



Revelation and Prophethood

[Man and Universe]

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Publisher(s): Islamic Seminary Publications

www.alhassanain.org/english

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Chapter 1: Revelation and Prophethood

Universal Guidance

A belief in revelation and Prophethood emanates from a particular conception of the world and man, which involves a belief in the universality of Divine guidance. The principle of universal guidance is a part of the monotheistic conception of the world as presented by Islam. As Allah, the Almighty is a compulsorily self-existing in every respect and absolutely Beneficent, He extends His favour to every species of the existing things in accordance with its capability and guides it on its evolutionary journey. This guidance covers everything from the tiniest particle to the largest star and from the lowest lifeless existence to the highest living being known to us, that is man. That is why the Holy Qur'an has used the word revelation in connection with the guidance of inorganic material, plants and animals as it has used it in connection with the guidance of man.

No existing thing in this world is at rest. Everything is moving towards its goal. At the same time all indications show that everything is pushed to its goal by a mysterious force existing within it. It is this force that is called Divine guidance. The Holy Qur'an reports that Prophet Musa said to the Fir'awn of his time:

"Our Lord is He who gave everything its distinctive nature and then guided it." (Surah Ta Ha, 20:50)

Our world is a world of goals. Everything is being attracted to its evolutionary goal by an inner force, or Divine guidance.

The word wahi meaning revelation has been repeatedly used in the Holy Qur'an. The way how it has been used and the occasions on which it has been used, show that the Holy Qur'an does not consider the revelation to be confined to man. The Holy Qur'an believes it to be effective in the case of everything, at least in the case of all living beings. That is why it talks of revelation even to the bee. All that may be said is that revelation and guidance have degrees which vary in accordance with the degree of the evolution of the different things.

The highest degree of revelation is that which is made to the Prophets. This kind of revelation is based on man's need of Divine guidance so that he may proceed towards a goal beyond the perceptible and material world, to which he must go in any case. In addition, revelation meets man's requirements in his social life which needs a Divinely sanctioned law. We have already explained man's need to an evolutionary ideology and his inability to frame such an ideology himself.

The Prophets are a sort of a receiving set in human form. They are chosen individuals capable of receiving guidance and knowledge from the invisible world. It is Allah alone who can judge who is fit to be a Prophet. The Holy Qur'an says.

"Allah knows best whom to entrust with His message." (Surah al-An'am, 6:124)

Though revelation is a phenomenon, which is beyond the purview of direct human perception and experiment, its impact can be felt, like the impact of many other forces, in the effects which it produces. Divine

revelation produces a deep and tremendous impact on the personality of its recipient, that is the Prophet. It 'raises' the Prophet to truth. In other words, it stimulates his talents and faculties and brings about a deep and big revolution in his person for the good of humanity. It endows him with an absolute conviction. History has not witnessed such a conviction as that of the Prophets and the persons produced by them.

Characteristics of Prophets

The Prophets who through revelation come in contact with the source of existence, have certain distinguishing characteristics to which we refer below:

(i) Miracles:

Every Prophet raised by Allah was endowed with a kind of supernatural power by means of which he worked one or more miracles to prove the truth and Divinity of his message and mission.

The Holy Qur'an calls the miracles wrought by the Prophets by the will of Allah, 'Ayat' that is the sign of Prophethood. The Holy Qur'an says that in every age the people have asked the Prophets of their time to work some miracles for them. The demand being reasonable and logical, the Prophets acceded to it, because otherwise it was not possible for those who sought truth, to acknowledge their Prophethood. Anyway the Prophets declined to accede to a request for a miracle if it was made with an intention other than seeking truth. For example, if an offer was made in the form of a bargain and the people said to a Prophet that they would embrace his faith only if he worked a particular miracle, their request was ignored. However, the Holy Qur'an has recounted many miracles of the Prophets, such as bringing the dead to life, curing the incurable, speaking in the cradle, turning a staff into a serpent, describing the unknown and foretelling future events.

(ii) Infallibility:

Another distinguishing feature of the Prophets is their infallibility, that is their immunity from committing a sin or making a mistake. The Prophets are not carried away by their personal desires. They do not err. Their infallibility is indisputable. But what does their infallibility actually mean? Does it mean that whenever they are about to commit a sin or to make a mistake, an angel comes and stops them in the same way as a father prevents his child from going astray?

Or does it mean that the Prophets have been created in such a way that they are incapable of doing anything wrong just like an angel who, for example, cannot commit adultery for he has no sexual desire, or like a machine, which makes no mistake because it has no brain?

Or is it that the reason why the Prophets do not sin nor do they err is that they have been endowed with a particular degree of intuition, faith and conviction?

Yes, that is the only right explanation. Now let us take up each of these two kinds of immunity separately.

Immunity from Sins:

Man is a free being. He himself determines what is beneficial to him and what is harmful, and on that basis he decides what he should do. His judgement plays an important role in his choice. It is impossible that he should choose to do a thing which according to his judgement is rather harmful to him than beneficial. For example a sensible man interested in his life would never throw himself down from a hilltop nor would take a lethal poison.

Individuals vary from the viewpoint of the strength of their faith and the extent of their consciousness of the consequences of a sin. The stronger their faith and the keener their consciousness, the less sins they will commit. Should the faith of a man be so strong that while committing a sin he feels as if he was throwing himself down from the top of a hill, the chance of his sinning will be nil. We call this state infallibility. Here infallibility originates from the perfection of faith and piety. To be infallible and immune, man does not require an external force to restrain him from committing sins, nor is there any need of his being powerless by nature. Not to commit a sin is not commendable if a man is unable to commit it, or is prevented from committing it by an external force. The position of a man who is unable to commit a sin is similar to that of a prisoner who is unable to commit a fraud. Naturally a prisoner cannot be described as an honest and upright man.

Immunity of the Prophets from sins and errors is an outcome of their intuition. A mistake occurs when a man comes into contact with a reality through his internal and external senses and forms some mental pictures of it which he analyses with the help of his mental faculties. In that case he may make a mistake in arranging his mental pictures or applying them to the external reality. But when he comprehends an external reality direct through a special sense, having no need of forming any mental picture of it, and his very apprehension of a reality means his direct contact with it, the question of making any mistake does not arise.

The Prophets have, a contact with the realities of the world from within themselves. Naturally no mistake can be imagined to exist in a reality itself. For example, if we put 100 rosary beads in a receptacle, then put another 100 beads in it and repeat this act 100 times, we may not be able to keep the count correctly and may not be sure whether we have repeated the action 100 times, 99 times or 101 times. But the actual reality cannot be different from what it is. Though the action has been repeated 100 times, the actual number of the beads can neither be less nor more than what it is. The men who are in the midst of reality and close to the root of existence are immune from making any kind of mistake. They are infallible.

Difference Between Prophets and Geniuses

From here the difference between the Prophets and the geniuses also becomes clear. The geniuses are the persons of exalted intellectual power and extraordinary understanding. They work on their own mental data and arrive at a conclusion by means of their intellectual power. They sometimes make mistakes in their calculations.

The Prophets besides being blessed with their intellectual and calculating powers, are equipped with an additional power called revelation, which the geniuses lack. Hence there can be no comparison between the geniuses and the Prophets. They belong to two different categories. We can make a comparison between the seeing or the hearing power of two persons, but we cannot compare one man's seeing power with another man's hearing power and say which is stronger. The geniuses have an extraordinary thinking power, whereas the Prophets have quite a different power called revelation. They maintain a close contact with the Source of existence. Therefore it is wrong to draw a comparison between the two.

(iii) Guidance:

The Prophethood begins with a spiritual journey from the creation to Allah and gain proximity to Him, which implies turning away from the externality to the internality. Anyhow, eventually it ends by the Prophet's returning to the people with a view to reforming human life and guiding it to the right path.

In Arabic there are two words for the Prophet, Nabi and Rasul. The first literally means a bringer of news and the second a messenger.

A Prophet conveys the message of Allah to the people and awakens and organizes their dormant powers. He invites them to Allah and to all that pleases Him, namely peace, cordiality, reformation, non-violence, veracity, uprightness, justice, emancipation from everything ungodly, love and all other virtues. A Prophet delivers humanity from the shackles of submission to base desires and false gods.

Dr. Iqbal describing the difference between the Prophets and all other individuals having 'unitary experience' says: "The mystic does not wish to return from the repose of his 'unitary experience'; and even when he does return, as he must, his return does not mean much for mankind at large. The Prophet's return is creative. He returns to insert himself into the sweep of time with a view to control the forces of history, and thereby to create a fresh world of ideals. For the mystic the repose of 'unitary experience' is something final; for the Prophet it is the awakening within him and the unleashing psychological forces, calculated to completely transform the human world." (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 124).

(iv) Sincerity of Purpose:

As the Prophets have a trust in Allah and are never oblivious of the mission entrusted to them by Him, they accomplish their duty with utmost sincerity. They have no aim other than the guidance of humanity as ordered by Allah, and ask for no remuneration for the performance of their mission.

The Holy Qur'an in Surah ash-Shu'ara has summed up what many of the Prophets said to their peoples. Of course every Prophet had a message for his people which was suited to the problems they faced. Anyhow there was a point which was revealed in the message of every Prophet. Each of them said: "I want no remuneration or wages from you". Therefore sincerity is one of the distinguishing features of Prophethood; and that is why the message of the Prophets has always been so firm.

As the Prophets felt that they had been 'raised' and they did not entertain the least doubt about the fact that they had been entrusted with an essential and useful mission, preached their message and defended it with unprecedented firmness and utmost conviction.

When Prophet Musa and his brother, Harun went to Fir'awn, they had no appurtenances with them except the woolen clothes on their body and their wooden staffs in their hands. They asked Fir'awn to accept their message and told him firmly that if he would accept it, his honour would be safeguarded, otherwise he would lose his government. Fir'awn was stunned by what they said.

In the early days of his Prophethood when the number of the Muslims did not exceed that of the fingers of the two hands, the Holy Prophet of Islam one day, known in history as the Day of the Warning, assembled elders of the Bani Hashim, conveyed his message to them and firmly and expressly told them that his religion was going to spread throughout the world and that it was in their own interest to embrace it. To them these words were unbelievable. They looked at each other with wide open eyes and dispersed without uttering a word.

When his uncle, Abu Talib conveyed to him the message of the Quraysh, saying that they were willing to select him their king, to give to him in marriage the most beautiful daughter of the tribe and make him the most wealthy member of their society, provided he gave up his preachings, the Holy Prophet said in reply that he was not going to budge an inch from his sacred mission even if they put the sun in one of his hands and the moon in the other.

Just as infallibility is a necessary outcome of a Prophet's communication with Allah, similarly sincerity and firmness are also the essential characteristics of Prophethood.

(v) Constructiveness:

The Prophets harness all the forces at their disposal and set them in motion for constructive purposes, that is to reform both the individual and society or in other words, to ensure human welfare. It is impossible that their activities should corrupt any individual or cause harm to society at large. Therefore if the preachings of a claimant of Prophethood lead to corruption or indecency, paralyze human power or cause decline of society, that is clear proof of his being an imposter. Dr Iqbal in this connection has very aptly said: "Another way of judging the value of a Prophet's religious experience would be to examine the type of manhood that he has created, and the cultural world that has sprung out of the spirit of his message". (The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam, p. 124)

(vi) Struggle and Conflict:

His struggle against idolatry, myths, ignorance, false ideas and tyranny is another sign of the truth of a Prophet. It is impossible that in the message of a person selected by Allah to be His Prophet there should be anything smacking of idolatry, supporting tyranny and injustice or tolerating polytheism, ignorance, myths, cruelty or despotism.

Monotheism, reason and justice are some of the principles which have been preached by all the Prophets. The message of only those who preach these principles is worth consideration and they alone can be asked to produce a proof or a miracle. If the message preached by a person contains an element indisputably unreasonable or contrary to the principles of monotheism and justice, or supporting tyranny, then it is not worth consideration at all. In such a case it is absolutely unnecessary to ask him to produce a proof of his claim. Similar is the case of a pretender, who commits a sin, makes a blunder or is unable to guide people because of a physical defect or some loathsome disease like leprosy, or because his teachings do not have constructive effect on human life. Even if such a pretender works miracles, it is absurd to follow him.

(vii) Human Aspect:

The Prophets, in spite of having many supernatural qualities, such as infallibility, the power of working miracles, the incomparable power of guidance, and reconstruction and the power of making unique struggle against polytheism, myths and tyranny, are after all human beings. They, like all other men eat, sleep, walk, beget and eventually die. They are subject to all essential human needs. They are obligated to perform the same religious duties as others. They like others are subject to all the religious laws conveyed through them.

Sometimes they have even some additional duties. The pre-dawn prayers which are supererogatory for others were obligatory for the Holy Prophet. The Prophets never considered themselves to be exempted from any religious injunctions. They, more than others had fear of Allah and they more than others worshipped Him. They offered prayers; kept fast; took part in the holy war; paid zakat and showed kindness to others. The Prophets worked hard for their own weal as well as the weal for the others. They were never a burden on anyone else in their life.

The revelation and the features connected with it constitute the only difference between the Prophets and others. The fact that they receive revelation does not exclude them from the category of human being. On the other hand it makes them a model of the perfect man. That is the reason why they are so fit to guide others.

(viii) Prophets Having A Divine Legal Code:

Generally speaking, the Prophets can be divided into two categories: The first category, which is in minority, is composed of those Prophets to whom independent codes of law were revealed, and who were ordered to guide the people on the basis of these codes. The Holy Qur'an has termed them the 'high-minded' Prophets. We do not know their number exactly. The Holy Qur'an expressly says that it has recounted the stories of only a few of the Prophets. Had it recounted the stories of all of them or at least had stated that it had recounted the stories of all those who were important among them, we might have known the number of the high-minded Prophets. Anyhow, we know that Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, 'Isa and Muhammad, the last Prophet (Peace be on them) are included among them. Independent codes of

law were revealed to all 'high-minded' Prophets, who were asked to train their followers on the basis of them.

The second category of the Prophets consists of those who had not their own independent codes of law but were asked to preach and propagate the already existing Divine laws. Most of the Prophets belong to this category which includes such names as those of Hud, Salih, Lut, Ishaq, Yaqub, Yusuf, Yushu, Shuayb, Harun, Zachariyyah and Yahya (may peace be upon them).

Chapter 2: Historical Role of the Prophet

Have the Prophets any positive or negative role in the movement of history? If they have, what is that? Is it positive or negative?

Even the anti-religious people admit that the Prophets have had an effective role in history. In the past they represented a great source of national power. In olden days the national power, was distinguished from blood relationships, tribal affinities and patriotic feelings or from religious tendencies and doctrinal bonds. The tribal heads and the national chiefs represented the first tendency and the Prophets and religious leaders the second. There are no two opinions about the fact that the Prophets constituted a force because of their religious influence. Anyhow, there are several views as to how this force worked:

(i) A section of people in their writings generally argue that as the Prophets had a spiritual and anti-temporal outlook, their role has been negative. These people hold that the central point of the teachings of the Prophets has been the renunciation of this world, concentration on the next, and introspection and escape from the external realities. That is why the force of religion and the Prophets, who have been a symbol of this force, have always discouraged people from taking interest in the worldly life and have applied a brake to progress. Thus the role of the Prophets has always been negative in history. This is the view which is expressed generally by those who claim to be broad-minded.

(ii) There is another section of people, who also maintain that the religious people have played a negative role, but the argument advanced by them is quite different. They maintain that the religious people are actually worldly-oriented and their spiritual orientation is merely a disguise to deceive the simple-minded. The efforts of the religious people have always been, directed toward securing the interests of the oppressors and, beguiling the oppressed. They have endeavoured to maintain the status quo, and opposed the evolution of society.

The supporters of this view say that history like any other phenomenon has a dialectical movement, which originates from its internal contradiction. With the emergence of proprietorship society was divided into two conflicting classes, one of them being the ruling and exploiting class and the other the deprived and exploited. With a view to protect its own special position the ruling class has always been anxious to maintain the existing situation and in spite of the inevitable development of production implements has wanted to keep society as it is. But the subjugated class in consonance with the development of the production implements wants to change the existing situation and to replace it with a more developed one.

The ruling class has used various tactics, and to achieve its nefarious ends has employed the three factors of force, wealth and deceit. In this game the role of the man of religion has been to hoodwink the people in the interest of the tyrants and exploiters. The people of religion have not been seriously interested in the Hereafter. Their pretention of godliness is only a disguise to conceal their worldliness and is intended to divert the attention of the underprivileged and the revolutionaries.

Thus the role of the men of religion has always been negative for they have always supported the wealthy and the powerful people interested in maintaining the existing institutions. This is the theory put forward by the Marxists to explain historical development. According to Marxism the three factors of religion, government and wealth are coeval with private property and all over history have played a role against the interests of the masses.

(iii) Some other people interpret history in a way different from that of the Marxists. Anyhow they too consider the role of religion and the Prophets to be negative. They hold that the law of natural evolution and the law of the development of history are based on the domination of the strong and the elimination of the weak. The strong have contributed and are contributing to the progress of history, whereas the weak have been and are responsible for its stagnation and decline. Religion has been invented by the weak to apply a brake to the strong.

The proponents of religions have invented such slavish moral conceptions as justice, freedom, virtue, love, compassion, cooperation etc. They did so in the interest of the weak, that is the lower classes and to the disadvantage of the strong, that is the upper classes which bring about progress and development. The people of religion brought the psychological forces of the strong under their control and prevented the elimination of the weak. Thus they have hampered the improvement of human race and the birth of the heroes.

Therefore the role of religion and the Prophets who represent it has been negative, because they have supported the slavish mentality against the masterly qualities which contribute to the advancement of history and society. This is the view of the German philosopher, Nietzsche.

(iv) Besides the above mentioned three groups, there are others which also include some anti-religious people. They admit that the role of the Prophets in the past has been positive and fruitful and contributed to the progress of history. These groups give due consideration to the social and moral content of the teachings of the Prophets and to the historical events connected therewith. They admit that in the past the Prophets played the most fundamental role in the reform, welfare and progress of their society.

