up the heavens like a scroll of writings. Just as We produced the first creation, ‘so’ shall We reproduce it. That is a promise binding on Us. We truly uphold ‘Our promises’!” (21,104)

Here Allah promises to make this ‘Big Crunch’ by rolling up the universe like a scroll.

Again the Qur’anic description is remarkably informative given the best of our understanding of the nature of the physical universe.

Bones and Reproduction

1400 years ago nobody knew that bones affect reproduction. Today we know that bones do affect fertility.

Researchers have discovered that the skeleton acts as a regulator of fertility through a hormone released by bone.

Traditionally, bone has been viewed as a relatively static tissue only fulfilling mechanical and scaffolding function. It is now clear that the skeleton regulates male reproductive functions.

This was portrayed in the Quran 1400 years before it was discovered.

“Mankind was created from gushing fluid, exiting from between the backbone and the breastbones.”
(86,6-7)

The Embryo

Consider, for instance, the insight given by the Qur'an into the embryo's development and its indication that the male sperm alone is responsible for the determination of the baby's sex:

"He created the sexes, the male and the female, from a drop of ejected semen,"
(53, 45)

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah speaks about the stages of man's embryonic development:

"We created man from an extract of clay. Then We made him as a drop in a place of settlement, firmly fixed. Then We made the drop into an alaqah (ie. leech like, suspended thing, and blood clot), then We made the alaqah into a mudghah (chewed-like substance). Then We made the mudghah into bones. Then We clothed the bones with flesh. Then We produced it into another creature. Most Blessed is Allah, the Best of Creators. "
(23:12-14)

Literally, the Arabic word alaqah has three meanings: (1) leech, (2) suspended thing, and (3) blood clot. In comparing a leech to an embryo in the alaqah stage, we find distinct similarity between the two. Also, the embryo at this stage obtains nourishment from the blood of the mother, similar to the leech, which feeds on the blood of others. The second meaning of the word alaqah is 'suspended thing'. This is what we can observe in the suspension of the embryo, during the alaqah stage, in the womb of the mother. The third meaning of the word alaqah is 'blood clot'. We find that the external appearance of

the embryo and its sacs during the alaqah stage is similar to that of a blood clot. This is due to the presence of relatively large amounts of blood present in the embryo during this stage. Also during this stage, the blood in the embryo does not circulate until the end of the third week. Thus, the embryo at this stage is like a clot of blood.

So the three meanings of the word alaqah correspond accurately to the descriptions of the embryo at the alaqah stage.

The next stage mentioned in the verse is the mudghah stage. The Arabic word mudghah means "chewed-like substance." If one were to take a piece of gum and chew it in his or her mouth and then compare it with an embryo at the mudghah stage, we would conclude that the embryo at the mudghah stage acquires the appearance of a chewed-like substance. This is because of the somites at the back of the embryo that "somewhat resemble teethmarks in a chewed substance."

Another startling fact mentioned in this verse is the development of bones before muscles. Modern studies have revealed that the vertebra is the first part of the skeleton to form however it is still made of cartilage. The first formation of actual bones happens at the jaw bone at day 41. Three days later the associated muscles form. So bones before muscles turned out to be the correct order of formation as described in the Qur'an.

How could Muhammad [S] have possibly known all this 1400 years ago, when scientists have only recently discovered this using advanced equipment and powerful microscopes which did not exist at that time? Hamm and Leeuwenhoek were the first scientists to observe human sperm cells (spermatozoa) using an improved microscope in 1677. But even they mistakenly thought that the sperm cell contained a miniature preformed human being that grew when it was deposited in the female genital tract.

As far as it is known from the history of embryology, little was known about the staging and classification of human embryos until the twentieth century. For this reason, the descriptions of the human embryo in the Qur'an cannot be based on scientific knowledge in the seventh century. The only reasonable conclusion is: these descriptions were revealed to Prophet Muhammad [s] from Allah. He could not have known such details because he was an illiterate man with absolutely no scientific training.

Newborn Brains Prewired to Read

Up until very recently people thought that reading skills are acquired a few years after birth. Today we know that this is incorrect. Neuroimaging newborns reveals that the human brain is born “prewired” to be receptive to words and language. Analyzing brain scans of newborns, researchers found that this part of the brain – called the “visual word form area” (VWFA) – is connected to the language network of the brain. That makes it fertile ground to develop a sensitivity to visual words – even before any exposure to language. This was only known recently, however in the very first revealed in the Qur'an, Allah says that He pre-programmed humans to read before birth:

“Read: In the Name of your Lord who created. Created man from a clinging clot. Read: And your Lord is the Most Generous. He who taught by the pen. Taught man what he knew not.”
(96,1-5)

"Created man from a clinging clot " describes the stage before birth. "He who taught by the pen" refers to the obvious fact that a pen writes words. In this verse Allah taught humans to read words even before birth. Today we know that human brains are born "prewired" to see words.

The Cerebrum

Allah has said in the Qur'an about one of the evil unbelievers who forbade the Prophet Muhammad [s] from praying at the Ka'bah:

"Let him beware! If he does not stop, We will take him by the nasiyah (front of the head), a lying, sinful nasiyah (front of the head)!" (96:15-16)

Why did the Qur'an describe the front of the head as being lying and sinful? Why didn't the Qur'an say that the person was lying and sinful? What is the relationship between the front of the head and lying and sinfulness?

For centuries it was thought that the frontal part of the human brain handled vision (simply because it is near the eyes). Today we know that this is false. The part that handles vision turned out to be at the rear of the brain. The front part of the brain is called the prefrontal cortex. What does physiology tell us about the function of this area? The motivation and the foresight to plan and initiate movements occur in the anterior portion of the frontal lobes. In relation to its involvement in motivation, the prefrontal area is also thought to be the functional center for aggression.

So, this area of the cerebrum is responsible for planning, motivating, and initiating good and sinful behavior and is responsible for the telling of lies and the speaking of truth. Thus, it is proper to describe the front of the head as lying and sinful when someone lies or commits a sin, as the Qur'an has said, "...A lying, sinful nasiyah (front of the head)!" Modern neuroscience today has discovered that this where lies are conceived, lying about Allah being the most audacious of them all.

The Production of Milk

In the past it was assumed that milk came from the white fat near the nipples. However today it has been discovered that milk is produced in mammary glands which in turn derive their nutrients directly from

the blood stream. The blood stream in turn gets its nutrients from the digestive system. The Qur'an states,

“Surely there is a lesson for you in the cattle. We provide you, out of what lies in their bellies between digested matter and blood, the (drink of) milk, pure and pleasant for those who drink.” (16,66)

Today we know this to be correct.

Living Organisms sense Earth's Magnetic Field

The Qur'an declares that Allah created everything then gave it 'guidance'. Today we know that all living organisms from bacteria, birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, etc... sense the Earth's magnetic field and use it for guidance. Humans are not thought to have a magnetic sense, but there is a protein (a cryptochrome) in the eye which seems to serve this function. Just like humans can see the rainbow, animals can see Earth's magnetic field in varying colors, and use it for orientation and navigation (guidance). The Qur'an declares,

“He said, ‘Our Lord is He who gave everything its existence, then guided it’.” (27:18)

"Kulla shay'" means 'everything', not just human beings. Today we know that organisms can sense Earth's magnetic field and use it for guidance.

Talking Ants

It was previously thought that the only form of communication between ants was through chemicals called pheromones. Modern research has confirmed, through the use of microphones, that communication among and between ant colonies does, in fact, occur through acoustic signals. They 'speak'. The Qur'an made mention of this phenomenon :

“And gathered for Solomon were his soldiers of the jinn and men and birds, and they were [marching] in rows. Until, when they came upon the valley of the ants, an ant said to her sisters: 'Go into your dwellings, ants, lest Sulayman (Solomon) and his warriors should crush you without knowing it.' So (Sulayman) smiled, amused at her speech...”(27,17)

Another amazing detail in the Qur'an is that the verse refers only to female ants. All male ants have wings. All worker ants are females. All ants that do not have wings are definitely females. The Qur'anic word used is 'qalat' meaning 'she said'. If this ant had wings it would have flown off to evade the danger however it didn't have this option; instead its only option was to hide underground. Since it didn't have wings then this was definitely a female ant. Here the Qur'an correctly and accurately addressed this ant in the female mode.

The Spiders Web

The Qur'an describes the spider's web or 'dwelling' as the frailest of 'houses'. It did not say the spider's filament but 'dwelling'. It is now known that the filaments of the spider's web are four times stronger than similar filaments of steel. The weakness, according to the Qur'an, is in the 'dwelling' not the material of which it is made. The spider's dwelling, in fact, is the worst possible place for anyone seeking residence or protection. It is a trap for all outsiders and it is a slaughter-house for its own inhabitants: the female spider swallows its mate after fertilization, it also gobbles up its offspring after they are hatched, and the young spiders themselves devour each other. The spider's dwelling is certainly the most vivid and eloquent exam-

ple that can be employed to illustrate the worst kind of shelter or fate. Those who resort for help or protection to others than Allah will be opting for a kind of refuge identical to that one may receive in a spi-

der's dwelling. Hence, the expressiveness of the verse:

"Surely the spider's is the frailest of all dwellings, if they but know it." (29, 41)

The last words - 'if they but know it' - are significant for they indicate that such knowledge about the frailty of the spider's dwelling will come to light only ages later just as the other biological mysteries referred to by the Qur'an. These are but a few of wondrous scientific facts that the Qur'an alludes to.

Contradictions and Inconsistencies in the Qur'an ?

"Will they not then ponder over the Qur'an? If it had been from anyone other than Allah they would have found therein much incongruity." (55, 82)

Before engaging the subject of contradiction in the Qur'an it may be worthwhile to relate the following story. The devil once appeared to a certain pious hermit. After they had talked for a while, the hermit asked shaytan if he had memorised any verses of the Qur'an, to which he retorted, "Why not, it is the Book of Allah. Listen! 'O you who believe! Approach not prayer...'; and 'Woe to those who pray...!'"

The surprised hermit pointed out that the first verse should read: "O you who believe! Approach not prayer while you are drunk." (4, 43), and the second: "Woe to those who pray, who are unmindful in their prayers..." (7, 45). He then demanded to know why shaytan did not recite the complete verses, but only half of them, to which shaytan replied, "I am under no obligation to memorise the whole Qur'an."

This is precisely the case with all supposed contradictions in the Qur'anic teachings. They occur purely as a consequence of misunderstanding or the maliciously intent of the disbeliever to invent lies

for their own purposes of discrediting divine revelation or Islam. It is alleged that if examined in detail, the Qur'an seems to be self-contradictory suggesting that it was not written in one period of time nor by one author. It is claimed that many verses are contradictory despite Muslim assertions that the Qur'an never contradicts itself. Take for example the following verses. How would Muslims explain the apparent inconsistencies!

Freedom or Compulsion ?

The verse,

"Let him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, deny it."

(18, 29)

is contradicted by another:

"Yet you cannot will except by the Will of Allah."

(76, 30).

In response, Muslims declare that what has been pointed out is not a contradiction. "Let him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, deny it," is an unambiguous verse indicating man's freedom of choice. This freedom, however, was not forcibly extorted from Allah. He gave it to us out of His own Will. This fact is pointed out in the second verse quoted: "Yet, you cannot will, except by the Will of Allah."

Man's freedom falls within and not against Allah's Will. It can be exercised in a manner that contradicts what pleases Allah - as when we choose to disbelieve - but it cannot go against His Will. It is always exercised within that Will even if it contravened divine pleasure. This is a very fine point which was discussed at length in the section of free will and predestination. We said there that predestination by Allah is the same as the freedom of the human will; for Allah des-

tines man to that which exactly corresponds to the content of his intention and heart. This means that He wants for man what man intentionally and freely wants for himself. Man, in fact, is predestined to what he has freely chosen. There is no compulsion, duality, or contradiction in this. Predestination is free will. This is indeed, one of the most difficult points in any attempt to solve the riddle of predestination and freedom of the will. What is described as a contradiction is, ironically, the unravelling of this mystery.

Questioning or No-Questioning

Another seeming contradiction is where the Qur'an asserts that guilty men will be questioned on the Judgment Day:

"That which they assert will be taken down. They shall be questioned."

(43, 19)

"It is an admonition to you and to your people. You shall be questioned all."

(43, 44)

Yet, elsewhere it has this to say:

"The wrong-doers shall not be questioned about their sins."

(28, 78)

The wrong-doers, according to the Qur'an, will be known by their looks and

"...they shall be seized by their forelocks and their feet..."

(55, 41)

As for these verses about the judgment of evil-doers, each one of them concerns a different group of persons. Some will be questioned

and their testimony heard, others, whose myriad sins show on their faces, will be known by their looks and will be "...seized by their forelocks and their feet...". There will also be the hardened disbelievers against whom their own hands and feet will testify:

"On that Day we shall seal their mouths. Their hands will speak, and their very feet will testify to their misdeeds."
(36, 65)

Who Binds Who ?

