

A SERIES OF
ISLAM AND SHIA

Shia – Quran in Islam – A Shi'ite Anthology

BY

ALLAMA SAYYID MUHAMMAD HUSAYN TABATABAI

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PREFACE

'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'iy Tabriziy, the well-known modern philosopher, is one of the most famed exegetes of the Holy Qur'ān. He was born in 1902 under the auspices of a family versed in religious knowledge. He started his religious studies in 1918 and traveled to the Ḥawzah 'Ilmiyyah (faculty of Islamic studies) of Najaf so as to continue his studies. In a period of ten years of study in this Ḥawzah, he could master the sciences of *Fiqh* (Muslim Jurisprudence) and *ʿIlm al-Uṣūl* (Principles of Muslim Jurisprudence) under the supervision of his mentors, Ayatollah Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Iṣfahāniy, Ayatollah Sayyid Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Iṣfahāniy, Ayatollah al-Nā'iniy, and Ḥakīm Badkubeh. In the interim, he studied philosophy, theology, mathematics, ethics, and *ʿIlm al-Rijāl* (study of biographies of traditionists and Hadīthists). In 1935, he returned to his hometown, Tabriz, where he resided for ten years. In 1946, he decided to move to the Ḥawzah 'Ilmiyyah of Qum where he provoked an intellectual revolution when he established a new methodology in the sciences of exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān (*Tafsīr*) and philosophy, which had been inactive and unsought by the educated people, in the Ḥawzah 'Ilmiyyah. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'iy, thus, authored many books and instructed these two materials although he dedicated the greatest portion of his interest to the exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān through the Holy Qur'ān (*tafsīr al-qur'ān bil'-qur'ān*), until he attracted many attentions to this field.

In November 1981, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'iy departed life.

As a matter of fact, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'iy is considered one of the few scholars who wrote, compiled, and investigated in the various fields of knowledge in some of which he has left a huge heritage. Among his many books are "*Shī'ah in Islam*" and "*Qur'ān in Islam*". These two books have been translated to various international languages and have been selected as curricula in the Iranian, as well as some international, universities. He also wrote the following books: "*Sunan al-Nabiy* (Traditions of the Prophet)", "*Bidāyat al-Hikmah* (The Outset of Wisdom)", "*Nihāyat al-Hikmah* (The Ultimate of Wisdom)", "*Uṣūl al-Falsafah* (Principles of Philosophy)". The book of "*Course of Realism*" comprises three lectures that 'Allāmah al-Ṭabāṭabā'iy delivered at the Hawzah 'Ilmiyyah of Qum as refutation of Materialism. Thereafter, these lectures were compiled in a book that was published in order that researchers would benefit by them. He also wrote a marvelous 20 volume book on exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān, titled "*al-Mizān fi Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*." This book is too famous to introduce it in this brief overture, especially in the view of experts and specialists in Qur'ānic studies.

Dear reader,

The current series comprises three books, namely "*Shī'ah in Islam*", "*Qur'ān in Islam*", and "*A Shī'ite Anthology*." This series aims at demonstrating Shi'ism and Islam in their true outline before the Western community. In addition, this series has acquired the favorable judgment of oriental scholars as well as those interested in Islamic and Shi'ite knowledge. In his introduction to the book of "*Shī'ah in Islam*", Dr. Ḥusayn Naṣr has referred to the fact that it comprises a precise definition of Shi'ism and Islam.

Finally, we are pleased to express our thanks and gratitude to the dear translators who undertook the mission of translating these precious books from Farsi into English, hoping for nothing other than the pleasure of Almighty Allah and serving the religion and

al-muṭalib

SHĪ`AH

‘ALLĀMAH SAYYID MUḤAMMAD ḤUSAYN ṬABĀṬABĀT

Translated By

SAYYID ḤUSAYN NAṢR

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
MOST MERCIFUL AND COMPASSIONATE*

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THE PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

In the Name of Allāh, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

This is one of the valuable works of `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī printed and presented, by the help of Allāh, for the sixth time in a new form.

`Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī was a great and unique person, free from want, and a commentator of the Holy Qur'ān. He was one of the shining stars of the Islāmic world, a man whose profound and gnostical ideas and valuable works had a deep influence in clarifying the Islāmic teachings. In the Islāmic world in general and among the Muslim scholars in particular, he was known as '*Allāmah* (the most learned), *faylasūf* (philosopher), *Mufasssīr* (interpreter of the Holy Qur'ān) and *Ayatollah*. But as the days pass, it is becoming more manifest that these words of respect are not able to reflect the great personality of the `Allāmah in all of its dimensions. If someone studies his behaviours, his way of life, his scientific works, his profound ideas, his sincerity and his knowledge, he will surely come to the conclusion that without real connection with Almighty Allāh, His Prophet and the Ahl al- Bayt no one can have such a grace and favor. "He (Allāh) gives the Wisdom to whomsoever He wills; and whoso is given the Wisdom has been given much good.[Qur'ān, 2:269]"

Imām Khumaynī expressed his grief for the death of the `Allāmah saying, "I express my sorrow at the loss, which occurred for the al-Ḥawzah al-`Ilmiyyah (the centre of the Islāmic Studies in Qum) and Muslims by the death of the late `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī. I pay my condolence to you, the nation of Iran, and the al-Ḥawzah al-`Ilmiyyah. May Allāh rise him (on

the day of Resurrection) among the servants and helpers of Islām, and may He bestow patience upon his family and students.

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʿī had trained many students each of whom has become an Islāmic thinker and a remarkable writer. To have a deeper insight on the ʿAllāmah's personality, we shall present the views of a number of his students: Shahīd Murtaḍā Muṭahharī says, "ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʿī is a man whose exalted thoughts deserve to be studied, analysed and evaluated for the next hundred years. Really, he is one of the great servants of Islām. He is truly a symbol of piety and spirituality. In purification of soul and piety, he has ascended high peaks. For many years, I have been benefiting from his blessed spirituality and I still continue to benefit. His exegesis of the Qurʿān, al-Mizān, is one of the greatest interpretations of the Holy Qurʿān. Of course, not only is he famous in Iran, but also in the Islāmic world and the non-Islāmic world like Europe and America. Orientalists who were familiar with Islāmic teachings have regarded him as a great thinker and used to visit him in Iran."

Shaykh Ibrāhīm Amīnī, an Islāmic scholar and a writer of many books, says, "ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʿī was a refined goodnatured, free from want, kind, humble, sincere, calm and pleasant man. I had the honor of attending his lectures for nearly thirty years. I even used to attend his private classes on Thursday nights. In all this period, I can never remember even once that he might have become angry or even spoken in insulting manner; he always taught calmly and behaved very kindly even with the most humble students as if they were his long-time friends. He listened to every question and objection. I had never seen him praising himself, he was never miser in imparting knowledge which he possessed and training the students. He never left anyone's question unanswered. In reading and thinking, he had an extraordinary power to concentrate on one subject for a long time. The great teacher was a symbol of noble ethics; he always listened to what others said and if a truth was uttered to him, he would accept it. He refrained from polemic discussions."

Muḥammad Taqī Mişbāḥ, a famous teacher in Qum, says, "Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī was a symbol of tranquillity, dignity, self-respect, relying on Allāh, sincerity, humbleness, kindness and noble ethics. One could see the sign of spiritual perfection, enlightenment of heart and the connection with the heavenly world on his angelic visage. In the course of thirty years in which I had the honour to attend his lectures, I have not heard the word 'I' from him, whereas 'I do not know' was heard many times. This was his humbleness. One of the remarkable qualities of this spiritual man was his superabundance love and faith for the Ahl al-Bayt. His day and night activities in the field of knowledge did not stop him from paying respects to, and asking help from, the Holy Prophet and his family; and for all his success, he considered himself obliged to these great personalities.

Although Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī was an unknown gem that did not have any desire for fame and spent a simple life, he immediately attracted the seekers of truth and preeminent personalities and started to teach and train them and thus planted the first deed for a cultural and ethical movement. Although he did not have any material sources at his disposal, he confronted all the problems with the faith in Allāh and the strength of personal merits. He continued his march on the path, which he had chosen without any selfishness or desire for material gains or position. He was not alone in this way; he guided all his students and disciples to the ultimate goal. Today, we are witnessing the movement, which was started thirty-five years ago by this great person. Today, we are benefiting from the fruits of a tree which was planted by this great man, and in the future by the grace of Allāh, it will provide more fruits for the Islāmic society.

The Publishers



* ALLĀMAH SAYYID MUḤAMMAD ḤUSAYN ṬABĀṬABĀ'Ī

PREFACE

By: Sayyid Ḥusayn Naṣr

The Study of Shī`ism

Despite the vast amount of information and the number of factual details assembled during the past century by Western scholarship in the fields of orientalism and comparative religion, many gaps still exist in the knowledge of the various religions of the world, even on the level of historical facts. Moreover, until recently, most of the studies carried out within these fields have suffered from a lack of metaphysical penetration and sympathetic insight. One of the most notable omissions in Western studies of the religions of the East, and of Islām in particular, has occurred in the case of Shī`ism. Until now, Shī`ism has received little attention; and when it has been discussed, it has usually been relegated to the secondary and peripheral status of a religio-political "sect," a heterodoxy or even a heresy. Hence, its importance in both the past and the present has been belittled far more than a fair and objective study of the matter would justify.

The present work hopes to redress partially the lack of accessible and reliable English-language material pertaining to Shī`ism. It is the first of a series of books designed to bring to the English-speaking world accurate information about Shī`ism through the translation of writings by authentic Shī`ite representatives and of some of the traditional sources which, along with the Qur`ān, form the foundation of Shī`ite Islām. The purpose of this series is to present Shī`ism, as a living reality as it has been and as it is, in both its doctrinal and historical aspects. Thereby, we can reveal yet another

dimension of the Islāmic tradition and make better known the richness of the Islāmic revelation in its historical unfolding, which could have been willed only by Providence.

This task, however, is made particularly difficult in a European language and for a predominantly non-Muslim audience by the fact that to explain Shī`ism and the causes for its coming into being is to fall immediately into polemics with Sunni Islām. The issues which thus arise, in turn, if presented without the proper safeguards and without taking into account the audience involved could only be detrimental to the sympathetic understanding of Islām itself. In the traditional Islāmic atmosphere where faith in the revelation is naturally very strong, the Sunni-Shī`ite polemics which have gone on for over thirteen centuries, and which have become especially accentuated since the Ottoman-Safavid rivalries dating from the tenth/sixteenth century, have never resulted in the rejection of Islām by Anyone from either camp. In the same way, the bitter medieval theological feuds among different Christian churches and schools never caused anyone to abandon Christianity itself, for the age was one characterized by faith. But were Christianity to be presented to Muslims beginning with a full description of all the points that separated, let us say, the Catholic and Orthodox churches in the Middle Ages, or even the branches of the early church, and all that the theologians of one group wrote against the other, the effect upon the Muslims' understanding of the Christian religion itself could only be negative. In fact, a Muslim might begin to wonder how anyone could have remained Christian or how the Church could have survived despite all these divisions and controversies. Although the divisions within Islām are far fewer than these in Christianity, one would expect the same type of effect upon the Western reader faced with the Shī`ite-Sunni polemics. These controversies would naturally be viewed by such a reader from the outside and without the faith in Islām itself which has encompassed this whole debate since its inception and has provided its traditional context as well as the protection and support for the followers of both sides.

Despite this difficulty, however, Shī`ism must of necessity be studied and presented from its own point of view as well as from within the general matrix of Islām. This task is made necessary first of all because Shī`ism exists as an important historical reality within Islām and hence it must be studied as an objective religious fact. Secondly, the very attacks made against Islām and its unity by certain Western authors (who point to the Sunni-Shī`ite division and often fail to remember the similar divisions within every other world religion) necessitate a detailed and at the same time authentic study of Shī`ism within the total context of Islām. Had not such a demand existed, it would not even have been necessary to present to the world outside Islām all the polemical arguments that have separated Sunnism and Shī`ism. This is especially true at a time when many among the Sunni and Shī`ite `ulamā are seeking in every way possible to avoid confrontation with each other in order to safeguard the unity of Islām in a secularized world which threatens Islām from both the outside and the inside.

The attitude of this group of `ulamā is of course in a sense reminiscent of the ecumenism among religions, and also within a given religion, that is so often discussed today in the West. Most often, however, people search in these ecumenical movements for a common denominator which, in certain instances, sacrifices divinely ordained qualitative differences for the sake of a purely human and often quantitative egalitarianism. In such cases the so-called 'ecumenical' forces in question are no more than a concealed form of the secularism and humanism which gripped the West at the time of the Renaissance and which in their own turn caused religious divisions within Christianity. This type of ecumenism, whose hidden motive is much more worldly than religions, goes hand in hand with the kind of charity that is willing to forego the love of God for the love of the neighbor and in fact insists upon the love of the neighbor in spite of a total lack of the love for God and the Transcendent. The mentality which advocates this kind of 'charity' affords one more example of the loss of the transcendent dimension and the reduction of all things to the

purely worldly. It is yet another manifestation of the Secular character of modernism which in this case has penetrated into the supreme Christian virtue of charity and, to the extent that it has been successful, has deprived this virtue of any spiritual significance.

From the point of view of this type of ecumenical mentality, to speak approvingly of the differences between religions, or of the different orthodox schools within a single religion, is tantamount to betraying man and his hope for salvation and peace. A secular and humanistic ecumenism of this kind fails to see that real peace or salvation lies in Unity *through* this divinely ordained diversity and not in its rejection, and that the diversity of religions and also of the orthodox schools within each religion are signs of the Divine compassion, which seeks to convey the message of heaven to men possessing different spiritual and psychological qualities. True ecumenism would be a search in depth after Unity, essential and Transcendent Unity, and not the quest after a uniformity which would destroy all qualitative distinctions. It would accept and honor not only the sublime doctrines but even the minute details of every tradition, and yet see the Unity which shines through these very outward differences. And within each religion, true ecumenism would respect the other orthodox schools and yet remain faithful to every facet of the traditional background of the school in question. It would be less harmful to oppose other religions, as has been done by so many religious authorities throughout history, than to be willing to destroy essential aspects of one's own religion in order to reach a common denominator with another group of men who are asked to undergo the same losses. To say the least, a league of religions could not guarantee religious peace, any more than the League of Nations guaranteed political peace.

Different religions have been necessary in the long history of mankind because there have been different "humanities" at human collectivities on earth. There having been different recipients of the Divine message, there has been more than one

echo of the Divine Word. God has said "I" to each of these 'humanities' or communities; hence the plurality of religions.¹ Within each religion as well, especially within those that have been destined for many ethnic groups, different orthodox interpretations of the tradition of the one heavenly message, have been necessary in order to guarantee the integration of the different psychological and ethnic groupings into a single spiritual perspective. It is difficult to imagine how the Far Eastern peoples could have become Buddhist without the Mahayana school, or some of the Eastern peoples Muslim without Shī'ism. The presence of such divisions within the religious tradition in question does not contradict its inner unity and transcendence. Rather it has been the way of ensuring spiritual unity in a world of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Of course, since the exoteric religious perspective relies on outward forms, it always tends in every religion to make its own interpretation the only interpretation. That is why a particular school in any religion chooses a single aspect of the religion and attaches itself so intensely to that one aspect that it forgets and even negates all other aspects. Only on the esoteric level of religious experience can there be understanding of the inherent limitation of being bound to only one aspect of the total Truth; only on the esoteric level can each religious assertion be properly placed so as not to destroy the Transcendent Unity which is beyond and yet dwells within the outward forms and determinations of a particular religion or religious school.