Human culture has two aspects: Material and Spiritual. The material aspect of culture is its technical and industrial aspect which has continued to develop in every age till today. Its spiritual aspect concerns the mutual relations of the human beings, for the correct determination of which humanity is indebted to the teachings of the Prophets. As it is under the shadow of the spiritual aspect of culture that its material aspect gets an opportunity to grow and develop on correct lines, the role of the Prophets in the development of the spiritual aspect of civilization is direct and in the development of its material aspect indirect. According to these groups there can be no doubt about the positive role of the teachings of the Prophets in the past.

Anyhow some of these groups are of the opinion that the time of the positive role of the teachings of the Prophets is now over. They assert that with the advancement of science the religious teachings have lost their validity a great deal and in future also they will continue to lose their

vitality. In contrast certain other groups hold that the role of faith and religious ideology can never be replaced by science, howsoever progress it may make. Science will always be as unable to replace religion as philosophical schools have been.

The Prophets have had various roles in the past. It is true that there are certain cases in which the collective human conscience is no longer in need of a religious support. But the most fundamental roles performed by the Prophets are those which will be as much required in future as they were in the past. Here are some instances in which the teachings of the Prophets have influenced historical development

(i) Education:

In the past education had a religious motive, and it was this motive which encouraged the teachers and the parents. With the development of social conscience the need of religious motive has been eliminated in this field.

(ii) Affirmation of Agreements and Covenants:

Social life of man stands on the respect of the treaties, covenants and agreements and on abiding by the promises and undertakings. Respect of the agreements and promises is one of the mainstays of the human aspects of culture. To ensure this respect is a role which religion has always shouldered and for which no replacement has been found till today. Will Durant, an atheist, as he is, admits this fact in his book, Lessons from History. He says: "Religion with the help of its rituals has conferred the reverence of man-God relations on human compacts and in this way has brought about constancy and firmness to them".

On the whole religion has provided a strong support to the moral and human values. Moral values minus religion are like currency notes having no financial backing. Such notes soon lose their value.

(iii) Emancipation from Social Bondage:

The role of the Prophets in the fight against despotism, tyranny and all aspects of oppression and persecution is the most basic. The Holy Qur'an lays stress on this role of the Prophets. It describes the establishment of justice as the main object of their being raised. The Holy Qur'an again and again recounts the stories of the conflict between the Prophets and the representatives of despotism. In a number of verses it has expressly mentioned that those who constantly opposed the Prophets belonged to this class.

The view expressed by Marx and his followers to the effect that religion, government and wealth are the three facts of the coercion of the ruling class against the underprivileged and the oppressed, is nothing but humbug. It is contrary to the indisputable historical facts. Explaining the view of Marx, Dr Arani says: "Religion has always been a tool in the hands of the dominating ruling class of society. In order to overpower the suppressed classes the rosary and cross always move side by side with the bayonet".

To be able to accept such an interpretation of history one will have to shut his eyes and overlook the historical facts. Imam Ali is the champion of the sword and the rosary both. He is a swordsman as well as a man of

rosary. But he did not use them to suppress the underprivileged. His motto was: "Oppose the oppressor and help the oppressed".

Throughout his life Imam Ali was a votary of the sword against those who possessed pelf and power. As Dr Ali al-Wardi has pointed out in his book, Comedy of Human Intellect, Imam Ali with his personality has refuted the philosophy of Marx.

The view of Nietzsche, which is diametrically opposed to that of Marx, is even more absurd. According to him, religion is a factor of stagnation and decline because it supports the weak while it is the powerful who form the most progressive class responsible for the development of society. It appears that in the opinion of Nietzsche human society makes speedy progress only when it is governed by the law of jungle. According to Marx the underprivileged people are the factor of development and the Prophets were against this class. But Nietzsche thinks that powerful are the factor of development and the Prophets opposed them. Marx says that religion is an invention of the powerful and the wealthy.

Nietzsche, on the other hand maintains that it is an invention of the weak and the underprivileged. Evidently Marx was wrong on several counts. Firstly he interpreted history merely on the basis of the contradiction of class interests, and overlooked its human aspect. Secondly he regarded the underprivileged alone as the factor of development. Thirdly he considered the Prophets to be the supporters of the ruling class. As for Nietzsche, he has made the mistake of regarding the factor of force as the factor of the development of history in the sense that he has equated the more powerful man with the superior man and has believed that the more powerful man alone is the factor that carried history forward.

Chapter 3: The Object of Prophethood

As now the role of the Prophets in the development of history has been made clear to a certain extent, we take up another question. The question is: What is the main object or the final goal for which the Prophets were raised and the Divine Books sent down?

In general terms it may be said that the main object is the guidance, salvation, well-being and prosperity of people.

There is no doubt that the Prophets were raised for guiding people to the straight path and saving their souls. But that is not the point. The point is to what final goal this straight path leads. What does the well-being of people imply according to the school of the Prophets? From what restraints and impediments does this school want to deliver man? What constitutes the ultimate good and prosperity according to it?

The Holy Qur'an in a number of verses has either expressly dealt with this subject or has hinted at it. It has mentioned two definite points which constitute the ultimate object of Prophethood, while the teachings of the Prophets are a prelude to them. These points are:

- (i) The acknowledgement of Allah and coming close to Him and
- (ii) The establishment of justice and fairplay in human society.

The Holy Qur'an says: "Prophet, We have surely sent you as a witness, a bringer of good tidings, a warner, a summoner to Allah by His permission and as a lamp that gives light." (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:45 - 46)

It is evident that out of all the qualities mentioned in this verse, the only quality which is fit to be considered the main object is that of summoning to Allah.

The Holy Qur'an in respect of the Prophets says: "We surely sent Our Messengers with clear proofs and revealed on them the Book and the criterion (to judge what is right and what is wrong) so that people may establish justice." (Surah al-Hadid, 57:25)

This verse expressly describes the establishment of justice as an object of raising the Prophets.

Summoning people to acknowledge Allah and to come close to Him implies preaching the theoretical and individualistic form of practical monotheism, and to establish justice and fairplay in society implies establishing practical monotheism on social level.

Now the question arises whether the main object of the coming of the Prophets is the acknowledgement of Allah, and all other things including the establishment of social justice are a prelude to it, or the main object is the establishment of social justice and the acknowledgement and worship of Allah are the means of the realization of that idea? If we use the same terminology as used by us earlier, we can thus recast this question: Is the main object theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism on individual level or is it practical monotheism on social level? Several answers have been given to this question:

- (i) From the viewpoint of the object, the Prophets were dualists. In other words their object was two fold. One of their objects concerned the next worldly life and human success in the Hereafter (theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism on individual level). The other object concerned

human success in this world (social monotheism). In order to ensure the prosperity of mankind in this world the Prophets preached social monotheism and to ensure human well-being in the next world they preached theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism on individual level, which is purely a spiritual and intellectual matter.

(ii) Another view is that the main object of the Prophets is social monotheism. Theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism on individual level are essential preliminaries to it. Theoretical monotheism concerns the acknowledgement of Allah. Man as such is in no need of acknowledging Him. It is immaterial for man whether the force motivating his spirit is Allah or thousands of other things. Similarly it makes no difference to Allah whether man acknowledges Him or does not acknowledge, worships Him or does not worship.

Anyhow perfection of man depends on his adherence to collective monotheism, which in its turn cannot be achieved without the materialization of theoretical monotheism and practical monotheism on individual level. Allah has enjoined on man to acknowledge Him and worship Him so that collective monotheism may take a practical shape.

(iii) The third view is that the main object is the acknowledgement of Allah and coming near to Him. Social monotheism is the means of achieving this noble object. As we mentioned earlier, according to the monotheistic conception of the world its nature is 'from Him' 'to Him'. Hence man's perfection lies in going to Him and gaining His nearness. Man has one special distinction. Allah has said: "I have breathed into him My spirit." (Surah al-Hijr, 15:29)

As such man's, reality is Divine. By nature he seeks Allah. His well-being, evolution, safety and prosperity all lie in the acknowledgement and worship of Allah and in making an advancement towards Him. The Prophets have undertaken to establish justice and to do away with tyranny and discrimination, because man being social by nature, we can have no conception of him apart from society. He cannot strive to seek proximity to Allah also, if a just system does not prevail in society. In fact such social values as justice, freedom, equality and democracy and such moral qualities as generosity, forgiveness, love and charity have no intrinsic value of their own. They in themselves are not the qualities denoting human excellence. They are simply the means of gaining excellence and perfection, not the ends. They pave the way for prosperity and salvation but do not constitute salvation.

(iv) The fourth theory is similar to the third one in so far as according it also the goal or the highest degree of excellence not only of man but of every existing thing is to move towards Allah. But according to it, it is polytheistic to assert that the Prophets have had a twofold object. Similarly it is a materialistic idea to say that the ultimate object of the Prophets is this worldly prosperity, which is nothing but the enjoyment of the gifts of nature in an atmosphere of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Anyhow, according to this theory, though social and moral values are only a means of reaching the real value, that is the acknowledgement of Allah and His worship, they do not totally lack an intrinsic value of their own.

The relationship between a preliminary and the main object is of two kinds. In certain cases the preliminary serves only as a prelude and after the object is achieved, its existence or nonexistence becomes immaterial. For example, a man wants to cross a water channel and for that purpose he puts a stone in the middle of it. Evidently after he has crossed the channel, the existence or the non-existence of that stone is of no importance to him.

The same is the case with the ladder used to climb to a roof and the mark-sheet of a class for the purpose of promotion to the next higher class. In some other cases a preliminary does not lose its value even after the main object has been achieved. Even after the realization of the main object, its existence still remains necessary. For example, the information which is acquired by a student in class I and class II is still required by him when he reaches a higher class. He cannot afford to forget all that he had learnt in these classes. He can continue to be in a higher class only if he retains the knowledge that he acquired in these lower classes.

The explanation is that in some cases a preliminary is a lower stage of the object itself, whereas in some other cases it is not. A ladder is not a stage of getting to the roof. Similarly a stone put in the middle of a channel is not a stage of crossing it. But the knowledge gained in lower classes and the knowledge to be gained in higher classes are the various stages of the same reality.

The relation between the moral and social values on the one hand and the acknowledgement and worship of Allah on the other is of the second type. A man who acknowledges Allah and worships Him cannot afford to be indifferent to honesty, righteousness, justice, charity, sincerity, munificence and forgiveness. All high and noble moral qualities are Divine.

There is a hadith which says: "Adopt the moral qualities of Allah". In fact the noble moral qualities are a part of the acknowledgement and worship of the Divine Being, for their adoption emanates from an inherent desire to have Divine attributes, though man may not be conscious of that fact. That is why according to Islamic teachings the good deeds of even the polytheists will not go in vain in the next world if they have such noble qualities as justice, generosity, philanthropy etc. They will be recompensed in some way or other provided their disbelief is not due to stubbornness. In fact such people attain a degree of godliness unconsciously.

Chapter 4: Religion or Religions

The scholars of divinity and the writers on the history of religion usually discuss their subject under the heading of religions. For example, they talk of Prophet Ibrahim's religion, the Jewish religion, the Christian religion and the religion of Islam. They regard every Prophet to whom a code of law was revealed as the founder of a separate religion.

But the Holy Qur'an has its own terminology and its own style. From its point of view there has been only one Divine religion from the beginning to the end. All Prophets irrespective of the fact whether they had or had not an independent code of law, had the same mission and preached the same message. Their basic principles called religion were the same. Their teachings differed only in rules and subsidiary matters of secondary importance which varied according to the requirements of the time, the peculiarities of the environment and the characteristics of the people whom these Prophets addressed. But in spite of the difference in the form of their teachings, all Prophets visualized one single goal.

Apart from the difference of form there was a difference of level also. The Prophets who came later, their teachings were of a higher level in keeping with the stage of the human development. For example, there is a vast difference in the level of the teachings of Islam and those of the earlier Prophets in respect of the genesis of man, the Hereafter and the conception of the world. In other words man vis-a-vis the teachings of the Prophets is like a student who is brought up step by step from class I to the highest class. This process signifies the development of religion, not the difference of religions.

The Holy Qur'an has nowhere here used the word religion in a plural form. From the point of view of the Holy Qur'an what has existed is the religion, not the religions. There exists one big difference between the Prophets and the great philosophers and other outstanding social leaders. Each eminent philosopher has had his own school. That is why so many schools of philosophy have always existed in the world. In contrast, the Prophets have always corroborated and never contradicted each other. Had any one of the Prophets lived in the time and environment of another Prophet, he would have preached the rules of law and conduct similar to those preached by the latter.

The Holy Qur'an declares expressly that all Prophets form one single series. The earlier Prophets foretold about the later ones, and the latter Prophets acknowledged the earlier ones. The Holy Qur'a'n also says that Allah made a covenant with the Prophets to the effect that they would believe in each other and help each other. It says:

"When Allah made the covenant with the Prophets, He said. 'Here are the Scripture and the wisdom which I have given you. Later a Prophet will come to you confirming what you possess. You shall believe in Him and you shall help him. He then said: 'Do you agree to this and take the responsibility I placed on you?' They answered: 'We agree. He said: 'Then bear witness and I will bear witness with you.'" (Surah Ale Imran, 3:81)

The Holy Qur'an calls the Divine religion Islam and described it as a continuous process from Adam to the last Prophet. This does not mean that

the Divine religion has always been known by this name. What is meant is that Islam is the best word to describe the nature of this religion. That is why the Holy Qur'an says: "There is no doubt that the only true faith in Allah's sight is Islam." (Surah Ale Imran, 3:19)

At another place the Holy Qur'an says: "Ibrahim was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright in faith and a Muslim" (Surah Ale Imran, 3:67)

Chapter 5: Finality of Prophethood

We have said that despite the differences in details all Prophets have delivered the same message and belonged to the same ideological school. The principles and teachings of this school were explained to human society gradually in proportion to its development till the humanity reached the stage when the entire teachings in a comprehensive form were presented. At this point Prophethood came to an end. The Holy Prophet, Muhammad bin Abdullah (Peace be on him and his progeny) was the person through whom the complete ideology was conveyed, and the Holy Qur'an was the last celestial Book. The Holy Qur'an itself says:

"In truth and justice has been perfected the word of your Lord. None can change His words." (Surah al-An'am, 6:115)

Now let us see why in the past the Prophethood was renewed from time to time and so many Prophets were raised in succession, though most of them were not given a new and independent code of law and were sent to promulgate then existing code? Why did this procedure come to an end with the last Prophet since whose time no Prophet, neither a law-giving one nor a preaching one has come, nor will ever come? Here we touch upon the reasons briefly.

Reasons of the Renewal of Prophethood

Though Prophethood is one continuous process and the Divine message, as the religion is not more than one reality, the reasons of the appearance of so many law-giving and preaching Prophets in succession and the termination of Prophethood after the advent of the last Prophet are as under:

Firstly the ancient man because of his intellectual immaturity was unable to preserve his celestial Book. Usually the Divine Books were either altered and corrupted or were lost totally. Therefore it was necessary that the message should be renewed from time to time. The revelation of the Holy Qur'an corresponded with a period when humanity had passed the period of its childhood and had become able to preserve its intellectual heritage. That is why there could be no alteration in the last Divine and Holy Book. The Muslims committed to memory and recorded in writing every verse of it as it was revealed, and did away with every possibility of addition, omission or alteration in it. Thus one of the reasons of the renewal of Prophethood disappeared.

Secondly, humanity being immature, it was not previously competent enough to have a comprehensive plan for its guidance, and hence it was necessary that it should be guided by the Prophets piecemeal and step by step.

Anyhow, by the period of the final Prophethood humanity had developed to the extent that it was able to have a comprehensive plan of conduct and it was no longer necessary that it should receive guidance stage by stage. Besides the extinction of the old celestial Books and the alteration in them, another reason for the continual renewal of Prophethood was that man in olden days was not able to receive a comprehensive plan. When his ability sufficiently developed, a comprehensive scheme was put at his disposal and this reason of the renewal of Prophethood also disappeared. Now the

Muslim scholars who were specialists in this field, can guide the Muslims in the light of this scheme and can frame the rules and procedures for them to suit every occasion.

Thirdly, the overwhelming majority of the Prophets consisted of the preaching and not the law-giving Prophets. The number of the law-giving Prophets did not exceed the number of the fingers of one hand. The task of the preaching Prophets was to propagate, interpret and promulgate the religious law prevailing during their time. Now the religious scholars of the age of the finality of Prophethood, which is the age of knowledge, are capable of applying the general principles of Islam to the requirements of the time and place and deducing the rules of religious laws.

This process is called ijthihad. The outstanding Muslim divines in this way perform many duties of the preaching Prophets and some of those even of the law-giving Prophet without being the law-givers themselves. They guide the Muslim Ummah. Thus, though the need of religion still exists and is expected to be ever increasing with the further cultural development of humanity, the need of the new Prophets and the new revealed Books has ceased to exist. And hence Prophethood has come to an end with the final Prophet.

It is clear from what has been mentioned that intellectual and social maturity of mankind has played a big role in the finality of Prophethood in several ways:

(i) It has enabled man to keep his celestial Book unaltered.

(ii) It has enabled him to receive his evolutionary programme all at once and not by stages.

(iii) It has enabled him to undertake the task of preaching and propagating religion, to set up religious institutions, to exhort people to do what is good and to restrain them from what is evil. Thus there is no longer any need of preaching Prophets who used to preach and propagate the teachings of the law-giving Prophets. This need is now being adequately fulfilled by the religious scholars and Divines.

(iv) From the viewpoint of mental development man has now reached a stage that in pursuance of his ijthihad he can interpret the revealed words and can apply the relevant principles to all the changing circumstances. This task is also being performed by the religious scholars.

It is evident that the finality of Prophethood does not mean that man is no longer in need of Divine teachings received through revelation. Prophethood has not come to an end because as the result of his mental development man is now able to dispense with religion.