At one place the Qur'an makes it known that on the Day of Judgment no one will bind (or take to task) the guilty for punishment:
"No one will be bound as he (himself) will bind."
(89, 25)

It is apparently understood that every evil-doer will undertake his own punishment. The Qur'an says:

"Your own soul shall on this Day call you to account."
(17, 14)

Yet in another place, however, we find this seemingly contradictory verse:

"...then fasten him with a chain seventy cubits long..."
(, 32)

There is no real contradiction for certain wrong-doers will call their own souls to account tormenting them with sorrowful regrets and chastening them with grief. Those will be the ones whom no one binds but themselves. There will be, finally, those master criminals and tyrants who will even go to the extent of lying to Allah as they are brought before him and swear falsely in that dire situation:

"On the Day when Allah restores them all to life, they will swear to Him as they now swear to you, and they will fancy that they have some standing. Surely they are the liars."

(58, 18)

It is this group that will be put in long chains and dragged to Hell with the faces of its members looking shamefully down.

Knowledge of Future Events

Yet another seemingly perplexing matter is that of 'Divine Knowledge' mentioned in such verses as the following:

"Allah alone has knowledge of the Hour of Doom. He sends down the torrents and knows what every womb conceals. No mortal knows what he will earn tomorrow, no mortal knows where he will die."

(31, 34)

The Qur'an affirms that such knowledge is Allah's alone and is not given to anyone else:

"He has the keys of all that is hidden. None knows them but He."

(6, 59).

Yet, any physician nowadays can know not only what is hidden in every womb but also whether that embryo is male or female. Scientists, moreover, are able to send down 'artificial rain' by certain chemical processes.

In responding, the Qur'an, does not mention 'rain' - as is alluded - but 'gaith' or a heavy, intense flood of rain that is sufficient to change the condition of an entire nation and save it by transforming its barrenness to fertility and prosperity (hence the Arabic 'gaith' which literal-

ly means 'that which rescues'. Rain in such profusion cannot be brought down by any scientific process.

Allah's knowledge of what is concealed in wombs, on the other hand, is a total, comprehensive prescience and is not merely limited to the future baby's sex. It is a knowledge that concerns the destiny of that new creature, what he or she will be, what he or she will do in the world, and what his or her history from birth to death will be like. This, certainly, is a knowledge beyond the scope of any physician.

Talking Ants ?

What about the Qur'an's supposed illogical story about the ant that 'talked' to warn off the rest of her race from the coming of Sulayman's (Prophet Solomon) [A] army:

"...an ant said to her sisters: 'Go into your dwellings, ants, lest Sulayman and his warriors should crush you without knowing it.'
(27, 18)

As mentioned earlier, the modern science of Entymology teems with elaborate studies of ant and bee 'languages'. That the ants have a language is now a certain fact. It would have been impossible to distribute functions in a cell comprising hundreds of thousands of ants, to organize them, and to propagate orders and instructions among that huge mass without a means of communication or a language. There is therefore nothing illogical or contradictory in that an ant recognized Sulayman [A]. Didn't man know the existence of Allah?

Allah Correcting Himself ?

A further enquiry is that of the possibility that Allah wipes out what is written in His Fixed Tablet of Destiny? It is said in the Quran:

"Allah confirms or abrogates what He pleases. His is the Eternal Book."
(13, 39)

Can Allah, according to this verse, make mistakes just as we do in our arithmetic calculations and go about blotting out and confirming? Or is it that He corrects himself as we human beings, do?

The answer is that Allah abrogates misdeeds by inspiring man with good actions. He says in His Book:

"Good deeds erase sins." (11, 114)

This is why He describes His good servants thus:

"...and We enjoined on them charity, prayer, and alms giving."
(21, 73)

In this way we can understand how Allah abrogates without really blotting out in the bungling sense.

Four More Examples of Baseless Objections

Below are four more pairs of verses from the Qur'an, each of which seems to contradict the other.

The first pair : In the Chapter known as The Mount, verse 25, we read:

"And they shall accost each other and ask questions",

while in The Believers, verse 101, we find:

"There will be no association between them that day, nor will one ask

one another".

Thus the 'asking' is affirmed in the former verse, whereas in the latter it is denied, which seems to be a blatant contradiction.

The second pair : In the chapter Al Haj, verse 92, we read:

"By thy Lord! We will question them, one and all, about what they have done".

Yet verse 39 of The Merciful reads:

"On that day neither man nor jinn shall be asked about his crime."

Again, the apparent inconsistency in the two verses is clear.

The third pair : Verse 33 of The Spoils reads:

"Nor was Allah going to torment them while they asked Him to forgive".

This directly contradicts the very next verse:

"But what plea have they that Allah should not punish them..."

The last pair : Verse 46 of The Cave conflicts with verse 28 of The Spoils the meaning of each being diametrically opposed to that of the other two. The respective verses read:

"Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of this world."

"O you who believe! Verily, among your wives and children there are enemies of yours." and "Know that your wealth and your children are

but a temptation."

With respect to the first instance, when one blast is sounded on the Trumpet on the Day of Judgement, the relationships of this world will be dissolved and relatives separated, as each individual will be occupied with his own fate, and no one will be in a position to ask after others. Those who are in the heavens and in the earth will swoon. When the Trumpet is blown again, they will stand up and look about them. Then they will approach each other, inquiring about what has befallen them, saying:

"Who has raised us from our place of sleep? This is that which the Beneficient did indeed promise, and the messengers spoke truth."

Thus we find that those who manufactured the charge of contradiction were in fact overlooking the distinction between the two circumstances, falling mute in the first instance as a result of the swoon, and in the second inquiring about one another when they came around after being raised from their repose.

In answer to the second alleged contradiction, between questioning and not questioning on the Day of Reckoning, we can point out that here too it is perfectly obvious that these are two stages. The first stage will be the calling of each man to account for his previous deeds on earth, ending with the Allah giving his verdict as to whether he should be numbered amongst the blessed or the damned. In the second stage, people having already been separated, each one knowing his fate; there can henceforward be no further argument about it, for all is now final.

In the third case, the people of Quraish, before embracing Islam, challenged Allah to send rain in the form of stones to torment them and make an end to them all, including the Holy Prophet Muhammad [S], who was then among them calling to the way of Allah. It is made

clear that since there were believers amongst them, such a supplication would not be fulfilled. The verses read as follows:

"O Allah God! If this be truth, and from you, then rain (stones) upon us from heaven or bring us grievous woe! But Allah would not torment them while you art amongst them; nor was Allah going to torment them while they asked him to forgive."

But when the Prophet [S], realizing that they would not embrace Islam, left them and migrated to Madinah, the verses stated that they would be tormented for their deeds. Where then is the contradiction?

And lastly, there is in fact no contradiction or confusion at all between the various verses describing wealth and children as an adornment of the life of the world, as our foes, and as a temptation. In the first instance, they are an adornment of life when the true man of faith is attached to his Lord and is never distracted by any temptation. But he whose faith is weak, wealth and children will sunder him from his Lord, for they will keep him so busy that he will never turn to his Creator. Thus it is wise to give him warning that what his heart has clung to are in reality his enemies, notwithstanding they are his wealth and his children. He should seek to strike the balance, having his share from the Here yet not forgetting his share from the Hereafter. In this case wealth and children are a test; and Allah will reward profusely one who puts the worship of Allah before the worship of wealth and children.

Another Alleged Contradiction

Another alleged contradiction is that wherein Islam demands that prostration be made to Allah alone. Yet we read in the Qur'an that the Angels prostrated themselves before Adam [A] Is this not a clear case of contradiction?

In response, understand that prostration is a gesture signifying glorification. But in this instance, it signifies obedience on the part of the Angels to Allah, Who commands and they obey. Hence it is not mere prostration to Adam [A] Furthermore, this prostration was made by the Angels to Adam [A] and not by us, as human beings, to Adam [A] There is a world of difference between the two cases. So no contradiction occurs here.

One More

Another point. How are we to understand the attributes of Allah when we read in the Qur'an in one place that He is Beneficent and Merciful, in another Powerful and Mighty, in a third Forgiving and Compassionate, and elsewhere that He is strict in Punishment. Are we not again faced with irreconcilables?

Surely this is irrefutable proof - if more were needed - of the confusion and inconsistency existing in the Quran.

It is true that Allah is Merciful and Beneficent to those who believe, but he is also Powerful and Mighty in so far as this power and might are shown to those who disbelieve and go astray. He is forgiving to those who repent and turn back to Him, but severe in the punishment of those who persist in their sins and never retrieve. We read: "But those who have done wrong, and turn (in repentance) thereafter and believe - verily, thy Lord, after that, is forgiving and merciful." Conversely, we find:

"As was the wont of Pharaoh's people, and those before them, they said that Our signs were lies, and Allah confounded them in their sin, for Allah is severe in punishment."

Prophecies in the Qur'an

The Qur'an contains many prophecies that have been fulfilled, but in this discussion, we will limit ourselves to only five. The first two prophecies are noteworthy: unlike any other world scripture, the Qur'an prophesizes its own preservation under divine care, and we will demonstrate how it actually occurred.

The Protection of the Qur'an from Corruption

The Qur'an makes a claim no other religious text makes, that God Himself will keep its text safe from alteration. God says:

"Behold, it is We Ourselves who have gradually revealed this reminder, and, behold, it is We who shall truly guard it [from all corruption]." (15,9)

The Ease of Memorizing the Qur'an

God has made the Qur'an easy to memorize:

"And in truth We have made the Qur'an easy to remember; who, then, is willing to take it to heart?" (54,17)

The ease with which Qur'an is memorized is inimitable. There is not a single scripture or religious text in the world that is as easy to memorize; even non-Arabs and children commit it to memory easily.

The entire Qur'an is memorized by almost every Islamic scholar and millions of ordinary Muslims, generation after generation. Almost every Muslim has some portion of the Qur'an memorized to read in his prayers.

The Twofold Prophecy

Before the rise of Islam, the Romans and the Persians were two competing superpowers. The Romans were led by Heraclius (610 - 641 CE), a Christian Emperor, whereas the Persians were Zoroastria-

ns led by Khosrow Parviz (reigned 590–628 CE), under whom the empire achieved its greatest expansion.

In 614, the Persians conquered Syria and Palestine, taking Jerusalem, destroying the Holy Sepulcher and the 'True Cross' carried to Ctesiphon. Then, in 619, they occupied Egypt and Libya. Heraclius met them at Thracian Heraclea (617 or 619), but they sought to capture him, and he rode madly back to Constantinople, hotly pursued.

The Muslims were grieved by the Roman defeat as they felt spiritually closer to Christian Rome than Zoroastrian Persia, but the Meccans were naturally buoyed up by the victory of pagan Persia. To Meccans, the Roman humiliation was a sinister omen of the defeat of the Muslims at pagan hands. At the time Allah's prophecy comforted the faithful:

"The Romans have been defeated - in a nearby lowest land; but they, (even) after (this) defeat of theirs, will soon be victorious - within ten years. With Allah is the Decision, in the past and in the future: on that Day shall the believers rejoice with the help of Allah. He helps whom He wills, and He is the Mighty, the Most-Merciful."
(30,2-5)

The Qur'an made a prophecy of two victories :

- (i) The future Roman victory within ten years over Persians, something unimaginable at the time
- (ii) The joy of the faithful on a victory over the pagans in the same period

Both of these prophecies occurred.

In 622, Heraclius left Constantinople as prayers rose from its many

sanctuaries for victory over the Persian Zoroastrians and the reconquest of Jerusalem. He devoted the next two years to campaigns in Armenia. In 627, he met the Persians near Nineveh. There, he killed three Persian generals in single combat, killed the Persian commander, and scattered the Persian host. A month later, Heraclius entered Dastagird with its stupendous treasure. Khosrow was overthrown by his son, who made peace with Heraclius. Returning to Constantinople in triumph, Heraclius was hailed as a hero.

Also, in the year 624 AH, Muslims defeated the Meccans in the first and decisive Battle at Badr.

A single line of prophecy was related to four nations and the fate of two great empires. All this proves the Holy Qur'an to be the Book of Allah.

Another remarkable fact mentioned in this verse is the description of the place where the defeat occurred, namely the Dead Sea, as the lowest.

"The Romans have been defeated - in a nearby lowest land.."

'Adna' in Arabic has two meanings: 'the nearest' and 'the lowest'. Today we know that the Dead Sea is the lowest point on Earth (423 m below sea level).

The Prophecy of Pagan Defeat

As mentioned above, the Qur'an predicted the defeat of the unbelievers in Mecca while Prophet Muhammad [s] and his followers were a minority still being persecuted by them :

"Or do they (the Meccan disbelievers) say: 'We are a great multitude, and we shall be victorious?' Their multitude will be defeated, and

they shall turn their backs [in flight]!"
(54:45)

The prophecy was revealed in Mecca, but was fulfilled at the Battle of Badr, two years after the Prophet's migration to the city of Medina.

Conquest of Khaybar and Mecca

The Qur'an has also foretold the conquest of Mecca and the triumph of the Muslims over the polytheists as follows:

"That which God inspired in his prophet by means of a dream is true and veracious: Without any doubt you will enter the sacred mosque (in Mecca) in safety and security. You will shave your heads and shorten your hairs without any fear or anxiety. Allah knows what you do not know. And you will win a victory near at hand".
(48:27)

These predictions were made at a time when no military expert or adviser could have predicted the occurrence, given the difficult circumstances of the Muslims and the unfavorable situation in which they found themselves.