Shī'ism in Islām should be studied in this light: as an affirmation of a particular dimension of Islām which is made central and in fact taken by Shī'ites to be Islām as such. It was not a movement that in any way destroyed the Unity of Islām, but one that added to the richness of the historical deployment and spread of the Qur'ānic message. And despite its exclusiveness, it contains within its forms the Unity which

¹ See F. Schuon, *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, translated by Lord Northbourne, London, 1965, especially Ch. IX, "Religio Perennis."

binds all aspects of Islām together. Like Sunnism, Sufism and everything else that is genuinely Islāmic, Shī`ism was already contained as a seed in the Holy Qur`ān and in the earliest manifestations of the revelation, and belongs to the totality of Islāmic orthodoxy.¹

Moreover, in seeking to draw closer together in the spirit of a true ecumenism in the above sense, as is advocated today by both the Sunni and Shī`ite religious authorities, Shī`ism and Sunnism must not cease to be what they are and what they have always been. Shī`ism, therefore, must be presented in all its fullness, even in those aspects which contradict Sunni interpretations of certain events in Islāmic history, which in any case are open to various interpretations. Sunnism and Shī`ism must first of all remain faithful to themselves and to their own traditional foundations before they can engage in a discourse for the sake of Islām or, more generally speaking, religious values as such. But if they are to sacrifice their integrity for a common denominator which would of necessity fill below the fullness of each, they will only have succeeded in destroying the traditional foundation which has preserved both schools and guaranteed their vitality over the centuries. Only Sufism or gnosis (*'irfān*) can reach that Unity which embraces these two facets of Islām and yet transcends their outward differences. Only Islāmic esotericism can see the legitimacy and meaning of each and the real significance of the intertwinement each has made of Islām and of Islāmic history.

Without, therefore, wanting to reduce Shī`ism to a least common denominator with Sunnism or to be apologetic, this book presents Shī`ism as a religion, reality and an important aspect of the Islāmic tradition. Such a presentation will make possible a more intimate knowledge of Islām in its multidimensional entity but at the same time it will pose certain difficulties of a polemical nature which can be resolved only on the level which transcends polemic, altogether. As

¹ See S. H. Naṣr, *Ideals and Realities of Islām*, Leaden, 1966 C h. IV, 'Sunnism and Shī`ism.'

already mentioned, the presentation of Shī'ism in its totality and therefore including its polemical aspects, while nothing new for the Sunni world, especially since the intensification of Sunni-Shī'ite polemics during the Ottoman and Safavid periods, would certainly have an adverse effect upon the non-Muslim reader if the principles mentioned above were to be forgotten.

In order to understand Islam fully, it must always be remembered that it, like other religions, contained in itself from the beginning the possibility of different types of interpretation: (1) that Shī'ism and Sunnism, while opposed to each other on certain important aspects of sacred history, are united in the acceptance of the Qur'ān as the Word of God and in the basic principles of the faith; (2) that Shī'ism bases itself on a particular dimension of Islām and on an aspect of the nature of the Prophet as continued later in the line of the Imāms and the Prophet's Household to the exclusion of, and finally in opposition to another aspect, which is contained in Sunnism; (3) and finally, that the Shī'ite-Sunni polemics can be put aside and the position of each of these schools explained only on the level of esotericism, which transcends their differences and yet unites them inwardly.

Fundamental Elements of Shī'ism

Although in Islām no political or social movement has been separated from religion, which from the point of view of Islām necessarily embraces all things, Shī'ism was not brought into existence only by the question of the political succession to the Prophet of Islām—upon whom be blessings and peace—as so many Western works claim (although this question was of course of great importance). The problem of political succession may be said to be the element that crystalised the Shī'ite, into a distinct group, and political suppression in later periods, especially the martyrdom of Imām Husayn—upon whom be peace—only accentuated this tendency of the Shī'ite, to see themselves as a separate community within the Islāmic world. The principal cause of the coming into being of Shī'ism,

however, lies in the fact that this possibility existed within the Islāmic revelation itself and so had to be realized. Inasmuch as there were exoteric and esoteric interpretations from the very beginning, from which developed the schools (*madhhab*) of the Sharī'ah and Sufism in the Sunni world, there also had to be an interpretation of Islām which would combine these elements in a single whole. This was realized in Shī'ism, for which the Imām is the person in whom these two aspects of traditional authority are united and in whom the religious life is marked by a sense of tragedy and martyrdom. There had to be the possibility, we might say, of an esotericism—at least in its aspect of love rather than of pure gnosis—which would flow into the exoteric domain and penetrate into even the theological dimension of the religion rather than remain confined to its purely inward aspect. Such a possibility was Shī'ism. Hence, the question which arose was not so much who should be the successor of the Holy Prophet as what the function and qualifications of such a person would be.

The distinctive institution of Shī'ism is the Imāmate and the question of the Imāmate is inseparable from that of *wilāyah*, or the esoteric function of interpreting the inner mysteries of the Holy Qur`ān and the Sharī'ah.¹ According to the Shī'ite view, the successor of the Prophet of Islām must be one who not only rules over the community in justice but also is able to interpret the Divine Law and its esoteric meaning. Hence, he must be free from error and sin (*ma`ṣūm*) and he must be chosen from on high by divine decree (*naṣṣ*) through the Prophet. The whole ethos of Shī'ism revolves around the basic notion of *wilāyah*, which is intimately connected with the notion of sanctity (*wilāyah*) in Sufism. At the same time, *wilāyah* contains certain implications on the level of the Sharī'ah inasmuch as the Imām, or he who administers the function of *wilāyah*, is also the interpreter of religion for the religious community and its guide and legitimate ruler.

¹ On *Wilāyah*, see S. H. Naṣr, *Ideals*, pp. 161-162, and the many writings of H. Corbin on Shī'ism, which nearly always turn to this major theme.

It can be argued quite convincingly that the very demand of `Alī for allegiance (*bay`ah*) from the whole Islāmic community at the moment that he became caliph implies that he accepted the method of selecting the caliph by the voice of the majority which had been followed in the case of the three *Khulafā` Rāshidūn* or "the rightly guided caliphs" before him and that thereby he accepted the previous caliphs insofar as they were rulers and administrators of the Islāmic community. What is also certain from the Shī`ite point of view, however, is that he did not accept their function as Imāms in the Shī`ite sense of possessing the power and function of giving the esoteric interpretations of the inner mysteries of the Holy Qur`ān and the Shari`ah as is seen by his insistence from the beginning that he was the heir and inheritor (*waṣī*) of the Prophet and the Prophet's legitimate successor in the Shī`ite sense of succession. The Sunni-Shī`ite dispute over the successors to the Holy Prophet could be resolved if it were recognized that in one case there is the question of administering a Divine Law and in the other of also revealing and interpreting its inner mysteries. The very life of `Alī and his actions show that he accepted the previous caliphs as understood in the Sunni sense of *khalīfah* (the ruler and the administrator of the Shari`ah), but confined the function of wilāyah, after the Prophet, to himself. That is why it is perfectly possible to respect him as a caliph in the Sunni sense and as an Imām in the Shī`ite sense, each in its own perspective.

The five principles of religion (*uṣūl al-Dīn*) as stated by Shī`ism include: tawḥīd or belief in Divine Unity; nubuwwah or prophecy; *Ma`ād* or resurrection; *Imāmah* or the Imāmate, belief in the Imāms as successors of the Prophet; and `Adl or Divine Justice. In the three basic principles—Unity, prophecy and resurrection—Sunism and Shī`ism agree. It is only in the other two that they differ. In the question of the Imāmate, it is the insistence on the esoteric function of the Imām that distinguishes the Shī`ite perspective from the Sunni; in the question of justice it is the emphasis placed upon this attribute as an intrinsic quality of the Divine Nature that is particular to Shī`ism. We might say that in the esoteric formulation of Sunni

theology, especially as contained in Ash`arism, there is an emphasis upon the will of God. Whatever God wills is just, precisely because it is willed by God; and intelligence (*'Aql*) is in a sense subordinated to this will and to the "voluntarism" which characterizes this form of theology.¹ In Shī`ism, however, the quality of justice is considered as innate to the Divine Nature. God cannot act in an unjust manner because it is His Nature to be just. Fa, Him to be unjust would violate His own Nature, which is impossible. Intelligence can judge the justness or unjustness of an act and this judgment is not completely suspended in favor of a pure voluntarism on the part of God. Hence, there is a greater emphasis upon intelligence (*'aql*) in Shī`ite theology and a greater emphasis upon will (*iradah*) in Scorn kalām, or theology, at least in the predominant Ash`arite school. The secret of the greater affinity of Shī`ite theology for the "intellectual sciences" (*al-'ulūm al-'aqliyah*) lies in part in this manner of viewing Divine Justice.²

Shī`ism also differs from Sunnism in its consideration of the means whereby the original message of the Qur`ānic revelation reached the Islāmic community, and thereby in certain aspects of the sacred history of Islām. There is no disagreement on the Qur`ān and the Prophet, that is, on what constitutes the origin of the Islāmic religion. The difference in view begins with the period immediately following the death of the Prophet. One might say that the personality of the Prophet contained two dimensions which were later to become crystallized into Sunnism and Shī`ism. Each of these two schools was later to reflect back upon the life and personality of the Prophet solely from its own point of view, thus leaving aside and forgetting or misconstruing the other dimension excluded from its own perspective. For Shī`ism, the "dry" (in the alchemical sense)

¹ For a profound analysis and criticism of Ash`arite theology, see F. Schuon. "Dilemmas of Theological Speculation." *Studies in Comparative Religion*. Spring 1969, pp. 66-93.

² See S. H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islāmic Cosmological Doctrines*, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1964, Introduction; also S. H. Nasr, *Sciences and Civilization in Islām*, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1968, Chapter II.

and "austere" aspect of the Prophet's personality as reflected in his successors in the Sunni world was equated with worldliness, while his "warm" and "compassionate" dimension was emphasized as his whole personality and as the essence of the nature of the Imāms, who were considered to be a continuation of him.¹

For the vast majority of the Islāmic community, which supported the original caliphate, the companions (*ṣaḥābah*) of the Prophet represent the Prophet's heritage and the channel through which his message was transmitted to later generations. Within the early community, the companions occupied a favored position and among them the first four caliphs stood out as a distinct group. It is through the companions that the sayings (*ḥadīth*) and manner of living (*sunnah*) of the Prophet were transmitted to the second generation of Muslims. Shī'ism, however, concentrating on the question of *wilāyah* and insisting on the esoteric content of the prophetic message, saw in 'Alī and the Household of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*), in its Shī'ite sense, the sole channel through which the original message of Islām was transmitted, although, paradoxically enough the majority of the descendants of the Prophet belonged to Sunnism and continue to do so until today. Hence, although most of the ḥadīth literature in Shī'ism and Sunnism is alike, the chain of transmission in many instances is not the same. Also, inasmuch as the Imāms constitute for Shī'ism a continuation of the spiritual authority of the Prophet—although not of course his law bringing function—their sayings and actions represent a supplement to the prophetic ḥadīth and sunnah. From a purely religious and spiritual point of view, the Imāms may be said to be for Shī'ism an extension of the personality of the Prophet during the succeeding centuries. Such collections of the sayings of the

¹ This idea was first formulated in an as yet unpublished article of F. Schuon entitled *Images d'Islām*, some elements of which can be found in the same author's *Das Ewige im Vorgänglichkeit*, translated by T. Burekhardt, Weirheim Oberbayern, 1970, in the Chapter entitled "Blick auf den Islam," pp. 111-129.

Imāms as the *Nahj al-Balāghah* of 'Alī and the *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* containing sayings of all the Imāms, are for the Shī'ites a continuation of the ḥadīth collections concerned with the sayings of the Prophet himself. In many Shī'ite collection of ḥadīth, the sayings of the Prophet and of the Imāms are combined. The grace (*barakah*)¹ of the Qur'ān, as conveyed to the world by the Prophet, reached the Sunni community through the companions (foremost among them were Abū-Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, 'Alī and a few others, such as Anas and Salmān), and during succeeding generations through the 'ulamā and the Sufis, each in his own world. This barakah, however, reached the Shī'ite community especially through 'Alī and the Household of the Prophet—in its particular Shī'ite sense as referred to above and not simply in the sense of any 'Alid.

It is the intense love to, 'Alī and his progeny through Fāṭimah that compensates for the lack of attention towards, and even neglect of, the other companions in Shī'ism. It might be said that the light of 'Alī and the Imāms was so intense that it blinded the Shī'ite to the presence of the other companions, many of whom were saintly men and also had remarkable human qualities. Were it not for that intense love of 'Alī, the Shī'ite attitude towards the companions would hardly be conceivable and would appear unbalanced, as it surely must when seen from the outside and without consideration for the intensity of devotion to the Household of the Prophet. Certainly, the rapid spread of Islām, which is one of the most evident extrinsic arguments for the divine origin of the religion, would have been inconceivable without the companions and foremost among them the caliphs. This fact itself demonstrates how the Shī'ite views concerning the companions and the whole of early Sunnism were held within the a religious family (that of the whole of Islām) whose existence was taken for granted. If

¹ This term is nearly impossible to translate into English, the closest to an equivalent being the word "grace," if we do not oppose grace to the natural order as is done in most Christian theological texts. See S. H. Naṣr, *Three Muslim Sages*, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1964, pp. 105-106.

Islām had not spread through the Sunni caliphs and leaders many of the Shī'ite arguments would have had no meaning. Sunnism and its very success in the world must therefore be assumed as a necessary background for an understanding of Shī'ism, whose minority role, sense of martyrdom and esoteric qualities could only have been realized in the presence of the order which had previously been established by the Sunni majority and especially by the early companions and their entourage. This fact itself points to the inner bond relating Sunnism and Shī'ism to their common Qur'ānic basis despite the outward polemics.

The barakah present in both Sunnism and Shī'ism has the same origin and quality, especially if we take into consideration Sufism which exists in both segments of the Islāmic community. The barakah is everywhere that which has issued from the Qur'ān and the Prophet, and it is often referred to as the "Muhammadan barakah" (*al-barakah al-muḥammadiyyah*).

Shī'ism and the general esoteric teachings of Islām which are usually identified with the essential teachings of Sufism have a very complex and intricate relationship.¹ Shī'ism must not be equated simply with Islāmic esotericism as such. In the Sunni world, Islāmic esotericism manifests itself almost exclusively as Sufism whereas in the Shī'ite world, in addition to a Sufism similar to that found in the Sunni world, there is an esoteric element based upon love (*maḥabbah*) which colors the whole structure of the religion. It is based on love (or in the language of Hinduism, bhakta) rather than a pure gnosis or *ma'rifah*, which by definition is always limited to a small number. There are, of course, some who would equate original Shī'ism purely and simply with esotericism.² Within the Shī'ite tradition itself the proponents of "Shī'ite gnosis" (*'irfān shī'ī*) such as Sayyid

¹ See our study "*Shī'ism and Sufism: Their Relationship in Essence and in History*" *Religions Studies* October, 1970, pp. 229-242; also in *cut Sufi Essays*, Albany, 1972.

² This position is especially defended by H. Corbin, who has devoted so many penetrating studies to Shī'ism.

Haydar Āmulī speak of the equivalence of Shī`ism and Sufism. In fact, in his major work, the *Jāmi` al-Asrār* (*Compendium of Divine Mysteries*), Āmulī's main intention is to show that real Sufism and Shī`ism are the same.¹ But if we consider the whole of Shī`ism, then there is of course in addition to the esoteric element the exoteric side, the law which governs a human community. `Alī ruled over a human society and the sixth Imām Ja`far al-Šādiq founded the Twelve-Imām Shī`ite school of law. Yet, as mentioned above, esotericism, especially in the form of love, has always occupied what might be called a privileged position within Shī`ism, so that even the Shī`ite theology and creed contain formulations that are properly speaking more mystical than strictly theological.