The eminent scholar and great Muslim thinker, Dr Iqbal, in spite of his extraordinarily intelligent discussions of the Islamic questions by which we have personally been greatly benefited and of which we have made use in this and other books, has been involved in a great misunderstanding while explaining the philosophy of the finality of Prophethood. He has based his conclusions on certain points, which we mention below, point by point:

(i) The word 'wahi' (revelation) which literally means 'to whisper', has been used by the Holy Qur'an in an expanded sense to include every kind of inspired guidance whether its recipient be inorganic material, plants,

animals or man. He says: "This contact with the root of his own being is by no means peculiar to man. Indeed the way in which the word 'wahi' is used in the Holy Qur'an shows that the Holy Qur'an regards it as a universal property of life, though its nature and character are different at different stages of the evolution of life. The plant growing freely in space, the animal developing a new organ to suit a new environment, and a human being receiving light from the inner depths of life, are all cases of inspiration varying in character according to the needs of the recipient, or the needs of the species to which the recipient belongs". (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 125)

(ii) Wahi or revelation is a sort of instinct and the guidance by means of revelations is a sort of instinctive guidance.

(iii) Wahi is a guidance from collective point of view. Human society being a moving unit and subject to the laws of motion, is definitely in need of guidance. The Prophet is just like a receiving set which instinctively receives what is required by mankind in this respect. Dr Iqbal says: "The world-life intuitively sees its own needs and at critical moments defines its own direction. This is what, in the language of religion, we call Prophetic revelation". (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 147)

(iv) In their primitive stages the living beings are guided by their instinct. As they go to the higher stages of evolution and their faculties of feeling, imagination and thinking develop, the power of instinct is reduced and is replaced by feeling and thinking Power. Thus the insects have the most numerous and the strongest instincts and man the weakest and the smallest in number.

(v) From sociological point of view human society is passing through an evolutionary process, Just as the animals in their primary stages have been in need of instinct and have gradually developed their faculties of feeling and imagination, and in certain cases of thinking also, and their instinctive guidance has been replaced by the guidance through feeling and imagination, similarly man in his evolutionary process has gradually reached a stage in which his rationality has so developed that his instinctive power (wahi or inspiration) has weakened. Dr Iqbal says: "During the minority of mankind psychic energy develops what I call Prophetic consciousness - a mode of economizing individual thought and choice by providing ready-made judgements, choices and ways of action. With the birth of reason and critical faculty, however, life in its own interest inhibits the formation and growth of non-rational modes of consciousness through which psychic energy flowed at an earlier stage of human evolution. Man is primarily governed by passion and instinct. Inductive reason, which alone makes man master of his environment, is in itself an achievement. Once born it must be reinforced by inhibiting the growth of other modes of knowledge". (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 125).

(vi) Basically the world has passed through two ages: the age of inspiration and the age of rational thinking and reflection on nature and history. The ancient world produced a few great systems of philosophy (like Greek and Roman). Anyhow their value was limited as humanity was still passing through the period of its minority. Dr Iqbal says: "There is no doubt

that the ancient world produced some great systems of philosophy at a time when man was comparatively primitive and governed more or less by suggestion. But we must not forget that this system-building in the ancient world was the work of abstract thought, which cannot go beyond the systematization of vague religious beliefs and traditions, and gives us no hold on the concrete situations of life". (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 126)

(vii) The Holy Prophet with whom Prophethood came to end, belonged to the ancient as well as the modern world. As the source of his inspiration was revelation and not the experimental study of nature and history, he belonged to the ancient world; but as the spirit of his teachings called for rational thinking and the study of nature and history with the birth of which the job of revelation is terminated, he belonged to the modern world. Dr Iqbal says: "Looking at the matter from this point of view, the Prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world.

In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the ancient world; and in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction. The birth of Islam is the birth of inductive intellect. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot forever be kept in leading strings; hence, in order to achieve full self-consciousness, man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Holy Qur'an and the emphasis it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality". (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 126)

These are the main points of the philosophy of the finality of Prophethood as conceived by Dr Iqbal. Unfortunately this philosophy is unsound and several of its principles are incorrect.

The first objection to which it is amenable is that if this philosophy was accepted, that would mean that not only there was no longer any need of a new Prophet or a new revelation, but that there was also no need of any guidance by revelation at all, for experimental intellect had taken its place. This philosophy is the philosophy of the end of religion and not that of the finality of Prophethood.

If this philosophy was accepted, the only thing that Islamic revelation could do was to proclaim the end of the era of religion and the beginning of the era of reason and science. Evidently this idea is not only contrary to the belief in the necessity of Islam but is also contrary to the view held by Dr Iqbal himself. All his efforts in fact, are directed to prove that reason and science though necessary for human society are not enough. Man requires faith and religion as much as he requires science and knowledge. Dr Iqbal says in clear terms that life is in need of fixed principles as well as changing minor factors, and that ijthihad is meant to apply the set principles to the specific situations.

He says: "The new culture finds the foundation of world-unity in the principle of 'Tawhid' (monotheism). Islam as a polity is the only practical means of making this principle a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind. It demands loyalty to Allah, not to thrones. And since Allah is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to Him virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature. The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change.

A society based on such a conception of reality must reconcile, in its life, to the categories of permanence and change. It must possess eternal principles to regulate its collective life; because eternity gives us a foothold in the world of perpetual change. But eternal principles when they are understood to exclude all possibilities of change which, according to the Holy Qur'an, is one of the greatest signs of Allah, tend to immobilize what is essentially mobile in its nature. The failure of Europe in political and social science illustrates the former principle; the immobility of Islam during the last 500 years illustrates the latter. What then is the principle of movement in Islam? This is known as 'ijtihad'. (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 147)

According to the above statement, guidance of revelation will always be required, and the guidance provided by experimental intellect will never be able to take its place. Dr Iqbal himself supports the principle of the permanent need of guidance. But the philosophy he has put forward to explain the finality of Prophethood, requires that not only there should be no need of any new Prophet and new revelation, but that religion itself should come to an end.

This misleading interpretation of finality by Dr Iqbal means that man's need of guidance and education by the prophets is of the same nature as the need of a class by a child.

The child every year goes to the next class and changes his teacher. Similarly man in every period has gone to the next stage, and required a new code of religious law. When the child reaches the final class, he completes his education and gets a certificate to that effect. Thereafter he is no longer in need of a teacher and can carry on his research independently. In the same way the man of the age of finality with the proclamation of the end of Prophethood has secured the certificate of the completion of his education. He can now undertake the study of Nature and History independently. That is what ijtihad means. With the end of Prophethood man has reached the stage of self-sufficiency.

There is no doubt that such an interpretation of the finality of Prophethood is wrong. The consequent results of this sort of interpretation are acceptable neither to Dr Iqbal himself, nor to those who have drawn these conclusions from what he has stated.

Further, should the view of Dr Iqbal be correct, the thing which he calls 'inner experience' (spiritual light and inspirations received by saintly persons) should also cease to exist, for it is also supposedly a part of the instinct which languishes with the appearance of experimental intellect. But according to Dr Iqbal that mystic experience still continues to exist. He

asserts that from Islamic point of view inner experience is one of the three sources of human knowledge, the other two being Nature and History. Personally also Dr Iqbal has a strong mystic tendency.

He firmly believes in inspiration. He says: "The idea however, does not mean that mystic experience, which qualitatively does not differ from the experience of the Prophets, has now ceased to exist as a vital fact. Indeed the Holy Qur'an regards both 'Anfus' (self) and 'Afaq' (world) as sources of knowledge. Allah reveals His signs in inner as well as outer experience, and it is the duty of man to judge the knowledge yielding capacity of all aspects of experience. The idea of finality, therefore, should not be taken to suggest that the ultimate fate of life is complete displacement of emotion by reason. Such a thing is neither possible nor desirable.

The intellectual value of the idea is that it tends to create an, independent critical attitude towards mystic experience by, generating the belief that all personal authority, claiming a supernatural origin has come to an end in the history of man... Mystic experience then, however unusual and abnormal, must. now be regarded by a Muslim as a perfectly natural experience open to critical scrutiny like other aspects of human experience"., (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 126)

What Dr Iqbal means to say is that with the end of Prophethood the inspirations and miracles of the saintly persons have, not come to an end, though they are no longer so authoritative, as they were in the past. Prior to the birth of experimented intellect, miracles had a perfectly natural authority. They were not open to any doubt. But for the intellectually developed man (of the age of finality) these things have ceased to be authoritative, and are now like other occurrences and phenomena open to critical scrutiny. Pre-finality period was that of miracles and supernatural events, but the age of finality is the age of reason, which does not regard any supernatural occurrence as a proof of anything. It judges every reality discovered through a mystic experience in accordance with its own standards.

This part of the remarks of Dr Iqbal is also not sound neither in regard to the pre-finality nor in regard to the post-finality period. We will make our comments on it under the following heading:

Miracles of the Final Prophet

Furthermore, the view expressed by Dr Iqbal that revelation is a sort of instinct, is also wrong. This view has led him to make several other mistakes. As Dr Iqbal himself is fully conscious, of the fact, an instinct is a purely innate, unacquired and unconscious propensity. It is a faculty lower than senses and intellect with which the primitive animals such as insects and other animals of a class lower than that of insects, have been provided according to the law of creation. With the development of other means of guidance such as senses and intellect, instinct is weakened and becomes dormant. That is why man who among the animals enjoys the highest degree of thinking power, has the weakest instinctive power.

In contrast, revelation is a means of guidance which ranks higher than senses and intellect and to a great extent is something which is acquired. Above all, it is the highest degree of consciousness, and the field in which it

makes discoveries is far vaster than the field in which experimental intellect can work.

In a previous section of this book, while discussing the question of ideology, we have proved that in view of the variety of the individual and social capabilities of man, complexity of his social relations and the dubiousness of the end of his evolutionary journey, the ideologies propounded by the philosophers and sociologists are misleading and bewildering. There is only one way open to man to have a sound ideology and that is the way of revelation. If we do not accept the way of revelation, we shall have to admit that man is unable to have an ideology at all.

The modern thinkers believe that the future line of the development of mankind can be determined through human ideologies only stage by stage. In other words, at every stage only the next stage can be determined, and that too according to the belief of these gentlemen. As for the subsequent stages and whether there exists any final stage at all, nothing is known. The fate of such ideologies is evident.

We wish that Dr Iqbal, who more or less studied the works of the Muslim gnostics and was especially devoted to the Mathnavi of Rumi, could have gone deeper into these works and found a better explanation of the finality of Prophethood. The gnostics say that Prophethood terminated because all the individuals and social stages of human development along with the way that man should follow to attain them were revealed all together. As thereafter none could discover anything additional, it was the duty of everyone to follow this last message.

The sufis say: that the final is he, who has finalized all stages, and leaves no stage uncovered. This is the basis of finality, not the development of the experimental intelligence of society as conceived by Dr Iqbal. If he had made a deeper study of the works of only those sufis to whom he himself was devoted, (like Rumi), he could know that revelation is not an instinct. It is a spirit and soul superior to the rational spirit. Rumi, the mystic poet says:

"Know that the soul of man is different from that of a cow and a donkey, and again the soul of a Prophet and a saint (holy man) is different from that of an ordinary man."

"The body is visible, but the soul is hidden. Again intellect is more hidden than soul. The spirit of revelation is still more hidden. The intellect of the Holy Prophet could be perceived by anybody. But the spirit of his revelation was not so perceptible".

"He was guided by the Protected Tablet and that is why was protected from any mistake and error. Divine revelation is neither astrology nor geomancy nor a dream. It is a fact and reality".

It appears that Dr Iqbal has unconsciously made the same mistake as was made by the Western world, which holds that knowledge has replaced faith. Of course Dr Iqbal was severely opposed to this theory of replacement. But his philosophy of the finality of Prophethood somehow leads to the same conclusion. Dr Iqbal describes revelation as a sort of an instinct. He also asserts that instincts cease to function when intellectual and thinking faculties begin to work. This remark of his is correct but is applicable to those cases in which thinking power performs the same function that was

previously performed by an instinct. But in those cases in which their functions are different, there is no reason why an instinct should cease to work when thinking power becomes active. Therefore even if we suppose that Divine revelation is a sort of instinct whose function is to put forward a sort of world conception and an ideology not produced by intellect and thinking power, there, is no reason why with the development of inductive intellect, in the words of Dr Iqbal, the function of this instinct should come to an end.

The fact is that Dr Iqbal in spite of all his outstanding talent, extraordinary intelligence and love of Islam is basically a product of Western culture, for his entire education was Western, though he made some studies in Islamic culture, especially in Islamic law, mysticism and philosophy. That is the reason why he sometimes makes grave mistakes. In the preface of our book, Principles of Philosophy and Method of Realism, vol. V, we have referred to the faultiness of Dr Iqbal's ideas about deep philosophical questions. That is why it is not proper to draw a comparison between him and Sayyid Jamiluddin Asadabadi.¹ Though from the viewpoint of mental endowments Jamaluddin is not comparable to Dr Iqbal, his original education was Islamic and Western education was only his secondary acquisition. In addition, the late Jamaluddin, owing to his vast travels in the Muslim countries and a close study of their affairs was more conversant than Dr Iqbal with the situation in the Muslim world. Therefore unlike Dr Iqbal he did not make any grave mistakes in evaluating certain events which took place in some Muslim countries like Turkey and Iran, for he could judge them better.

Note

1. Popularly known as Jamaluddin Afghani.

Chapter 6: Miracle of Finality

The Holy Qur'an is the everlasting miracle of the last Prophet. The miracles of the former Prophets like Prophet Ibrahim, Prophet Musa and Prophet 'Isa, each of whom had a revealed Book and also wrought miracles, were distinct from their revealed Books. They wrought such miracles as the transformation of a blazing fire into 'coolness and peace', the conversion of a dry piece of wood into a serpent and bringing the dead to life. Obviously each of these miracles, was temporary and passing. But in the case of the last Prophet his Book itself was his miracle. It is the proof of his Prophethood. As such, the miracle of finality, unlike any other miracle, is everlasting, not passing nor meant only for the time being.

The fact that a Divine Book is the miracle of the last Prophet is absolutely in conformity with his time, the age of the advancement of science, knowledge, culture and education. The eternity of this Holy Book is also in consonance with the eternity of its message which is never to be abrogated.

The Holy Qur'an in several verses of it has expressly proclaimed this extraordinary and superhuman aspect of itself. One of these verses says:

"If you are in doubt about what We have revealed to Our bondman, then bring a chapter like it." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:23)

It has also expressly mentioned several other miracles wrought by the last Prophet.

The Holy Qur'an has dwelt on a number of questions related to the miracles. It declares that a Divine message must be accompanied by some miracles, that a miracle is a decisive evidence and definite proof, that the Prophets work the miracles by the will of Allah and that they work them to prove the veracity of their claim, and that they are not bound to accede to every request of everybody in this respect. In other words, the Prophets are not expected to hold an exhibition of miracles or to set up a factory of them.

As the Holy Qur'an has dealt with these questions, it has also expressly recounted the stories of the miracles of many of the former Prophets like Nuh, Ibrahim, Lut, Salih, Hud, Musa and 'Isa, and has categorically confirmed them.

Some orientalist and Christian clergymen on the basis of those verses in which the Holy Qur'an responded negatively to the demand of the idolaters to work the miracles proposed by them, have claimed that the Prophet of Islam told the people that he had no miracle other than the Holy Qur'an, and if they did not accept it, he could do nothing further. Some 'liberal-minded' Muslim writers also have accepted this view, and explaining it, they say that the miracle is an argument which can convince only immature humanity looking for something extraordinary and fantastic. A mature man is not impressed by such things and is concerned only with the things rational.

As the age of the Prophet of Islam was that of rationality, not of myths and fancy, he declined by the will of Allah to accept any request for a miracle besides the Holy Qur'an. One writer says: "To seek the help of the miracles was unavoidable for the former Prophets, for in those days it was almost impossible for them to convince people with any rational arguments.

At the time the Prophet of Islam appeared, humanity had passed the period of its minority.

It had reached the stage of its intellectual majority. The child of yesterday no longer depended on his mother and was able to stand on his own feet and use his brain. In such circumstances it was not unreasonable that the Prophet of Islam resisted the pressure of the disbelievers and his opponents demanding from him to work miracles. To prove the truth of his mission he solely relied on rational arguments and historical evidence. In spite of the insistence of the disbelievers the Prophet of Islam by the order of Allah refused to work miracles similar to those of the former Prophets.

He relied on the Holy Qur'an alone as an incomparable miracle. Its incomparability is in itself a proof of the finality of Prophethood. It is a Book that contains truths, teachings and guidance in complete conformity with all aspects of life. It is a miracle worthy of mature humanity, not an immature humanity believing in myths and fables.

The so called our liberal-minded Muslim writer adds: "The atmosphere in which the ancient man lived was always full of myths, idle stories and supernatural ideas. Hence he was not impressed by anything unless it was contrary to what was reasonable and perceptible. That is why we find mankind throughout history to be fond of what is unknown and in search of what is supernatural. This sentimental attitude towards what is imperceptible and unreasonable is more acute among the more uncivilized. The more men are close to nature, the more they are fond of what is extra-natural. Myths are an evil outcome of this situation.

The man of the desert is always looking for a miracle. His world is full of spirits and wonderful mysteries. The spirit of a primitive man is moved only by what is marvellous and mysterious. That is why we see that not only the Prophets, but also the kings, the heroes and the sages of every nation have resorted to something supernatural to justify what they claimed. In these circumstances the Prophet whose mission was based on the invisible had to have recourse to a miracle more than others, for at this period of history supernatural events were more effective than logic, science and indisputable facts".

However, the life of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him and his progeny) is an exception to this rule. He announced that his miracle is a Book. He made this announcement in a society, in the largest commercial city of which the number of those who knew the art of writing was not more than seven. This society never thought of anything other than boasting, the sword, the camel and the male child. It is in itself a miracle that in this society he announced that his miracle was a Heavenly Book.