In the same verse (48:27), the Qur'an also mentions the future occurrence of another historical event, namely the triumph of the Muslim warriors at Khaybar, and their conquest of its formidable fortresses. Hard blows had been inflicted upon the Muslims from Khaybar, but in the end the army of Islam triumphed over the Jews, and the predictions of the Qur'an was completely fulfilled. Can we ascribe this precise knowledge of the future to the knowledge and speculation of the Prophet?

The Fate of Specific Individuals

Walid ibn Mughira was a staunch enemy who openly ridiculed the Qur'an:

"Then said he: "This is nothing but magic, derived from of old; this is nothing but the word of a mortal!"
(74,24-25)

The Qur'an prophesized that he would never accept Islam:

"Soon will I cast him into Hell-Fire! And what will explain to thee what Hell-Fire is? It leaves naught nor does it spare aught."
(74,26-28)

Walid died in a state of disbelief as prophesized by the Qur'an.

Also, concerning Abu Lahab, a fiery opponent of Islam, the Qur'an foretold that he would die opposing the religion of Allah :

"May the hands of Abu Lahab perish, and [indeed] he has perished. His wealth and gains will not profit him. He will be plunged in flaming Fire."
(111,1-3)

Specifically, three prophecies were made about Abu Lahab:

- (i) The conspiracies of Abu Lahab against the Prophet would not succeed.
- (ii) His wealth and children would not benefit him.
- (iii) He would die opposing Allah's religion and enter the Fire.

Abu Lahab also died in a state of disbelief as prophesized by the Qur'an. Had Walid or Abu Lahab accepted Islam even superficially, they would have disproved its prophecies and thus the Qur'an's heavenly source.

In addition, Abu Lahab had four sons, two of whom died at a young age during his lifetime. The other two sons and a daughter embraced Islam and frustrated his hopes! Finally, he died of a plague; people would not touch his body out of fear of contamination and dumped rocks and stones on him where he died to make it his grave.

The Return of the Prophet [S] to Mecca

Likewise, the prediction that the Prophet [S] would return to Mecca, his home, made at a time when he abandoned it for Medina because of the pressures of the polytheists, is also an indication of a higher consciousness:

“Allah Who made incumbent on you the recitation of the Qur’an will return you to your birthplace”.
(28:85)

All the afore-mentioned predictions of future events are inexplicable unless they be ascribed to the source of revelation, to the infinite knowledge of Allah.

The Descendants of the Prophet [S]

In Surah Kawthar, the Qur’an informs people that the descendants of the Prophet [s] will ultimately be numerous, this despite the fact that in his lifetime his enemies were hopeful that he would die without issue, since all the sons of the Prophet [s] had died in infancy, and only one of his daughters survived.

“To you We have granted abundance. Therefore to Your Lord turn in prayers and sacrifice. For he who hated you, will be cut-off (ie. left without successors)”.
(108)

Today, the descendants of the Prophet [s] can be found everywhere,

while the progeny of the enemies of the Prophet Muhammad [s] have been lost to history. Given this, was it possible for any other than Allah, that eternal reality and fixed pivot of truth, to predict that matters would unfold in a manner completely opposed to existing circumstances.

A key foundation to believing that a scripture is actually a revelation of Allah is internal truth, whether it be in regards to occurrences in the past, or those to come in the future, or in contemporary age. As one can see, there are many prophecies which were fulfilled in the Prophet's lifetime, or have been fulfilled since his death, while others are yet to occur.

Conclusion

It was such scientific, historical, figurative, and literal truth that Allah referred to when He thus described the Qur'an:

"Falsehood cannot come at it from before or behind."
(41, 42)

"If it had not come from Allah, they could have surely found in it many contradictions."
(4, 82)

The contradictions meant here are both among the verses themselves and between them and the established scientific truths discovered by the sciences. Both kinds of discrepancy invariably plague works of human origin. More often than not we find the writer anxious to add, omit or emend every time he produces a new edition of a book of his. We observe, in science, how theories succeed each other with the latter one invalidating the former. However careful the writer may be, he is bound to fall into contradictions. This is a defect from which the Qur'an is free.

The Qur'an delivers to us the final word in politics, ethics, systems of government, war and peace, the economy, society, marriage, and human relationships. It laid down perfect laws that anticipated and excelled, in the relevant areas, those included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for instance. All this is presented in a unique style, a sublime phrasing, and a stylistic and aesthetic structure that stands apart in the history of the Arabic language.

When the mystic Ibn 'Arabi was asked about the secret of the miracle of the Qur'an, he replied in one phrase: "Absolute truthfulness !". The words of the Qur'an are absolutely true whereas the utmost that any writer can achieve is to attain 'relative truth'; the most he can aspire to is to reach truth according to his own vision. The extent of an individual's vision, however, is always limited and it changes from one time to another. Everyone of us comprehends only one side of truth and misses many: we look at an angle and neglect others. The truth we reach is always relative. Only Allah possesses omniscience and comprehensive insight. He alone is capable of knowing the absolute, unchanging Truth. For this reason we say that the Qur'an is from Allah because it strikes upon the absolute truth in all matters.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] was asked to describe the Qur'an. He said: "In it there is the history of what came before you, the judgment concerning your own affairs, and mention of what will come after you. It is the perfect Book and Allah's strong rope. It is the Straight Path. Any tyrant who deserts it will be broken down by Allah. Anyone who seeks guidance elsewhere will be led astray by Allah. It is never indistinct to the tongue, nor are minds misled by it. Its freshness is not staled by repetition. Scholars never have their fill of it. Its wonders are never over."

For all these characteristics, it could not have been composed by a human.

SECTION 7



WHY DOES THE DISBELIEVER GO TO HELL FOREVER? AND WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARADISE AND HELL?

How is it that Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful, punishes us for a transgression committed in a moment of finite time with eternal and infinite torment - "In Hell they will dwell forever"? Who are we and what is our worth in comparison to Allah's greatness to deserve such vengeance?

Man is only an atom or a speck of dust in the universe and, relative to Allah's Majesty, he is infinitely more insignificant than that. He is, in fact, nothing, in the full meaning of the word.



These conceptions, from an Islamic perspective, are in obvious need of correction. We are not like atoms or specks of dust in the universe.

Man is Profound

Our standing in the sight of Allah is not insignificant but considerable. Didn't He breathe into us of His Spirit? Didn't He command the angels to bow down before us? Didn't He promise us the inheritance

of the heavens and the earth? Didn't He say of us:

"Indeed, We have honoured the Children of Adam and carried them over land and sea. Given them for sustenance things good and pure, and exalted them above many of Our creatures."

(17, 70)

"...And He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him of His Spirit..." (32, 9)

We have, then, something of Allah's Spirit in us. Nor are we atoms or specks of dust in relation to the universe. If we consider our bodies only we may well be like mere specks in the wide, spacious world. But don't we contain this universe in, and comprehend it with, our minds, realizing its laws and defining the orbits of its planets and stars? For example, the astronauts who landed on the moon ascertained that all our calculations and designs have been true and accurate.

Doesn't this indicate that in so far as our spirit is concerned we are larger than the universe and that we 'contain' it? The Arab poet was right when he spoke of man in the well-known verse, "You deem yourself an insignificant body, While the great universe is within you contained." Man, as the honoured sufis say, is the "...comprehensive book while the entire universe is but some of its pages..."

Man, then, is of great standing and importance. He comes from the Spirit of Allah. His deeds thus necessitate accountability.

Finite Sin, Infinite Torment ?

As for the finite sin in time for which Allah visits us with infinite torment in eternity, Allah speaks about those immortalized in Hell-fire

who beg to be returned to the earthly life so as to change their deeds to the better,

"But if they were returned, they would certainly return to that from which they have been forbidden. For they are indeed liars."
(6, 28)

Their guilt, according to this verse, is not confined to one moment of time. It is, in fact, a permanent feature of their constitution that repeats itself at any given time. Indeed, if they were returned to a new life they will commit the same transgressions all over again; therefore, they lie in their promise of reformation. Their sinning is an innate and enduring attribute of their psyche and not a momentary slip in the context of some exceptional life circumstance.

In another Qur'anic verse, Allah describes those inveterate sinners,

"On the day Allah restores them all to life, then will they swear to Him as they now swear to you, thinking that they have some standing. Surely they are liars all."
(58, 18)

This is a flagrant form of perversity and impudence which motivates them to lie even to Allah and to swear falsely before Him on that Day of the Great Resurrection, when veils are lifted and covers are removed. Indeed, this is most audacious and overbearing, a reflection of an innate perversity.

We are definitely not dealing with a transgression limited to a point in time but one that continues through time, and after time itself has ended. We are really confronting a psyche that carries within itself its eternal evil. Hence, everlasting torment is only equitable for such souls. The Qur'an candidly puts it,

"...but (they) shall never come out of Hell."
(2, 167)

Ibn 'Arabi, the great mystic, says that "...mercy for those souls lies in their consonance to Hell-fire which is their appropriate abode through infinite ions."

The Blazing Soul

There is undoubtedly an affinity of element between certain transgressing souls and fire - some of these souls are, in reality, blazes of envy, lust, jealousy, and bitterness; they are flames of wrath, resentment, rebellion, and animal passions that flare and rage as a veritable fire.

Such souls can never live at peace or endure just one hour without causing conflict and setting fire to everything that surrounds them; for fire is their element and natural habitat. It is a just judgment that Hell be their final abiding place. It will be like placing a thing in its rightful element.

If they were admitted to Paradise they would not be able to enjoy it. Didn't they disdain peace while on earth?

The Nature of Paradise and Hell

We ought to be broad-minded in our conception of both Hell and Paradise. Hell-fire in the other world is not a 'grill' and what goes on there is not merely burning, in its earthly sense. Allah says that, "...the damned in Hell-fire speak with and curse each other". Hell has in its midst a tree with 'fruit', the Zaqqum Tree which grows from the bottom of Hell. In Hell there is also scorching water for the tormented to drink from, and it is a fire which speaks, reprimanding the transgressors who enter it. Such a fire in which a tree and water exist and

which speaks, and where the damned talk must be another form of fire than the one we know,

"As it enters every nation will curse the one that went before it, and when all are gathered there, the last of them will say of the first: 'There, O Lord, are the men who led us astray. Let their punishment be doubled in Hell-fire.'"

(7, 37-8)

The tormented talk while in Hell-fire, a fire "...whose fuel is men and stones..." (2, 24). This fire, then, is something that belongs to the Unseen (Ghayb); all references to it can only be interpreted in metaphysical terms. It must not, however, be understood that Muslims deny physical torment, advocating instead a 'psychic' punishment. Physical torment is so clearly indicated that no one dare contest or doubt it. We certainly believe in its occurrence. What Muslims believe is that the true nature and particulars of such torment as well as the qualities and features of Hell-fire belong to the hidden or Unseen. As it is described from Qur'anic references, it is a fire unlike that which we know in our world, just as the bodies exposed to it will be different from the frail, 'clayey' bodies we now have.

The same view can apply to Paradise. It is not a market display of fruits - dates, pomegranates, and grapes. These Qur'anic descriptions of it are mere approximations, or illustrations that bring its truth within the conceptual compass of human minds,

"This is a similitude of Paradise which the righteous have been promised. There shall flow in it rivers of unpolluted waters, and rivers of milk for ever fresh."

(47, 15)

Allah is only furnishing us with an approximation of heaven, but the truth of heavenly bliss remains a matter of the Unseen,

"No mortal knows what bliss is reserved for them as a reward for their endeavour."
(32, 17)

"A Paradise as vast as heaven and earth."
(3, 133)

Paradise cannot be a mere 'earthly type' garden. Its fruits are abundant, "...unforbidden, never-ending..." (56, 32). They are certainly unlike our own earthly fruits which can be forbidden and which cease from season to season. The wine of Paradise "...will neither pain their heads nor take away their reason...", it is, undoubtedly, very different from the wine known to us which leaves a hangover and unsettles the mind. The Qur'an goes on to say that Allah "...shall take away all hatred..." from the souls of the blessed in Paradise (70, 43). Here again we confront a state of being very unfamiliar to the one we experience.

Paradise, then, is just like Hell - a matter belonging to the Unseen. Nevertheless, this view does not, imply any denial whatsoever of physical bliss. We believe that Paradise contains both physical and spiritual bliss just as Hell is physical and spiritual torment at one and the same time. What we would rather emphasize is that the details and nature of such bliss or torment are unknown to us, that Paradise is not just a fruit and vegetable market nor is Hell simply an oven for baking meat.

Punishment is Mercy

Torments in the hereafter are not a form of tyranny Allah exercises over his creatures, but rather a type of purification, enlightenment, correction, and mercy.

Men were not all damned for torment when they were created. Allah does not punish the believer who has knowledge of Him; He only visits His torment on the obdurate disbeliever with whom all means of guidance and acquaintance with the truth have failed,

It is Allah's law that these men should taste the minor punishments of this world to be roused from their torpor and frightened out of their deafness and slumber "...so that they may return to the right path..."