In addition to its law and the esoteric aspect contained in Sufism and gnosis, Shī`ism contained from the beginning a type of Divine Wisdom, inherited from the Prophet and the Imāms, which became the basis for the *ḥikmah* or *sophia* that later developed extensively in the Muslim world and incorporated into its structure suitable elements of the Graeco-Alexandrian, the Indian and the Persian intellectual heritages. It is often said that Islāmic philosophy came into being as a result of the translation of Greek texts and that after a few centuries Greek philosophy died out in the Muslim world and found a new home in the Latin West. This partially true account leaves out other basic aspects of the story, such as the central role of the Qur`ān as the source of knowledge and truth for the Muslims; the fundamental role of the spiritual hermeneutics (*ta`wīl*) practised by Sufis and Shī`ites alike, through which all knowledge became related to the inner levels of meaning of the Sacred Book; and the more than one thousand years of traditional Islāmic philosophy and theosophy which has continued to our day in Shī`ite Persia and in adjacent areas.²

¹ See H. Corbin's introduction to Sayyid Haydar Āmulī *La Philosophie Shī`ite*, Tehran-Paris, 1969.

² The only history of philosophy in Western language, which takes these elements into account is H. Corbin (with the collaboration of S. K. Naṣr and O. Yahaya), *Historie de la philosophie islamique* vol.1, Paris, 1964.

When we think of Shī`ism, we must remember that, in addition to the law and the strictly esoteric teachings, Shī`ism possesses a "theosophy" or *hikmah* which made possible the vast development of later Islāmic philosophy and the intellectual sciences from the beginning, enabling it to have a role in the intellectual life of Islām far outweighing its numerical size.

The respect accorded to the intellect as the ladder to Divine Unity, an element that is characteristic of all of Islām and especially emphasized by Shī`ism, helped create a traditional educational system in which rigorous training in logic went hand in hand with the religious and also the esoteric sciences. The traditional curriculum of the Shī`ite universities (*madrasahs*) includes to this day courses ranging from logic and mathematics to metaphysics and Sufism. The hierarchy of knowledge has made of logic itself a ladder to reach the suprarational logical demonstration, especially *burhān*—or demonstration in its technical sense, which has played a role in Islāmic logic that differs from its use in Western logic—came to be regarded as a reflection of the Divine Intellect itself, and with the help of its certainties the Shī`ite metaphysicians and theologians have sought to demonstrate with rigor the most metaphysical teachings of the religion. We see many examples of this method in the present book, which is itself the result of such a traditional madrasah education. It may present certain difficulties to the Western reader who is accustomed to the total divorce of mysticism and logic and for whom the certainty of logic has been used, or rather misused, for so long as a tool to destroy all other certainties, both religious and metaphysical. But the method itself has its root in a fundamental aspect of Islām—in which the arguments of religion are based not primarily on the miraculous but on the intellectually evident¹—an aspect which has been strongly emphasized in Shī`ism and is reflected in both the content and the form of its traditional expositions.

¹ This question has been treated with great lucidity in F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, translated by D. M. Matheson, London, 1963.

Present State of Shī'ite Studies

Historical factors, such as the fact that the West never had the same direct political contact with Shī'ite Islām that it did with Sunni Islām, have caused the Occident to be less aware until now of Shī'ite Islām than of Sunnism. And Sunni Islām, also, has not always been understood properly or interpreted sympathetically by all Western scholars. The West came into direct contact with Islām in Spain, Sicily and Palestine in the Middle Ages and in the Balkans during the Ottoman period. These encounters were all with Sunni Islām with the exception of limited contacts with Ismā'ilism during the Crusades. In the colonial period, India was the only large area in which a direct knowledge of Shī'ism was necessary for day-to-day dealings with Muslims. For this reason the few works in English dealing with Twelve-Imām Shī'ism are mostly connected with the Indian subcontinent.¹ As a result of this lack of familiarity, many of the early Western orientalists brought the most fantastic charges against Shī'ism, such as that its views were forged by Jews disguised as Muslims. One of the reasons for this kind of attack, which can also be seen in the case of Sufism, is that this type of orientalist did not want to see in Islām any metaphysical or eschatological doctrines of an intellectual content, which would rank of it something more than the famous "simple religion of the desert." Such writers therefore had to reject as spurious any metaphysical and spiritual doctrines found within the teachings of Shī'ism or Sufism. One or two works written during this period and dealing with

¹ See, for example, J. N. Holloster, *The Shi'ah of India*. London, 1953; A. A. Fyzee, *Outlines of Muhammadan Law*. London, 1887; and N. B. Baillie, *A Digest of Muhammadan Law*, London, 1887. Of course in Iraq also the British were faced with a mixed Sunni-Shī'ite population but perhaps because of the relatively small size of the country, this contact never gave rise to serious scholarly concern with Shī'ite sources as it did in India.

Shī'ism were composed by missionaries who were particularly famous for their hatred of Islām.¹

It is only during the last generation that a very limited number of Western scholars have sought to make a more serious study of Shī'ism. Chief among them are L. Massignon, who devoted a few major studies to early Arab Shī'ism, and H. Corbin, who has devoted a lifetime to the study of the whole of Shī'ism and its later intellectual development especially as centered in Persia, and who has made known to the Western world for the first time some of the metaphysical and theosophical richness of this as yet relatively unknown aspect of Islām.² Yet, despite the efforts of these and a few other scholars, much of Shī'ism remains to this day a closed book, and there has not appeared as yet an introductory work in English to present the whole of Shī'ism to one who is just beginning to delve into the subject.

¹ We specially have in mind D. M. Donaldson's *The Shi'ite Religion*, London, 1933, which is still the standard work on Shī'ism in Western universities. Many of the works written on the Shī'ites in India are also by missionaries who were severely opposed to Islām.

² Some of the works of Corbin dealing more directly with Twelve-Imām Shī'ism itself include: "*Pour une Morphologie de la Spiritualité Shi'ite*," *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XXIX, 1960; "*Le Combat Spirituel du Shi'isme*," *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XXX, 1961; and "*Au 'pays' de L'Imām cashê*," *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XXXII, 1963. Many of Corbin's writings on Shī'ism have been brought together in his forthcoming *En Islām*.

The Present Book

It was to overcome this deficiency that in 1962, Professor Kenneth Morgan of Colgate University, who pursues the laudable goal of presenting Oriental religions to the West from the point of view of the authentic representatives of these religions, approached me with the suggestion that I supervise a series of three volumes dealing with Shī`ism and written from the Shī`ite point of view. Aware of the difficulty of such an undertaking, I accepted because of the realization of the importance which the completion of such a project might have upon the future of Islāmic studies and even of comparative religion as a whole. The present work is the first in that series; the others will be a volume dealing with the Shī`ite view of the Qur`ān, written also by `Allāmah¹ Ṭabāṭabā`ī and an anthology of the sayings of the Shī`ite Imāms.

During the summer of 1963 when Professor Morgan was in Tehran, we visited `Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā`ī in Darakah, a small village by the mountains near Tehran, where the venerable Shī`ite Authority was spending the summer months away from the heat of Qum where he usually resides. The meeting was dominated by the humble presence of a man who has devoted his whole life to the study of religion in whom humility and the power of intellectual analysis are combined. As we walked back from the house through the winding and narrow roads of the village, which still belongs to a calm and peaceful traditional world not as yet perturbed by the sound and fury of modernism, Professor Morgan proposed that `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā`ī write the general volume on Shī`ism in the series and also the volume on the Qur`ān. Later, I was able to gain the consent of this celebrated Shī`ite authority that he put aside his monumental Qur`ānic commentary, *al-Mizān*, to devote some of his time to these volumes. Having studied for

¹ `Allāmah is an honorific term in Arabic, Persian and other Islāmic languages meaning, "very learned."

years with him in the fields of traditional philosophy and theosophy, I knew that of the traditional Shī'ite authorities he was the one most qualified to write such a work; a work which would be completely authentic from the Shī'ite point of view and at the same time based upon an intellectual foundation. I realized, of course, the innate difficulty of finding a person who would be a reputable religious authority, respected by the Shī'ite community and untainted by the influence of Western modes of thought and at the same time well enough conversant with the Western world and the mentality of the Western reader to be able to address his arguments to them. Unfortunately, no ideal solution could be found to this problem, for in Persia, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, there are today usually two types of men concerned with religious questions: (1) the traditional authorities, who are, as a rule, completely unaware of the nature of the psychological and mental structure of modern man, or at best have a shallow knowledge of the modern world, and (2) the modernized so-called "intellectuals," whose attachment to Islām is often only sentimental and apologetic and who usually present a version of Islām which would not be acceptable to the traditional authorities or to the Muslim community (ummah). Only during the past few years has a new class of scholars, still extremely small in number, come into being which is both orthodox and traditional in the profound sense of these terms and at the same time knows well the modern world and the language necessary to reach the intelligent Western reader.

In any case, since the aim of Professor Morgan was to have a description of Shī'ism by one of the respected traditional Shī'ite scholars, the 'ulamā, it was necessary to turn to the first class, of which 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī is an eminent example. Of course, one could not expect in such a case the deep understanding of the Western audience for whom the work is intended. Even his knowledge of Sunni Islām moves within the orbit of the traditional polemics between Sunnism and Shī'ism, which has been taken for granted until now by him as by so many other of the prominent 'ulamā of both sides. There are several types of Muslim, and in particular of Shī'ite, 'ulamā

and among them some are not well-versed in theosophy and gnosis and limit themselves to the exoteric sciences. `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā`ī represents that central and intellectually dominating class of Shī`ite `ulamā who have combined interest in jurisprudence and Qur`ānic commentary with philosophy, theosophy and Sufism, and who represent a more universal interpretation of the Shī`ite point of view. Within the class of the traditional `ulamā, `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā`ī possesses the distinction of being a master of both the Sharī`ite and esoteric sciences and at the same time he is an outstanding *hakīm* or traditional Islāmic philosopher (or more exactly, "theosopher"). Hence he was asked to perform this important task despite all the difficulties inherent in the presentation of the polemical side of Shī`ism to a world that does not believe in the Islāmic revelation to start with and for whom the intense love of `Alī and his Household, held by the Shī`ites, simply does not exist. Certain explanations, therefore, are demanded that would not occur to a person writing and thinking solely within the Shī`ite world view.

Six years of collaboration with `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā`ī and many journeys to Qum and even Mashhad, which he often visits in the Summer, helped me to prepare the work gradually for translation into English—a task which requires a translation of meaning from one world to another, to a world that begins without the general background of knowledge and faith which the usual audience of `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā`ī possesses. In editing the text so that it would make possible a thorough and profound understanding of the structure of Islām, I have sought to take into full consideration the differences existing between traditional and modern scholarship, and also the particular demand, of the audience to which this work is addressed.¹ But putting aside the demands made by these two conditions, I have tried to remain as faithful to the original as possible so as to enable the non-Muslim reader to study not only the message

¹ For my own views on the relationships between Sunnism and Shī`ism, see *Ideals and Realities of Islām*, Ch. VI.

but also the form and intellectual style of traditional Muslim authority.

The reader must therefore always remember that the arguments presented in this book are not addressed by 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī to a mind that begins with doubt but to one that is grounded in certainty and is, moreover, immersed in the world of faith and religious dedication. The depth of the doubt and nihilism of certain types of modern man would be inconceivable to him. His arguments, therefore, may at times be difficult to grasp or unconvincing to some Western readers; they are only so, however, because he is addressing an audience whose demand for causality and whose conception of the levels of reality is not identical with that of the Western reader. Also there may be explanations in which too much is taken for granted or repetitions which appear to insult the intelligence of the perspicacious Western reader in whom the analytical powers of the mind are usually more developed than among most Orientals.¹ In these cases, the characteristic manner of his presentation and the only world known to him, that of contemporary Islām in its traditional aspect, must be kept in mind. If the arguments of St. Anselm and St. Thomas for the proof of the existence of God do not appeal to most modern men, it is not because modern men are more intelligent than the medieval theologians, but because the medieval masters were addressing men of different mentalities with different needs for the explanation of causality. Likewise, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī offers arguments addressed to the audience he knows, the traditional Muslim intelligentsia. If all of his arguments do not appeal to the Western reader, this should not be taken as proof of the contention that his conclusions are invalid.

¹ On this important question of the difference between the Oriental and Western dialectic, see F. Schuon, "La dialectique orientale et son enracinement dans la foi," *Logique et Transcendance* Paris, 1970, pp. 129-196.

To summarize, this book may be said to be the first general introduction to Shī'ism in modern times written by an outstanding contemporary Shī'ite authority. While meant for the larger world outside of Shī'ism, its arguments and methods of presentation are those of traditional Shī'ism, which he represents and of which he is a pillar. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī has tried to present the traditional Shī'ite point of view as it is and as it has been believed in and practiced by generations of Shī'ites. He has sought to be faithful to Shī'ite views without regard for the possible reactions of the outside world and without brushing aside the particular features of Shī'ism that have been controversial.

To transcend the polemical level, two religious schools would either have to put aside their differences in the face of a common danger, or the level of discourse would have to be shifted from the level of historical and theological fact, and dogmas to purely metaphysical positions. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī has not taken either path but has remained content with describing Shī'ism as it is. He has sought to do full justice to the Shī'ite perspective in the light of the official position that he holds in the Shī'ite religious world as he is a master of both the exoteric (zāhir) and the esoteric (bāṭin) sciences. For those who know the Islāmic world well, it is easy to discern the outward difficulties that such an authority faces in expounding the total view of things and especially in exposing the esoteric doctrines, which alone can claim true universality. He is seen in this book as the expositor and defender of Shī'ism in both its exoteric and esoteric aspects, to the extent that his position in the Shī'ite world has allowed him to speak openly of the esoteric teachings. But all that is uttered carries with it the voice of authority, which tradition alone provides. Behind the words of 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī stand fourteen centuries of Shī'ite Islām and the continuity and transmission of a sacred and religious knowledge made possible by the continuity of the Islāmic tradition itself.

The Author

‘Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā’ī¹ was born in Tabrīz in AH (lunar) 1321 or AH (solar) 1282, (AD 1903)² in a family of descendants of the Holy Prophet which for fourteen generations has produced outstanding Islāmic scholars.³ He received his earliest education in his native city, mastering the elements of Arabic and the religious sciences, and at about the age of twenty set out for the great Shi‘ite University of Najaf to continue more advanced studies. Most students in the madrasahs follow the branch of “transmitted sciences” (*al-‘Ulūm al-Naqliyyah*) especially the sciences dealing with the Divine Law, *fiqh* or jurisprudence, and *uṣūl al-fiqh* or the principles of jurisprudence. ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī, however, sought to master both branches of the traditional sciences: the transmitted and the intellectual. He studied Divine Law and the principles of jurisprudence with two of the great masters of that day, Mīrzā Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nā‘īnī and Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Iṣfahānī. He became such a master in this domain that had he kept completely to these fields, he would have become one of the foremost *mujtahids*, or authorities in Divine Law, and would have been able to wield much political and social influence.

But such was not his destiny. He was more attracted to the intellectual sciences and he studied assiduously the whole cycle

¹ An account in Persian of ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī by one of his outstanding students, Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtiyānī, can be found in *Ma‘ārif Islāmi*, vol. V, 1347 (A. H. solar), pp. 48-50.

² Since the beginning of the reign of Reza Shah, the Persians have been using even more than before the solar hegira calendar in addition to the lunar, the former for civil and daily purposes and the latter for religious functions. In the present work, all Islāmic dates are lunar unless otherwise specified.