He announced this in a country where no Heavenly Book ever existed. His Lord, Allah, the Creator swears by the ink, the pen and the writing before a people who regarded the pen as the tool of a few helpless and weak persons. This is a miracle in itself. Only that Book is a miracle which can always be seen. Unlike any other miracle it is the only miracle the marvellous and extraordinary nature of which can be more accurately understood and appreciated by those who are more wise and more learned in comparatively advanced and cultured societies. It is the only miracle the

belief in which is not confined to those who have faith in supernatural things.

Its supernaturalness can be acknowledged by any knowledgeable person. It is the only miracle which is not for the common people. It is for the intelligentsia, unlike other miracles it is not intended to stimulate the admiration of the onlookers and to persuade them to accept a message on that basis. It is meant to educate those who accept it. It is a message in itself. The miracle of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him and his progeny), though not a human product, is not something not concerned with the human beings. Unlike the miracles of the past, it is not a device used only to make people believe, and having no other use. But his miracle represents a sort of the display of the highest human talent. It is also the best model for exercise and training, and for that a model which is always available.

The Holy Prophet tried to divert human inquisitiveness from what was extraordinary and supernatural to the rational, logical and intellectual problems and social and moral questions. His task was not so easy, especially in view of the fact that the people with whom he had to deal were not willing to submit to anything except what was unnatural.

It is really astonishing how he called himself a Prophet, invited people to accept his Divine message and at the same time admitted formally that he was not aware of the "unknown". Apart from the human value of this admission, what is striking is the extraordinary truth which is felt in his actions and which compels every heart to bow to him in admiration and respect. Some people asked him to foretell what price their goods were to fetch so that they might plan accordingly to be able to earn profit and make money.

The Holy Qur'an ordered him to say: "I have no power to acquire for myself a benefit or to avert any trouble except by the will of Allah. If I had the knowledge of the unknown, I would have certainly acquired for myself much that is good and no harm would have touched me. I am no more than the one who gives warning and brings good news to a believing people." (Surah al-A'raf, 7:188)

A Prophet who could make no prophecy, who did not converse with the spirits, the fairies and the jinn and who did not work a miracle everyday, was no good in the sight of the people of the desert. The Holy Prophet called upon them to look into the universe, to observe piety, uprightness and faith, to acquire knowledge and to understand the meaning of life and destiny, but they ceaselessly continued to ask him to work a miracle and make a prophecy. On the other hand Allah prompted him to say: "Glory be to my Lord! I am no more than a human messenger." (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:93)

Those who deny the occurrence of miracles rely mostly on the following Qur'anic verses saying: "They say: We will not believe you unless you make a spring gush forth from the earth for us; or you have a garden of date-palms and cause rivers to flow abundantly in their midst; or you cause the sky to fall on us in pieces as you have asserted, or you bring Allah and the angels before us; or you have a house of gold; or you ascend to heaven. But even

then we will not believe in you until you bring down for us a book which we can read. Say: Glory be to my Lord. I am nothing but a human messenger.'" (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:90 - 93)

They say that these verses show that the idolaters asked the Holy Prophet to work a miracle other than the Holy Qur'an, but he declined to accede to their demand.

Unfortunately we cannot agree to this theory, especially in view of the points mentioned above and in view of what we have said in regard to the superiority of the Holy Qur'an to all other miracles. From our point of view the disputable points are as under:

(i) The Prophet of Islam had no miracle other than the Holy Qur'an. He refused to fulfil the demand of the idolaters who wanted him to produce some other miracle. The verses of the Surah Bani Isra'il prove this point.

(ii) As for the value and effectiveness of miracles, it may be said that they were compatible with the period of the minority of mankind when reason and logic were not effective. Even the sages and the kings had recourse to supernatural things to justify themselves. The Prophets also had to resort to them to convince their people. The Prophet of Islam whose miracle is a Book is an exception to this rule. He justifies himself by means of a Book or actually by reason and logic.

(iii) The Prophet of Islam tried to divert the attention of the people from the unusual and supernatural things to the rational and logical questions and to turn their sensitivity from wonders to the actualities and facts.

Now let us discuss one by one the points made by the opponents of the miracles: Is it true that the Prophet of Islam had no miracle except the Holy Qur'an? Apart from the fact that this view is unacceptable from the viewpoint of history and traditions reported by numerous authorities, it is contrary even to what the Holy Qur'an itself says. The miracle of the split of the moon is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an itself. Suppose someone explains away the verse mentioning this miracle, though it is not amenable to any explanation, how will the story of the ascension of the Holy Prophet mentioned in the Surah Bani Isra'il be explained? The Holy Qur'an expressly says: "Glory be to Him who carried His slave by night from the Masjidul Haram (in Makkah) to the Masjidul Aqsa' (in Jerusalem), the precincts of which We have blessed. (We took him on this journey) to show him some of Our signs." (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:1)

Is this occurrence not a supernatural event and a miracle?

In Surah at-Tahri'm there is an event saying that the Holy Prophet told a secret in confidence to one of his wives who divulged it to another wife of his. The Holy Prophet asked the first wife why she disclosed the secret to the second one and recounted a part of the conversation which had transpired between the two. That wife was surprised and asked the Holy Prophet how he came to know all that. The Holy Prophet replied that Allah had apprised him of the event.

When the Holy Prophet confided a fact to one of his wives and when she afterwards divulged it and Allah apprised him thereof, he made known to her of part thereof and passed over the rest. And when he told it to her, she said: "Who has told you?" He said: "The Knower, the Aware has told me".

Does this not mean telling the unknown? Is this not a miracle? What has been mentioned in Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:90 - 93 and some other verses does not at all indicate what has been inferred from it. The idolaters were not asking for a proof of Prophethood and sign with a view to gain satisfaction. They were actually asking for something else. These verses as well as Surah al-'Ankabut, 29:50 throw ample light on the unique mentality of the idolaters who were apparently demanding a miracle. These verses also make clear the philosophy of the Holy Qur'an about the miracles of the Prophets.

In Surah Bani Isra'il the idolaters begin their talk saying virtually: "We will not join you unless you on your part make a spring gush forth for us in this arid land of Makkah." This is just a bargain.

They further say: "Or you have a garden of date palms with rivers flowing in their midst or you have a house full of gold, so that we may share these things with you." This is again a bargain, as they wanted these things for their own benefit.

They say: "Or you cause the sky to fall on us in pieces as you think that it will fall on the Day of Resurrection."

This is asking for a punishment and the end of everything, though apparently they asked for a miracle.

"Or you ascend to heaven or you bring Allah and the angels before us."
(Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:90 - 93)

This is again a bargain, though this time they were not asking for riches, but were asking for something they could be proud of. Anyhow, they ignored the fact that it was impracticable to fulfil their demand.

The words actually used by the idolaters are notable. They did not say: 'Lan numina bika', that is we will not believe you. Instead they said: 'Lan numina laka', meaning we will not join you to your advantage. This difference in meaning has been pointed out by the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence while explaining similar expressions in Surah at-Tawbah, 9:61. Further, the intention of the idolaters is clear from the way they put their demand. They asked the Holy Prophet to make a spring gush forth for them in exchange for their support and expedient faith. Evidently this is a demand for remuneration and not for a proof and a miracle. The Holy Prophet came to make the people believers, not to purchase their opinion and faith.

The writer whom we quoted above, himself says: "The idolaters asked the Holy Prophet to foretell the price their goods would fetch so that they could earn profit". Evidently this demand for a miracle was not made in order to know the truth. They wanted to use the Prophet as a means of making money. Naturally his reply was: "If I had the knowledge of the unknown, I would have certainly used it to acquire for myself much that is good in this world. Obviously miracles are not meant for such purposes. I am a Prophet. I only give warning and bring good news to a believing people".

The idolaters, thought that the Prophet could work a miracle to order, any time and for any purpose. That is why they wanted him to make a spring gush forth, to have a house of gold and make a prophecy about the market rates. But the fact is that a miracle is just like a revelation. Its occurrence is

determined from "that side", not "from this". Just as a revelation is not subject to the wish of the Prophet and is a process which influences his will, similarly a miracle is also a process that proceeds from the other side and influences the will of the Prophet, though it is worked by him. That is what the words, 'by the will of Allah' signify both in the case of a revelation and a miracle. And that is what is meant by the following verse of Surah al-'Ankabut, which has been misinterpreted by the Christian missionaries: "The signs are with Allah alone. I am nothing but a plain warner". (Surah al-'Ankabut, 29:50)

The same is the case with the revealing of the unknown miraculously. As far as the personality of the Holy Prophet is concerned, he is not aware of the unknown. The Holy Qur'an says: "Say: I do not say to you that I am an angel, nor am I aware of the unknown."

But when he comes under a supernatural influence he tells of what is hidden, and when he is asked how he knew that, he replies that Allah, the All-knowing apprised him of the unknown matter.

When the Holy Prophet says that he does not know the unknown and if he had known it he would have earned a lot of money through that knowledge, he wants to refute the false presumption of the idolaters; and makes it clear that the knowledge of the unknown falls within the range of a miracle for he receives it through Divine revelation only. Had his knowledge of the unknown been automatic and had he been able to use it for any purpose he liked, he would have used it to fill his own coffers instead of telling the future market rates to others in order to enable them to fill their pockets.

In another verse the Holy Qur'an says: "He is the knower of what is hidden and He reveals His secret to none, except to a Messenger He has chosen." (Surah al-Jinn, 72:26 - 27)

The Holy Prophet was certainly His chosen Messenger.

Furthermore, the Holy Qur'an has recounted many miracles of the former Prophets like Prophet Ibrahim, Prophet Musa and Prophet 'Isa. Then how was it possible that the Holy Prophet when asked to work a miracle like that of the former Prophets; should say that he was no more than a human messenger? Had not the idolaters a right to retort and say: "You yourself describe the miracles of the former Prophets so eloquently. Were they not human beings or were they not Prophets?" Is it possible that such a glaring contradiction should exist in the Holy Qur'an? Is it imaginable that the idolaters did not take notice of such a glaring contradiction?

Should the thinking of these liberal-minded be correct, the Holy Prophet instead of saying: "Glory be to Allah! I am no more than a human messenger", should have said: "Glory be to Allah! I being the last Prophet, am excluded from the rule applicable to other Prophets. Therefore do not ask me to do, what the other Prophets were asked to do". Anyhow, he did not say so. On the other hand he said: "I am a messenger like all other messengers".

This shows that what the idolaters, demanded from the Holy Prophet was not a miracle or a sign with a view to find out the truth. They were asking for something else and their demand was such that the Prophets usually do

not accede to it. That is why the Holy Prophet declined to give a positive reply to their selfish and arrogant demand. They were actually asking for something impossible.

We admit that the common people are inclined to invent the stories of the miracles and ascribe them not only to the Prophets and the Imams but even to any grave, stone or tree. But that is no reason why we should deny that the Holy Prophet had miracles other than the Holy Qur'an.

Further, there is a difference between a Prophetic miracle and a saintly miracle. A Prophetic miracle is a Divine sign and a proof to prove that there is a Divine assignment. It is always linked together with a challenge. It has certain special conditions and takes place for a special purpose. As for a saintly miracle, that is a supernatural event which is purely an outcome of the spiritual power and personal sanctity of a perfect or a semi-perfect man and does not take place to prove the truth of any Divine mission. It is almost an affair with no special conditions attached to it. A Prophetic miracle is the voice of Allah in support of a particular person. But that is not the case with a saintly miracle.

Value and Effect of a Miracle

What is the value of a miracle? The logicians and the philosophers divide the material that is used to argue a case into several kinds. Some arguments have a proving value. They are something beyond any reasonable doubt, as is the case with the data used by a mathematician. Some other arguments have only a persuasive value, as is the case with the arguments advanced by the rhetoricians. If the arguments of the latter are analysed, they often do not prove to be convincing. But so long as they are not dissected, they prove quite moving. Some other arguments are merely emotional or have some other value.

Value of a Miracle From the Viewpoint of the Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an describes the miracles of the Prophets as the signs and clear proofs, and regards them as a convincing and logical evidence of the existence of Allah in the same way as it regards the creation as the incontrovertible proof of His existence.

The Holy Qur'an has elaborately dwelt on the question of the miracles. It considers the demand of the people for a miracle and their refusal to submit to the Prophets unless a sign was shown to them, to be reasonable and justified, provided the demand was not made for ulterior motives or just as a pastime. It has eloquently narrated many stories of the practical response of the Prophets to such demands. The Holy Qur'an has nowhere indicated that a miracle is only a persuasive argument suitable to the simple-minded people and appropriate to the period of the minority of mankind. On the other hand it has called it a clear proof.

Nature of the Holy Prophet's Guidance

The miracle of the 'Finality' being a Book, a piece of literature and a treasure of culture and knowledge, is an everlasting miracle. Many of its miraculous aspects are still gradually coming to light. Some wonderful features of the Holy Qur'an which have become known to the people of our

times were not known and could not be known in the past. The value of a Book-miracle is better grasped by the thinkers than by the common people. It is true that this miracle because of its special merits, is appropriate to the period of the finality, but, is it also true that this miracle has the nature of a Book because it is intended, among other things, to divert the attention of man from the unknown to the known, from the unreasonable to the reasonable and logical, and from the supernatural to the natural, Does the Holy Prophet try to draw of the inquisitiveness of people from the unusual and supernatural things to the rational, logical, intellectual, scientific, social and moral questions and to turn their sensitivity from wonders to the realities?

That does not appear to be true. Should it be true, that would mean that all other Prophets were inviting people to the unknown and only the Holy Prophet invited them to the known. If this is the case, then why have hundreds of the verses of the Holy Qur'an been devoted to the description of miracles?

Undoubtedly it is one of the basic distinctions of the Holy Qur'an that it calls for the study of nature and describes the natural phenomena as Divine signs. But a call for the study of nature does not mean diverting the attention of people from everything that does not pertain to nature. On the other hand a call for the study of natural phenomena as signs means passing from nature to what is beyond nature and from what is perceptible to what is intelligible.

The importance of the work of the Holy Prophet lies in the fact that just as he calls the people for the study of nature, history and society, he also persuades those who submit to nothing but supernatural to submit to reason, logic and science also. He similarly tries to make those who are fond of reason and logic and submit to nothing but what is natural and perceptible, to get acquainted with a higher logic as well.

The basic difference between the world presented by the religion on the whole, and especially by Islam, and the world depicted by purely human sciences and philosophies, is that as William James has put it, in the construction of the world of religion certain other elements have gone in addition to the material elements and the laws generally recognized by mankind.

The Holy Qur'an does not want to divert the attention from natural and perceptible things to supernatural and imperceptible things. The importance of the Holy Qur'an lies in the fact that besides paying attention to what is natural or in the words of the Holy Qur'an, is the seen, it puts the belief in the unseen in the forefront of its teachings: "This is the Book about which there is no doubt. It is a guidance to the pious, who believe in the unseen." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:2 - 3)

How can the Holy Qur'an divert the attention of people from what is supernatural when it is itself a miracle, and so many other miracles have been described in more than hundred verses of it.

We are unable to understand what is meant by saying that the Book is the only miracle, the belief in which is not confined to those who believe in the supernatural things.

What belief? Does the writer mean the belief that the Holy Qur'an is a Book the contents of which are very valuable and sublime, or the belief that it is a miracle? The belief that a thing is miraculous in the sense that it is a Divine sign, amounts to the belief in its supernaturalness. How can a man have a belief in a miracle and at the same time not have a belief in anything supernatural?

It has been said that the miracle of the Prophet of Islam does not belong to the category of non-human matters though it is a non-human act. To us the meaning of this statement also is not clear for it can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly it may mean that the Holy Qur'an being a revealed Book, not having been composed by the Holy Prophet is a non-human act, but though it is the word of Allah, not of any human being, it belongs to the category of human matters and is an ordinary act, like other human acts.

It appears to be improbable that this is what the writer means, for in the case of the acceptance of this view, the Holy Qur'an would have no distinction over other revealed Books. All the other revealed Books have also issued from the same source of revelation, but as they have no supernatural aspect, they not belong to the category of superhuman acts.

There is a category of the sayings of the Holy Prophet known as Hadith al-Qudsi. These sayings are the revealed words of Allah but still they are neither miraculous nor superhuman.

The Holy Qur'an is distinguished from other revealed Books and from Hadith al-Qudsi in that it is superhuman. It is revealed as well as superhuman and supernatural. That is why the Holy Qur'an says: "Say: If all human beings and jinn were to combine to produce the like of the Qur'an, they would surely fail to compose the like of it, even if they helped one another." (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:88)

The other interpretation of the above-mentioned statement may be that unlike the miracles of other Prophets such as converting a staff into a serpent and bringing the dead to life which definitely do not belong to the category of human acts, the miracle of Muhammad (Peace be on him and his progeny) being a sort of learned speech and dissertation, belongs to that category, but it is still superhuman, having sprung from a supernatural source. Should this interpretation be what is intended, and it should be, then this statement in itself is an admission that there exists what is supernatural and extraordinary and that there are things which are unseen and unknown. Then why should we think of a miracle as if it is something mythical and irrational. Why should we not from the very beginning distinguish between the miracles on the one hand and the myths and superstitions on the other, so that the less-informed people may not form that impression of the miracles which we do not want them to form. Why instead of saying clearly and in a straightforward manner that the Book of the Prophet of Islam is a miracle, should in a roundabout way say that his miracle is a Book?

In one of the last works of the same writer an article has been published under the heading: 'The Qur'an and the Computer'. This article may be considered to be a correction of his earlier view about the miraculousness of the Holy Qur'an and a sign of the gradual development of his thinking.

In this article he has proposed the replacement of the letters of the Holy Qur'an by the computerized signs and the use of this great manifestation of human culture for the discovery of the Qur'anic knowledge. This is a timely and sound suggestion. The writer has hinted at the endeavours made and being made by some Egyptian and Iranian scholars in this field. He has also made an interesting discourse under the caption: 'How to Prove the Inimitability of the Qur'an'.