"But We will inflict on them the lighter punishment of this world before the supreme punishment of the world to come, so that they may return to the right path,"
(32, 21)

If all such approaches fail, with the disbeliever persisting in his attitude, there remains only one option open - to inflict the promised torments on him so that he may come to know the truth. Acquaintance with the truth is the essence of mercy. Should Allah abandon those obstinate disbelievers in their blindness and ignorance, He would be unjust - far removed is He from this. To be led to Hell-fire is a kind of 'Care' for such benighted souls. All Allah's actions are merciful. He shows the mercy of 'correction' and of 'enlightenment' to the benighted in Hell; and He is merciful with his generosity and blessings to the knowing in Paradise,

"I will visit my scourge upon whom I please, yet my mercy encompasses all things".
(7, 156)

Allah encompasses all things with his mercy, even those under punishment.

Conclusion

Let us, in our turn, ask, "would Allah be more just if He treated both sinner and sinned against, murderer and murdered, villain and victim in the same manner throwing up a 'tea-party' for all on the Last Day? Is justice, in the view of an atheist or agnostic, synonymous to equalling black with white? "

And to those that find it impossible for Allah to inflict punishment we may say, "Doesn't He actually inflict suffering on us in this world? Aren't old age, sickness, anguish... etc. basic forms of torment? Who created the microbe? Aren't these all warnings that we are dealing with an Allah who can torment?"

"But We will inflict on them the lighter punishment of this world before the supreme punishment of the world to come, so that they may return to the right path,"

(32, 21)

SECTION 8



DO WE REALLY HAVE A SOUL ?

What evidence is there to prove that man has a soul, that he will be resurrected after death, and that he is not just a physical body that ends in dust? In this era of empirical science, the sentimental notion of a 'soul' and a 'hereafter' surely seems absurd, to say the least. And, if it be proven that there is a 'soul' which enters into the 'hereafter' after death, what does Islam then say about 'soul summoning', as in séances, for example?



The question is undoubtedly very difficult. Discussing the soul is like wandering in a labyrinth; there are very few facts known about this subject beyond the ambit of religious teaching. However, the little there is supports the religious position.

Man has a Dual Nature

The first indication which aids us in finding evidence for the existence of the soul is that man has a dual nature. There is, firstly, an external, apparent, visible nature which is his body. This has all the attributes of matter. It can be weighed and measured; it occupies a portion of space and time; it is continually moving and changing from

one condition to the other and from one moment to the next. The body is subject to all conditions - health, sickness, fatness, leanness, ruddiness, paleness, vitality, satiety, etc. Appended to the physical nature we find a continuous 'tape' of sensations, emotions, instincts, and fears which never, even for an instant, stops unwinding in the mind.

In so far as this primary nature and the sensations appended to it have the characteristics of matter, we can say that man's body and his 'animal spirit' belong to matter.

There is, however, another nature within man which is unlike the first in its characteristics. It is distinguished by constancy and permanence; it transcends time and space. This nature is what we call 'reason' with its unchanging standards, axioms, and deductions. It is also the 'conscience' with its judgments and the aesthetic sense. It is summed up in the ego or self which consists of all the abovementioned faculties: reason, conscience, aesthetic and ethical sense.

The ego is completely other than the body and the 'animal spirit' or instincts which can be enflamed with hunger and desire. The ego is the absolute, fundamental identity through which man experiences that profound sense of presence, being, presentation to, and attendance in the world. He feels that he is and has always been here. This is a fixed, unchanging, and continuous sense which does not wax or wane or grows ill or ages with time. It knows no past, present, or future; but is an enduring present or 'now' that does not elapse as sensations fade into the past. Its essence is that awareness of duration and permanence.

It is here that we encounter another kind of existence which transcends the attributes of matter. It does not change, it does not occupy a position in space-time, and it cannot be weighed and measured. On the contrary, this form of existence is the constant by which variables

are measured; it is the absolute by which we come to know all that is relative in the dimension of matter. The most accurate description of this type of existence is that it is spiritual in nature.

Which of the Two Natures Constitute Man

We may go on to ask, "Which of the two natures constitute man in reality? Is 'true' man the body or the spirit?" To know the answer we have to establish which of the two natures governs the other.

The materialists claim that man is just his body which is the controlling nature. All the elements enumerated - reason, aesthetic and ethical sense, conscience, and that 'superstition' called identity or the ego - they deem mere secondary effects of the body, manipulated by it and serving and satisfying its lusts and passions.

This materialistic conception is erroneous. The truth is that the body is servant not master, compliant and not imperious. Doesn't the body feel hunger but we refuse to oblige it with food because we have previously decided to fast that particular day in worship of Allah ? Isn't it aroused with lust but we restrain it?

Doesn't our body begin spontaneously from the moment we wake up in the morning to carry out 'a plan of action' formulated to the smallest detail by the mind? Who is leader here and who is led?

Where is the body's dominance at the moment of self-immolation when a commando, for example, charges into the midst of battle, certain of death? What bodily interest does he serve by his death? Which nature controls the other here?

The spirit resolves to destroy the body in a purely idealistic moment which no materialistic doctrine can explain away by reference to any tangible gain. The body cannot resist such resolve; it has no power to

counter it and has no option but to fade away completely. It is here that we know which of the two existences is the more ascendant, which of them really constitutes the essence of man.

Man is Not the Sum of Physical Components

We possess today even more confirmation that the body is the secondary form of existence: operations of amputation, substitution, or transplanting of body parts, 'electric' hearts, artificial kindeys, blood and cornea banks, and those 'stores of human accessories' where legs, arms, and hearts can be replaced or fitted on.

It would not be an unbelievable joke to hear that a bridegroom be surprised by his bride in the future by finding her taking off her wig, dentures, foam-rubber breasts, artificial eye, and artificial limbs leaving nothing behind but a 'chassis' like that of a car where the seats, doors, and upholstery have been removed.

The body undergoes extensive replacements without the character of the individual being correspondingly affected, because the substituted arm or leg or eye or breast is not what contributes to make up man. Thus, they are removed and replaced even by batteries, metal rods, or pieces of aluminium and nothing happens to 'man' simply because he is not merely the sum of these members but is the spirit which presides at 'the driving wheel' and controls that machine we call the body.

The spirit is not the brain but the managing agent of the body and it is represented by a 'board of directors' working out of the brain's cells. The brain, just as the body's cells, complies with the orders issued to it and reveals them in its actions; in the end, however, it is only a 'glove' worn by that invisible hand, the soul, to act with it in the material world.

All this evidence leads us to grasp that man has two natures: an essential, ruling nature which is his soul and a secondary, transient one; namely, his body. What occurs in death is that the second nature passes away while the immortal soul joins eternity. The body is reduced to dust but the spirit ascends to its immortal world.

The Soul Transcends Time

To those who prefer philosophical arguments we can produce yet another proof of the spirit's existence. This proof is drawn from the peculiarities of motion. For motion can only be observed from a point outside it; you cannot perceive the motion of which you are a part but you must have an external point from which you can observe it. This explains why you may not at certain moments be able to know whether the lift you are in has stopped moving or not because you have become an integral part of its movement. You can only perceive the lift's movements if you look through its door to the fixed platforms outside. The same applies to a modern train speeding on its rails. You can perceive its speed, while you are inside it, only at the moment it stops or if you look out of the window at some fixed landmarks. Similarly, the sun's movement cannot be observed by a person standing on its surface, if that is possible, but it can be observed from the earth or the moon. In like manner, the earth's movement can only be observed from the moon and not from its own surface.

The principle is, that you cannot fully perceive a thing or state unless you are outside it. Thus, we could not possibly have been able to perceive the passage of time if the 'perceiving' part in us had not been implanted in a separate 'threshold' external to that continual passage; that is, in a 'threshold of eternity'. If our perception of time moved with every jump of the seconds hand of our clocks, we would not have ever perceived the passage of those seconds, and our perception of them would have just faded away as the seconds elapse, without leaving a trace.

This is a stunning conclusion to draw, and it means that part of our being is external to the framework of the temporal continuum. It is immortal, and this is borne out by the Hadith (Prophetic Saying), "... You have been created to be eternal...". Thus the soul can observe time from a point of stillness and perceive it without being implicated in it. It, therefore, neither ages nor elapses. When the body crumbles into dust, that part will remain as it is to live its own, non-temporal life. That part is the soul.

We all Perceive the Soul

Each one of us can sense that spiritual existence deep down as a state of presence, permanence, attendance, and being which is totally unlike the material existence with its changes, fluctuations, and pulses which occur with the passage of time outside it. This internal state called 'presence', and of which we are conscious at moments of inner awareness, is the key to our spiritual existence and to that puzzle - the soul.

Freedom Confirms the Transcendence and Existence of the Soul

Another confirmation of our spiritual nature is our intuitive sense of freedom. If we were mere material bodies governed within the framework of material existence by inevitable material laws, this intuitive sense of freedom would be inconceivable.

According to general scientific opinion, if all that exists is matter and energy, and if matter and energy interact strictly according to the laws of physics and mathematics, given that our bodies and brain processes are part of energy and matter, it would be logical to assert that human beings cannot possess any free will whatsoever.

However, in our experience we all observe that, along with existing

natural laws, the free human will too is operational. Given that human beings do possess and exercise 'free will' then it is automatically proven that mankind represents something beyond mere matter and energy. Their 'person' is more than physical.

We have, then, a spirit that transcends energy, matter and material inevitabilities, and even time and death itself.

But what about Resurrection?

No one has so far returned from the kingdom of death to tell us what experiences he underwent. The Day of Resurrection has not yet arrived for us to point to a tangible, incontrovertible proof.

All that can be said about resurrection is that it is a religious fact which both reason and science find probable. But why should these two latter find it probable?

All the phenomena and aspects of the universe indicate that everything passes through a complete circle where the end is followed by a new beginning: night comes after day and then the day dawns again; the sun rises and sets to rise once more. The four seasons follow each other in a repeated cycle. Such observations make the waking involved in resurrection probable after the sleep of death; for everything returns to where it began or is renewed. Allah refers to himself in the Qur'an as the Originator and Restorer:

"You shall return to Him as He created you initially."
(70, 29)

"He gives being to all His creatures, and in the end He will bring them back to life;"
(10, 4)

Isn't it observed that everything moves in orbits from atoms to galaxies? Even civilizations and history have cycles. This eternal renewal favours the possibility of resurrection.

Another proof we may cite in favour of the truth of resurrection is the order, accurate to precision, which governs the universe, from the largest galaxy down to the smallest atom, without the slightest aberration. Even the invisible sub-atomic electron is governed by that order and law. This infinitesimal part cannot move from one orbit to another within the same atom unless it discharges or absorbs an amount of energy equaling that taken by its jump. It is more like a train traveller who cannot go anywhere without a ticket.

Given this very tightly-woven order how can we imagine that a murderer or an unjust person can escape retribution simply because he has managed to elude the police. The mind finds it justifiable to conceive that this person will necessarily be punished and that there must be another life in which scores are settled - this is what justice decrees.

We are born to love, to seek, and to strive for the achievement of justice. Nevertheless, justice is absent from our world. If some thinkers consider that thirst for water proves the existence of water, we can, similarly, contend that longing for justice is evidence that justice exists, if not in our world then, by necessity, at a future time and hour when its scales will be erected.

All the previous hints are indications that point to and favour the reality of resurrection, reckoning, and the next life. A person who believes in the Qur'an, however, has no need for such proofs because his heart has reached certainty, thus relieving him from disputation.

The Greatest Proof of the Life Hereafter

The greatest proof of the life hereafter is our present life, in which we must obviously believe, even if we do not accept that there is an afterlife. But then why should we not accept it? It should be obvious that if life is possible on one occasion, it is perfectly possible for it to come into existence a second time. There would be nothing very strange about the recurrence of our present experience of life.

In truth, there is nothing so irrational as admitting to a present occurrence, while rejecting the probability of its recurrence in the future. Once we accept the first life, we have left ourselves no basis for the denial of the second life.

Empirical Indispensability of Belief in the Hereafter

If we reject the concept of the life hereafter there remains no other deterrent strong enough to control man and oblige him to observe the rules of justice and fair play. In such a situation, the state inherits the entire burden of public morality which requires it to use the threat of punishment and prohibitive police surveillance. Yet this is almost always unsuccessful because morality, integrity and self-respect not already inherent in the individual cannot be enforced through legislation and punitive action.

Only by a spiritual awareness and inculcation of the spiritual value of the attributes of virtue can morality emanate. The concept of God and the life hereafter are very important in that they serve as the only reliable postulates of the moral sense. Only by means of belief in God and the life hereafter can an atmosphere of good morals be created. In the absence of such beliefs we have no incentive for good behaviour, making the maintenance of a social order almost impossible.

Therefore, when a culture has fallen totally away from spiritual pursuits into materialism as modern society has, it becomes a matter of urgency then to begin by demonstrating that human beings are

first and foremost spiritual beings, not merely material animals. From this realization of their own religious nature individuals can rediscover the Divine and thus once again become more truly themselves.