³ The title “Sayyid” in ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s name is itself an indication of his being a descendant of the Prophet. In Persia, the term ‘Sayyid’ (or seyyed) is used exclusively in this sense while in the Arab world, it is usually used as the equivalent of “gentleman” or “Mr.”

of traditional mathematics with Sayyid Abu'l-Qāsim Khānsārī and traditional Islāmic philosophy, including the standard texts of the *Shifa'* of Ibn Sinā, the *Asfār* of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and the *Tamhīd al-Qawā'id* of Ibn Turkah, with Sayyid Ḥusayn Bādkūbā'ī himself a student of two of the most famous masters of the school of Tehran, Sayyid Abu'l-Ḥasan Jilwah and Āqā 'Alī Mudarris Zunūzī.¹

In addition to formal learning, or what the traditional Muslim sources call 'acquired science' (*'Ilm Ḥuṣūlī*), 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī sought after that "immediate science" (*'Ilm Ḥuḍūrī*) or gnosis through which knowledge turns into vision of the supernal realities. He was fortunate in finding a great master of Islāmic gnosis, Mīrzā 'Alī Qāḍī who initiated him into the Divine mysteries and guided him in his journey toward spiritual perfection. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī once told me that before meeting Qāḍī, he had studied the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* of Ibn 'Arabī and thought that he knew it well. When he met this master of real spiritual authority, he realised that he knew nothing. He also told me that when Mīrzā 'Alī Qāḍī began to teach the *Fuṣūṣ*, it was as if all the walls of the room were speaking of the reality of gnosis and participating in his exposition. Thanks to this master, the years in Najaf became for 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī not only a period of intellectual attainment but also one of asceticism and spiritual practices, which enabled him to attain that state of spiritual realization often referred to as becoming divorced from the darkness of material limitations (*tajrīd*). He spent long periods in fasting and prayer and underwent a long interval during which he kept absolute silence. Today, his presence carries with it the silence of perfect contemplation and concentration even when he is speaking.

Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī returned to Tabrīz in AH (solar) 1314 (AD 1934) and spent a few quiet years in that city teaching a small number of disciples, but he was as yet unknown of the religious

¹ On these figures, see S. H. Naṣr, 'The School of Ispahan, "Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī" and "Sabziwārī" in M. M. Sharif (ed), *A Hosiery of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. II, Wiesbaden, 1966.

circles of Persia at large. It was the devastating events of the Second World War and the Russian occupation of Persia that brought `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī from Tabrīz to Qum in AH (solar) 1324 (AD 1945). Qum was then, and continues to be, the center of religious studies in Persia. In his quiet and unassuming manner, `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī began to teach in this holy city, concentrating on Qur'ānic commentary and traditional Islāmic philosophy and theosophy, which had not been taught in Qum for many years. His magnetic personality and spiritual presence soon attracted some of the most intelligent and competent of the students to him, and gradually he made the teachings of Mulla Ṣadra once again a cornerstone of the traditional curriculum. I still have a vivid memory of some of the sessions of his public lectures in one of the mosque-madrasahs of Qum when nearly four hundred students sat at his feet to absorb his wisdom.

The activities of `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī since he came to Qum have also included frequent visits to Tehran. After the Second World War, when Marxism was fashionable among some of the youth in Tehran, he was the only religious scholar who took the pains to study the philosophical basis of Communism and supply a response to dialectical materialism from the traditional point of view. The fruit of this effort was one of his major works, *Uṣūl falsafah wa rawish-i ri'alism* (*The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*), in which he defended realism—in its traditional and medieval sense—against all dialectical philosophies. He also trained a number of disciples who belong to the community of Persians with a modern education.

Since his coming to Qum, `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī has been indefatigable in his efforts to convey the wisdom and intellectual message of Islām on three different levels: to a large number of traditional students in Qum, who are now scattered throughout Persia and other Shī'ite lands; to a more select group of students whom he has taught gnosis and Sufism in more intimate circles and who have usually met on Thursday evenings at his home or other private places; and also to a group of Persians with a modern education and occasionally

non-Persians with whom he has met in Tehran. During the past ten or twelve years, there have been regular sessions in Tehran attended by a select group of presume, and in the fall season by Henry Corbin, sessions in which the most profound and pressing spiritual and intellectual problems have been discussed, and in which I have usually had the role of translator and interpreter. During these years, we have studied with 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī not only the classical texts of divine wisdom and gnosis but also a whole cycle of what might be called comparative gnosis, in which in each session the sacred texts of one of the major religions, containing mystical and gnostic teachings, such as the *Tao Te-Ching*, the *Upanishads* and the *Gospel of John*, were discussed and compared with Sufism and Islāmic gnostic doctrines in general.

'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī has therefore exercised a profound influence in both the traditional and modern circles in Persia. He has tried to create a new intellectual elite among the modern educated classes who wish to be acquainted with Islāmic intellectuality as well as with the modern world. Many among his traditional students who belong to the class of 'ulamā have tried to follow his example in this important endeavor. Some of his students, such as Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī of Mashhad University and Murtaḍā Muṭahharī of Tehran University, are themselves scholars of considerable reputation. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī often speaks of others among his students who possess great spiritual qualities but do not manifest themselves outwardly.

In addition to a heavy program of teaching and guidance, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī has occupied himself with writing many books and articles which attest to his remarkable intellectual powers and breadth of learning within the world of the traditional Islāmic sciences.¹

Today at his home in Qum, the venerable authority devotes nearly all of his time to his Qur'ānic commentary and the

¹ See the bibliography for a complete list of the writings of 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī.

direction of some of his best students. He stands as a symbol of what is most permanent in the long tradition of Islāmic scholarship and science, and his presence carries a fragrance, which can only come from one who has tasted the fruit of Divine Knowledge. He exemplifies in his person the nobility, humility and quest after truth, which have characterized the finest Muslim scholars over the ages. His knowledge and its exposition are a testimony to what real Islāmic learning is, how profound and how metaphysical, and how different from so many of the shallow expositions of arms of the orientalists or the distorted caricatures of so many Muslim modernists. Of course, he does not have the awareness of the modern mentality and the nature of the modern world that might be desired, but that could hardly be expected in one whose life experience has been confined to the traditional circles in Persia and Iraq.

A word must be added about the system of transliteration of Arabic and Persian words and the manner in which reference is made to Islāmic sources. In the question of transliteration, I have followed the standard system used in most works on Islām, but in making reference to Islāmic books, I have sought to remain completely faithful to the original manuscript. The author, like most other Persian writers, refers to the very well-known Arabic works in the Persian-speaking world in their Persian form and to the less well-known in the original Arabic. For example, the history of al-Ṭabarī is referred to by the author as *Tārīkh Ṭabarī* using the *idāfah* construction in Persian, which gives the same meaning as the word "of" in English. This may appear somewhat disconcerting to one who knows Arabic but not Persian, but it conveys a feeling for the spiritual and religious climate of Persia where the two languages are used side by side. In any case, such references by the author have been transliterated according to the original. I have only sought to make them uniform and to give enough indication in the bibliography to make clear which author and which work is in question.

In the bibliography also, only the works referred to by 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī as his sources have been included, and not any secondary or even other primary ones which I could have added

myself. Also, the entry in the bibliography is according to the name of the book and not the author, which has always been the method used in Islāmic circles.

For technical reasons, diacritical marks on Arabic words which have become common in English, and italics in the case of all Arabic words appearing in the text, have been employed only in the index and at the first appearance of the word.

In the end, I should like to thank Professor Kenneth Morgan, whose keen interest and commendable patience in this project has made its achievement possible, and Mr. William Chitticks, who has helped me greatly in preparing the manuscript for publication.

Sayyid Husayn Naṣr

Tehran

Rabī al-Awwal, 1390

Urdibihisht, 1350

May, 1971.

INTRODUCTION

This book, which we have called Shī'ite Islām,¹ seeks to clarify the true identity of Shī'ism which is one of the two major branches of Islām, the other being Sunnism. It deals in particular with the way Shī'ism originated and later developed, with the type of religious thought present in Shī'ism, and with Islāmic sciences and culture as seen from the Shī'ite point of view.

The Meaning of Religion (dīn),² Islām, and Shī'ism

Religion: There is no doubt that each member of the human race is naturally drawn to his fellow-men and that in his life in society, he acts in ways which are interrelated and interconnected. His eating, drinking, sleeping, keeping awake, talking, listening, sitting, walking, his social intercourse and meetings, at the same time that they are formally and externally distinct, are invariably connected with each other. One cannot

¹ *Editor's note:* The original title given by 'Allāmah Ṭabātabā'ī to the book is *Shī'ah dar Islām* (Shī'ism in Islām). What the author intends by the title is Islām as seen and interpreted by Shī'ism. Therefore we have chosen to call it Shī'ite Islām.

² *Editor's note:* Although we have rendered the word *Dīn* by religion, its meaning is more universal than that usually given to religion today. *Dīn* is the set of transcendent principles and their applications in every domain of life which concern man in his journey on earth and his life beyond this world. It could properly be translated as tradition as understood by the traditional authors in the West such as F. Schuon, R. Guénon and A. K. Coomaraswamy.

perform just any act in any place or after any other act. There is an order which must be observed.

There is, therefore, an order which governs the actions man performs in the journey of this life, an order against which his actions cannot rebel. In reality, these acts all originate from a distinct source. That source is man's desire to possess a felicitous life, a life in which he can reach to the greatest extent possible the objects of his desire, and be gratified. Or, one could say that man wishes to provide in a more complete way for his needs in order to continue his existence.

This is why man continually conforms his actions to rules and laws either devised by himself or accepted from others, and why he selects a particular way of life for himself among all the other existing possibilities. He works in order to provide for his means of livelihood and expects his activities to be guided by laws and regulations that must be followed. In order to satisfy his sense of taste and overcome hunger and thirst, he eats and drinks, for he considers eating and drinking necessary for the continuation of his own happy existence. This role could be multiplied by many other instances.

The rules and laws that govern human existence depend for their acceptance on the basic beliefs that man has concerning the nature of universal existence, of which he himself is a part, and also upon his judgment and evaluation of that existence. That the principles governing man's actions depend on his conception of being as a whole becomes clear if one meditates a moment on the different conceptions that people hold as to the nature of the world and of man.

Those who consider the Universe to be confined only to this material, sensible world, and man himself to be completely material and therefore subject to annihilation when the breath of life leaves him at the moment of death follow a way of life designed to provide for their material desires and transient mundane pleasures. They strive solely on this path, seeking to

bring under their control the natural conditions and factors of life.

Similarly, there are those who, like the common people among idol-worshippers, consider the world of nature to be created by a god above nature who has created the world specially for man and provided it with multiple bounties so that man may benefit from his goodness. Such men organize their lives so as to attract the pleasure of the god and not invite his anger. They believe that if they please the god, he will multiply his bounty and make it lasting and if they anger him he will take his bounty away from them.

On the other hand, such men as Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians and Muslims follow the "high path" in this life for they believe in God and in man's eternal life, and consider man to be responsible for his good and evil acts. As a result, they accept as proven the existence of a day of judgment (*qiyāmat*) and follow a path that leads to felicity in both this world and the next.

The totality of these fundamental beliefs concerning the nature of man and the Universe, and regulations in conformity with them which are applied to human life, is called religion (*dīn*). If there are divergences in these fundamental beliefs and regulations, they are called schools such as the Sunni and Shī'ite schools in Islām and the Nestorian in Christianity. We can therefore say that man, even if he does not believe in the Deity, can never be without religion if we recognize religion as a program for life based on firm belief. Religion can never be separated from life and is not simply a matter of ceremonial acts.

The Holy Qur'ān asserts that man has no choice but to follow religion, which is a path that God has placed before man so that by treading it man can reach Him. However, those who have

accepted the religion of the truth (Islām)¹ march in all sincerity upon the path of God, while those who have not accepted the religion of the truth have been diverted from the divine path and have followed the wrong road.²

Islām etymologically means surrender and obedience. The Holy Qur'ān calls the religion which invites men toward this end Islām since its general purpose is the surrender of man to the laws governing the Universe and men, with the result that through this surrender he worships only the One God and obeys only His commands.³ As the Holy Qur'ān informs us, the first person who called this religion "Islām" and its followers "Muslims" was the Prophet Abraham—upon whom be peace.⁴

¹ *Editor's note:* Speaking as a Muslim religious authority, the author has mentioned Islām in parentheses as "the religion of the truth" without, however, in any way negating the universality of revelation asserted in the Qur'ān. For a Muslim quite naturally the "religion of the truth" *par excellence* is Islām without this belief detracting from the verity of other religions to same of which the author himself has referred in this and other work. See S. H. Naṣr "Islām and the Encounter of Religions" *The Islāmic Quarterly*, vol. X, nos. 3 and 4, July and December 1966 pp. 47-68.

² "The curse of Allāh is on evildoer, who debar (men) from the path of Allāh and would have it crooked, ..." (Qur'ān, VII, 44-45) (This and all subsequent citations of the Qur'ān are from *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, An Explanatory Translation* by Muḥammad Marmaduke Pickthall, New York, New American Library, 1953).

³ "Who is better in religion than he who surrendereth his purpose to Allāh while doing good (to men) and followeth the tradition of Abraham, the upright?" (Qur'ān, IV, 125). "Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allāh, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him and that none of us shall fake others for lords beside Allāh. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him) [muslimūn] (Qur'ān, III, 64) "O ye who believe! Come all of you into submission unto Him)..." (Qur'ān, 11, 208).

⁴ "Our Lord! And make us submissive unto Thee and of our seed a nation submissive unto Thee" (Qur'ān, II, 128) "The faith of your father Abraham (is yours). He hath named you Muslims." (Qur'ān, XXII 78).

Shi'ah which means literally partisan or follower, refers to those who consider the succession to the Prophet—upon whom be blessings and peace—to be the special right of the family of the Prophet and who in the field of the Islāmic sciences and culture follow the school of the Household of the Prophet.¹

¹ A group of Zaydis who accept two caliphs before 'Alī and in jurisprudence follow Abū-Ḥanifah are also called Shi'ite because in contrast to the Umayyads and 'Abbāsids, they consider the later caliphate as belonging solely to 'Alī and his descendants.

PART I
THE HISTORICAL
BACKGROUND OF
SHĪ`ISM

CHAPTER ONE
THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF SHĪ`ISM

Shī`ism began with a reference made for the first time to the partisans of `Alī (*shī`at `Alī*), the first leader of the Household of the Prophet, during the lifetime of the Prophet himself.¹ The course of the first manifestation and the later growth of Islām during the twenty-three years of prophecy brought about many conditions which necessitated the appearance of a group such as the Shī`ites among the companions of the Prophet.

The Holy Prophet during the first days of his prophecy, when according to the text of the Qur`ān he was commanded to invite

¹ The first designation to have appeared during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet of God was *shī`ah* and Salmān, Abu-Dharr, Miqdād and `Ammār were known by this name. See *Hādīr al-`Ālam al-Islāmī*, Cairo, 1352, vol. 1, pp. 188.

his closer relatives to come to his religion,¹ told them clearly that whoever would be the first to accept his invitation would become his successor and inheritor. 'Alī was the first to step forth and embrace Islām. The Prophet accepted 'Alī's submission to the faith and thus fulfilled his promise.²

From the Shī'ite point of view, it appears as unlikely that the leader of a movement, during the first days of his activity, should introduce to strangers one of his associates as his successor and deputy but not introduce him to his completely loyal and devout aides and friends. Nor does it appear likely that such a leader should accept someone as his deputy and successor and introduce him to others as such, but then throughout his life and religious call deprive his deputy of his duties as deputy, disregard the respect due to his position as successor and refuse to make any distinctions between him and others.

The Prophet, according to many unquestioned and completely authenticated ḥadīths, both Sunni and Shī'ite, clearly asserted that 'Alī was preserved from error and sin in his actions and sayings. Whatever he said and did was in perfect conformity with the teachings of religion³ and he was the most

¹ Qur'ān, XXVI, 214.