In this article he has referred to a valuable book entitled, 'The Process of the Development of the Qur'an', which has lately been published and in which its learned author has proved that the size and the length of the verses and the words revealed to the Holy Prophet in over 23 years form an exact and regular curve. Commenting on the discovery made in this book the writer says: "Is there any speaker in the world the year of whose sentences may be ascertained from their length, especially when these sentences do not form the text of any literary or scientific book produced by an author in a regular manner?"

In contrast, they are the sentences which came from time to time on the lips of a man over a long period of twenty-three years of his busy life. They do not form a book written on a particular subject, nor do they pertain to even any pre-conceived field. They cover multifarious questions which arose in society from time to time. Some of them answer the specific queries made, and some others deal with the problems that came up in the course of a long-drawn struggle. They were revealed to a great leader and were collected and arranged later".

Chapter 7: The Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an is our celestial Book and the eternal miracle of our Holy Prophet. This Divine Book was revealed to the Holy Prophet over a period of 23 years. The Holy Qur'an besides being a revealed Book and a manifestation of the miracle-producing power of the Holy Prophet has had a deeper and greater role than that of the staff of Prophet Musa and the breath of Prophet 'Isa. The Holy Prophet used to recite the verses of the Holy Qur'an to the people. Their magnetic power on many occasions drew many a man to Islam. Such incidents are innumerable in Islamic history.

The Holy Qur'an is a collection of 114 chapters which consist of 6205 verses comprising about 78,000 words.

The fact that Muslims from the early days of Islam till the present day have been taking an unprecedented interest in the Holy Qur'an, shows their devotion to it. In the lifetime of the Holy Prophet the Holy Qur'an was preserved in writing by a number of persons especially appointed by him and known as the 'scribes of revelation'. Besides, most of the Muslims irrespective of their sex and age were keen to memorize the whole or a part of the Holy Qur'an. They recited it in their prayers and considered it a meritorious act to recite it even when they were not offering prayers. They really enjoyed its recitation.

Great Interest of Muslims in the Holy Qur'an

Under the impact of their ardent love for their revealed Book the Muslims in every age have rendered some service to the Holy Qur'an corresponding with their intellectual and practical potentialities. They memorized it. They acquired special training in reading it properly and uttering every letter of it through proper organs. They wrote commentaries on it and compiled special books explaining the meaning of every word of it.

They counted its verses, its words and even its letters. They explored its meanings and applied results to the legal, moral, social, philosophical, gnostic and scientific questions. They adorned their speeches and writings by quoting the verses of the Holy Qur'an. The inscriptions of high merit, Mosaics and Qashani tiles inscribed with beautifully drawn and illuminated lines and letters contained the Qur'anic verses. The Muslims taught the Holy Qur'an to their children before giving them any other education. They compiled Arabic grammar and Arabic dictionaries to facilitate the understanding of the Holy Qur'an. They were inspired by it to develop the art of rhetoric.

The devotion of Muslims to the Holy Qur'an was the source of the origin of a number of sciences and literary arts which would not have come into being if it did not exist.

Inimitability of the Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an is an everlasting miracle of the last Prophet. From the very beginning of its revelation in Makkah which began with small surahs, the Holy Prophet formally threw a challenge to the idolaters. He claimed that the Holy Qur'an was not his work. It was the work of Allah and neither he nor any other human being could produce a like of it. He said that if they

did not believe him, they could make an attempt to produce the like of it, and for that purpose could seek the help of anybody they liked. But they should know beforehand that they would never succeed in such an attempt even if all the human beings and the jinn joined hands together with them. The opponents of the Holy Prophet neither during his lifetime nor during any subsequent period of the past 1400 years, have been able to respond to this challenge. The only thing that the opponents of Islam of the Holy Prophet's time could do was that they asserted that the Holy Qur'an was a piece of magic.

This accusation was in itself an admission of the supernaturalness of the Holy Qur'an and of their inability to emulate it. The die-hard opponents of the Holy Prophet had no scruples. They were so desperate that they left no stone unturned in order to harm and weaken his position. But the only thing they were unable to do was that which was proposed by the Holy Prophet himself and expressly asked by the Holy Qur'an. The Holy Qur'an had asked them to produce the like of at least one surah of it even if that be a one-line surah like Surah at-Tawhid or Surah al-Kawthar.

Various Aspects of the Inimitability of the Holy Qur'an

Here we propose to refer to some aspects of the miraculousness or supernaturalness of the Holy Qur'an. On the whole the inimitability of the Holy Qur'an has two aspects: one of them pertains to its words and the other to its contents.

The inimitability of its words is due to its beautiful and artistic diction, and the inimitability of its contents is due to their high intellectual and scientific value. Each of these two aspects, especially the second one again in its turn has several aspects. Lately certain Egyptian and Iranian scholars have claimed that one of the aspects of the inimitability of the Holy Qur'an is that its letters and words have been so arranged that its verses form a special type of ascending curve.

Wording of the Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an has its own style, which is different from that of both poetry and prose. It is not poetry because it is neither rhymed, nor has it a metrical rhythm. Moreover, poetry entails a sort of imagery called poetic fancy. It is interwoven with exaggeration which amounts to telling a lie. The Holy Qur'an has no poetic imagery nor fanciful similes and metaphors. At the same time it is no ordinary prose, for it is characterized by a kind of harmonious flow and cadence not found in any other prose work. The Muslims have always recited the Holy Qur'an with a particular harmonic tune.

There are religious instructions to the effect that the Holy Qur'an should be recited in a melodious voice. The Holy Imams sometimes recited the Holy Qur'an in their houses so melodiously that the passers-by stopped in the street to listen to their recitation. No other piece of prose can be melodized in the same way as the Holy Qur'an. Its sound-effect is compatible with its spiritual value and is different from that of music.

Since the invention of radio no other spiritual speech has been found comparable with the Holy Qur'an in its sweet melodious effect. In addition

to the Muslim countries the non-Muslim countries also have included the recitation of the Holy Qur'an in their radio programmes on account of its sweet sound and beauty. It is astonishing that the beauty of the Holy Qur'an has surpassed the limits of time and place. Many of the beautiful speeches are appreciated only during a particular period of time and with a change in taste they lose their value and effect. Some of them are appreciated only by certain nations having a particular taste and a particular cultural background. But the beauty of the Holy Qur'an is unique. It is not peculiar to any particular time, race or culture.

All those who are conversant with the diction of the Holy Qur'an, find it conforming to their individual taste. The more the time passes and the more the various nations get acquainted with the Holy Qur'an, the more they are fascinated by its charming beauty.

The biased Jews, Christians and the followers of certain other religions over the past fourteen centuries have in various ways offered resistance to the Holy Qur'an with a view to weaken its position. They alleged that alteration had taken place in it. They tried to create doubts about various matters concerning it and they resorted to so many other machinations and tricks, but they never thought of seeking the help of their writers and men of letters to respond to the challenge of the Holy Qur'an and produce at least a small surah like it.

In the history of Islam there appeared a large number of people known as zindiqs or heretics. Some of them were extraordinarily intelligent. They in various ways criticized the religion generally and the Holy Qur'an particularly. Some of them enjoyed a great command of the Arabic language. They tried to contest the superiority of the Holy Qur'an; but all that they could do was that they proved their own lowliness and the grandeur of the Holy Qur'an. In this connection history has related the stories of Ibn Rawandi, Abul 'Ala' al-Mu'ari and Abut Tayyib al-Mutanabbi. It was they who wanted to show that they were able to emulate the Holy Qur'an and could prove that it was a human work. There arose also many pretenders who claimed to be the Prophets. They produced utterances about which they claimed that they were revealed to them by Allah just like the Holy Qur'an. Tulayhah, Musylimah and Sajah belong to this category. They again could prove only the grandeur of the Holy Qur'an and their own lowliness.

It is astonishing that the sayings of the Holy Prophet himself on whose tongue the Holy Qur'an flowed, are dissimilar to the Holy Qur'an. A very large number of the sayings of the Holy Prophet, including his sermons, invocations, maxims and orders have come down to us. Their language is apt and flawless, but it is in no way similar to that of the Holy Qur'an. This clearly proves that the sayings of the Holy Prophet and the Holy Qur'an have originated from two different sources.

Imam Ali's contact with the Holy Qur'an began when he was only 10 years old. In other words, he was 10 years of age when the first verses of the Holy Qur'an were revealed to the Holy Prophet. He received them as zealously as a thirsty person would receive pure water. Till the last moments of the Holy Prophet's life he headed the scribes of revelation. He knew the

Holy Qur'an by heart and recited it regularly. At night his most favorite act of worship was the recitation of the Holy Qur'an.

In these circumstance if it had been possible to emulate the style of the Holy Qur'an, Imam Ali with his unrivalled eloquence would certainly have done so. Influenced by the style of the Holy Qur'an as he was, his sermons would have taken the form of the Qur'anic verses. But as we know, his style is quite different from that of the Holy Qur'an.

When Imam Ali in his eloquent sermons quotes a verse of the Holy Qur'an, it always has a distinctive look and shines like an extraordinarily bright star among other stars.

The Holy Qur'an has not used the themes which are usually selected by the human beings in order to display their rhetorical skill, such as self-glorification, panegyric, satire, elegy, love-songs and description of natural scenery. The Holy Qur'an has not dealt with any of these themes. Its subjects are all spiritual, such as Monotheism, Resurrection, Prophethood, ethical duties, rules of law, religious exhortations and moral stories. However, its diction is remarkably superb and extremely beautiful, in every case.

The arrangement of the words in the Holy Qur'an is matchless. Nobody can change the position of a single word without damaging its beauty nor can anybody produce a like of it. In this respect the Holy Qur'an is comparable to a beautiful building in which no alteration can be made, nor can anybody construct a building better than it or like it. The style of the Holy Qur'an is unprecedented and will ever remain unrivalled. In spite of the challenge of the Holy Qur'an, no one has ever been able to rival or emulate it.

The challenge of the Holy Qur'an is still valid and will ever remain so. Even now the faithful Muslims invite the people the world over to take part in the competition suggested by the Holy Qur'an. They say that if the like of the Holy Qur'an was produced, they would give up their faith. They are sure that such a thing cannot happen and would never happen.

Contents of the Holy Qur'an

The inimitability of the Holy Qur'an from the viewpoint of its contents is a subject which requires such a vast discussion that for it a separate book would be needed. Anyhow, we may briefly discuss the preliminaries here. First of all we should know what kind of a Book the Holy Qur'an is. Is it a philosophical Book? Is it a Book of science, literature, or art?

The answer is that it is none of them. The Prophets are a distinct type. They are neither philosophers, nor scientists, neither men of letters, nor historians, neither artists nor craftsmen. Still they have all the good points of all of them with many things extra. The Holy Qur'an is a revealed Book. It is neither a Book of philosophy, nor of science nor of history nor of literature nor of art. But it has the good points of all of them with many additional merits.

The Holy Qur'an is a Book intended for the guidance of man. It may be called the Book of man - a man who has been created by Allah and for whose guidance and salvation the Prophets came and taught him how to know himself.

As it is the Book of man, it is also the Book of Allah, for man is the being whose creation began prior to the creation of this world and will end after the end of this world. From the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an man is the breath of Divine spirit. He has to return to Allah. Hence the knowledge of Allah and the knowledge of man are interrelated. Man cannot know his Allah correctly unless he knows himself, nor can he have the knowledge of his reality unless he knows Allah.

The man of the school of the Prophets whose complete description is found in the Holy Qur'an is vastly different from the man whose knowledge can be obtained through science. The man of the school of the Prophets is far more extensive.

The man described by science exists only between the two points of his birth and his death. Darkness surrounds all that is before and after these two points, science has no knowledge of it. But the man of the Holy Qur'an is not so limited. He has come from another world and his future lies in that world. In this world he has to perfect himself. His future in the next world depends on the nature of his activity in this world and on the fact whether he makes right type of effort or not. Further, ordinary human beings do not know man even between the points of his birth and death as well as the Prophets do.

The man of the Holy Qur'an must know: (i) From where has he come? (ii) Where is he going? (iii) Where is he at present? (iv) How should he be? (v) What should he do?

His weal and prosperity in this and the next world will be ensured only when he gives practical answers to these five questions correctly.

To know from where he has come, man should know his Creator and to know his Creator, he should go deep into the world and man as His signs.

To know where he is going, he should reflect on and believe in what the Holy Qur'an has stated about Resurrection, torments of the Day of Judgement, recompensation and severe retribution which may in certain cases be eternal. He should believe that just as Allah is the point of the beginning of all existing things, He is also the point of their return.

To know where he is, he should study the world system and the laws operating in it. He should find out the position of man vis-a-vis other things and should rediscover himself. To know what he should be, he should acquire the knowledge of true human ways and manners and should build his habits and behaviour accordingly.

To know what he should do, he should abide by a certain code of individual and social rules and regulations.

In addition to all this the man of the Holy Qur'an must have a belief in the existence of certain imperceptible and invisible things described by the Holy Qur'an itself as the 'Unseen', and believe that they are the channels through which the will of Allah operates in the universe. He must also know that Allah, the Almighty has never left man without Divine guidance. He raised a large number of the selected people as the Prophets, who conveyed His message to mankind.

The man of the Holy Qur'an looks at nature as a sign of Allah and at history as a real 'testing ground' which proves the accuracy of the teachings of the Prophets.

So, that is the man of the Holy Qur'an, and these are some of the duties which have been prescribed by Islam for him.

The Holy Qur'an has discussed so many subjects that it is not possible to enumerate all the topics discussed by it. However at a cursory glance the following questions come to the view:

- Allah, His essence, His oneness, His positive and negative attributes, that is the qualities which we should believe that He possesses and the qualities which we should believe that He is free from them.

- The Hereafter, the Resurrection and the stages between death and Resurrection (Purgatory).

- Angels, that is the powers that are conscious of themselves and of their Creator and are the executors of the Divine will.,

- Prophets or the men who received the Divine revelation in their hearts and conveyed it to other people.

- Exhortation to have belief in Allah, in the Hereafter, in the angels, in the Prophets and in the revealed Books.

- Creation of the heavens, the earth, the mountains, the rivers, the plants, the animals, the clouds, the rain, the hailstones, the meteors etc.

- Call for the worship of Allah, the One, wholeheartedly and for not associating any person or thing with Him. The prohibition of the worship of anything other than Allah whether it is a man, an angel, the sun, a star or an idol.

- Remembering the blessings and the bounties bestowed by Allah in this world.

- Eternal favours of Allah to the virtuous in the next world and severe and sometimes eternal punishment meted out by Him to the evil-doers.

- Arguments in respect of Allah, Resurrection, Prophets etc. and some prophecies in this connection.

- Narration of the stories and historical events proving the truth of the mission of the Prophets and showing that happy was the end of those virtuous people who followed the Prophets and unhappy of those who repudiated them.

- Piety, virtuousness and self-purification. n Attention to the danger of fiendish insinuations, self-delusion and incorrect thinking.

- Individual moral virtues such as courage, perseverance, patience, justice, charity, love, remembrance of Allah, love of Allah, expressing gratitude to Allah, fear of Allah, trust in Allah, resignation to the will of Allah, submission to the commands of Allah, prudence, knowledge, truthfulness, honesty and luminousness of heart as the result of piety, veracity and honesty.

- Collective moral virtues such as unity, urging each other to accept the truth, asking each other to be steadfast, mutual cooperation in the matters of virtue and piety, abstention from hatred and malice, exhortation to what is good, restraining from evil and sacrificing life and property for the sake of Allah.

- Rules of law regarding such matters as prayers, fasting, zakat, khums, hajj, jihad, vow, oath, sale, mortgage, hire, gift, marriage, rights of the husband and wife, rights of the parents and children, divorce, oath of condemnation, zihar, bequest, inheritance, retaliation, punishment, debt, evidence, wealth, property, government, consultation, rights of the poor, rights of society etc.
- Events and incidents which took place during the 23 years of the Prophethood of the Holy Prophet.
- A description of the distinguishing features and high endowments of the Holy Prophet.
- Complete description of the three groups of the believers, the disbelievers and the hypocrites of every age.
- Characteristics of the believers, the disbelievers and the hypocrites of the time of the Holy Prophet.
 - Invisible beings other than the angels, the jinn and the Devil.
 - Characteristics of the Holy Qur'an itself.
 - Glorification of Allah by all things existing in the world and their inner consciousness of the existence of their Creator.
- World, its laws, its transitoriness, and its unsuitableness for being the ideal of man. Only Allah, the Hereafter and the eternal world are fit to be the ultimate aim.
 - Miracles of the Prophets.
 - Confirmation of the former revealed Books, especially the Tawrat (Torah) and the Injil (Evangel). Rectification of the alterations and errors which have crept into these Books.

Vastness of Meanings

This was a brief description of the contents of the Holy Qur'an. Brief though it is, it can by no means be claimed to be even briefly adequate.

Even if we take into consideration these few subjects concerning man and his duties, the world and Allah, no human book about man, can be compared to the Holy Qur'an, especially in view of the fact that the Holy Qur'an was revealed through an illiterate person not conversant with the ideas of any thinker, or intellectual. The environment in which he lived was primitive and pagan. The people around him were mostly uncultured.

The Holy Qur'an for the first time introduced many vast and meaningful subjects, and presented them in such a manner that subsequently the philosophers, the lawyers, the jurists, the moralists and the historians were inspired by them.

It is not possible even for the most genius person to think of all these ideas at a level that they may impress the most eminent intellectuals. This is the position, if we suppose that what the Holy Qur'an has presented is of the same level as of that which has been produced by the human scholars. But we know definitely that in most cases the Holy Qur'an has opened absolutely new horizons.

Allah in the Holy Qur'an

Here we refer to only one topic. It is that of Allah and His relation with the world and man.