Those who adhere to the view that the life hereafter is merely a hypothesis should pause to consider why, if it is really only hypothetical, we should find this notion so indispensable. Why is it that, without such a concept, we cannot have true social order? Why is it that if this concept is eliminated from human thinking, the whole moral structure of life disintegrates? Can any mere hypothesis be so integral to life as this? Is there any other single example in this universe of a supposedly non-existent thing looming so large in human life, as a positive reality? The concept of the life hereafter being so vital to the establishment of a just and equitable order of life clearly shows that it is the greatest and most universal of all truths. It is in no way an exaggeration to say that, seen in this way, the concept of the life hereafter is quite consistent with the standards set by empiricism.

What is the Nature of the Soul ?

It remains for us to ask, "What is the soul?" The Qur'an says,

"They ask you about the soul. Say, "The soul is of the matters of my Lord. And Little indeed is the Knowledge Vouchsafed to you".
(17, 85)

The Soul or Spirit is a puzzle about which no one knows anything. It is striking that whenever the Spirit is mentioned in the Qur'an the words "...of my Lord's matters...", "...Our will"..., "...of my Lord's knowledge...", "...by his leave..." or "...command..." or others of similar meaning, accompany it, Allah's will, command and word is a spirit too. Didn't He speak about 'Isa [A] (Jesus) in the following words:

"...A word from Him. His name is Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary..."

(3, 45)

Allah also said that 'Isa [A] is,

"...His word which he cast into Mary; a Spirit from Him..."

(4, 171)

Thus the true nature of the soul is yet unknown to man.

Quantum Mechanics, the Soul and Life after Death

Prominent physics researchers across the world claim that quantum mechanics predicts the 'soul' and 'life after death'. They assert that human beings possess a 'body-soul' duality that is an extension of the wave-particle duality of subatomic particles.

As described in 'Section 1', quantum physicists suggest that given there is a quantum code for all things, living and dead, therefore there is existence after death. They explain that consciousness 'resides' in the microtubules of the brain cells, which are the primary sites of quantum processing, and just as a particle "writes" all of its information on its wave function, the brain is the tangible "floppy disk" on which we save our data, and this data is then "uploaded" into the 'spiritual' quantum field. Continuing with this analogy, they say that when we die the body, or the physical disk, is gone, but our consciousness, or the data on the computer, 'lives' on.

Therefore, the death of consciousness simply does not exist, according to quantum physicists. It only 'exists' as a current thought because people identify themselves with their body. Such people believe that just as the body is going to perish, sooner or later, their consciousness will disappear too. The general assumption is that if

the body generates consciousness, then consciousness dies when the body dies. But consciousness does not end at the death of the physical vehicle. Consciousness exists outside of the constraints of time and space. It is able to be anywhere: in the human body and outside of it. In other words, it is non-local in the same sense that quantum objects are non-local.

But why do they say that ‘consciousness exists outside of the constraints of time and space’. Well, neuroscientists explain that our central nervous system is phase encoded, which is a type of coding that allows multiple pieces of data to occupy the same time. Our thoughts, our will, our consciousness and our feelings display properties which have no direct interaction with the known fundamental forces of natural science, such as gravitation, electro magnetic forces, etc.

As explained in ‘Section 1’, Allah, is the perpetual consciousness that sustains all cosmic phenomena and its processes – the formation of nebulae, stars, black holes, galaxies, planets, and life itself. This ‘proto-consciousness’ is a fundamental property of the universe, present even at the first moment of the universe during the Big Bang. Interestingly, modern scientists suggest that proto-conscious experience is a basic property of physical reality accessible to a quantum process associated with brain activity. They say that our ‘souls’ are in fact constructed from the very fabric of the universe – and have existed since the beginning of time. Our brains are just receivers and amplifiers for the proto-consciousness that is intrinsic to the fabric of space-time. So there is really a part of you that is non-material and will live on after the death of the physical body and the physical universe.

An example that is given is the following: Let’s say the heart stops beating, the blood stops flowing, and the microtubules lose their quantum state. The quantum information within the microtubules is not destroyed, it can’t be destroyed, it just distributes and dissipates

to the universe at large. Not only does it exist in the universe, it exists in another universe. If the patient is resuscitated or revived, this quantum information can go back into the microtubules and the patient says “I had a near death experience.” If they’re not revived, and the patient dies, this quantum information exists outside the body, indefinitely, as a ‘soul’.

This novel account of quantum consciousness explains things like near-death experiences, astral projection, out of body experiences, to name a few. Your consciousness gets recycled back into a different body at some point, and in the mean time it exists outside of the physical body on some other level of reality, and in another universe, or what Muslims refer to as the ‘Barzakh’(Interspace) and ‘Aakhirah’(Hereafter).

What we consider the here and now, this physical world, it is actually just the material level that is comprehensible. The ‘beyond’ is an infinite reality that is much bigger, which this world is rooted in. In this way, our lives in this plane of existence are encompassed, surrounded, by the ‘afterworld’ already. The body dies but the spiritual quantum field continues. In this way, human beings are immortal. In fact, physicists and astrophysicists agree with the existence of parallel worlds and assert the possibility of multiple universes. They believe that no physical laws exist which would prohibit the existence of parallel worlds.

To use a simple analogy, there are hundreds of different radio waves being broadcast all around you from distant stations. At any given instant, your office or car or living room is full of these radio waves. However if you turn on a radio, you can listen to only one frequency at a time. These other frequencies are not in phase with each other. Each station has a different frequency, a different energy rhythm. As a result, your radio can only be turned to one broadcast at a time. Likewise, in our universe we are tuned into the frequency that corresponds to physical reality. But there are an infinite number of

parallel realities coexisting with us in the same room, although we cannot tune into them yet.

The fact that our universe is not alone is supported by data received from the Planck space telescope. Astrophysicists also found that the universe has a lot of dark recesses represented by some holes and extensive gaps due to the fact that our universe is influenced by other universes existing nearby. Holes and gaps are a direct result of intrusions on us by neighbouring universes.

Although Quantum Physics is still quite rudimentary and crude in its attempts to describe the enigma of the soul, it nevertheless represents an interesting negation of materialist denial of the spiritual realm.

Summoning the Souls of the Deceased

Finally, the query about 'the summoning of souls'. This phenomenon is suspect in the eyes of believers. They doubt that what occurs in the darkened rooms of séances is caused by the presence of this or that spirit. A prominent thinker like Henri Soder, for instance, says that such phenomena originate in the medium's subconscious and through his or her psychic powers; according to him, nothing in fact, is summoned.

Some believe that what really enters the medium's body during the séance are some nether world spirits which know certain facts about the dead and use them to ridicule those present and have fun at their expense.

Muslim mystics, for their part, say that it is not the spirit which attends the séances but its Karin or Double; that is the jinn who accompanied the dead person during his life. The jinn knows all the dead man's secrets by virtue of such 'company'. As the jinn live much longer than man, the Double survives his human mate and it is he who attends séances divulging the secrets of his mate and imitating

his voice and manners to poke fun at those present in accordance with the jinn's hostility towards human beings.

Those mystics resort to a vivid illustration of their view. They say that if we ring the bell in an office the servant will show up to enquire about our requests but the master or director of the office will not leave his domain so easily to attend on us. The same, they add, applies to the world of spirits. It is the jinn who are summoned in séances and who impose on their audiences.

The human spirits abide in another world; namely, the Barzakh or Barrier. They cannot be recalled but they may communicate with the living, either in dreams or, indeed, in wakefulness provided the appropriate conditions exist. It is regrettable, however, that superstitions are far in excess of the facts in this area.

Many will undoubtedly laugh at hearing such words as the jinn. Yet, if we had been born hundreds of years ago and someone came to us talking about an invisible ray that cuts through iron, or about pictures that travel the air, across the oceans in less than a second, or about a man who walks over the dusty surface of the moon, wouldn't we have laughed and chuckled at what he says many times more than the laughter in ridicule of what has been said? These, however, are facts that are all too apparent before our eyes and ears today. Similarly, because of our lack of spiritual insight into such matters, we can have tremendous difficulty with subjects of the like, but due only to our very own spiritual inadequacies.

SECTION 9



IS RELIGION AN OPIUM ?

What can be said to counter those who describe religion as an opium which intoxicates the poor and oppressed and makes them acquiesce to the injustice and destitution they suffer under, leaving them to dream of Paradise while the rich hold tightly to their wealth as a right incumbent from the creation of men in various 'degrees'?

Furthermore, religions have been accused of fatalism and superstition, with its consequent retrogression and persecution of science, as evinced in the Dark Ages of Europe. So what response do believers have to the secular claim that abandoning religion is necessary to ensure the progress of humanity and that modern Western civilization alone guarantees prosperity and advancement for all.

What, further, can be said in reply to those who believe that religion did not really descend from Allah but, rather, originated from the 'earth', springing from social causes and conditions, to be employed as a weapon by one class against another?



Religion Means Awareness

Nothing can be more erroneous than describing true religion as an opium. In its essence, religion implies burdens, injunctions, and responsibilities; it surely does not mean disencumberment or disavowal of anything and is, thus, no shirking of responsibility and definitely no 'opium'. Islam stresses work and not laziness:

"Say: 'Act' Allah will behold your deeds, and so will His Prophet and the faithful;"
(9, 105)

We believe in true reliance upon Allah (Tawakkul) not in helpless inaction (Tawakul). Reliance upon Allah necessitates resolve, expenditure of every possible effort, exhaustion of every energy and means, and, then, submission to Allah's will and decree:

"When you are resolved, put your trust in Allah."
(3, 159).

Resolve comes first. The Prophet's [S] advice to the man who wanted to leave his camel untied relying upon Allah's preserving it was: "Tie it and rely on Allah"; that is, he should do his best to secure the animal and then put his trust in Allah.

Religion means watchfulness, attentiveness, alertness, self-questioning, and the heeding of conscience in every deed, word, or prompting - this is not the way of 'opium-addicts'.

The true opium-addict is the materialist who rejects religion because he wishes thereby to evade its consequences and responsibilities and who thinks that the 'moments' he lives belong to him, thus going about recklessly doing as he wishes, believing that there is no watcher, questioner, or resurrection after death. How can a man like

this compare with the true Muslim who considers himself responsible even for his 'seventh neighbour' and who blames himself if any individual in his nation starves or if even any animal is mistreated feeling that he has not fulfilled a duty made incumbent on him by his religion.

Islam does not Serve the Rich and Powerful

It is also not true that Islam originated from 'the soil', from social conditions and causes, to be employed as a weapon in the hand of one class against another and to perpetuate the wealth and privilege of the rich and the suffering of the poor. Quite the opposite is true. Islam came as a revolt against the rich, the money-hoarders, the exploiters, and the oppressors. It expressly enjoined that wealth should not be monopolized and exchanged among the rich alone but it should be open for all as a right:

"Proclaim a woeful punishment to those that hoard up gold and silver and do not spend it in Allah's service."

(9, 340)

'Spending' starts with the compulsory Zakat (payable on various sorts of income and assets). It can be increased, voluntarily, to include all excess wealth :

"They ask you what they should give in alms. Say: 'What you can spare'."

(2, 219)

That which can be spared is anything more than is required for sustenance and the satisfaction of immediate needs.

In this way, Islam combined the compulsory, legal injunction with an exhortation to conscience and free will. This is more honourable for

man than forceful confiscation and expropriation. Islam was not revealed to confirm injustice but to declare an unconditional revolt against all the unjust. It came as a sword waging war on tyrants and dictators of all persuasions.

"To some of you Allah has given more than to others."

The materialists, however, quote verses from the Qur'an such as the following to charge that religion class-oriented:

"To some of you Allah has given more than to others."

(16, 71)

"We have exalted some in rank above others."

(43, 32)

In reply to such a charge we can say that these verses are universal and apply to modern London, Paris, Berlin, New York, Tokyo or Moscow just as much as they apply to Cairo, Damascus, or Jeddah. Even if we surveyed the streets of Moscow during the Soviet era, as a glaring example, we would have found some people walking on their feet, some riding bicycles, some driving a Moskovitch, and yet others being driven in a luxurious Zim car, inspite of all the claims to egalitarianism by Communists. What else can this be but an expression of indelible natural variance in livelihood itself, in ranks, and in economic levels?

The existence of differences between people is an axiomatic fact. Even Communism at its height had not been able to level such differences. Most extremist advocates of materialism and anarchy also did not call for equality. Equality as such is impossible; for how can we make two originally unequal people the same?

From the moment of birth, men are unequal in intelligence, strength, beauty, or talents. They are born in ranks or degrees in more ways

than one. The utmost that economic philosophies have aspired to is to achieve equality in opportunities and not equality of men, to secure for everyone the same opportunity in education, health-care, and a minimum standard of living - the same things, in fact, that Islam calls for.

To abolish degrees and differences would not only be injustice in quintessence but a contradiction to nature as well. The natural order as a whole is based on variance, differentiation, and variety in everything: in the fruits of the earth, in animals, and in men. In cotton for example we find innumerable short and long varieties. We know numerous varieties of dates and of grapes too. In animals and men, the ranks, degrees, or variations are found in a far greater measure.

Differentiation, in fact, is the law of existence as a whole. The wisdom behind it is quite clear. If all men were born with the same bodies, features, and qualities there would have been no need for them to be created in the first place. It would have been sufficient for just one 'prototype-man' to be created in lieu of the rest. This would have naturally been generalized to every order of existence leading to the impoverishment and bankruptcy of creation. The wealth and fertility of nature show only in the variety of its yields and fruits and in the differences among its products.