² According to this ḥadīth, 'Alī said, "I who was the youngest of all have submitted that I am your vizier. The Prophet put his hand around my neck and said, 'This person is my brother, inheritor and vicegerent. You must obey him.' People laughed and told Abū-Ṭālib, 'He has ordered you to obey your son.'" Ṭabari, *al-Tārīkh*, Cairo, 1357, vol. II, pp. 63; Abū'l-Fidā', *al-Tārīkh*, Cairo, 1325, vol. I pp. 116; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, Cairo, 1358, vol. III, pp. 39; Bahārāni, *Ghāyat al-Marām*, Tehran, 1272, pp. 320. [Editor's note: The reader will notice that this ḥadīth and certain others which are quoted more than once appear each time in a slightly different form. This is because the author has made use of different transmitted versions in each place.]

³ Umm Salamah has recounted that the Prophet said: "Alī is always with the Truth (*ḥaqq*) and the Qur'ān, and the Truth and the Qur'ān are always with him and until the Day of Judgment, they will not be separated from each other." This ḥadīth has been transmitted through fifteen channels in Sunni sources and eleven in Shī'ite sources. Umm Salamah, Ibn 'Abbās.

knowledgeable of men in matters pertaining to the Islāmic sciences and injunctions.¹

During the period of prophecy, 'Alī performed valuable services and made remarkable sacrifices. When the infidels of Mecca decided to kill the Prophet and surrounded his house, the Holy Prophet decided to emigrate to Medina. He said to 'Alī, "Will you sleep in my bed at night so that they will think that I am asleep and I will be secure from being pursued by them?"² 'Alī accepted this dangerous assignment with open arms. This has been recounted in different histories and collections of ḥadīth. 'Alī also served by fighting in the battles of Badr, Uḥud, Khaybar, Khandaq and Ḥunayn in which the victories achieved with his aid were such that if 'Alī had not been present the enemy would most likely have uprooted Islām and the Muslims, as is recounted in the usual reference books of history (*Tārīkh*), biography of the Prophet (*Sīrah*) and collections of ḥadīth.

For Shī'ites, the central evidence of 'Alī's legitimacy as successor to the Prophet is the event of Ghadīr Khumm³ when

Abū-Bakr, 'Ā'ishah, 'Alī, Abū-Sa'id al-Khidrī, Abū-Laylā, Abū-Ayyūb al-Ansārī are among its transmitters. *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 539-540. The Prophet has said "God bless 'Alī for the Truth is always with him." *Al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah* vol. VII, pp. 36.

¹ The Prophet said, 'Arbitration has been divided into ten parts. Nine parts are given to 'Alī and one part is divided among all the people.' *al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, vol. VII, pp. 359. Salīmān Fārsī has transmitted this saying from the Prophet: 'After me, the most learned of men is 'Alī.' *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 528. Ibn 'Abbās has said that the Prophet said, 'Alī is the most competent among people in judgment.' From the book, *Fadā'il al-Sahābah*, mentioned in *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 528, 'Umar used to say, "May God never afflict me with a difficult task where 'Alī is not present." *Al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, vol. VII, pp. 359.

² The emigration from Mecca to Medina marks the date of origin of the Islāmic calendar, known the *hijrah*.

³ *Editor's note:* According to Shī'ite beliefs, on returning from the last pilgrimage to Mecca on the way to Medina at a site called Ghadīr Khumm, the Prophet chose 'Alī as his successor before the vast crowd that was accompanying him. The Shī'ites celebrate this event to this day as a major

the Prophet chose `Alī to the "general guardianship" (*wilāyah `Āmmah*) of the people and made `Alī, like himself, their "guardian" (*walī*).¹

It is obvious that because of such distinctive services and recognition, because of `Alī's special virtues which were acclaimed by all,² and because of the great love the Prophet showed for him,³ some of the companions of the Prophet who knew `Alī well, and who were champions of virtue and truth, came to love him. They assembled around `Alī and followed him to such an extent that many others began to consider their love for him excessive and a few perhaps also became jealous of him. Besides all these elements, we see in many sayings of the Prophet reference to the "Shī'ah of `Alī and the "Shī'ah of the Household of the Prophet."⁴

religious feast marking the day when the right of `Alī to succession was universally acclaimed.

¹ The ḥadīth of Ghadir in its different versions is one of the definitely established ḥadīths among Sunnis and Shī'ah. More than a hundred of the companions have recounted it with different chains of transmission and expressions; and it has been recorded in books of Sunnism and Shī'ism alike. Concerning details, refer to *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 79, *Abāqāt of Mūsawī*, India, 1317 (Volume on Ghadir) and *al-Ghadir* of Amini, Najaf, 1372.

² *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, Najaf, 1358, vol. II, pp. 137 and 140, *Tārīkh Abī'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 156; *Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī*, Cairo, 1315, vol. IV, pp. 207; *Murūj al-Dhahab* of Mas'ūdī Cairo, 1367, vol. II, pp. 437, vol. III, pp. 21 and 61.

³ *Ṣaḥīḥ of Muslim*, vol. XV, pp. 176; *Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī*, vol. IV, pp. 207; *Murūj al-Dhahab* vol. III, pp. 23 and vol. II, pp. 437; *Tārīkh Abū'l-Fidā'* vol. I, pp. 127 and 181.

⁴ Jābir says: "We were in the presence of the Prophet when `Alī appeared from far away. The Prophet said, 'I swear by Him who holds my life in His hands, this person and his partisans (Shī'ah) will have salvation on the Day of Judgment.'" Ibn `Abbās says: "When the Verse: '(And) lo! those who believe and do good works are the best of created beings' (Qur'ān, XCVII, 7) was revealed, the Prophet told `Alī, 'This verse pertains to you and your partisans who will possess felicity on the Day of Judgment and God will

The Cause of the Separation of the Shī'ite Minority from the Sunni Majority

The friends and followers of `Alī believed that after the death of the Prophet, the caliphate and religious authority (*marja`iyat-i `ilmī*) belonged to `Alī. This belief came from their consideration of `Alī's position and station in relation to the Prophet, his relation to the chosen among the companions, as well as his relation to Muslims in general. It was only the events that occurred during the few days of the Prophet's final illness that indicated that there was opposition to their view.¹ Contrary to their expectation, at the very moment when the Prophet died and his body lay still unburied while his household and a few companions were occupied with providing for his burial and funeral service, the friends and followers of `Alī received news

also be satisfied with you." These two hadiths and several others are recorded in the book of *al-Durr al-Manthūr* of Suyūṭī, Cairo, 1313, vol. VI, pp. 379 and *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 326.

¹ While suffering from the illness that led to his death, (Prophet) Muḥammad organized an army under the command of Usāmah ibn Zayd and insisted that everyone should participate in this war and go out of Medina. A number of people disobeyed the Prophet including Abū-Bakr and `Umar and this disturbed the Prophet greatly. (*Sharḥ Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd*, Cairo, 1329 vol. 15, pp. 53.) At the moment of his death, the Holy Prophet said, "Prepare ink and paper so that I will have a letter written for you which will be a cause of guidance for you and prevent you from being misled." `Umar, who prevented this action, said, "His illness has run out of bend and he is delirious!" (*Tārīkh Tabarī*, vol. II, pp. 436; *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī vol. III and *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim Cairo, 1349 vol. V; *al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, vol. V, pp. 227; *Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd* vol. I, pp. 133.) A somewhat similar situation occurred again during the illness, which led to the death of the first caliph. In his last testament, the first caliph chose `Umar and even fainted while making the testament, but `Umar said nothing and did not consider him to be delirious, although he had fainted while the testament was being written. The Prophet had been inerrant and fully conscious when he asked them to write down a letter of guidance. (*Rawdat al-Safā*, Mir Khwand Lucknow, 1332, vol. II, pp. 260.)

of the activity of another group who had gone to the mosque where the community was gathered faced with this sudden loss of its leader. This group, which was later to form the majority, set forth in great haste to select a caliph for the Muslims with the aim of ensuring the welfare of the community and solving its immediate problems. They did this without consulting the Household of the Prophet, his relatives or many of his friends, who were busy with the funeral, and without providing them with the least information. Thus, 'Alī and his companions were presented with a *fait accompli*.¹

'Alī and his friends—such as 'Abbās, Zubayr, Salmān, Abū Dharr, Miqdād and 'Ammār—after finishing with the burial of the body of the Prophet became aware of the proceedings by which the caliph had been selected. They protested against the act of choosing the caliph by consultation or election, and also against those who were responsible for carrying it out. They even presented their own proofs and arguments, but the answer they received was that the welfare of the Muslims was at stake and the solution lay in what had been done.²

¹ Ibn Abī'l-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*, vol. I, pp. 58 and pp. 123-135; *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī* vol. II, pp. 102; *Tārīkh Ṭabarī* vol. II, pp. 445-460.

² *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 103-106; *Tārīkh Abī'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 156 and 166; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. II, pp. 307 and 352; Ibn Abī'l-Ḥadīd, vol. I, pp. 17 and 134. In answer to Ibn 'Abbās's protest, 'Umar said, "I swear to God, 'Alī was the most deserving of all people to become caliph, but for three reasons we pushed him aside: (1) he was too young, (2) he was attached to the descendants of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (3) people did not like to have prophecy and the caliphate assembled in one household." (Ibn Abī'l-Ḥadīd, vol. 15, pp. 134.) 'Umar said to Ibn 'Abbās, "I swear to God that 'Alī deserved the caliphate, but the Quraysh would not have been able to bear his caliphate, for had he become caliph, he would have forced the people to accept the pure truth and follow the Right Path. Under his caliphate, they would not have been able to transgress the boundaries of justice and thus would have sought to engage in war with him." (*Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 137.)

It was this protest and criticism which separated from the majority the minority that were following `Alī and made his followers known to society as the "partisans" or "Shī'ah" of `Alī. The caliphate of the time was anxious to guard against this appellation being given to the Shī'ite minority and thus to have Muslim society divided into sections comprised of a majority and a minority. The supporters of the caliph considered the caliphate to be a matter of the consensus of the community (*ijmā'*) and called those who objected the "opponents of allegiance." They claimed that the Shī'ah stood, therefore, opposed to Muslim society. Sometimes the Shī'ah were given other pejorative and degrading names.¹

Shī'ism was condemned from the first moment because of the political situation of the time and thus it could not accomplish anything through mere political protest. `Alī, in order to safeguard the well-being of Islām and of the Muslims, and also because of lack of sufficient political and military power, did not endeavor to begin an uprising against the existing political order, which would have been of a bloody nature. Yet, those who protested against the established caliphate refused to surrender to the majority in certain questions of faith and continued to hold that the succession to the Prophet and religious authority belonged by right to `Alī.² They believed

¹ `Amr ibn Hārith said to Sa'id ibn Zayd, "Did anyone oppose paying allegiance to Abu-Bakr?" He answered, "No one was opposed to him except those who had become apostates or were about to become so." *Tārikh Tabari*, vol. II, pp. 447.

² In the famous ḥadīth of *thaqalayn*—the two things of value—the Prophet says, 'I leave two things of value amidst you in trust which if you hold on, you will never go astray: the Qur'ān and the members of my household; these will never be separated until the Day of Judgment.' This ḥadīth has been transmitted through more than a hundred channels by over thirty-five of the companions of the Holy Prophet. (*'Abaqāt*, volume on ḥadīth *thaqalayn*, *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 211.) The Prophet said, 'I am the city of knowledge and `Alī is its gate. Therefore whosoever seeks knowledge

that all spiritual and religious matters should be referred to him and invited people to become his followers.¹

The Two Problems of Succession and Authority in Religious Sciences

In accordance with the Islāmic teachings which form its basis, Shī'ism believed that the most important question facing Islāmic society was the elucidation and clarification of Islāmic teachings and the tenets of the religious sciences.² Only after such clarifications were made could the application of these teachings to the social order be considered. In other words, Shī'ism believed that, before all else, members of society should be able to gain a true vision of the world and of men based on the real nature of things. Only then could they know and perform their duties as human beings—in which lay their real welfare—even if the performance of these religious duties were to be against their desires. After carrying out this first step, a religious government should preserve and execute real Islāmic order in society in such a way that man would worship none other than God, would possess personal and social freedom to the extent possible and would benefit from true personal and social justice.

These two ends could be accomplished only by a person who was inerrant and protected by God from having faults. Otherwise, people could become rulers or religious authorities who would not be free from the possibility of distortion of

should enter through its door.' (*al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, vol. VII, pp. 359.)

¹ *Tarikh Ya'qūbī* vol. II, pp. 105-150, where this is mentioned often.

² The Book of God and the sayings of the Holy Prophet and his household are replete with encouragement and exhortation to acquire knowledge, to the extent that the Holy Prophet says, "To seek knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim" *Biḥār al-Anwār* of Majlisī, Tehran, 1301-15, vol. I, pp. 55.

thought or the committing of treachery in the duties placed upon their shoulders. Were this to happen, the just and freedom-giving rule of Islām could gradually be converted to dictatorial rule and a completely autocratic government. Moreover, the pure religious teachings could become, as can be seen in the case of certain other religions, the victims of change and distortion in the hands of selfish scholars given to the satisfaction of their carnal desires. As confirmed by the Holy Prophet, 'Alī followed perfectly and completely the Book of God and the tradition of the Prophet in both words and deeds.¹ As Shī'ism sees it, if, as the majority say, only the Quraysh² opposed the rightful caliphate of 'Alī, then that majority should have answered the Quraysh by asserting what was right. They should have quelled all opposition to the right cause in the same way that they fought against the group who refused to pay the religious tax (*zakāt*). The majority should not have remained indifferent to what was right for few of the opposition of the Quraysh.

What prevented the Shī'ah from accepting the elective method of choosing the caliphate by the people was the fear of the unwholesome consequences that might result from it: fear of possible corruption in Islāmic government and of the destruction of the solid basis for the sublime religious sciences. As it happened, later events in Islāmic history confirmed this fear (or prediction), with the result that the Shī'ites became even firmer in their belief. During the earliest years, however, because of the small number of its followers, Shī'ism appeared outwardly to have been absorbed into the majority, although privately it continued to insist on acquiring the Islāmic sciences

¹ *Al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, vol. VII, pp. 360.

² *Editor's note*: The Quraysh was the most aristocratic tribe in pre-Islamic Arabia from which rose the Holy Prophet himself. But the Quraysh, being the guardians of the Ka'bah, first opposed his prophecy and offered the greatest resistance against him. Only later did they surrender to the new religion in which they have always continued to hold a place of honor, especially the branch directly connected with the family of the Prophet.

from the Household of the Prophet and to invite people to its cause. At the same time, in order to preserve the power of Islām and safeguard its progress, Shī'ism did not display any open opposition to the men of Islāmic society. Members of the Shī'ite community even fought hand in hand with the Sunni majority in holy wars (*jihād*) and participated in public affairs. `Alī himself guided the Sunni majority in the interest of the whole of Islām, whenever such action was necessary.¹

The Political Method of the Selection of the Caliph by Vote and Its Disagreement with the Shī'ite View

Shī'ism believes that the Divine Law of Islām (Sharī'ah), whose substance is found in the Book of God and in the tradition (*Sunnah*)² of the Holy Prophet, will remain valid to the Day of Judgment and can never, nor will ever, be altered. A government which is really Islāmic cannot, under any pretext, refuse completely to carry out the Sharī'ah's injunctions.³ The only duty of an Islāmic government is to make decisions by consultation within the limits set by the Sharī'ah and in accordance with the demands of the moment.