If we consider only how the Holy Qur'an has dealt with this question and compare what the Holy Qur'an has said in this respect, with the ideas put forward by the human beings, the miraculousness of the Holy Qur'an becomes crystal clear.

The Holy Qur'an has described Allah as free from all defects and all qualities not worthy of Him. On the other hand it has ascribed to Him all high attributes and mentioned His most beautiful names. There are some 15 verses in which Allah has been declared to be free from defects and drawbacks, and more than 50 verses in which His high attributes and most beautiful names have been mentioned.

The Holy Qur'an is so precise in its description of Allah that its exposition has astonished the scholars of divinity.

This in itself is a clear miracle of an unschooled and illiterate person. The Holy Qur'an has suggested all possible ways leading to the recognition of Allah. They include the study of the world and man, self-purification, and deep and careful consideration of life and existence. The most eminent philosophers of Islam admit that their strongest arguments have been inspired by the Holy Qur'an.

According to the Holy Qur'an the relation of Allah with the world and the creation stands purely on the basis of monotheism. In other words, in regard to His actions and will Allah has neither a rival nor a partner. On the other hand all the actions, intentions and choices of all others are determined and destined by Him.

Man's Relation with Allah

The Holy Qur'an has most beautifully described man's relation with Allah. Unlike the deity of the philosophers, Allah of the Holy Qur'an is not a dry and spiritless being having nothing to do with mankind. Allah of the Holy Qur'an is closer to man than his jugular vein. His relation with man is that of 'give and take'. He gets pleased with man on reciprocal basis. He draws man to Himself and gives him solace. The Holy Qur'an says: "Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest." (Surah al-Ra'd, 13:28)

Not only man but all things want Him and call Him. All existing things from the inmost of their existence are in communication with Him. They praise Him and glorify Him:

"There is nothing that does not celebrate His praise, though you do not understand their praise." (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:44)

The deity of the philosophers, whom they call simply the 'First Cause' or the "Necessarily Existing Being", has nothing to do with man except that He has created him and put him in this world. But Allah of the Holy Qur'an is an object of love and the most wanted Being. He fills man with enthusiasm and induces him to make sacrifice. For His sake man often passes sleepless nights and restless days, for He becomes his most holy ideal.

Because of their familiarity with the Holy Qur'an, the Muslim philosophers were able to promote their theology to the highest level by introducing Qur'anic conceptions into it.

Is it possible that an unlettered, unschooled and an illiterate person should be in the matters of divinity thousands years ahead of such philosophers as Plato and Aristotle?

Qur'an, Tawrat and Injil

The Holy Qur'an confirmed the Old and the New Testaments of the Bible, but said that alterations had occurred in those Books and that betraying human hands had played with them. The Holy Qur'an has rectified some of the errors which had crept in these Books in the matters of theology, stories and some of the rules of law. An example of these errors is the story of the Forbidden Tree and the mistake (sin) of Adam as mentioned by us earlier.

The Holy Qur'an has repudiated such silly stories as that of the wrestling of God and has declared that the Prophets are free from the improper things ascribed to them in the former Books. This in itself is a proof of the truth of the Holy Qur'an.

Historical Stories

The Holy Qur'an recounted some historical stories of which the people of that age knew nothing. Even the Holy Prophet himself was unaware of them. The Qur'an says: "Neither you knew it nor your people." (Surah Hud, 11:49)

Not a single person among the Arab claimed that he knew the stories in question. While narrating these stories the Holy Qur'an did not follow the Bible, but gave a modified version of them. The researches of the modern historians in respect of the people of Sheba and the tribe of Thamud have confirmed the version of the Holy Qur'an.

The Holy Qur'an and Predictions

The Quraysh were very happy when in 615 AD Iran defeated the Romans. On this occasion the Holy Qur'an firmly said that in a period of less than 10 years the Romans would again defeat Iran. On this question some idolaters betted against the Muslims. But later events proved the truth of the Holy Qur'an and everything happened as was predicted by it. Similarly the Holy Qur'an firmly foretold that the man who calls the Holy Prophet 'without offspring' is himself 'without offspring'. At that time that man had seven children, but within two or three generations his offspring ceased to exist.

All this shows that the Holy Qur'an is miraculous and inimitable. There are a number of other remarkable points which prove its miraculousness on the intellectual level. They are related to natural sciences, philosophy and history.

Chapter 8: Distinguishing Features of Islam

Islam is the name of the religion of Allah. That is the religion preached by all Prophets. The most perfect form of it was conveyed to people through the last Prophet, Muhammad bin Abdullah. (May peace and blessings of Allah be on him and his progeny). With him the Prophethood came to an end. The message given by him is now known by the name of Islam throughout the world.

The Islamic teachings conveyed through the last Prophet, being the everlasting guide and the most perfect form of the religion of Allah, have certain special features consistent with the period of finality. These features in their totality could not exist during previous ages, the period of the minority of people.

Each of these features is a means of knowing Islam, and represents one of its basic doctrines. These features help forming a picture of Islam, though it may be a bit vague. They are also a criterion by which it can be judged whether a particular teaching is or is not a part of Islam.

We do not say that it is possible for us to mention all these features, but we will try to present an overall picture of them.

We know that every ideology, or for that matter, every school of thought, which offers a programme for the salvation, perfection and prosperity of man, also puts forward certain values and prescribes certain do's and don'ts, should and shouldn'ts on the level of the individual or society. Every ideology says what should happen and what should be done, and determines the general policy and the aims to be pursued, for example it may lay down that everybody should be free and should live a free life. Everybody should be bold and brave and should make continuous progress in order to attain perfection. A society should be built on the basis of justice and fair play, making an advance towards proximity to Allah.

These 'do's' and 'don'ts' should naturally be based on some philosophy capable of explaining them. In other words it is but natural that the injunctions of an ideology should be based on a particular conception of the world, man and society according to which it may be said that such and such should be like this or like that, because the world or man or society is like this.

A conception of the world means the sum-total of the views and interpretations regarding the world, man and society. In regard to the world it covers such views as: the world is like this or like that; it has such and such a law; it goes forward in such and such a way; its pursuer does not pursue such and such objective; it has or has not an origin; it has or has not a purpose. In regard to man the views which constitute the conception of the world are such as whether man has any innate nature; whether he is free or predestined; whether he is, in the words of the Holy Qur'an, a chosen being. As regards man the questions are: Whether society has a law independent of the laws governing the individuals; what laws govern society and history; and similar other questions.

As ideology is always based on a particular conception of the world which explains why the world, society or man is like this or like that, and determines what actions man should take and what sort of life he should

lead. The answer of every 'why' of an ideology underlies the world conception on which it is based. Technically every ideology is a sort of 'practical wisdom', whereas every conception of the world is a sort of 'theoretical wisdom'. Naturally every practical wisdom is based on a particular theory. For example, the practical wisdom of Socrates is based on his particular outlook on the world, which forms his theoretical wisdom. Similar is the relation between the practical wisdom of Epicurus and others and their theoretical wisdom.

As various people have different conceptions of the world naturally their ideologies vary.

Now a question arises why there are so many conceptions of the world or so many cosmologies? Why should one school of thought look at the world in one way and another school in another way?

The answer to this question is not so simple. Some people have gone to the extent of asserting that it is the class position of an individual that determines his attitude and outlook and puts special glasses on his eyes through which he sees the world. According to this theory the methods of production and distribution create reactions that shape the mentality and the views of an individual in a certain fashion depending on how favourably or adversely he is affected by these methods. The views thus formed affect his judgement and his evaluation of the things. Mowlawi says:

"If you feel giddy, you will find the whole house whirling round; if you travel in a boat, you will find the shore moving along with you; if you are distressed on account of some bad event you will find the whole world boring; if you are happy, you will find everything pleasant. You being a part of the world, you see as if the whole world is like you".

According to this theory nobody can claim that his view alone is correct and the view of others is wrong, for the views are a relative matter only. They are the outcome of an individual's contact with his natural and social environment. Hence everybody's views may be presumed to be correct as far as he himself is concerned.

Anyhow, the matter is not so simple. There is no denying the fact that a man's thinking is greatly influenced by his environment. But it also cannot be denied that man is endowed with a faculty of independent thinking free from any influence. It is this faculty which has been termed by Islam as the innate nature of man. We may deal with this question in detail on some other occasion.

Even if we hold that man has no independent, in fact, realistic thinking, it is still too early at this stage of cosmology to blame him.

What the modern philosopher who have made a close study of this question admit that the root-cause of the variety of conceptions of the world should be looked for in what is called the theory of knowledge.

The philosophers have paid enough attention to this theory. Some of them have asserted that philosophy is not cosmology. It is only the methodology of the pursuit of knowledge. The reason why there are so many cosmological theories is that there are several methods of knowing the world. Some say that the world should be known through reason. Some others are of the opinion that the knowledge of the world can be acquired

only through illumination and inspiration. So there is a difference of opinion about the method, the source and the criterion of attaining the knowledge of the world. According to some reason has a very limited role in this respect, but according to others its role is unlimited.

In short, the ideology of every school is based on its conception of the world, which in its turn is based on its theory of knowledge. How far an ideology is progressive depends on how far its conception of the world is progressive, which in its turn depends on how far its method of attaining knowledge is progressive. In fact the practical wisdom of every school depends on its theoretical wisdom, that is its way of thinking. Therefore it is necessary that every school must in the first instance make its way of thinking clear.

Islam is not a school of philosophy and has not talked in philosophical terms. It has its own terminology, which is intelligible to all classes in accordance with their particular level of understanding. It is astonishing that though it has referred to these questions only in between other subjects, its ideology in the form of practical thinking and its world conception in the form of a logical doctrine can easily be deduced from its teachings.

Evidently here we have to be contented with making a reference only to Islamic world conception, and cannot dwell at length on the valuable views expressed by Muslim scholars such as jurists, philosophers, mystics and other thinkers on the questions of Islamic Ideology, Islamic World Conception and the Methods of Acquiring Knowledge. Should we make such an attempt, the task is likely to be voluminous.

At the most we can produce a list, though incomplete, of the main features of Islamic views on these questions. We may be able to complete the list on some other occasion.

A list of the main features of the views of Islam under their appropriate headings, viz. The -Methods of Knowing, Conception of the World and the Ideological Features of Islam is as under:

1. The Methods of Knowing

(i) Is it possible to identify the truth?

This is and has always been the first question in this respect. Many of the thinkers are of the opinion that it is impossible to identify the truth correctly. They maintain that it is the lot of man not to know exactly what really in this world is and what passes in it. They consider it impossible to gain an indisputably accurate knowledge conforming to reality.

However, the Holy Qur'an regards it possible to know the truth. It invites man to know Allah, the world, himself and history. In the story of Prophet Adam, which is really the story of man, it considers him to be fit to learn all the Divine names or the realities of the world. The Holy Qur'an says that in certain cases human knowledge can comprehend some items of Divine knowledge:

"They cannot comprehend anything out of what He knows save what He wills." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:255)

(ii) What are the Sources of Knowledge?

From the viewpoint of Islam the sources of knowledge are: the natural signs or the signs existing in the world, man himself, history or the social events and episodes of the nations and the communities, reason or the self-evident principles, heart, in the sense of the illuminating and purifying organ and the written record left by the past people.

In many verses the Holy Qur'an has asked people to ponder over the nature of the heavens and the earth: "Behold what is in the heavens and the earth." (Surah Yunus, 10:101)

Similarly the Holy Qur'an has invited people to study the history of the past nations intelligently with a view to take lesson from it: "Have they not travelled in the land so that they may have hearts to understand and ears to hear!" (Surah al-Hajj, 22:46)

The Holy Qur'an believes in the reliability of reason as well as of self-evident truths. It bases its arguments on them and says: "Say: 'Had there been gods besides Allah, then surely both the heavens and the earth (i.e. the whole universe) would have been thrown into confusion'." (Surah al-Ambiya, 21:22)

"Allah has not chosen any son, nor is there any god along with Him. Otherwise each god would have surely championed which he has created and some of them would surely have overcome others. Glorified be Allah above all that they allege." (Surah al-Mu'minun, 23:91)

Similarly the Holy Qur'an regards the heart as the centre of Divine inspirations and intuitions. Every man can receive inspiration in accordance with his sincere devotion and his effort to keep this centre spiritually pure and active. The revelation of the Prophets is the highest degree of this kind of knowledge. The Holy Qur'an has repeatedly referred to the value of the pen and the book and on several occasions taken an oath by them: "Nun. By the pen and that which they write therewith." (Surah al-Qalam, 68:1)

(iii) What are the means of Acquiring Knowledge?

The means of acquiring knowledge are the senses, faculty of thinking, argumentation, purification of soul and the study of the learned works of others. In Surah an-Nahl the Holy Qur'an says: "And Allah brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers knowing nothing, and gave you hearing, sight and hearts so that you might give thanks." (Surah an-Nahl, 16:78)

In this verse it has been expressly stated that contrary to the theory of Plato, man at his birth is devoid of every kind of knowledge. Allah has bestowed on him senses to study this world. He has given him conscience and the power of analysis so that he may subsequently go deep into the realities of things, and may discover the laws governing them.

According to his famous theory Plato believed that everything that existed had its corresponding form in the world of ideas. At the time of his birth man was already aware of all things, but was oblivious of them. He did not learn things anew in this world but only recollected them.

What has been mentioned in this verse is not contrary to the Qur'anic theory of innate knowledge. This theory does not imply that man at his birth actually knows all things. What the Holy Qur'an means is that the essence of

man is in a state of growth and evolution, and that in his life he intuitively discovers certain fundamental and self-evident truths besides what he learns through his senses. The discovery of these truths is sufficiently convincing to force man to believe in them. That is what the Holy Qur'an means when it calls for 'tazakkur' or recalling. Hence there is no contradiction between the Qur'anic verses calling for tazakkur and the above quoted verse of Surah an-Nahl.

In this verse hearing and sight, being the most important senses, have been mentioned as the instruments of knowing. Technically they are known as the means of superficial or primary knowledge, while heart or conscience which has also been mentioned in the verse, is technically described as the means of deep and logical knowledge.

Incidentally in this verse an allusion has been made to another important question also. It is the question of the stages of knowledge.

Apart from the sense and the faculty of thinking the Holy Qur'an equally recognizes piety and purity of soul as the means of acquiring knowledge. This point has been mentioned in many verses implicitly or explicitly: "Believers, if you fear Allah, He will give you power to distinguish between what is good and what is bad." (Surah al-Anfal, 8:29)

"By the soul and Him who perfected it and inspired it with the consciousness of what is wrong for it and what is right for it! He is indeed successful who purified it and he is indeed a failure who corrupted it." (Surah al-Shams, 91:7 - 9)

Learning and reading are some other means of acquiring knowledge which have been formally recognized by the teachings of Islam. In order to illustrate this point, it is enough to say that the first revelation to the Holy Prophet began with the word, 'Read'.

"Read in the name of your Lord who created. He created man from clot. Read, for your Lord is the most Bounteous, Who taught by the pen. He taught man what he did not know." (Surah al-'Alaq, 96:1 - 5)

(iv) Subjects of Knowledge

What are the things worth knowing and what is that which one should know? One should know Allah, the world, man, society and time. All of them are worth knowing and one should know all of them.

2. Conception of the World

This book being an introduction to the Islamic conception of the world is mainly concerned with this subject and it is the subject which you will find scattered throughout this book. Anyhow, to maintain continuity, we give a brief narration of the main features of the Islamic conception of the world:

(1) Nature of the world is 'from Him'. In other words the reality of the world is derived from His reality. A thing may come out of another thing, but its reality is not necessarily completely derived from that of the latter. For example take the case of a son and his parents. The son comes from his parents, but the reality of his existence is different from theirs and is something additional to their reality. In contrast the nature of the world is 'from Him'. Its entire reality is nothing more than its attribution to Allah. Its reality and its attribution to Allah are identical that is what is meant when

we say that the world has been created by Allah. Had the creation of the world meant differently, it would have been procreation and not creation. The Holy Qur'an says: "He does not beget nor was He begotten." (Surah al-Ikhlās, 112:3)

It makes no difference whether in terms of time the world has or has not a beginning. If it has a beginning, it is a limited reality "from Him". If it has no beginning, it is an unlimited reality "from Him". But in either case it is 'from Him', and its limitedness or unlimitedness makes no difference to its creational reality and its being 'from Him'.

(2) The reality of the world besides being "from Him" and hence transient by its nature, is not only changing and moving with the time, but is in itself a movement. As such it is continuously in the flux and is always in a state of being created and recreated. No moment passes without the world being created and annihilated.

(3) The realities of this world are a lower form of the realities existing in another world called the unseen world. Whatever exists here in a measured and limited form, is found in the transcendental or the unseen world in an unmeasured and unlimited form, or in the Qur'anic words, in the form of 'treasures': "There is nothing but we have treasures of it and We do not send it down except in a known measure." (Surah al-Hijr, 15:21)

(4) As the nature of this world is "from Him", it is also 'to Him'. This world has made a descending journey, but it is also in the state of making an ascending journey towards Him:

"We are Allah's and indeed to Him we are returning." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:156)

"The end of them all rests with your Lord." (Surah an-Nazi'at, 79:44)

"Remember that all things reach Allah at last." (Surah ash-Shura, 42:53)

(5) The world has a firm and regular system based on causation. Every existing thing is governed by a Divine destiny through this system.

(6) The system of causation is not confined to material causes and effects. As far as the material dimension of the world is concerned, its causative system is material, but as far as its spiritual dimension is concerned, its causative system is not material. There is no inconsistency between these two systems, each of them having its own place. The angels, the soul, the protected Tablet, the Pen and the revealed Books are the means by which Divine favour operates in the world by Allah's will.

(7) The whole world is governed by unfailing laws and norms they being a part and parcel of the system of causation prevailing in the world.