It is a Test

This is in no way a pronouncement on or justification of economic disparity and oppression for they have causes contingent to the ill-behaviour and misconduct of man. Islam did not stand passively in the face of such variance between rich and poor. It instructed that this condition be responsibly addressed and described it as a temptation and trial:

"We test you by means of one another. Will you not have patience ?" (25, 20).

We, as men, shall discover how the powerful man, for instance, uses his strength: will he help the weak or employ it to harass, murder, and tyrannize? We shall see how the rich man manages his wealth: will he monopolize and squander or sympathize and be charitable? We shall also find out how the destitute behaves in his poverty: will he envy and grudge, steal and embezzle or will he work and improvise and innovate to his best possible capacities to raise his standard of living in a manner that is lawful and just?

Islam commanded justice, the redress of wrongs, and equality of opportunities. It raised the torments of the hereafter as a threat saying that there will be more widely-spaced ranks or degrees in the next world to redress what has not been rectified in this:

"See how we have exalted some above others. Yet this life to come has greater degrees and is more exalted."

(17, 21)

The Individual has an Absolute Value

To those who accuse Islam of political reaction we reply that it brought with it the most progressive principles of rule. Respect for the individual has reached its summit in Islam which not only preceded but excelled the modern Human Rights Declaration in this regard. An individual, in the consideration of Islam, is equal to humanity in its entirety:

"Whoever killed a human being, except as a punishment for murder or other wicked crimes, should be looked upon as though he had killed all of mankind; and whoever saved a human life should be regarded as though he had saved all of mankind."

(5, 32)

All material achievements and reforms or the construction of dams

and sophisticated factories or the landing of astronauts on the moon cannot balance the murder of just one individual at the hand of the ruler in the process of carrying out these reforms; it would be as if the ruler, in committing this crime, has killed all humanity. Such is the zenith in the respect for individuals which has not been attained by any political doctrine old or new. In Islam, the individual has an absolute value whereas his value in all other political philosophies is relative. Under Islamic injunctions a man is secure in his home, in his private affairs, and in his wealth, income, possessions, and freedom. Everything has a place in the Qur'an: the exchange of greetings, making room for those sitting in a gathering, and the utterance of kind words.

Islam Forbids Oppression

The Qur'an forbade oppression, tyranny, and the monopoly of power by any one individual. Allah instructed the Prophet [S], perfect and competent as he was:

"You are not a compeller over them."
(50, 45).

Allah also said to His beloved Prophet [S]:

"Therefore give warning. Your duty is only to remind them. You are not their ward."
(88, 21)
"The believers are a band of brothers."
(49, 10)

The Quran also forbade the worship of rulers and the deification of the great:

"None of us shall set up mortals as gods besides Him,"
(3, 64)

"Your Lord has enjoined you to worship none but Him,"
(17, 23)

Allah prohibited demagoguery, the flattery of the mob and the riff-raff, and compliance with the misleading majority:

"Most men do not know."
(12, 21)

"But most of them are senseless men."
(29, 63)

"They (the greater part of mankind) follow nothing but idle fancies and they do but utter falsehood,"
(6, 116)

"They are like the cattle - nay, they are farther astray."
(25, 44)

Allah similarly enjoined against racialism and discrimination on its basis:

"The noblest of you in Allah's sight is he who fears Him most"
(49, 13)

"It was He who created you from a single soul."
(70, 189)

Islam is, in a scientific sense, a dialectical synthesis of the materialistic bent of Judaism and the spirituality of Christianity; it combines that strict, dry justice which laid down the taking of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth with the amiability and excessive toleration which preach the turning of the left cheek. The Qur'an came as a golden mean between the Tawrah, which has been corrupted to become a purely materialistic book with no mention of the Judgment Day, and the Injil (Evangel), which, in its turn, inclined to total asceticism. The Qur'an lays down the law of mercy which incorporates

both justice and love. It allows the legitimacy of self-defense but prefers pardon, forbearance, and forgiveness:

"And whoso is patient and forgives - that, verily, is of the steadfast heart of matters." (42, 43)

Whereas capitalism gave the individual free rein in the pursuit of profit to the extent of exploiting others, and while communism completely crushed any freedom in that sphere, Islam offered the golden mean:

"Unto men a share of that which they have earned, and unto women a share of that which they have earned." (4, 32)

The individual is free to acquire gains but he cannot keep them all to himself; he has a right only to a share of them. The poor have a share in such gains which is to be taken in the form of the compulsory Zakat or in voluntary charitable spending. This share is not given by way of alms or, indeed, charity but it represents Allah's right in the gains. It was through such a fine balance that Islam preserved both the individual's freedom and the right of the poor.

The Justly Balanced Nation

The Qur'an perfectly hits the mark when it records Allah's call to the nation (Ummah) of Islam:

"We have made you a justly balanced nation." (2, 143).

Islam has chosen the just mean with regard to everything. It is not a mathematically determined mean but rather a dialectical or synthetic structure which incorporates thesis and antithesis - the right and the left - transcending and adding to them. It cannot, therefore, be claimed that there is either a rightist or a leftist tendency in Islam;

there is only the Sirat (Path) of the moderate mean which we call 'the Straight Path'. Any inclination either to the right or to the left of this path is a deviation from Islam.

The Qur'an, despite the clear principles set forth, did not tie us down to a definite political programme or a detailed system of governance for Allah knew, in his Prescience, that circumstances change necessitating Ijtihad or inventive intellectual effort by qualified specialist 'Ulama' (Scholars) to formulate different programmes for different ages. In this way, the Muslim would be free to effect an exchange with the branches of knowledge available at every age without being confined to a set and unchanging programme. That is why the Qur'an found it sufficient to proclaim the above-mentioned general political recommendations as the essentials of ideal government. It did not shackle us with a dogmatic theory and this is, in fact, one of the aspects of its miraculous nature and not a defect or shortcoming.

Islam Demands Progress

In this approach we find another fact of the Qur'an's idea of progress which predated all other doctrines of progress. We answer those alleging that religion means rigidity and petrification by pointing out that Islam was never a creed of that sort; it always called for and championed thinking, contemplation, development, and change. Consider, for example, such verses in their clear indications:

"Say: 'Travel in the land and see how He originated creation,'"
(29, 20)

"Let man consider from what he is created...."
(86, 7)

"Will they not reflect on the camels and how they were created; and heaven and how it was raised on high; the mountains and how they were set up, the earth and how it was levelled flat."
(88, 17- 19)

All these are unambiguous commands for investigating the creation of man, animals, the mountains, the strata of the earth's crust, and space with its stars and orbits. Such investigations, in fact, encompass all the material we now group under disciplines such as geology, astronomy, anatomy, physiology, biology, and embriology.

We have, then, in the Qur'an clear injunctions to travel through the earth gathering evidence, deducing laws, and understanding how it all functions.

There is no taboo against error. The Prophet Muhammad [s] promised eternal rewards to anyone who expends an intellectual effort and errs; the reward is doubled for him who hits on the truth.

There is no foundation to the charge that belief in Islam is the cause of our backwardness while atheism and materialism is the secret behind the progress of the west. What is true is that we lagged behind when we turned our backs to the teachings of our religion. When the Muslims did adhere to the injunctions of their creed there was real progress, a nation that extended from China to the Spain, and scholars like Ibn Sina in medicine, Ibn Rushd in philosophy, Ibn Al-Haytham in mathematics, Ibn Al-Nafis in anatomy, and Jabir Ibn Hayyan in chemistry.

Nations at that time received knowledge from us. European dictionaries still keep the Arabic names of many stars and constellations. The French word for the distilling device, imbique, and the verb for that process, imbiquer, still retain their Arabic original: Ambiq.

The west did not advance by atheism but through knowledge. The roots of the entire mistaken notion go back to the clerical tyranny of the Middle Ages, to the Inquisition's restrictions against science and scientists exemplified by Galileo's imprisonment and Giordano

Bruno's burning at the stake.

When the Church ruled supreme and was diverted by the Popes from its noble mission, it became a force for backwardness. Superficial critics imagined that such a situation applies to Islam as well. This is a mistake; Islam does not institute any clergy or papacy. Allah did not set up any mediators or warders between Him and the believers. When Islam ruled it was a factor of true universal progress, as history testifies, belying such shallow allegations.

No Contradiction Between Religion and Knowledge

Unequivocal Qur'anic verses incite to knowledge and enjoin its acquisition; they do not set up any opposition between religion and science:

"Say: 'Lord increase my knowledge.'"

(20, 114)

"Are those who know equal with those who know not?"

(33)

"Allah bears witness that there is no god but Him, and so do the angels and the men of learning."

(3, 18)

In the last verse Allah even couples the men of learning with the angels relating both to the honour of His name and His act of witnessing.

The very first word revealed of the Quran was "Read"; and the knowledgeable are promised the highest ranks:

"Allah will raise to high ranks those that have faith and knowledge among you."

(58, 11)

The word 'knowledge' and its various derivatives recur in the Qur'an about eight hundred and fifty times. How can anyone, in the light of the previous remarks, speak about a contradiction between religion and science or about restrictions imposed by the former on the latter?

Studying religion and deepening its understanding is a desirable attitude. The entire history of Islam is nothing but continuous movements of revival and development. The Qur'an is certainly innocent of imposing any rigidity on men. Everything in our religion accepts development except, of course, the essence of its creed and the core of its Shari'ah (Divine Law). Allah is one and He will not 'develop' to become two or three; His status is absolute. Similarly, evil will remain evil while good remains so. Murder will never become a virtue nor will theft change into a blessing or lying metamorphose into an ornament for the good. Apart from such elements, true religion is always open to intellectual advancement.

Islam, in its quintessence, is rationalistic. It accepts dialogue and argument and encourages the use of the mind and reasoning. In more places than one we find the Qur'an asking rhetorically, "...Don't they reason?...", "...Don't they understand?...". The believers are described as the "...people of reason..." and the Qur'an tells us:

"The meanest beasts in Allah's sight are those that are deaf, dumb, and devoid of sense."

(8, 22)

"Have they never journeyed in the land? Have they no hearts to reason with, nor ears to hear with?"

(22, 46)

Islam is Dynamic

Respect for the mind is the heart and essence of religion, positive atti-

tudes its core, and dynamism its spirit. Islam has never been a negative creed of acquiescence:

"Fight for the sake of Allah those that fight against you,"

(2, 190)

"Allah loves those who fight in His cause in ranks as if they were a solid structure."

(61, 4)

At the very centre of our religion we encounter values such as sacrificing the self, wealth, and sons in the struggle for Allah's cause. Steadfastness in fighting and the express injunction against turning tail are Islamic values; and so are endurance, constant readiness, and the defeating of despair.

How can a religion with such high regard for flexibility, rationalism, the scientific approach, and positive and revolutionary attitudes be libelled by charges of rigidity and petrification except from the tongues of such men as are ignorant of the rudimentaries of Islam.

Western Civilization

The pursuit and acquisition of wealth, and its use as an instrument for the domination of man over man, have always been and still are the cause of the misery of the world, of revolutions, and of wars. The worship of wealth was and still is the cause of the moral deterioration which has enveloped the world and of which human society continues to suffer. It is the acquisition, pursuit, and hoarding of wealth which has destroyed human fraternity and planted enmity between man and man.

Were men to follow a higher vision and had they a noble bent of mind, they would have realized that fraternity is more conducive to happiness than wealth, that to spend wealth on the needy is worthier

with Allah and with men than the subjugation of men to its dominion. Were they truly convinced of Allah, they would realize this fraternity toward one another, and they would fulfil, as the least requirement of such a fraternity, the duties of rescuing the needy, assisting the deprived, and putting an end to the misery and suffering brought about by poverty and want.

Western civilization is one which found itself upon economic activity and erects its moral system on that activity as a base, giving no weight in public life to faith. Indeed, a civilization which so regards human life is bound to bring upon mankind all the calamities which have befallen our world in recent centuries. Under its aegis, any attempt to prevent war and to establish universal peace will prove futile and vain, for in Western civilization, man's relation to man is based upon the loaf of bread and the struggle which man wages against his fellow men in order to get it for himself, a struggle the success of which depends upon the animal power which each one of us can marshal for the purpose.

Materialism and Barbarism

It is indubitable that in such a civilization every man will watch for the best occasion to cheat his fellow out of his loaf of bread. Every man will regard his fellow man as his enemy rather than his brother, and personal morality will have nothing but the animal in us on which to stand. This is true though man's animality may remain hidden until need uncovers it, for only utility is consonant with such a moral foundation. Charity, altruism, love, brotherhood - in short, all the principles of nobler morality and the values of higher humanity - will forever pass over a consciousness disciplined by such a civilization just as water passes off the back of a duck.

The actualities of the contemporary world furnish empirical evidence for these claims. Competition and struggle are the first principles of

the economic system and the most salient characteristic of Western civilization. In it, the worker competes with his fellow worker, the capitalist with his fellow capitalist, and worker and capitalist are committed enemies of each other.