The vow of allegiance to Abū-Bakr at Saqifah, which was motivated at least in part by political considerations, and the

¹ *Tārīkh i Ya'qūbi*, pp. 111, 126 and 129.

² *Editor's note*: The traditions of the Prophet as contained in his sayings are called *hadīth* while his activities, deeds, words and all that made up the life which has become an example to all Muslims are called *sunnah*.

³ God says in His Word: 'For lo! It is an unassailable Scripture. Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or behind it,' (Qur'ān, XLI, 41-42) And He says, 'The decision is for Allāh only' (Qur'ān, VI, 57, also XII, 40 and 67), meaning the only Sharī'ah is the Sharī'ah and laws of God which must reach man through prophecy. And He says, 'But he [Muḥammad] is the messenger of Allāh and the Seal of the Prophets.' (Qur'ān, XXXIII, 40) And He says, 'Whose judgeth not by that which Allāh hath revealed; such are the disbelievers (Qur'ān, V, 44).'

incident described in the ḥadīth of 'ink and paper,'¹ which occurred during the last days of the illness of the Holy Prophet, reveal the fact that those who directed and backed the movement to choose the caliph through the process of election believed that the Book of God should be preserved in the form of a constitution. They emphasized the Holy Book and paid much less attention to the words of the Holy Prophet as an immutable source of the teachings of Islām. They seem to have accepted the modification of certain aspects of Islāmic teachings concerning government to suit the conditions of the moment and for the sake of the general welfare.

This tendency to emphasise only certain principles of the Divine Law is confirmed by many sayings that were later transmitted concerning the companions of the Holy Prophet. For example, the companions were considered to be independent authorities in matters of the Divine Law (*mujtahid*)² being able to exercise independent judgment (*ijtihād*) in public affairs. It was also believed that if they succeeded in their task, they would be rewarded by God and if they failed, they would be forgiven by Him since they were among the companions. This view was widely held during the early years following the death of the Holy Prophet. Shī'ism takes a stricter stand and believes that the actions of the companions, as of all other Muslims, should be judged strictly according to the teachings of the Shari'ah. For example, there was the complicated incident involving the famous general Khālid ibn al-Walīd in the house of one of the prominent Muslims of the day, Mālik ibn Nuwayrah which led

¹ *Editor's note:* According to Shī'ite sources, after the death of the Prophet, people gathered in the 'covered porch' (*saqifah*) of Banū-Sā'idah and swore allegiance to Abū-Bakr as caliph. As for the ḥadīth of "ink and paper," it refers to the last moments of the life of the Prophet as related above.

² *Editor's note:* The *mujtahid* is one who through mastery of the religious sciences and the possession of moral qualities has the right to practice *ijtihād* or the giving of fresh opinion on matters pertaining to the Shari'ah. The right of exercising one's independent judgment based on the principles of the Law, or *ijtihād*, has ceased in Sunni Islām since the 3rd/9th century whereas the "gate of *ijtihād*" has been always open in Shī'ite Islām. The leading authorities in the Law are called in Shī'ism *mujtahids*.

to the death of the latter. The fact that Khālid was not at all taken to task for this incident because of his being an outstanding military leader¹ shows in the eyes of Shī'ism an undue lenience toward some of the actions of the companions which were below the norm of perfect piety and righteousness set by the actions of the spiritual elite among the companions.

Another practice of the early years which is criticized by Shī'ism is the cutting off of the *Khums*² from the members of the Household of the Prophet and from the Holy Prophet's relatives.³ Likewise, because of the emphasis laid by Shī'ism on the sayings and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet, it is difficult for it to understand why the writing down of the text of ḥadīth was completely banned and why, if a written ḥadīth were found, it would be burned.⁴ We know that this ban continued through the caliphate of the *khulafā' rāshidūn*⁵ into the Umayyad

¹ *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 110; *Tārīkh Abī'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 158.

² *Editor's note*: A religious tax paid to the family of the Prophet which was discontinued in Sunni Islām after his death but continues in Shī'ite Islām to this day.

³ *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. III, pp. 186; *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 48. Besides these, the necessity of the khums has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān: "And know that wherever ye take of spoils of war, lo! a fifth (khums) thereof is for Allāh, and for the messenger and for kinsmen..." (Qur'ān, VIII, 41).

⁴ During his caliphate, Abū-Bakr collected five hundred ḥadīths. 'Ā'ishah recounts: "One night, I saw my father disturbed until morning. In the morning he told me, 'Bring the ḥadīths.' Then he set them all on fire." (*Kanz al-'Ummāl* of 'Alā' al-Dīn Muttaqī, Hyderabad, 1364-75, vol. V, pp. 237.) 'Umar wrote to all cities stating that whosoever had a ḥadīth should destroy it. (*Kanz al-'Ummāl*, vol. V, pp. 237) Muḥammad ibn Abi Bakr says: "During the time of 'Umar ḥadīths increased. When they were brought to him, he ordered them to be burned." (*Ṭabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd, Beirut, 1376, vol. V, pp. 140.)

⁵ *Editor's note*: The first four caliphs, Abū-Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī, were together called the *Khulafā' Rāshidūn*, the rightly guided caliphs, and their period of caliphate is sharply distinguished from that of the Umayyad, which followed because the rule of the first four caliphs was strongly religious in character while the Umayyad caliphate was colored by mundane and worldly considerations.

period¹ and did not cease until the period of `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Azīz who ruled from AH 99/AD 717 to AH 101/AD 719.²

During the period of the second caliph (13/634-25/644), there was a continuation of the policy of emphasizing certain aspects of the Sharī`ah and of putting aside some of the practices which the Shī`ites believe the Holy Prophet taught and practised. Some practices were forbidden, some were omitted, and some were added. For instance, the pilgrimage of *tamattu`* (a kind of pilgrimage in which the `umrah ceremony is utilized in place of the ḥajj ceremony) was banned by `Umar during his caliphate, with the decree that transgressors would be stoned; this in spite of the fact that during his final pilgrimage, the Holy Prophet—upon whom be blessings and peace—instituted, as in Qur`ān Sūrah II, 196, a special form for the pilgrimage ceremonies that might be performed by pilgrims coming from far away. Also, during the lifetime of the Prophet of God, temporary marriage (*mut`ah*) was practiced, but `Umar forbade it. And even though during the life of the Holy Prophet it was the practice to recite in the call to prayers, "Hurry to the best act" (*ḥayya `alā khayr al-`ama*), `Umar ordered that it be omitted because he said it would prevent people from participating in holy war, *jihād* (It is still recited in the Shī`ite call to prays, but not in the Sunni call.) There were also additions to the Sharī`ah; during the time of the Prophet, a divorce was valid only if the three declarations of divorce ("I divorce thee") were made on three different occasions, but `Umar allowed the triple divorce declaration to be made at one time. Heavy penalties were imposed on those who broke certain of these new regulations, such as stoning in the case of *mut`ah* marriage.

It was also during the period of the rule of the second caliph that new social and economic forces led to the uneven

¹ *Tārīkh Abū'l-Fidā`*, vol. I, pp. 151, and others similar sources.

² *Editor's note:* For the benefit of non-Muslim readers, all dates will be given in both AH (Islamic lunar calendar dating from the Hijrah) and the corresponding AD years (13/634-25/644); when a reference is added to a century, we have given first the Islamic century and then the corresponding Christian century (4th/10th century).

distribution of the public treasury (*bayt al-māl*) among the people,¹ an act which was later the cause of bewildering class differences and frightful and bloody struggles among Muslims. At this time, Mu`āwiyah was ruling in Damascus in the style of the Persian and Byzantine kings and was even given the title of the "Khosrow of the Arabs" (a Persian title of the highest imperial power), but no serious protest was made against him for his worldly type of rule.²

The second caliph was killed by a Persian slave in 25/644. In accordance with the majority vote of a six-man council, which had assembled by order of the second caliph before his death, the third caliph was chosen. The third caliph did not prevent his Umayyad relatives from becoming dominant over the people during his caliphate and appointed some of them as rulers in the Hījāz, Iraq, Egypt and other Muslim lands.³ These relatives began to be lax in applying moral principles in government. Some of them openly committed injustice and tyranny, sin and iniquity, and broke certain of the tenets of firmly established Islāmic laws.

Before long, streams of protest began to flow toward the capital. But the caliph, who was under the influence of his relative—particularly Marwān ibn Ḥakam—⁴did not act promptly or decisively to remove the causes against which the people were protesting. Sometimes it even happened that those who protested were punished and driven away.

An incident that happened in Egypt illustrates the nature of the rule of the third caliph. A group of Muslims in Egypt rebelled against `Uthmān. `Uthmān sensed the danger and asked `Alī for help, expressing his feeling of contrition. `Alī told the

¹ *Tārīkh Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 131; *Tārīkh Abī'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 160.

² *Uṣd al-Ghābah* of Ibn Athīr, Cairo, 1280, vol. IV, pp. 386; *al-Iṣābah* of Ibn Hajar 'Asqalānī, Cairo, 1323, vol. III.

³ *Tārīkh Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 150; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 168; *Tārīkh Ṭabarī*, vol. III, pp. 377, etc.

⁴ *Tārīkh Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 150; *Tārīkh Ṭabarī*, vol. III, p. 397.

Egyptians, "You have revolted in order to bring justice and truth to life. `Uthmān has repented saying, 'I shall change my ways and in three days will fulfill your wishes. I shall expel the oppressive rulers from their posts.'" `Alī then wrote an agreement with them on behalf of `Uthmān and they started home. On the way, they saw the slave of `Uthmān riding on his camel in the direction of Egypt. They became suspicious of him and searched him. on him they found a letter for the governor of Egypt containing the following words: "In the name of God. When `Abd al-Raḥmān ibn `Addis comes to you beat him with a hundred lashes, shave his head and beard and condemn him to long imprisonment. Do the same in the case of `Amr ibn al-Ḥamq, Sawdah ibn Ḥamrān, and `Urwah ibn Nibā'." The Egyptians took the letter and returned with eager to `Uthmān, saying, "You have betrayed us!" `Uthmān denied the letter. They said, "Your slave was the carrier of the letter." He answered, "He has committed this act without my permission." They said, "He rode upon your camel." He answered, "They have stolen my camel." They said, "The letter is in the handwriting of your secretary." He replied, "This has been done without my permission and knowledge." They said, "In any case you are not competent to be caliph and must resign, for if this has been done with your permission you are a traitor and if such important matters take place without your permission and knowledge then your incapability and incompetence is proven. In any case, either resign or dismiss the oppressive agents from office immediately." `Uthmān answered, "If I wish to act according to your will, then it is you who are the rulers. Then, what is my function?" They stood up and left the gathering in anger.¹

During his caliphate, `Uthmān allowed the government of Damascus, at the head of which stood Mu`āwiyah, to be strengthened more than ever before. In reality, the center of gravity of the caliphate as far as political power was concerned was shifting to Damascus; and the organization in Medina, the capital of the Islāmic world, was politically no more than a form

¹ *Tārīkh Tabarī*, vol. III, pp. 402-409; *Tārīkh Ya`qūbī*, vol. V, pp. 150-151.

without the necessary power and substance to support it.¹ Finally, in the year 35/656, the people rebelled and after a few days of siege and fighting, the third caliph was killed.

The first caliph was selected through the vote of the majority of the companions, the second caliph by the will and testament of the first, and the third by a six-man council whose members and rules of procedure were organized and determined by the second caliph. Altogether, the policy of these three caliphs, who were in power for twenty five years, was to execute and apply Islāmic laws and principles in society in accordance with *ijtihād* and what appeared as most wise at the time to the caliphs themselves. As for the Islāmic sciences, the policy of these caliphs was to have the Holy Qur'ān read and understood without being concerned with commentaries upon it or allowing it to become the subject of discussion. The ḥadīth of the Prophet was recited and was transmitted orally without being written down. Writing was limited to the text of the Holy Qur'ān and was forbidden in the case of ḥadīth.²

After the battle of Yamāmah, which ended in 12/633, many of those who had been reciters of the Holy Qur'ān and who knew it by heart were killed. As a result, 'Umar ibn al-Al-Khaṭṭāb proposed to the first caliph to have the verses of the Holy Qur'ān collected in written form, saying that if another war were to occur and the rest of those who knew the Qur'ān by heart were to be killed, the knowledge of the text of the Holy Book would disappear among men. Therefore, it was necessary to assemble the Qur'ānic verses in written form.³

From the Shī'ite point of view, it appears strange that this decision was made concerning the Qur'ān and yet despite the fact that the prophetic ḥadīth, which is the complement of the Qur'ān, was faced with the same danger and was not free from corruption in transmission, addition, diminution, forgery and

¹ *Tārīkh Ṭabarī*, vol. III, p. 377.

² *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, vol. VI, pp. 98; *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 113.

³ *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 111; *Tārīkh Ṭabarī*, vol. III, pp. 129-132.

forgetfulness, the same attention was not paid to it. On the contrary, as already mentioned, writing it down was forbidden and all of the written versions of it that were found were burned, as if to emphasize that only the text of the Holy Book should exist in written form.

As for the other Islāmic sciences, during this period little effort was made to propagate them, the energies of the community being spent mostly in establishing the new socio-political order. Despite all the praise and consecration which are found in the Qur`ān concerning knowledge (`ilm)¹ and the emphasis placed upon its cultivation, the avid cultivation of the religious sciences was postponed to a later period of Islāmic history. Most men were occupied with the remarkable and continuous victories of the Islāmic armies, and were carried away by the flood of immeasurable booty, which came from all directions inward the Arabian Peninsula. With this new wealth and the worldliness which came along with it, few were willing to devote themselves to the cultivation of the sciences of the Household of the Prophet, at whose head stood `Alī, whom the Holy Prophet had introduced to the people as the one most versed in the Islāmic sciences. At the same time, the inner meaning and purpose of the teachings of the Holy Qur`ān were neglected by most of those who were affected by this change. It is strange that, even in the matter of collecting the verses of the Holy Qur`ān, `Alī was not consulted and his name was not mentioned among those who participated in this task, although it was known by everyone that he had collected the text of the Holy Qur`ān after the death of the Prophet.²

¹ *Editor's note:* The word `ilm means science in its most universal sense, like the Latin *scientia*, and applies to the religious as well as intellectual, rational and philosophical forms of knowledge. Generally, it is distinguished from *ma`rifah* or *`irfān* which is Divine knowledge and may be compared to the Latin *sapientia*. Certain Muslim masters, however, consider `ilm in its highest sense to stand above `irfān since it is a Divine Quality, one of God's Names using *al-`Alim*, He Who knows.

² *Tārīkh Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 113; *Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd*, vol. I, pp. 9.

It has been recounted in many traditions that after receiving allegiance from the community, Abū-Bakr sent someone to `Alī and asked for his allegiance. `Alī said, "I have promised not to leave my house except for the daily prayers until I compile the Qur`ān." And it has been mentioned that `Alī gave his allegiance to Abū-Bakr after six months. This itself is proof that `Alī had finished compiling the Qur`ān. Likewise, it has been recounted that after compiling the Qur`ān, he placed the pages of the Holy Book on a camel and showed it to the people. It is also recounted that the battle of Yamāmah after which the Qur`ān was compiled occurred during the second year of the caliphate of Abū-Bakr. These facts have been mentioned in most works on history and ḥadīth which deal with the account of the compilation of the Holy Qur`ān.

These and similar events made the followers of `Alī firmer in their belief and more conscious of the course that lay before them. They increased their activity from day to day and `Alī himself, who was cut off from the possibility of educating and training the people in general, concentrated on privately training an elite.

During this twenty-five year period, `Alī lost through death three of his few dearest friends and associates, who were also among the companions of the Prophet: Salmān al-Fārsī, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, and Miqdād. They had been constant in their friendship with him in all circumstances. It was also during this same period that some of the other companions of the Holy Prophet and a large number of their followers in the Ḥijāz, the Yemen, Iraq and other lands, joined the followers of `Alī. As a result, after the death of the third caliph, the people turned to `Alī from all sides, swore allegiance to him and chose him as caliph.