(8) The world is a guided reality. Its evolution is guided. All the particles of the world are situated in such a way that they receive the light of guidance. Instinct, senses, reason, inspiration and revelation are all different stages of the general guidance of the world. Prophet Musa said: "Our Lord is He who gave to everything its nature and then guided it aright." (Surah Ta Ha, 20:50)

(9) In the world there is good as well as evil. There is consistency as well as inconsistency. There exist abundance and scarcity both. There is light as well as darkness. There are progress and development as well as stillness and stagnation. But the existence of what is good, consistent, abundant,

bright and developing has the prime importance, whereas the existence of all that is evil, dark, inconsistent, and stagnant, is only subsidiary and secondary. Yet these subsidiary and secondary things play an important and basic role in the induction of what is good, consistent, harmonious and evolutionary.

(10) The world being a living unit and being administered by conscious forces (the angels managing the affairs of the world), is a world of action and of reaction as far as its relation with man is concerned. The world is not indifferent to a good man and a bad man. The rules of retribution, recompense and remuneration operate in this world as they do in the Hereafter. The faithful and the unfaithful are not treated equally. The Holy Qur'an says: "If you are thankful, I will give you more, but if you are ungrateful, then know that my punishment is terrible." (Surah Ibrahim, 14:7)

Imam Ali says: "The ingratitude of someone should not deter you from doing good. Maybe that someone whom you have done no favour gives you thanks. You may receive more gratitude from the grateful than you miss in the case of the ungrateful. Allah likes those who do good". (Nahjul Balaghah -- See Saying 194)

What Imam Ali means is that the world being a living organism, harmonious and co-ordinated, it is not necessary that a person should get the reward of his virtue from whom he expects it. He may get it from some other unexpected quarter. The world has Allah who likes the virtuous.

(11) This world will be followed by another world. That world will be eternal where everybody will be recompensed in accordance with the deeds performed by him in this world.

(12) The soul of man is an eternal reality. Man shall not only be raised as a living being on the Day of Resurrection, but during the interval between this world and the Day of Resurrection also he enjoys a sort of life which is stronger and more perfect than this worldly life. Some 20 verses of the Holy Qur'an indicate that while the body of man is in the state of decay following his death and prior to the Day of Resurrection, he is not totally devoid of some sort of life.

(13) The fundamental rules of life, that is the moral and human principles, are firm and eternal. It is only the secondary rules and not the main principles that are relative and subject to a change. Humaneness cannot be one thing in one age and something totally different in another. It is not possible that during one period of time humaneness may mean to be an Abuzar and during another period it may mean to be a Mu'awiyah. There are certain eternal principles according to which an Abuzar will be an Abuzar and a Mu'awiyah will be a Mu'awiyah. The principles according to which Prophet Musa is Musa and Fir'awn is Fir'awn, are eternal.

(14) Truth is also eternal. If a scientific truth is absolutely correct, it is correct forever and if it is wrong, it is wrong forever. If it is partly correct, and partly wrong, it is always partly correct and partly incorrect. What undergoes a change is a reality, and that too a material reality. As for the truths, that is intellectual ideas and mental beliefs, they remain firm from the point of view of their applicability or non-applicability to a particular reality.

(15) The world, the earth and the sky are founded on the principles of truth and justice: "We have not created the earth, the heavens and what is between them except with truth." (Surah al-Ahqaf, 46:3)

(16) It is the established practice of Allah to bring final victory to truth against falsehood. The righteous and what is right are always victorious: "Our word has surely gone forth to our Prophets that they would be helped and that those who fight for Our cause would be victorious." (Surah as-Saffat, 37:173)

(17) All men have been created equal. No man by virtue of his creation can claim any privilege or right which another man does not possess. There are only three things which make a man superior to others:

The first is knowledge: "Are those who know equal with those who do not know?" (Surah az-Zumar, 39:9)

The second is fighting for the cause of Allah: "Allah has given those, who struggle with their lives and property, a rank higher than those who stay behind." (Surah al-Nisa, 4:95)

The third is piety: "Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is he whose conduct is best." (Surah al-Hujurat, 49:13)

(18) Man by nature has certain innate tendencies and inclinations. They include his religious and moral inclinations. The main foundation of man's conscience is his God-given innate nature and not his class position, gregarious proclivities or his struggle with nature. All these influences are acquired conscientiously only. Man by virtue of his human nature can have a unique culture and ideology. He can resist his natural environment, social atmosphere, historical factors and hereditary tendencies, and can rid himself of their influence.

(19) Every man is born as a human being, and as such even the most wicked man is capable of giving up his bad habits and reforming himself. That is why the Prophets have been entrusted with the task of advising and giving spiritual counsel to even the most wicked persons and their worst enemies in order to awaken their human conscience. If that method fails, only then they are allowed to fight against them. In his first meeting with Fir'awn, Prophet Musa was told to say to him: "Are you interested in reforming yourself. If so, I will guide you to your Lord, so that you may have a fear of Him." (Surah al-Nazi'at, 79:19)

(20) Man's personality is a compound in the real sense. At the same time it is one single element and that too in the true sense.

Unlike other organic and inorganic compounds, the component parts of which when combined together, lose their identity and independent nature and are merged in a harmonious whole, the contradictory elements of which man's personality is made up, do not lose their nature totally. This results in an inner struggle in which man is pulled to different directions. In the language of religion this struggle is known as the contradiction between reason and passion or the contradiction between the soul and the body.

(21) As man has an independent spiritual essence, from which his will originates, he is free to exercise his will. No kind of compulsion can deprive him of his freedom of choice. That is why he is accountable for himself and his society.

(22) Like human individuals, human society is also a real compound. It has its own laws, traditions and systems. Throughout history society as a whole has never followed the will of one single individual. A society is always composed of contradictory elements. The various intellectual, professional, political and economic groups forming it, never lose their identity completely. Clashes between these groups always continue in the form of political, economic, intellectual and doctrinal wars. Moreover, so long as man does not reach the zenith of humanity, a war will always be on between the developed men having the highest tendencies and the beastly men having the lowest tendencies.

(23) Allah does not change the destiny of any people unless and until they change themselves: "Allah does not change the condition of any people until they first change what is in their hearts." (Surah al-Ra'd, 13:11)

(24) Allah, the Almighty, who is the Creator of this world as well as of man, is independent of everything. He has no component parts. He is absolutely perfect. He shall always remain as He is. In His case any further development or evolution is impossible. His attributes are identical with His essence. The entire world is His work and a manifestation of His will. None can check or obstruct what He wills. Every other factor or will is perpendicular and not horizontal to His will.

(25) The world has a quasi-organic unity, because it has issued forth from one single source, is going back at a uniform pace towards it and is being managed and administered by conscious forces.

Ideological Aspect

The Islamic ideology being very vast and having so many ramifications, it is hardly possible to describe all its features. Anyhow, acting in accordance with the maxim that something is better than nothing, we list hereunder what is conveniently possible:

(1) **Comprehensiveness:** As compared to other religions comprehensiveness is one of the distinguishing features of Islam. It would be more correct to say that comprehensiveness and all-inclusiveness are the principal characteristics of Islam which is the most developed and perfect religion. With the help of the four sources of Islamic law, the Muslim scholars can find out Islamic point of view about every question. The Muslim scholars do not believe that there can be a situation about which Islam has no rule.

(2) **Applicability of Ijtihad:** The general rules of Islam have been so arranged that they are amenable to ijtihad. Ijtihad means the discovery and application of firm and fundamental principles to the particular and changing cases. Further, the task of ijtihad has been made easy by the fact that reason has been recognized as one of the sources of Islamic law.

(3) **Liberality and Simplicity:** In the words of the Holy Prophet Islamic law is liberal and simple. There is a hadith in al-Kafi, vol. V, according to which the Prophet said that Allah had not given him the instruction to escape from worldly involvement. He had sent him with an upright, easy and liberal law. Islam has not prescribed any hard and tedious duties. "In the matter of religion Allah has not put on you any undue constraint". As the

religious law is characterized by liberality, any rule found to be causing undue hardship, would be regarded as null and void.

(4) Useful and Healthy Life: Islam advocates a useful and healthy life and condemns extreme austerity and escape from life. That is why it has severely resented monkery and seclusion. "There is no monkery in Islam".

In the ancient societies there existed either of the two tendencies; either monasticism and escape from worldly involvement or indulgence in this worldly life and escape from all that relates to the Hereafter. Islam has made the preparation for the Hereafter a part of this worldly life. The way to the next world passes through the life and the responsibilities of this world.

(5) Socialization: All Islamic teachings have a social character. Even such individualistic rules as prayers and fasting create collectivism. There are many social, political, economic, legal and penal rules of Islam which have this character. Similarly such precepts as jihad (the Holy War), urging to do good and restraining from evil originate from the collective responsibility of the Muslims.

(6) Rights and Freedom of the Individual: Though Islam is a social religion, it attaches great importance to society and considers the individual to be responsible to society, it does not overlook the rights and freedom of the individual and does not belittle his economic, legal as well as social rights. From political point of view, an individual has the right of being consulted and elected, from economic point of view he has the right of owning the product of his effort and receiving the remuneration for his labour. He can sell, lend, donate, endow, cultivate and invest his legal property and can enter into a partnership in regard to it. From the legal point of view he has the right of instituting a legal case, establishing his claim and giving evidence. From social point of view he has the right of choosing a profession, choosing a residence and choosing a course of study etc. From family point of view he has the right of choosing his life-partner.

(7) Precedence of the Right of Society to the Right of Individual: Where there is a contradiction or conflict between a right of society and a right of individual, the right of social or the public right gets precedence to the private right or the right of an individual. Anyhow, this matter is to be decided by an Islamic court of law.

(8) Principle of Consultation: From Islamic point of view the principle of consultation is a recognized principle in social matters. In those cases where no Islamic injunction exists, the Muslims should decide their way of action through consultation and collective thinking.

(9) Elimination of Loss: The rules of Islamic law though general and absolute, are enforceable only to the extent that they cause no undue loss or damage. This rule is universal and constitutes a sort of the right of veto in respect of every rule of law.

(10) Importance of Usefulness: In the case of every act whether it is individual or collective, the first importance is given to its useful result. From Islamic point of view every action which is not useful is regarded as vain: "Successful indeed are those who shun all that is vain." (Surah al-Mu'minun, 23:3)

(11) Importance of Lawful Transactions, Circulation of Wealth and Transfer of Money and Property: All such deals must be free from every kind of fraud and underhand dealing. Any transaction otherwise will be unfair: "And do not usurp one another's property by unjust means." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:188)

Transfer of wealth by means of gambling is tantamount to swindling and is unlawful.

(12) Any profit on the capital lying idle, not in circulation for beneficial purposes, and not subject to loss and diminishing which takes the form of a debt or a security is usury and unlawful.

(13) Every financial transaction must be conducted with the full knowledge and prior information of both the parties. Any transaction which involves a loss owing to lack of information is void. "The Prophet has forbidden fraudulent transactions". This hadith originally relates to the fraudulent sale of defective items, but the principle of ijihad has made the rule general.

(14) Contrariety to Reason: Islam respects reason and describes it as an inward prophet (guide). The principles of religion are not acceptable unless they conform to the results of rational research. In subsidiary matters relating to religion reason has been recognized as a source of ijihad. Islam regards reason as a sort of purity and lack of it as a sort of ritual impurity. According to Islamic law insanity or intoxication invalidates minor ablution (Wuzu) just like urination or sleeping. Islam combats the use of every kind of intoxicant, because of its contrariety to reason. Reason is an integral part of religion.

(15) Contrariety to Will: Just as Islam respects reason, and in Islamic law there are certain provisions to protect it, Islam also respects will, which is the power which carries out the dictates of reason. That is why Islam considers all diverting activities which hinder the use of will-power to be prohibited and unlawful. In the language of Islam such diverting activities are called "Lahw".

(16) Work: Islam is opposed to idleness and lethargy. As man receives much from society, he must do something for the benefit of society as well as for the benefit of himself. It is his duty to exert himself to do some useful work. An idle man's mind is the devil's workshop, as the proverb goes. Islam curses the man who is a parasite or a burden on society. "Accursed is he who throws his burden on other people".

(17) Sanctity of Occupation and Profession: To have an occupation besides being a duty is something sacred and is liked by Allah. Occupation is semi-jihad.

"Allah likes a believer having a profession".

"A man who works hard for the sake of his family is like a person who fights for the cause of Allah". (Wasa'ilush Shiah)

(18) Prohibition of Exploitation: Islam resents and censures every form of slave labour and serfdom. It is enough for making a work unlawful, that it has the nature of utilizing the services of anyone else for one's own selfish and unfair ends.

(19) Extravagance and Wastage: People are allowed to exercise control of their property, but that does not mean more than that they have a freedom to use it within the frame-work allowed by Islam. They are neither allowed to waste it in any way nor to expend it unnecessarily. It is unlawful to spend it on those luxuries and outrageous embellishments which have been described by Islam as squandering.

(20) Comforts in Life: To provide the family (wife and children) such things which make their life easy is not only allowed, but is also encouraged so long as that does not involve extravagance and does not lead to anything unlawful.

(21) Bribery: The giver and the taker of illegal gratification have been severely censured by Islam and described as deserving of Hell-fire. Any money received as a bribe is unlawful.

(22) Hoarding: Hoarding of foodstuffs and not bringing them to market, with a view to sell them when the prices go up, is prohibited. The Islamic Government is allowed to seize such a stock and put it on sale at a reasonable price even without the consent of the owner.

(23) Basis of earning is public interest and propriety and not the desire of people. Normally in financial matters importance is attached to the people's wants and inclinations, and for the legality of any profession, it is considered enough that it is in demand by the public. But Islam does not consider a mere demand to be enough for the soundness and desirability of any job or profession. It considers propriety and soundness as a necessary condition. In other words existence of a demand is not enough for the legality of any profession. On this basis Islam prohibits a number of professions and transactions. Such prohibited professions are of several kinds:

i. Dealing in Things Which Give Currency to Ignorance and False Ideas: Anything which encourages ignorance, perversion of thinking or distortion of belief is unlawful, even if there exists sufficient demand for it. On this basis selling of idols and crosses, adornment of women with a view to deceive their suitors, praising of anybody who does not deserve a praise and soothsaying and divining are prohibited. Any income derived through such means is unlawful.

iii. Dealing in Misleading and Stupefying Articles: The sale and purchase of all such books, films and other articles which in some way or other spread misguidance or corruption in society, is prohibited.

v. Any Action Which May be Helpful to Enemy: To make money through any action which may strengthen the position of the enemy militarily, economically, morally or technologically and weakens the Islamic front is prohibited and is unlawful. Not only the sale of arms and other important equipment to the enemy is not allowed, but the sale of rare manuscripts is also prohibited.

vii. To make money through anything which may be harmful to the individual or society such as the sale of intoxicants, gambling equipment, things which are basically unclean and the things that are forged or adulterated is prohibited. Gambling, defamation of a believer, support of the

wrong-doers and acceptance of a post offered by an unjust ruler also come under this category.

There is also another kind of unlawful earning. There are certain tasks for which remuneration must not be accepted. They are too holy to be paid for and hence they should not be turned into a means of earning. Such tasks are 'ifta' (telling the rules of Islamic law), administering justice, giving religious education, delivering a sermon and the like. The profession of a physician also possibly comes under this category.

These jobs are too sacred to be made a source of securing income and collecting money. These duties should be performed without accepting any compensation. The Muslim treasury should ensure that the expenses of those who undertake these sacred jobs are met.

(24) Sanctity of Defending Rights: It is a sacred duty to safeguard the individual as well as the social rights and to fight against any transgressor: "Allah does not like abusing others, unless a man has been wronged." (Surah an-Nisa, 4:148)

The Holy Prophet has said: "The best jihad is to say the just word before a despotic ruler".

Imam Ali has quoted the Holy Prophet as having said: "No nation can occupy a commendable position unless it is able to secure the rights of the weak against the strong without any fear". (Nahjul Balaghah - See Letter 53)

(25) Continuous Struggle Against Corruption and Improving the Existing Conditions: The principle of enjoining good and restraining from evil is, in the words of Imam Muhammad Baqir, the basis of all Islamic injunctions. This principle keeps a Muslim in a state of seeking continuous reform and making incessant struggle against corruption and disorder: "You are the best nation that has been raised for mankind, for you exhort to what is good and restrain from evil." (Surah Ale Imran, 3:110)

The Holy Prophet has said: "You must exhort to do good and restrain from evil, otherwise Allah will put you under the control of the wicked. Then the good among you will be praying, but their prayer will be in vain". (Nahjul Balaghah)

(26) Monotheism: Islam is above all a monotheistic religion. It does not accept any doubt in regard to theoretical and practical monotheism. In Islam all ideas, behaviors and conducts begin with Allah and end with Him.

Islam severely rejects every kind of dualism, trinity, and polytheism and is opposed to every idea that is contrary to monotheism such as the recognition of two independent, fundamental and exclusive principles of Allah and Satan, Allah and man or Allah and matter. Whatever is done, must begin and end with the name of Allah and must be done for His sake and to gain His pleasure. Anything which does not conform to this conception is un-Islamic. In Islam all paths lead to monotheism. Islamic morals spring from monotheism and end there. The same is the case with Islamic education, Islamic politics, Islamic economy and Islamic socialism.

In Islam every act begins with the name of Allah and with His help. "In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful". "All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the universe". Everything takes place with the name of

Allah and with His support. "I put my trust in Allah and on Him should the believers rely".

Islamic monotheism is not a mere idea and a dry belief, as Allah is not separate from His creatures. He is with all of them and encompasses them all. Everything begins with Him and ends with Him. The idea of monotheism encompasses the entire existence of a real monotheist. It controls all his ideas, faculties and behaviour, and gives them direction. That is why a true Muslim thinks of Allah in the beginning, in the middle and in the end of every act he performs. He never associates anything with Allah.