The devotees of this view regard struggle and competition as the forces of man's good and progress. They regard these forces as the source of motivation for the pursuit of perfection and the division of labour, as well as for a just criterion for the distribution of wealth. But as long as struggle and competition for wealth are the essence of life, then it will remain a consequence that the people and nations of the world will struggle and prey upon one another in order to realize their purposes. In this Western twentieth century we have witnessed sufficient evidence to convince anyone that a world founded upon such civilization may dream of, but never realize, peace.

Islamic Civilization is Firstly Spiritual

Unlike Western civilization, the civilization of Islam is built upon a spiritual base in which man is first and foremost called upon to recognize ultimate reality, Allah, and to realize his position in the world with regard to Allah. Whenever man's consciousness of this relation reaches the point of certainty and conviction, that conviction will nourish his heart as well as his mind with the sublime principles of magnanimity, contentment, brotherhood, love, charity and piety. On the basis of such principles man will then organize his economic life. Islamic civilization is first and foremost a spiritual civilization. In it, the spiritual order constitutes the groundwork of the system of education, of personal and social morality. The principles constituting the moral order in turn constitute the ground work of the economic system. It is therefore not permissible in this civilization that any moral principle be sacrificed for the sake of the economic system.

SECTION 10



WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TESTIMONY OF FAITH ?

It is argued that Muslims over-exaggerate the significance of the testimony of faith, "La ilaha illa-llah", (There is no god but Allah) as if it were a key that opens every door, unlocking every mystery, and assuring salvation even to the inveterate sinner.

Muslims bury their dead and receive their new-born babies while repeating this phrase. They engrave it on seals, and hang it on walls and claim that whoever pronounces it will enter Paradise and have his body saved from Hell fire, as if it were a magic talisman, a charm to scare the demons away, or fairy tale bottle for holding giants captive. If this be so could not the disbeliever argue that by simply uttering a few words and being assured of salvation from torment the entire significance of religion would be lost?

Furthermore, it is argued that if there really is a Paradise then even the disbeliever will enter it, for indeed, many are more righteous than the believers, with their beards and rosaries. Most non-believers do not hurt others, they do not steal, kill, accept bribes, or envy. They have no grudges, nor intend evil for any creature. Many have only benevolence at heart and their sole aim is the general good of all. They wake up and go to bed with an easy conscience and their motto

in life is to manage matters as uprightly as they can. Isn't this religion? Don't Muslims accept that the essence of religion is good conduct?

Also, why should we pray? Why all the various movements of the body? Wouldn't piety of the heart have been sufficient? And is mere prayer sufficient a devotion to Allah?



"There is no god but Allah" is a Covenant

In response, let it be stated first that by simply uttering the testimony of faith a person has not really achieved anything, because this phrase benefits only those who act upon its meaning. It is not for those who merely pronounce it with the tip of their tongue. It implies a method of action and a life plan; it is not just the aggregate of some letters.

Let us examine its meaning. When we say "There is no god but Allah" we really mean that none is to be worshipped except Allah. Our entire creed can, in fact, be found in the negator 'La' (no) and the exceptive 'illa' (but), in the negation and affirmation that both words indicate. Between negation and affirmation lies our whole creed. 'La' denies divinity to anything. It denies it to all the worldly pleasures we worship: wealth, splendour, power, lust, fine living, gorgeous women, luxurious affluence, pomp. We refuse to be enslaved by these or worship them. By 'La' we also restrain our own souls from coveting 'divinity'. For man is wont to worship his own self, his own opinion, prejudice, will and whim. He is naturally prone to adoring his intelligence, talents, and fame and imagining that with them he can control events and people, even the entire world around him. He, thus, deifies himself without realising it. It is against such aggrandizement of self that we say 'no' or 'La'; we refuse

to worship or confer divinity to the self.

We say 'no' to the ego directing our selves, to our superiors, and to our rulers. We decline to accept them as gods, for 'god' here means an agent or doer and the true agent, in our belief, is Allah alone. All else are mere means. We, therefore, say 'no' to the kings, to wealth, splendour, power and to the self with all its talents and aptitudes. We refuse to confer divinity on them.

By 'illa' (but), on the other hand, we except only One Being from the attitude defined above, a Being with regard to whom we confirm such capacity and power : Allah.

Our entire creed falls between 'la' and 'illa', between negation and affirmation. Anyone who is totally preoccupied with accumulating money, heaping wealth, appeasing kings, gratifying passion, yielding to prejudice and chauvinism, narcissistically clinging to his opinions, and fanatically consumed by his own viewpoint has not really said 'no' to all these 'objects of his worship'. He is prostrating himself before their altar. If he says "There is no god but Allah" he is lying; he is merely uttering with his tongue that which he does not confirm by the actions of his limbs.

"There is no god but Allah" really means that there is no reckoner or observer except Allah. He alone is worthy of being feared. Whoever fears any other, whether that other be sickness or a tyrant, has not truly said 'no' to all such false gods. He remains in their service, joining a host of fake gods with his Creator. He lies even if he utters "There is no god but Allah."

All this proves that "There is no god but Allah" is a covenant, a constitution, and a way of life. It is intended to be enacted. To whomever acts according to its full implications, it really becomes a talisman opening all recalcitrant doors. It will save him in this and in the next

world and will be his gateway to Paradise. A mere utterance of that phrase with the tongue without heart-felt belief or bodily actions confirming it is quite meaningless.

"There is no god but Allah" Expresses a Philosophical Attitude

In addition, "There is no god but Allah" expresses a philosophical attitude. This testimony implies the admission of three facts: that the utterer or witness exists, that the entity indicated by the witness exists, and that the persons before whom the testimony is delivered also exist. It is, to put it more simply, a clear admission that the self, Allah, and others have a real existence.

Islam, thus, rejects both philosophical idealism and materialism. It repudiates both the right and the left choosing for itself a mediate position. It rejects philosophical idealism which does not recognize the existence of others or that of the objective world as an external fact independent of mind. Everything, according to this philosophy, occurs in the mind just like dreams or thoughts. You, as a person, the table and chair, the street, people, and all events occurring around us are only events or visions that take place in the mind. The external world does not really exist according to this philosophical position.

This extremist idealistic position is rejected by Islam and denied by the testimony of "There is no god but Allah"; for that testimony, is a frank admission that the witness, the entity attested for, and those present when it is delivered - the self, Allah, and others - are all facts.

Islam similarly rejects philosophical materialism because that creed accepts only the objective world and denies anything beyond it; it denies the unseen and Allah.

In this attitude, Islam advances a realistic philosophy and manner of

thinking. It recognizes the existence of the objective world and, then, adds to that world all the magnitude that the unseen existence of Allah confers. It presents, in fact, a synthetic structure combining the ideas of both left and right within a comprehensive philosophy that still challenges the efforts of thinkers by surpassing their probabilistic theories which are not established on any certainty.

Mere Utterance Constitutes a Lie

The testimony of "There is no god but Allah", then, implies a way of life and a philosophical stance. Thus the uttering of a disbeliever of the testimony of faith without conviction is of no consequence for by so doing he lies twice. Firstly, he affirms what his materialistic philosophy denies and secondly, he does not act according to the implications of the testimony even for a single second of his life.

Religion and Good Conduct

With respect to the enquiry about the meaning of religion and good conduct, it may be said that what the disbeliever practices is something else, called good manners. It is, indeed, enjoined by Islam but is not synonymous with it. The skeptic is confusing religion with its requirements. Religion has only one meaning; namely, the knowledge of Allah; to know your creator truly and to cultivate a certain conduct and behaviour towards Him. It is to know Allah as He is - Absolute, Perfect, Supreme, Majestic and Transcendent. It is to pray to Him, kneeling and prostrate, in reverence and humility. This relationship between creature and creator is the essence of religion.

As for good conduct towards fellow men, it is necessitated by religion and is, in fact, God-oriented behaviour. The Holy Prophet [S] said: "Alms reach the hand of Allah before that of the beggar". Whoever loves Allah will equally love his creatures and be charitable to them. If, however, correct conduct and dealings are confined to men only

recognizing and seeing nothing else beside them and this earthly life, it would in no way diminish the abomination of disbelief. Indeed, good behaviour in this context is often motivated by a sense of propriety and tactfulness. They do not prove righteousness but rather a means of furthering the worldly ambitions of men and assuring material success. This is the bent of most disbelievers.

Good is Determined by the State of Heart

All the good deeds of the disbeliever will be rejected and thrown to the wind on the Day of Judgment. This will not be, in any way, injustice. Quite the contrary, it is justice itself. The disbeliever presumes that such deeds are a consequence of their own endeavour and have not been inspired by the Guiding and the All-Wise who leads and guides his servants. It is the disbeliever who is unjust to his Creator, denying his favours.

This is the difference, in fact, between the good deeds of the believer and those of the disbeliever who may seem to be equal in their external good action and behaviour. Both may build a hospital for the treatment of the sick. The disbeliever says, "I build this grand hospital for the people." The believer, however, says, "Allah guided my efforts and endowed me with the facilities to build this hospital for the people. I was only a means to the realization of this good."

There is really a great difference between the two. The latter person attributes the good deed to its real author and source leaving to himself only the role of means. He is thankful to Allah for even this limited function praising Him for allowing him to be only a mediate cause. He acknowledges the bounties and favours of Allah admitting the true source of all good. The disbeliever in turn does not acknowledge the truth of matters. On the contrary, in the name of virtue, he denies the source of all good which is the quintessence of perversity.

There is certainly a vast difference between pride and modesty, arrogance and humility, truth and falsehood.

Wisdom of Salah (Ritual Prayer)

The point and wisdom of prayers is that the false pride man dwells in be shattered the moment his forehead touches the dust and his heart and tongue join in saying "Exalted be my Cherisher, Allah." At this moment he realizes his true position: he is the lesser and Allah is the Supreme. He is dust walking on dust and Allah is the absolute Being exalted over the seven firmaments.

As for the necessity of bodily movements and why wouldn't heart-felt reverence be enough, let it be asked in turn: why was the body created in the first place? A human being is not satisfied with oral expressions of love but desires to kiss and embrace. We would mock anyone who is content with heart-felt generosity without physically giving aid and money. Allah created the body so that it may manifest what is latent in the heart. What really permeates the heart will overflow to the body. If piety is sincere, it will manifest itself through the body, making one kneel and prostrate. If false, it will not proceed beyond the tongue.

Only Allah Knows the Truly Devoted

But, can we ever be devoted enough to Allah? We will certainly all pass across Hell and then Allah will save those who were devoted to Him. The believer does not know whether he has been enough of a devoted servant or not. This is only known to the Knower of the Unseen. All his deeds, regrettably, are mere ink-blots on paper. The deed may be pure but the design may not. Intentions may be sound but sincerity may not.

"So hold not yourselves purified, He knows best who it is that is truly

pious."
(53, 32)

A person may think that he is performing good deeds for Allah's sake while he is really expending his efforts for the sake of fame and worldly glory among men. We often delude ourselves. We unconsciously allow illusions, wishful thinking, presumption and a false sense of security to deceive us.

A believer begs Allah for safety. He realizes that he cannot be sincere enough of his own will but it is Allah who purifies hearts. That is the reason why the Qur'an speaks in most of the verses dealing with this matter about the 'purified' and not the 'sincere'. Allah, however, promises to guide to His own path those who 'return'; that is, those who repent and acknowledge their inadequacies vis-à-vis his absolute transcendence, their worthlessness before his absolute worthiness. They revert to Him and by so returning He accepts them, for they have acknowledge the truth of matters, and truth is the ultimate goal.

SECTION 11



IS 'HAJ' A PAGAN RITE ?

It is observed by many that the Hajj or pilgrimage rites seem to be frankly pagan? First of all there is the stone structure, the Ka'bah, to which Muslims cling and then circle.

There is also the stoning of the 'devil' - the stone obelisks, the hurrying between Safa and Marwa - two rocky outcrops, the kissing of the Black Stone, and the occurrence of the number seven in many rites. This is, surely, a vestige of ancient pagan custom and superstition concerning talismanic numbers.

There is yet that Ihram cloth you wrap round your naked bodies in preparation for the pilgrimage which seems to be yet another vestige of primitive eastern, pagan stoicism.



The Smaller Revolves Around the Larger

It is observed that according to the laws of matter it is established that the smaller body revolves round the larger - the electron in the atom circles round the nucleus, the moon round the earth, the earth round

the sun, the sun round the galaxy, the galaxy circling within the cosmos, and so on till we ascend to the Absolute Greatest - Allah!

Don't we repeat the phrase "Allah is greatest" meaning that He is 'bigger' than everything? Hence, and in accordance with the laws of science, everything should revolve round Him. We are now, in fact, revolving round Him in spite of ourselves, along with our solar system. You cannot choose but revolve, for nothing is still in the universe but Allah - the Sanctuary, the Enduring. He is static whereas everything else is in perpetual motion around him.

Symbolism and Religion

As for Muslims, we circle around Allah's 'House' of our own free will. This House, the Ka'bah, was the first structure man dedicated to the worship of Allah. Ever since that time immemorial it has become a symbol and a 'House' of Allah.