The Termination of the Caliphate of `Alī Amīr al-Mu`minīn¹ and His Method of Rule

The caliphate of `Alī began toward the end of the year 35/656 and lasted about four years and nine months. During his period as caliph, `Alī followed the ways of the Holy Prophet² and brought conditions back to their original state. He forced the resignation of all the incompetent political elements who had a hand in directing affairs³ and began in reality a major transformation of a "revolutionary" nature which caused him innumerable difficulties.⁴

On his first day as caliph, in an address to the people, `Alī said, "O People, be aware that the difficulties which you faced during the apostolic period of the Prophet of God have come upon you once again and seized you. Your ranks must be turned completely around so that the people of virtue who have fallen behind should come forward and those who had come to the fore without being worthy should fall behind. There is both truth (ḥaqq) and falsehood (bāṭil). Each has its followers; but a person should follow the truth. If falsehood be prevalent, it is not something new, and if the truth is rare and hard to come by, sometimes even that which is rare wins the day so that there is hope of advance. Of course it does not occur often that

¹ *Editor's note:* The title *Amīr al-Mu`minīn*, "commander of the faithful," is used in Shī'ism solely for `Alī, whereas in Sunni Islām it is a general title conferred upon all the caliphs.

² *Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, p. 154.

³ *Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, p. 155; *Murūj al-Dhahab* vol. II, pp. 364.

⁴ *Editor's note:* Revolutionary in this context does not of course bear the same meaning that it carries generally today. In a traditional context, a revolutionary movement is the reestablishment or reapplication of immutable principles of a transcendent order whereas in an anti-traditional context, it means rebellion against either these principles or their application or against any established order in general.

something which has turned away from man should return to him."¹

ʿAlī continued his radically different type of government based more on righteousness than political efficacy but, as is necessary in the case of every movement of this kind, elements of the opposition whose interests were endangered began to display their displeasure and resisted his rule. Basing their actions on the claim that they wanted to revenge the death of ʿUthmān, they instigated bloody war which continued throughout almost all the time that ʿAlī was caliph. From the Shīʿite point of view, those who caused these civil war had no end in mind other than their own personal interest. The wish to revenge the blood of the third caliph was no more than an excuse to fool the crowd. There was no question of a misunderstanding.

After the death of the Holy Prophet, a small minority, following ʿAlī, refused to pay allegiance. At the head of the minority there were Salmān, Abū Dharr, Miqdād, and ʿAmmār. At the beginning of the caliphate of ʿAlī also a sizable minority in disagreement refused to pay allegiance. Among the most persistent opponents were Saʿīd ibn ʿĀṣ, Walīd ibn ʿUqbah, Marwān ibn Ḥakam, ʿAmr ibn ʿĀṣ, Busr ibn Arṭaʿah, Samarah ibn Jundab and Mighīrah ibn Shuʿbah.

The study of the biography of these two groups, and meditation upon the acts they have performed and stories recounted of them in history books, reveal fully their religious personality and aim. The first group were among the elite of the companions of the Holy Prophet and among the ascetics, devout worshippers and selfless devotees of Islām who struggled on the path of Islāmic freedom. They were especially loved by the Prophet. The Prophet said, "God has informed me that He loves few men and that I should love them also." They asked about their names. He mentioned ʿAlī and then the names of Abū

¹ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the fifteenth sermon.

Dharr, Salmān and Miqdād.¹ `Ā'ishah has recounted that the Prophet of God said, "If two alternatives are placed before `Ammār, he will definitely choose that which is more true and right."² The Prophet said, "There is no one between heaven and earth more truthful than Abū Dharr."³ There is no record of a single forbidden act committed by these men during their lifetime. They never spilled any blood unjustly, did not commit aggression against anyone, did not steal anyone's property and never sought to corrupt and misguide people.

History is, however, full of accounts of unworthy acts committed by some of the second group. The various acts committed by some of these men in opposition to explicit Islāmic teachings are beyond reckoning. These acts cannot be excused in any manner except the way that is followed by certain groups among the Sunnis who say that God was satisfied with them and therefore they were free to perform whatever act they wished, and that they would not be punished for violating the injunctions and regulations existing in the Holy Book and the Sunnah.

The first war in the caliphate of `Alī, which is called the "Battle of the Camel," was caused by the unfortunate class differences created during the period of rule of the second caliph as a result of the new socio-economic forces which caused an uneven distribution of the public treasury among members of the community. When chosen to the caliphate, `Alī divided the treasury evenly⁴ as had been the method of the Holy Prophet, but this manner of dividing the wealth upset Ṭalḥah and Zubayr greatly. They began to show signs of disobedience and left Medina to Mecca with the alleged aim of making the pilgrimage. They persuaded "the Mother of the Faithful" (*umm al-Mu'minīn*), `Ā'ishah who was not friendly with `Alī, to join

¹ *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, Cairo, 1372, vol. I, pp. 66.

² *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, vol. I, pp. 66.

³ *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah, vol. I, pp. 68.

⁴ *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. II, p. 362; *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 122; *Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 160; *Ibn Abi 'l-Ḥadīd*, vol. I, p. 180.

them and in the name of wanting to revenge the death of the third caliph, they began the bloody Battle of the Camel.¹ This was done despite the fact that this same Ṭalḥah and Zubayr were in Medina when the third caliph was besieged and killed but did nothing to defend him.² Furthermore, after his death they were the first to pay allegiance to `Alī on behalf of the immigrants (*muhājirūn*)³ as well as on their own.⁴ Also, the "mother of the faithful," `Ā'ishah did not show any opposition to those who had killed the third caliph at the moment when she received the news of his death.⁵ It must be remembered that the main instigators of the disturbances that led to the death of the third caliph were those companions who wrote letters from Medina to people near and far inviting them to rebel against the caliph, a fact which is repeated in many early Muslim histories.

As for the second war, called the Battle of Šiffīn, which lasted for a year and a half, its cause was the covetousness of Mu`āwiyah for the caliphate which for him was a worldly political instrument rather than a religious institution. But as an excuse, he made the revenge of the blood of the third caliph the main issue and began a war in which more than a hundred thousand people perished without reason. Naturally, in these wars, Mu`āwiyah was the aggressor rather than the defender, for the protest to revenge someone's blood can never occur in the form of defense. The pretext of this war was blood revenge. During the last days of his life, the third caliph, in order to quell the uprising against him, asked Mu`āwiyah for help, but the army of Mu`āwiyah which set out from Damascus to Medina purposely waited on the road until the caliph was killed. Then he returned to Damascus to begin an uprising to revenge the

¹ *Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 156; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 172; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. II, pp. 366.

² *Ya`qūbī*, vol. V, pp. 152.

³ *Editor's note*: The *muhājirūn* refers to the early converts to Islām who immigrated with the prophet to Medina from Mecca.

⁴ *Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 154; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 171.

⁵ *Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 152.

caliph's death.¹ After the death of `Alī and his gaining the caliphate himself, Mu`āwiyah forgot the question of revenging the blood of the third caliph and did not pursue the matter further.

After Šiffīn, there occurred the battle of Nahrawān in which a number of people, among whom there could be found some of the companions, rebelled against `Alī, possibly at the instigation of Mu`āwiyah.² These people were causing rebellion throughout the lands of Islām, killing the Muslims and especially the followers of `Alī. They even attacked pregnant women and killed their babies. `Alī put down this uprising as well, but a short while later was himself killed in the mosque of Kūfah by one of the members of this group who came to be known as the Khawārij. The opponents of `Alī claim that he was a courageous man but did not possess political acumen. They claim that at the beginning of his caliphate he could have temporarily made peace with his opponents. He could have approached them through peace and friendship, thus courting their satisfaction and approval. In this way, he could have strengthened his caliphate and only then turned to their extirpation and destruction. What people who hold this view forget is that the movement of `Alī was not based on political opportunism. It was a radical and revolutionary religious movement (in the true sense of revolution as a spiritual movement to reestablish the real order of things and at in its current political and social sense); therefore, it could not have

¹ When `Uthmān was surrounded by those who had rebelled, he wrote to Mu`āwiyah asking for help. Mu`āwiyah prepared an army of twelve thousand men and sent them toward Medina. But he asked them to camp around Damascus and came to `Uthmān himself to report on the readiness of the army. `Uthmān said, "You have made your army stop on purpose so that I will be killed. Then you will make the spilling of my blood an excuse to revolt yourself." *Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 152, *Murāj al-Dhahab*, vol. III, pp. 25; *Ṭabari*, vol. III, pp. 403.

² *Murāj al-Dhahab*, vol. II, pp. 415.

been accomplished through compromise or flattery and forgery. A similar situation can be seen during the apostleship of the Holy Prophet. The infidels and polythesis proposed peace to him many times and swore that if he were to abstain from protesting against their gods they would not interfere with his religious mission. But the Prophet did not accept such a proposal, although he could in those days of difficulty have made peace and used flattery to fortify his own position, and then have risen against his enemies. In fact, the Islāmic message never allows a right and just cause to be abandoned for the sake of strengthening another good cause, nor a falsehood to be rejected and disprove, through another falsehood. There are many Qur'ānic verses concerning this matter.¹

The Benefit which the Shī'ah Derived from the Caliphate of `Alī

During the four years and nine months of his caliphate, `Alī was not able to eliminate the disturbed conditions, which were prevailing throughout the Islāmic world, but he was successful in three fundamental ways:

1. As a result of his just and upright manner of living, he revealed once again the beauty and attractiveness of the way of life of the Holy Prophet, especially to the younger generation. In contrast to the imperial grandeur of Mu`āwiyah, he lived in simplicity and poverty like the poorest of people.² He never

¹ For instance, see the traditional commentaries which describe the circumstances at the time of the revelation of these verses: "The chiefs among them go about, exhorting: Go and be staunch to your gods!" (Qur'ān, XXXVIII, 7) and "And if We had not made thee wholly firm thou mightest almost have inclined unto them a little." (Qur'ān, XVII, 74) and, "Who would have had thee compromise, that they may compromise." (Qur'ān, MYTH, 9).

² *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. II, pp. 431; *Ibn Abī'l-Hadīd*, vol. I, pp. 181.

favored his friends or relatives and family above others,¹ nor did he ever prefer wealth to poverty or brute force to weakness.

2. Despite the cumbersome and strenuous difficulties, which absorbed his time, he left behind among the Islāmic community a valuable treasury of the truly divine sciences and Islāmic intellectual disciplines.² Nearly eleven thousand of his proverbs and short sayings on different intellectual, religious and social subjects have been recorded.³ In his talks and speeches, he expounded the most sublime Islāmic sciences in a most elegant and flowing manner. He established Arabic grammar and laid the basis for Arabic literature.⁴

He was the first in Islām to delve directly into the questions of metaphysics (*falsafah ilāhī*) in a manner combining intellectual rigor and logical demonstration. He discussed problems, which had never appeared before in the same way among the metaphysicians of the world.⁵ Moreover, he was so devoted to metaphysics and gnosis that even in the heat of battle he would carry out intellectual discourse and discuss metaphysical questions.⁶

3. He trained a large number of religious scholars and Islāmic savants, among whom are found a number of ascetics and gnostics who were the forefathers of the Sufis such men as

¹ Abū'l-Fidā', vol. 1, pp. 182; *Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd*, vol. I, pp. 181.

² *Nahj al-Balāghah* and ḥadīths found in books of both Sunnis and Shi'ite.

³ *Kitāb al-Ghurar wa'l-Durar* of Āmidī Sidon, 1349.

⁴ Such works are the *Nahw*, (Grammar) of Suyūṭī, Tehran, 1281, etc., vol. II, *Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd*, vol. I, pp. 6.

⁵ See *Nahj al-Balāghah*.

⁶ Amidst the fighting of the Battle of Jamal (the Camel), a Bedouin asked 'Ali: "Oh, Commander of the Faithful! You say God is one?" People attacked him from two sides and said: "Don't you see that 'Ali is worried and his mind occupied with so many diverse matters? Why do you engage in a discussion with him?" 'Ali told his companions, "Leave this man alone. My goal in fighting with these people is none other than to clarify true doctrines and the ends of religion." Then he set out to answer the Bedouin. *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. II, pp. 65.

Uways al-Qaranī, Kumayl al-Nakha'ī, Maytham al-Tammār and Roshayd al-Ḥajārī. These men have been recognized by the later Sufis as the founders of gnosis in Islām. Others among his disciples became the first teachers of jurisprudence, theology, Qur'ānic commentary and recitation.¹

The Transfer of the Caliphate to Mu'āwiyah and Its Transformation into a Hereditary Monarchy

After the death of 'Alī, his son, Ḥasan ibn 'Alī, who is recognized by the Shī'ah as their second Imām, became caliph. This designation occurred in accordance with 'Alī's last will and testament and also by the allegiance of the community to Ḥasan. But Mu'āwiyah did not remain quiet before this event. He marched with his army toward Iraq, which was then the capital of the caliphate, and began to wage war against Ḥasan.

Through different intrigues and the payment of great sums of money, Mu'āwiyah was able gradually to corrupt the aides and generals of Ḥasan. Finally, he was able to force Ḥasan to hand the caliphate over to him so as to avoid bloodshed and to make peace.² Ḥasan handed the caliphate to Mu'āwiyah on the condition that the caliphate would be returned to him after the death of Mu'āwiyah and that no harm would come to his partisans.³

In the year 40/661, Mu'āwiyah finally gained control of the caliphate. He then set out immediately for Iraq and in a speech to the people of that land said: "I did not fight against you for the sake of the prayers or of fasting. These acts you can perform yourself. What I wanted to accomplish was to rule over you and this end I have achieved." He also said, "The agreement I made

¹ *Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd*, vol. 15, pp. 6-9.

² *Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, p. 191, and other books of history.

³ *Ya'qūbī*, vol. 115 pp. 192; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 183.

with Ḥasan is null and void. It lies trampled under my feet."¹ With this declaration, Mu`āwiyah made known to the people the real character of his government and revealed the nature of the program he had in mind.

He indicated in his declaration that he would separate religion from politics and would not give any guarantees concerning religious duties and regulations. He would spend all his force to preserve and to keep alive his own power, whatever might be the cost. Obviously, a government of such a nature is more of a sultanate and a monarchy than a caliphate and vicegerency of the Prophet of God in its traditional Islāmic sense. That is why some who were admitted to his court addressed him as "king."² He himself in some private gatherings interpreted his government as a monarchy,³ while in public he always introduced himself as the caliph.

Naturally, any monarchy that is based on force carries with it inherently the principle of inheritance. Mu`āwiyah, too, finally realized this fact, and chose his son, Yazīd who was a heedless young man without the least religious personality,⁴ as the "crown prince" and his successor. This act was to be the cause of many regrettable events in the future. Mu`āwiyah had previously indicated that he would refuse to permit Ḥasan ibn `Alī to succeed him as caliph and that he had other thoughts in

¹ *Al-Naṣā'ih al-Kāfiyah* of Muḥammad al-'Alawī, Baghdad, 1368, vol. II, pp. 161 and others.

² *Ya`qūbī*, vol. 11, pp. 193.

³ *Ya`qūbī*, vol. 115 pp. 207.

⁴ Yazīd was a lecherous and self-indulgent person. He was always drunk and wore silk and unbecoming dress. His nightly parties were combined with music and wine. He had a dog and a monkey which were always with him as companions with which he amused himself. His monkey was named Abū-Qays. He would dress him in beautiful attire and make him be present at his drinking parties. Sometimes, he would mount him on horseback and send him to races. *Ya`qūbī*, vol. 11, pp. 196; *Murāj al-Dhahab*, vol. III, pp. 77.

mind. Therefore, he had caused Ḥasan to be killed by poisoning,¹ thus preparing the way for his son, Yazīd.