(27) Doing Away with Intermediaries: Though Islam acknowledges that Allah's blessings come to the world through certain intermediaries and believes that the system of causation operates both in material and spiritual affairs, it does not recognize any intermediary as far as the question of worship and adoration is concerned. As we know, all other revealed religions have been deformed and altered, and as a result the individual has forgotten the value of his direct contact with Allah. Now it is supposed that there exists a gap between man and Allah, and only the priests and divines can be in direct communication with Allah. Islam considers this idea to be polytheistic. The Holy Qur'an expressly says: "If My bondmen ask you about Me, tell them that I am close to them and respond to the prayer of those who pray." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:186)

(28) Possibility of Coexistence With Those Who Believe in Only One Allah: From the point of view of Islam, the Muslims under certain conditions can live amicably in their country with such followers of other religions, as originally believed in monotheism, though now they have deviated from their original beliefs, such as the Jews, the Christians, the Magians etc. But the Muslims cannot live together in a Muslim country with the polytheists. Anyhow, in their own higher interest the Muslims can conclude with the polytheists, a peace treaty, a non-aggression pact or an agreement on any specific subject.

(29) Equality: Equality and non-discrimination are the principal articles of Islamic ideology. From the point of view of Islam all men are essentially equal. They have not been created in two or more than two strata. Blood, race or nationality is not the criterion of superiority. A Qurayshi sayyid and a negro are equal to each other. In Islam freedom, democracy, and justice are the by-products of equality.

From the point of view of Islam an individual can be deprived of his civil rights in his own interest and in the interest of society. But that can be done under very specific condition and that too only for a limited period only. Anyhow this provision has nothing to do with any racial discrimination. From Islamic point of view temporary slavery is allowed only for reformatory and educational purposes. This question has no economic and exploitative significance.

(30) Rights, duties and punishments are bisexual in Islam. Man and woman both are human beings and as such they have many common characteristics. But as they belong to two different sexes, they have some traits which are peculiar to either of them only. Their rights, duties and

punishments are common to both the sexes. In this respect there is no difference between a man and a woman. The right of acquiring knowledge, the right of worship, the right of choosing a spouse, the right of owning and disposing of property are all unisexual. But in some secondary cases where the question of sex has some special significance, the position of man and woman, though equal, is dissimilar and bisexual.

Chapter 9: The Holy Prophet

The Holy Prophet, Muhammad bin Abdullah (Peace be on him and his progeny), with whom Prophethood came to an end, was born in 570 AD at Makkah. He was raised as a Prophet when he was 40 years of age. For 13 years He preached Islam in Makkah, where he underwent great many difficulties and hardships. During this period he trained a few selected persons. Thereafter he migrated to Madina where he established his centre. For ten years he openly propagated Islam there. He fought a number of successful battles against the arrogant Arabs whom he finally subdued. By the end of this period the entire Arabian Peninsula had embraced Islam.

The Holy Qur'an was revealed on him piecemeal over a period of 23 years. The Muslims showed a wonderful devotedness and reverential attachment to the Holy Qur'an and the person of the Holy Prophet, who passed away in 11 A.H. in the 23rd year of his Prophetic mission when he was 63 years of age. He left behind a nascent society full of spiritual zeal, believing in a constructive ideology and conscious of its world responsibility.

There were two things which gave this new-born society a spirit of enthusiasm and unity. One was the Holy Qur'an which inspired the Muslims. It was always recited by them. The other was the lofty and penetrating personality of the Holy Prophet of which they were greatly enamoured. Now we briefly discuss the personality of the Holy Prophet:

His Childhood

He was still in his mother's womb, when his father, returning from a business trip to Syria died in Madina. Thereafter Abdul Muttalib, his grandfather took over his custody.

From his very childhood the signs of the Holy Prophet's great future were evident from his features, his conduct and his demeanor. Abdul Muttalib intuitively detected that his grand son had an exceptionally bright future.

The Holy Prophet was only 8 years old when his grand father also passed away and according to the will of the old gentleman, the guardianship of the child passed to his elder uncle, Abu Talib, who was also surprised to see that the boy's behaviour differed from that of other children.

Unlike the children of the neighbours he was never covetous of food, and unlike the prevailing custom of those days he always kept his hair combed and his face and body clean.

One day Abu Talib wanted him to change his dress in his presence before going to bed. Muhammad (Peace be on him and his progeny) did not like the idea. But as he could not flatly refuse to obey the order of his uncle, he asked him to turn his face away, so that he could take off his dress. Abu Talib was naturally surprised, as even the Arabs of mature age during those days were not averse to become totally naked in the presence of others. Abu Talib says: "I never heard him telling a lie, nor did I see him doing anything indecent. He never laughed unnecessarily, nor was he desirous of taking part in the games of the children. He preferred to be alone and was always modest".

Abhorrence of Idleness and Lethargy

He disliked idleness and laziness. He used to say: "Allah! I take refuge in You from laziness, lethargy, disability and worthlessness".

He always exhorted the Muslims to work hard and to be industrious, and used to say that adoration had seventy parts, the best of them is to earn one's livelihood lawfully.

Honesty

The Holy Prophet, prior to his being raised to Prophethood, made a journey to Syria on behalf of Khadija who subsequently became his wife. This journey, more than ever before made his honesty and efficiency clear. His honesty and reliability became so well known that he received the epithet of Muhammad, the trust-worthy. People entrusted their valuables to him for safe custody. Even after his being raised to Prophethood despite all their hostility to him, the Quraysh continued to deposit their valuables with him, for safe keeping. That is why at the time of his migration to Madina he left behind Imam Ali for a few days to return the deposits to their original owners.

Combat with Tyranny

During the pre-Islamic period a pact was concluded by the victims of cruelty and tyranny with a view to make common efforts for the protection of the oppressed against the unjust tyrants. This pact which is known as "Hilful Fuzul" was arranged in the house of Abdullah ibn Jad'in in Makkah by certain important personalities of the time. Later during the period of his Prophethood, the Holy Prophet often mentioned this pact and said that he was still willing to participate in a similar pact and not to violate its provisions.

Family Behavior

He was kind to his family. To his wives he was never harsh. The Makkans were not generally familiar with such a good behavior. He tolerated the stinging remarks of some of his wives, though they were resented by others. He emphatically counseled his followers to be kind to their wives for, as he often remarked, men and women both had good and bad traits. Man must not take into consideration only the unpleasant habits of his wife and divorce her for that reason. If he disliked some qualities of his wife, she must be possessing some other qualities which he liked. Thus the whole thing was balanced. The Holy Prophet was extremely affectionate to his children and grand-children and showed love and tenderness to them. He loved them, seated them on his lap, put them on his shoulders and kissed them. All this was contrary to the custom and usage of the Arabs of those days.

The Holy Prophet showed love and affection to the children of the common Muslims also. He seated them on his lap and passed his hand on their heads. Mothers often brought their children to him for his blessing. Sometimes it so happened that some child urinated on his clothes. On such occasions mothers were upset and felt ashamed. Some of them tried to stop the child from making water. But the Holy Prophet asked them not to

interrupt the child and said that he himself would clean his clothes, if they became dirty.

Treatment of Slaves

He was extraordinarily kind to the slaves. He told people that the slaves were their brothers. He said: "Give them of the same food of which you eat yourselves, and provide them with the same kind of clothes as you put on yourselves. Do not force them to do jobs which are too difficult for them. Share with them their jobs and help them in the performance of them. Do not call them slaves, for all men are the bondsmen of Allah, who is the real Master of everyone. Call your male slaves young man and your female slaves young woman."

Islam gives to the slaves all possible facilities leading to their complete liberation. The Holy Prophet described the slave-trading as the worst occupation and said that those who traded in human beings were the worst people in the sight of Allah.

Cleanliness and Use of Perfume

The Holy Prophet was greatly interested in cleanliness and was fond of the use of perfume. He urged his friends and followers also to keep their body and house clean and perfumed. He especially exhorted them to have bath and use perfume on Fridays so that bad odor might not cause inconvenience to the congregation.

Social Behavior

In his social life the Holy Prophet was always kind, cheerful and courteous to the people, took a lead in greeting all, including the children and the slaves. He did not stretch his feet in front of anyone and did not recline in the presence of others. In his company all sat in a circular form, and none had any distinct place or position. He was watchful of his companions and if he did not see anyone of them for two or three days, he inquired about him.

If anyone of them was ill, he went to see him and if anyone had any trouble, he made every effort to solve his problem. In a gathering he did not address or pay attention to any one individual, but equally attended to all. He did not like that he should be sitting and others be serving him. He personally took part in all that was to be done. He used to say that Allah hates to see a man who considered himself to be superior to others.

Soft as well as Tough

In his personal matters the Holy Prophet was soft, sympathetic and tolerant. His tolerance on many historical occasions was one of the reasons of his success. But in the matters of principle where a question of public interest or of law was involved, he was tough and never showed any leniency. At the time of the conquest of Makkah and his victory over the Quraysh he overlooked all the wrongs which they had committed against him over a period of 23 years and declared general amnesty.

He accepted the apology of the murderer of his well-beloved uncle, Hamzah. But on that very occasion he punished a woman of Banu Makhzum, who had committed theft. This woman belonged to a very

respectable family, who regarded the enforcement of a punishment against her as a great insult to them. They persistently requested the Holy Prophet to pardon her. Some prominent companions of the Holy Prophet also interceded on her behalf. But the Holy Prophet said angrily that the Divine law could not be suspended for the sake of any individual. In the evening on that day he delivered a speech and said:

"Former nations and communities declined and ceased to exist because they discriminated in the enforcement of the Divine law. If an influential person committed a crime, he was let off and no action was taken against him, but if an unimportant and weak person committed it, he was punished. I swear by Allah in whose hands my life is that I will be ruthless in the enforcement of justice even if the culprit be one of my own relatives".

Worship

He devoted a part of every night, sometimes half of it and sometimes one third or two thirds of it, to worship and adoration. Though his whole day was preoccupied, especially during his stay at Madina, he never curtailed the time of his worship. He found complete satisfaction in his worship and communication with his Lord. His worship was an expression of love and gratitude and was not motivated by a desire of securing paradise or by a fear of Hell. One day one of his wives asked him why after all he was so devoted to his worship? His reply was: "Should I not be thankful to my Lord?"

He fasted very often. In addition of fasting during the whole month of Ramazan and a part of the month of Sha'ban, he kept fast every other day. He always passed the last 10 days of the month of Ramazan in seclusion in the mosque, where he devoted his whole time to worship. Nevertheless, he told others that it was enough to observe fast for three days every month. He used to say that each one should carry out the acts of worship according to one's capacity and should not exert oneself more than one can bear, for such an exertion has an adverse effect. He was against monastic life, escape from worldly involvement and renunciation of family life. Some of his companions had expressed an intention to lead a monastic life, but he censured and reprovved them. He used to say: "Your body, your wife, your children and your friends all have a claim on you and you must fulfil your obligations".

He prolonged his acts of worship while performing them singly, and sometimes was busy with his pre-dawn prayers for hours. But he tried to shorten his prayers while in congregation. In this respect he considered it essential to have a regard for the aged and weakest among his followers, and counseled others also to his follow his example.

Austerity and Simple Living

Simple living was one of the principles of his life. He took simple food; wore simple clothes and travelled in a simple manner. He slept mostly on a mat, set on bare ground and milked his goat with his own hands. He mounted saddle-less animals and did not like anybody to walk by his side while he was riding. His staple food mostly comprised barley bread and dates. He mended his shoes and patched his clothes with his own hands. Though he led a simple life, he did not advocate the philosophy of

asceticism, and believed that it was necessary to spend money for the good of society and other lawful purposes. He used to say: "What a nice thing wealth is, if obtained through legal means by a man who knows how to spend it".

He also said: "Wealth is a good aid to piety".

Resolution and Perseverance

He had a wonderful willpower which permeated among his companions also. The total period of his Prophethood was entirely a lesson in resolution and perseverance. In his lifetime several times the conditions so developed that no hope was apparently left, but he never allowed the idea of failure to enter his mind, nor was his conviction of his final success ever shaken for a moment.

Leadership, Administration and Consultation

Though his companions carried out every order of his without any hesitation and repeatedly said that they had an unflinching faith in him and were willing even to plunge themselves into a river or a fire if he ordered them to do so, he never adopted any dictatorial methods. In regard to the matters about which he had received no specific instructions from Allah, he consulted his companions and respected their views, and thus helped them develop their personality. On the occasion of the Battle of Badr he left the questions of taking military action against the enemy, choosing the camping ground, and as to how the prisoners of war should be dealt with, to the advice of his companions. On the occasion of Uhud he made consultation as to whether the Muslim troops should fight from within the city of Madina or should go out of the city. He consulted his companions on the occasion of the Battles of Ahzab and Tabuk also.

The kindness and tolerance of the Holy Prophet, his anxiety to seek the forgiveness of the sins of his community, his giving importance to his companions and his consultations with them were the main factors which contributed to the wonderful and great influence that he exercised over his companions.

The Holy Qur'an points out this fact when it says: "It is by the mercy of Allah that you (the Prophet) were lenient to them, for if you had been harsh and hard-hearted, they surely would have left your company. Therefore pardon them and implore Allah to forgive them. And hold consultations with them in regard to the conduct of affairs. Once you are resolved, put your trust in Allah. Allah likes those who put their trust in Him" (Surah Ale Imran, 3:159)

Regularity and Orderliness

All his actions were governed by regularity and orderliness. He worked according to a well drawn time-table, and urged others also to do likewise. His companions under his influence were fully disciplined. Even when he considered it necessary not to disclose certain decisions lest the enemy should get an inkling of them, his companions carried out his orders without any argument. For example, once he said that they would move the next day.

Next day all those who were ordered proceeded with him without knowing the final destination of which they came to know only in the last moments. Sometimes he ordered some people to move in certain direction, gave a letter to their commander and said that he should open it on reaching such and such point and act according to the instructions given in it. They acted accordingly. Before reaching that particular point they did not know what was their destination and for what purpose they were going. In this way he kept the enemy and his spies in the dark and often took them unawares.

Capacity to Listen to Criticism and Dislike of Flattery and Undue Compliments

Sometimes he had to face the criticism of his companions, but without being harsh to them, he explained his decision and gained their agreement and concurrence.

He absolutely disliked flattery and undue compliments. He used to say: "Throw dust on the face of the flatterers".

He liked solid work. He was in the habit of doing things correctly and firmly. When Sa'd ibn Mu'az died and was laid in his grave, the Holy Prophet with his own hands placed the bricks and stones in their right place on the grave and made them firm. He said: "I know that before long all this will be mined, but I like things to be done correctly and efficiently".

Fight Against Weak Points

He did not exploit the weak points and the ignorance of his people. On the other hand he tried to rectify their weaknesses and acquainted them with what they did not know. The day his 17 months old son expired, by chance the sun was eclipsed. People said that the solar eclipse was due to the calamity suffered by the Holy Prophet. He did not keep quiet in the face of this silly notion, but ascended the pulpit and said: "Men! the moon and the sun are the two signs of Allah. They are not eclipsed on account of the death of anybody".

Possession of the Necessary Qualities of Leadership

He had the maximum qualities of leadership such as the sense of knowing men, firmness, determination, boldness, having no fear of the possible consequences of a necessary action, foresight, capacity of bearing criticism, recognition of the ability of others, delegation of powers to others in accordance with their ability, flexibility in his personal matters, rigidity in regard to the matters of principle, giving importance to others, promotion of their intellectual, emotional and practical talents, refraining from despotism, not demanding blind obedience, modesty and humility, simplicity and contentment, dignity and elevation of manners and great interest in organizing human resources. He used to say: "If three persons of you travel together, choose one of you as your leader and commander".

At Madina he organized a special secretariat, and appointed a group of persons for performing specific job. There were scribes of revelation who wrote the Holy Qur'an. Some people were entrusted with the job of drafting and writing special letters. Some recorded the deeds of legal transactions.

Some others were made responsible to keep financial records. Still some others were responsible for drafting agreements and treaties. All these details are recorded in the books of history such as Tarikh by Ibn Wazih, al-Ya'qubi, at-Tanbih wal Ishraf by Mas'udi, Mu'jam al-Buldan by al-Bilazari and at-Tabaqat by Ibn Sa'd.

Method of Preaching

In preaching Islam his method was gentle and mild, not harsh and severe. He mostly relied on arousing hope and avoided threatening and frightening. To one of his companions, whom he sent for preaching Islam, he said: "Be pleasant and do not be harsh. Tell the people what may please them and do not make them disgusted".

He took active interest in the propagation of Islam. Once he went to Taif for this purpose. During the Hajj season he used to call upon various tribes and convey the message of Islam to them. Once he sent Imam Ali and on another occasion Mu'az bin Jabal to Yemen for preaching. Before going to Madina himself he sent there Mus'ab bin Umayr to preach Islam. He sent a good number of his companions to Ethiopia. Besides escaping from the persecution of the Makkans, they propagated Islam there and paved the way for the acceptance of Islam by the Negus, the king of Ethiopia and 50% of the population of that country. In the sixth year of migration he wrote letters to the heads of a number of States in the various parts of the world and intimated them about his Prophethood. About hundred letters which he wrote to various personalities are still extant.

Encouragement of Knowledge

He encouraged his companions to acquire knowledge and literacy and with this end, he made it compulsory for their children to learn reading and writing. Further, he ordered some of his companions to learn the Syriac language. He often said: "It is obligatory on every Muslim to seek knowledge".

Some of his other sayings are: "Wherever you find a useful piece of knowledge, acquire it. It does not matter if you find it with a disbeliever or a hypocrite".

"Acquire knowledge even if you have to go to China for that purpose"

This emphasis on knowledge was the reason why the Muslims so speedily spread to all corners of the world in search of it and secured the scientific works wherever they found them. The Muslims not only translated these works, but took to research themselves also, and thus they became a connecting link between the ancient cultures of Greece, Rome, Iran, Egypt and India and the modern culture of Europe. In the course of time the Muslims themselves became the founders of one of the grandest civilizations and cultures in human history, known to the world as the Muslim civilization and culture.

The Holy Prophet's character and behaviour like his sayings and his religion were comprehensive and all-sided. History does not at all remember any personality who like him ever attained perfection in all human dimensions. He was really a perfect man.

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