Didn't reverent communists 'circle' the Kremlin revering its inhabitant entombed there and claiming that he 'saved' mankind. Don't open agnostics lay wreaths on stone monuments suggesting that it symbolizes the endeavours of their heros, and don't they pelt their political adversaries with eggs and tomatoes? Why, then, criticize Muslims for sanctifying the Ka'bah or casting a pebble at a pillar which symbolizes shaytan?

Don't people live in a ceaseless 'hurrying' from the moment of their birth to that of their death and don't their progeny, after their death, repeat that 'hurrying' all over again? This is similar to the symbolic 'hurrying' from Safa - the name in Arabic connoting emptiness or vacuum as a symbol of nothingness - to Marwa, the spring - which signifies life and being. Isn't this, in fact, the pendulous movement of all creatures? Can't, the non-Muslim discern in the rites of pilgrimage a profound symbolic synopsis of all these mysteries?

Let it further be asked, don't we kiss a letter our beloved sends to us? Are we, then, all pagans? Why criticise Muslims, therefore, for kissing the Black Stone which is a sacred relic descended from Paradise and which Prophet Muhammad [S] carried in his own blessed hands and kissed? There is no paganism involved at all; for Muslims do not direct their devotion and worship to the stones but to the profound meanings, symbols, and memories they evoke of the Divine.

Islam is a religion of pure Monotheism. It does not admit of any intermediaries or intercessors between man and his Creator.' It frowns upon all material and visible objects which might become centres of devotion and to which people paid spiritual homage in one form or another. There is no place in it for an intervening agency, a manifestation, an image or an idol. There is also no priestly class in it or 'chosen people'.

But human nature being what it is, the quest for something within the perceptible phenomenon through which one could seek the satisfaction of the inward impulse of love, adoration and submission has always formed a part of his essential character and personality.

For the fulfillment of this need, Allah has appointed certain visible and material objects which are consecrated to Him and bear a special relation to His Blessed Name and are held popularly to be His own and upon which there is so much of His Grace that the mere sight of them evokes His remembrance. Besides, with them are associated events, rites and experiences that serve as the portents of Allah, and remind us of His religion and the fortitude and endeavour of His Apostles. He has pleased to give to these objects the name of the 'Landmarks of Allah', and to proclaim that to pay reverence to them is to pay reverence to Him while to show disrespect to them is to show disrespect to Him. He has permitted, or, rather, invited mankind to gratify its innate urge for love, closeness and observation through them.

"That is (the command). And whoso honours the 'Landmarks of Allah', it surely is from the devotion of the hearts." (22:32)

The Number '7'

Now for the number seven that moves the disbeliever to so much sarcasm. Let it be asked, why do we have seven tones in the sound scale - Sol, La, C, Do, Re, Mi, Fa? After the seventh tone we return again to the pitch of Sol - always seven tones and not eight or more. The shades of the light spectrum are seven, electrons revolve round the nucleus in seven fields, the embryo completes its growth only in the seventh month and if delivered before that time will be still born. The days of the week are seven - among all peoples - and this was reached without any previous agreement. Doesn't all this signify something? Or is it that all these facts are, for their part, mere talismanic superstitions? Are not these symbols of a grander universal order?

An Occasion for Contemplation

The pilgrimage actions are occasions for inducing contemplation, arousing the feelings, and instilling godliness in the heart. The Ihram cloth Muslims wrap round their naked bodies, and which should not be sewn, symbolizes the renunciation of worldly ornament and complete devotion in the Presence of the Creator. It is exactly the same as our condition at birth and death; for we come to the world wrapped in a piece of cloth and depart from it in the same attire. Don't you need formal suits for audiences with kings? We, for our part, say that only such stripping of ornament and donning of this simple robe is appropriate for the slave in the presence of his Majestic Master; for He is greater than all kings and nothing more befits attendance before Him than absolute humility and the shedding of ostentation. The humble Ihram robe worn in Allah's Presence by rich and poor alike also signifies that men are brothers however different they may be in rank and wealth.

For us the pilgrimage is a great gathering, a universal spiritual conference; it is an enlarged version, if you like, of the Friday prayers - that smaller meeting which unites us every week. These events have wonderful significance for anyone who cares to contemplate their meanings. They are as far removed from paganism as can be imagined.

If the disbeliever had stood, as Muslims do, on Mount Arafat, one among millions crying "Allahu Akbar", praising Allah Almighty in a hundred tongues, calling out "labbayk Allahumma labbayk" (we have answered your call, Oh our Lord), sobbing, and melting in love and longing - he would have shed tears unconsciously and merged into that multitude of humanity, he would have experienced that sense of reverence and annihilation of self before Allah, the Magnificent, the Lord of all Being.

SECTION 12



THE DELUSION OF FAITH ?

The disbeliever may contend that he comes off the better as compared to the delusional, idealistic Muslim because he has won the happiness of this life, the lion's share of this world's pleasures: drinking, beautiful women, luxurious living and the myriad pleasures it offers, untarnished by taboos of the forbidden or haram.

Believers seem only to have fasting, prayers, remembrance of Allah, and the fear of Reckoning, which by themselves seem to be merely conjectural. It may seem that the disbeliever is the real winner between the competitors in the race for fulfillment of life.

Furthermore, even the believer, consciously or otherwise, acknowledges his infatuation with the glamour of the world, even sometimes expressing blasphemous ideas and attitudes outstretching even the most disbelieving in audacity. He too, in his desire for the good of this world, admits to the 'maxim' held by the disbeliever "Enjoy today for you die tomorrow." Could this not be a subconscious admission of the true nature of our lives on earth being no more than enjoyment of the moment.

And lastly, what would happen if all the believer's expectations are erroneous and he ends up, after a long life of hope and expectation,

in dusty death that has nothing beyond it?



The Deception of Worldly Bliss

The Muslim will be ready to concede victory to the disbeliever if it be true that he has really gained happiness in this world as he claims. If, however, we patiently consider the truth of the matter, we will find that the picture drawn of the disbelievers worldly bliss - midnight parties, drinking and intoxicants, pleasures unmolested by fear of the prohibition taboo - is truly misery in essence. Such a life is, in truth, slavery to insatiable appetites that, no sooner are satisfied, hunger again for more, and if sated they grow dull and weary causing the disbeliever to fall into indolence and sloth.

Are the embraces of women the place to find lasting happiness in? We know that affections fluctuate, that passion is volatile, and that beautiful women are seduced by mere words of praise. The stories of 'lovers' tell only of unhappiness, which is exacerbated and crowned with greater disappointment if the illusory infatuation ends in the realities which marriage bring. For in that latter estate each party will yearn for the desired perfections in the other he imagined were there. After the lust is slaked and the desire abates each will come to see the other's defects, enlarged as if through a magnifying glass.

What about great wealth? It is merely another form of slavery. The wealthy, in fact, are put in the service of their riches; they are enslaved in the process of aggrandizing, collecting, and guarding them, thus becoming their servants in a reversal of the normal, or at least expected, course of events.

What about power and glory? Aren't they, in essence, pitfalls leading

to arrogance and tyranny. The person in power is like a rider on a lion: today he has the reins in his hand but tomorrow he is eaten by the beast that carries him.

Indulgence is only a Form of Escape

And are wine, drugs, gambling, lechery, and secret sex, unhampered by fear of the unlawful, aspects of happiness? They are, in truth, but forms of escape from mind, from conscience, from the spirit's yearning and human responsibility by drowning oneself in the fire of lust and the rabidness of appetites. Is this really a superior manner of living or a degeneration, back to the hording of apes and the copulation of animals? The Qur'an has struck the perfect truth when it described the 'unbelievers'.

"...The unbelievers take their fill of pleasures and eat as beasts eat; but Hell shall be their home".

(47, 12)

It is not denied that the unbelievers enjoy their life; but this joy is like that of animals. Is it really a form of happiness? This life of lust is only a series of stimulated desires, tensions, consuming hunger, and gorging surfeit. It has no relation whatsoever to true happiness which can only be attained in a state of spiritual peace and relief, and of spiritual liberation from all forms of slavery.

True Happiness

In its final definition true happiness is a state of peace between man and his soul, others, and Allah. .

If we look at nature, we see that everything is in a state of submission and obedience to Law - the Law of Allah. We find no disorder or chaos in them. Superb harmony and perfect order is

evident in the system of nature. This is why we find eternal peace in the natural world. If human beings were to follow the guidance vouchsafed to us through the Prophets and Messengers of Allah, we too are sure to have peace in the world we live in.

This reconciliation, peace, and sense of internal quietude can only be reached through a certain expenditure of effort when man devotes his strength, wealth, and health to the service of others, when he lives, in intention and deed, a life of goodness and charity, and when his relationship with Allah is deepened by prayer and reverence reciprocated from the Divine by Help, Light, and Tranquility.

Such happiness is the essence of Islam – the word Islam literally meaning ‘Peace through Submission to Allah’. Didn't the mystic in his rags cry out, "We live in such bliss that kings would fight us with swords in hand for it, if they but knew". Those who have tasted that bliss, the bliss of communion with Allah and peace with the self, know that the mystic is quite right.

The Mind-Set of the Believer

It is true that even the believer is sometimes infatuated with the glamour of the world, “even sometimes expressing blasphemous ideas and attitudes outstretching even the most disbelieving in audacity”? What then sets the believer on the opposite course?

The answer is that the believer looks around himself and finds that death and dust are absurd and meaningless jests. He sees the universe in which he lives precisely and accurately governed with no room for aberration or disorder. "If my life was meaningless and destined for nothingness, as the 'absurdists' imagine," the believer asks, "Why is it, then, that I weep, repent, or feel a burning yearning for truth and justice willing to sacrifice my life and blood for such values."

He sees majesty and harmony in the universe, its stars and galaxies, he sees beauty in the leaves of trees, in the feathers of peacocks, and in the wings of butterflies. He hears delightful music in the chanting of hoopoes and the chattering of birds. Wherever he turns his face he sees the brush strokes of a painter, the designs of intelligence, and the creations of an inventive hand.

He observes in nature an integrated, accurately wrought structure in which anything coincidental or haphazard is impossible. Every phenomenon cries out, "I have been planned by a designer and created by a Powerful Creator." Even within himself he sees miracles : the human brain, the wonder of wonders, containing one hundred billion neurons all working at the same time in miraculous harmony. He knows that if just one fault occurred, it would immediately result in his own paralysis, blindness, loss of speech, mental confusion, or hallucination. Such defects, however, are only exceptional. What power, then, maintains the safety of this enormous machine and who endowed it with all those perfections he asks ?

He reads the Qur'an and finds in his ears a resonance and rhythm unknown in familiar language. It staggers his mind. It delivers the conclusive word in everything that it touches upon: matters of state, morals, legislation, the universe, life, the self, and society; and that in spite of its being revealed more than one thousand four hundred years ago.

The Qur'an accords with all that the most brilliant minds have discovered or invented, despite being brought to the world by an illiterate bedouin from a primitive nation which did not know the light of civilization. He reads the history of that man and of his deeds, and concludes that he was truly a prophet. He could not have been but a prophet and this wonderful universe could not have been created but by an All-Powerful God whom the Qur'an mentions and Who's works it describes.

There is no Fate Worse than Disbelief

As to the question of what would happen if all the believer's expectations are erroneous and he ends up, after a long life of hope and expectation, in dusty death that has nothing beyond it? The answer is that the believer would not have lost anything! He would certainly have enjoyed as full, happy, and eventful a life as can be. It is the disbeliever, however, who will lose much if the beliefs and expectations of a Muslim are proved true. The convincing argument of faith floods the disbeliever with terror, exposing the fact that for all his arrogance, obstinacy, and obduracy, the disbeliever is always standing precariously on the edge of an abyss of doubts, emptiness, and nihilism, clutching at nothing.

There is no sin or fate worse than disbelief.





"Acquire the knowledge of revelation.

It enableth its possessor
to distinguish right from wrong;
It lighteth the way to heaven;
It is our friend in the desert,
our society in solitude
and our companion when friendless;
It guideth us to happiness;
It sustaineth us in misery;
It is an ornament amongst friends,
and an armour against enemies."

This book addresses the questions that most believers tend to be very reluctant to confront :

IF ALLAH (God) CREATED ME, WHO CREATED ALLAH?
HAVE I BEEN CREATED MERELY FOR WORSHIP?
IF ALLAH HAS PREORDAINED MY DEEDS,
WHY SHOULD HE JUDGE ME?
WHY DID ALLAH CREATE EVIL?
WHAT ABOUT THOSE UNREACHED BY THE QUR'AN?
COULD MUHAMMAD BE THE AUTHOR OF THE QUR'AN?
WHY DOES THE DISBELIEVER GO TO HELL FOREVER?
DO WE REALLY HAVE A SOUL? ...ETC.

The purpose of compiling this book is to present to the English speaking public an instructive insight into some of the most basic doctrines and principles of Islamic belief in a manner that may be helpful in removing the doubts and misgivings raised in the sphere of religious belief in these modern, materialistic times in general & against Islam in particular.

Muslims have undoubtedly been effected by the modern world such that their identity has become indistinct, their values tarnished with secularism and their vision constricted to oppressively narrow horizons. This treatise is aimed at reasserting that identity, purifying those values and expanding those horizons.