In breaking his agreement with Ḥasan, Mu'āwiyah made it clear that he would never permit the Shī'ah of the Household of the Prophet to live in a peaceful and secure environment and continue their activity as before, and he carried into action this very intention. It has been said that he went so far as to declare that whoever would transmit a ḥadīth in praise of the virtues of the Household of the Prophet would have no immunity or protection concerning his life, merchandise and property.² At the same time, he ordered that whoever could recite a ḥadīth in praise of the other companions or caliphs would be given sufficient reward. As a result, a noticeable number of ḥadīths were recorded at this time praising the companions, some of which are of doubtful authenticity.³ He ordered pejorative comments to be made about 'Alī from the pulpits of mosques throughout the lands of Islām, while he himself sought to revile 'Alī. This command continued to be more or less in effect until the caliphate of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, when it was discontinued.⁴ With the help of his agents and lieutenants, Mu'āwiyah caused the elite and the most outstanding among the partisans of 'Alī to be put to death and the heads of some of them to be carried on lances throughout different cities.⁵ The majority of Shī'ites were forced to disown and even curse 'Alī and to express their disdain for him. If they refused, they were put to death.

¹ *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. III, pp. 5; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 183.

² *Al-Naṣā'ih al-Kāfiyah*, pp. 72, recounted from *Kitāb al-Aḥdāth*.

³ *Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 199 and 210; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 186; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. III, pp. 33 and 35.

⁴ *Al-Naṣā'ih al-Kāfiyah*, pp. 72-73.

⁵ *Al-Naṣā'ih al-Kāfiyah*, pp. 58, 64, 77-78.

The Bleakest Days of Shī`ism

The most difficult period for Shī`ism was the twenty-year rule of Mu`āwiyah, during which the Shī`ites had no protection and most of them were considered as marked characters, under suspicion and hunted down by the state. Two of the leaders of Shī`ism who lived at this time, Imāms Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, did not possess any means whatsoever to change the negative and oppressive circumstances in which they lived. Ḥusayn, the third Imām of Shī`ism, had no possibility of freeing the Shī`ites from persecution in the ten years he was Imām during Mu`āwiyah's caliphate, and when he rebelled during the caliphate of Yazīd, he was massacred along with all his aides and children.

Certain people in the Sunni world explain as pardonable the arbitrary unjust and irresponsible actions carried out at this time by Mu`āwiyah and his aides and lieutenants, some of whom were, like Mu`āwiyah himself, among the companions. This group reasons that according to certain ḥadīths of the Holy Prophet, all the companions could practice *ijtihād*, that they were excused by God for the sins they committed, and that God was satisfied with them and forgave them whatever wrong they might have performed. The Shī`ites, however, do not accept this argument for two reasons:

1. It is not conceivable that a leader of human society like the Prophet should rise in order to revivify truth, justice and freedom and to persuade a group of people to accept his beliefs—a group all of whose members had sacrificed their very existence in order to accomplish this sacred end—and then as soon as this end is accomplished give his aides and companions complete freedom to do with these sacred laws as they will. It is not possible to believe that the Holy Prophet would have forgiven the companions for whatever wrong action they might have performed. Such indifference to the type of action performed by them would have only destroyed the structure, which the Holy Prophet had built with the same means that he had used to construct it.

2. Those sayings which depict the companions as inviolable and pardoned in advance for every act they might perform, even one unlawful or inadmissible, are most likely apocryphal; the authenticity of many of them has not been fully established by traditional methods. Moreover, it is known historically that the companions did not deal with one another as if they were inviolable and pardoned for all their sin's and wrongdoings. Therefore, even judging by the way the companions acted and dealt with each other, it can be concluded that such sayings cannot be literally true in the way some have understood them. If they do contain an aspect of the truth, it is in indicating the legal inviolability of the companions and the sanctification which they enjoyed generally as a group because of their proximity to the Holy Prophet. The expression of God's satisfaction with the companions in the Holy Qur'ān, because of the services they had rendered in obeying His Command,¹ refers to their past actions, and to God's satisfaction with them in the past, not to whatever action each one of them might perform in the future.

The Establishment of Umayyad Rule

In the year 60/680, Mu'āwiyah died and his son, Yazīd, became caliph, as the result of the allegiance which his father had obtained for him from the powerful political and military leaders of the community. From the testimony of historical documents, it can be seen clearly that Yazīd had no religious character at all and that even during the lifetime of his father he was oblivious to the principles and regulations of Islām. At that time, his only interest was debauchery and frivolity. During his three years of caliphate, he was the cause of calamities that had no precedent in the history of Islām, despite all the strife that had occurred before him.

During the first year of Yazīd's rule, Imām Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Holy Prophet, was massacred in the most

¹ See Qur'ān, IX, 100.

atrocious manner, along with his children, relatives and friends. Yazīd even had some of the women and children of the Household of the Prophet killed and their heads displayed in different cities.¹ During the second year of his rule, he ordered a general massacre of Medina and for three days gave his soldiers freedom to kill, loot and take the women of the city.² During the third year, he had the sacred Ka`bah destroyed and burned.³

Following Yazīd, the family of Marwān gained possession of the caliphate, according to details that are recorded in the history books. The role of this eleven-member group, which lasted for nearly seventy years, was successful politically but from the point of view of purely religious values, it fell short of Islāmic ideals and practices. Islāmic society was dominated by the Arab element alone and non-Arabs were subordinated to the Arabs. In fact, a strong Arab empire was created which gave itself the name of an Islāmic caliphate. During this period, some of the caliphs were indifferent to religious sentiments to the extent that one of them—who was the "vicegerent of the Holy Prophet" and was regarded as the protector of religion—decided without showing any respect for Islāmic practices and the feelings of Muslims to construct a room above the Ka`bah so that he could have a place to enjoy and amuse himself during the annual pilgrimage.⁴ It is even recounted of one of these caliphs that he made the Holy Qur`ān a target for his arrow and in a poem composed to the Qur`ān said, "On the Day of Judgment when you appear before God, tell Him 'the caliph tore me.'"⁵

¹ *Ya`qūbi*, vol. III, pp. 216; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 190; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. III, pp. 64, and other books of *Tārīkh* (history).

² *Ya`qūbi*, vol. II, pp. 223; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 192; *Murūj al-Dhahab* vol. III, pp. 78.

³ *Ya`qūbi*, vol. II, pp. 224; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 192; *Murūj al-Dhahab* vol. III, pp. 81.

⁴ Walid ibn Yazid; mentioned in *Ya`qūbi*, vol. III, pp. 73.

⁵ Walid ibn Yazid; mentioned in *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. III, pp. 228.

Naturally the Shī'ites, whose basic differences with the Sunnis were in the two questions of the Islāmic caliphate and religious authority, were passing through bitter and difficult days in this dark period. Yet, in spite of the unjust and irresponsible ways of the governments of the time, the asceticism and purity of the leaders of the Household of the Prophet made the Shī'ites each day even more determined to hold on to their beliefs. Of particular importance was the tragic death of Ḥusayn, the third Imām, which played a major role in the spread of Shī'ism, especially in regions away from the center of the caliphate, such as Iraq, the Yemen and Persia. This can be seen through the fact that during the period of the fifth Imām, before the end of the first Islāmic century, and less than forty years after the death of Ḥusayn, the Shī'ites took advantage of the internal differences and weaknesses in the Umayyad government and began to organize themselves, flocking to the side of the fifth Imām. People came from all Islāmic countries like a flood to his door to collect ḥadīth and to learn the Islāmic science. The first century had not yet ended when a few of the leaders who were influential in the government established the city of Qum in Persia and made it a Shī'ite settlement. But even then, the Shī'ah continued to live for the most part in hiding and followed their religious life secretly without external manifestations.¹

Several times, the descendants of the Prophet (who are called in Persian *sādāt-i 'alawī*) rebelled against the injustice of the government, but each time they were defeated and usually lost their lives. The severe and unscrupulous government of the time did not overlook any means of crushing them. The body of Zayd, the leader of Zaydi Shī'ism, was dug out of the grave and hanged; then after remaining on the gallows for three years, it was brought down and burned, its ashes being thrown to the wind.² The Shī'ites believe that the fourth and fifth Imāms were

¹ *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, Yāqūt Ḥamawī, Beirut, 1957.

² *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. III, pp. 217-219; *Ya' qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 66.

poisoned by the Umayyads as the second and third Imāms had been killed by them before.¹

The calamities brought about by the Umayyads were so open and unveiled that the majority of the Sunnis, although they believed generally that it was their duty to obey the caliphs, felt the pangs of their religious conscience and were forced to divide the caliphs into two groups. They came to distinguish between the "rightly guided caliphs" (*khulafā' rāshidūn*) who are the first four caliphs after the death of the Holy Prophet (Abū-Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī), and the others who began with Mu'āwiyah and who did not possess by any means the religious virtues of the rightly guided caliphs.

The Umayyads caused so much public hatred as a result of their injustice and heedlessness during their rule that after the definitive defeat and death of the last Umayyad caliph, his two sons and a number of their family encountered great difficulties in escaping from the capital. No matter where they turned, no one would give them shelter. Finally, after much wandering in the deserts of Nubia, Abyssinia, and Bajawah (between Nubia and Abyssinia) during which many of them died from hunger and thirst, they came to Bab al-Mandab of the Yemen. Then they acquired travel expenses from the people through begging and set out for Mecca dressed as porters. In Mecca, they finally succeeded in disappearing among the mass of the people.²

Shī'ism During the 2nd/8th Century

During the latter part of the first third of the 2nd/8th century, following a series of revolutions and bloody wars throughout the Islāmic world which were due to the injustice, repressions and wrongdoings of the Umayyads, there began an anti-Umayyad movement in the name of the Household of the Prophet in Khurāsān in Persia. The leader of this movement was the Persian general, Abū-Muslim Marwāzī, who rebelled against

¹ *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. XII, on the life of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.

² *Ya'qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 84.

Umayyad rule and advanced his cause step by step until he was able to overthrow the Umayyad government.¹

Although this movement originated from a profound Shī'ite background and came into being more or less with the claim of wanting to avenge the blood of the Household of the Prophet, and although people were even asked secretly to give allegiance to a qualified member of the family of the Prophet, it did not rise directly as a result of the instructions of the Imāms. This is witnessed by the fact that when Abū-Muslim offered the caliphate to the sixth Imām in Medina, he rejected it completely saying, "You are not one of my men and the time is not my time."²

Finally, the `Abbāsids gained the caliphate in the name of the family of the Prophet³ and at the beginning showed some kindness to people in general and to the descendants of the Prophet in particular. In the name of avenging the martyrdom of the family of the Prophet, they massacred the Umayyads, going to the extent of opening their graves and burning whatever they found in them.⁴ But soon, they began to follow the unjust ways of the Umayyads and did not abstain in any way from injustice and irresponsible action. Abū-Ḥanīfah, the founder of one of the four Sunni schools of law, was imprisoned by al-Manṣūr and tortured.⁵ Ibn Ḥanbal, the founder of another school of law, was whipped.⁶ The sixth Imām died from poisoning after much torture and pain.⁷ The descendants of the Holy Prophet were sometimes beheaded in groups, buried alive or even placed within walls of government buildings under construction.

¹ *Ya'qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 79; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 208, and other books of history.

² *Ya'qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 86; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. III, pp. 268.

³ *Ya'qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 86; *Murūj al-Dhahab*, vol. III, p. 270.

⁴ *Ya'qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 91-96; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 212.

⁵ *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. II, pp. 6.

⁶ *Ya'qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 198; *Abū'l-Fidā'*, vol. II, pp. 33.

⁷ *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. XII, on the life of Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.

Hārūn al-Rashīd, the `Abbāsīd caliph, during whose reign the Islāmīc empire reached the apogee of its expansion and power, occasionally would look at the sun and address it in these words: "Shine wherever thou wilt, thou shalt never be able to leave my kingdom." On the one hand, his amīss were advancing in the East and West, on the other hand, a few steps from the palace of the caliph, and without his knowledge, officials had decided on their own to collect tolls from people who wanted to cross the Baghdad Bridge. Even one day when the caliph himself wanted to cross the bridge, he was stopped and asked to pay the toll.¹

A singer, by chanting two lascivious verses, incited the passions of the `Abbāsīd caliph, Amīn who awarded him three million dirhams. The chanter in joy threw himself at the feet of the caliph saying, "Oh, leader of the faithful! You give me all this money?" The caliph answered, "It does not matter. We receive this money from an unknown part of the country."²

The bewildering amount of wealth that was pouring every year from all corners of the Islāmīc world into the public treasury in the capital helped in creating luxury and a mundane atmosphere. Much of it in fact was often spent for the pleasures and iniquities of the caliph of the time. The number of beautiful slave girls in the court of some of the caliphs exceeded thousands. By the dissolution of Umayyad rule and the establishment of the `Abbāsīds, Shī`ism did not benefit in any way. Its repressive and unjust opponents merely changed their name.

Shī`ism in the 3rd/9th Century

At the beginning of the 3rd/9th century, Shī`ism was able to breathe once again. This more favorable condition was first of all, due to the fact that many scientific and philosophical books

¹ *Al-Aghānī* of Abū`l-Faraj Iṣfahānī, Cairo, 1345-51, the story of the bridge of Baghdad.

² *Al-Aghānī* of Abū`l-Faraj Iṣfahānī, Cairo, 1345-51, the story of Amīn.

were translated from Greek, Syriac and other languages into Arabic, and people eagerly studied the intellectual and rational sciences. Moreover, al-Ma'mūn, the `Abbāsīd caliph from 198/813 to 218/833, had Mu`tazilite leanings and since in his religious views, he favored intellectual demonstration, he was more inclined to give complete freedom to the discussion and propagation of different religious views. Shī`ite theologians and scholars took full advantage of this freedom and did their utmost to further scholarly activities and propagate Shī`ite teachings. Also, al-Ma'mūn, following the demands of the political forces at the time, had made the eighth Shī`ite Imām his successor, as is recounted in most standard histories. As a result, the descendants of the Holy Prophet and their friends were to a certain extent free from pressures from the government and enjoyed some degree of liberty. Yet before long the cutting edge of the sword once again turned towards the Shī`ites and the forgotten ways of the past came upon them again. This was particularly true in the case of al-Mutawakkil (233/847-247/861) who held a special enmity towards `Alī and the Shī`ites. By his order, the tomb of the third Imām in Karbalā' was completely demolished.¹

Shī`ism in the 4th/10th Century

In the 4th/10th century, certain conditions again prevailed which aided greatly the spread and strengthening of Shī`ism. Among them were the weaknesses that appeared in the central `Abbāsīd government and administration and the appearance of the Buyid rulers. The Buyids, who were Shī`ite, had the greatest influence not only in the provinces of Persia but also in the capital of the caliphate in Baghdad, and even upon the caliph himself. This new strength of considerable proportions enabled the Shī`ites to stand up before their opponents who previously had tried to crush them by relying upon the power of the caliphate. It also made it possible for the Shī`ites to propagate their religious views openly.

¹ *Abū'l-Fidā'* and other histories.

As recorded by historians, during this century most of the Arabian Peninsula was ShĪ`ite with the exception of some of the big cities. Even some of the major cities, like Hajar, Oman, and Sa`dah were ShĪ`ite. In Basra, which had always been a Sunni city and competed with Kūfah which was considered a ShĪ`ite center, there appeared a notable group of ShĪ`ites. Also in Tripoli, Nablus, Tiberius, Aleppo, Nayshapur and Herat there were many ShĪ`ites, while Ahwaz and the coast of the Persian Gulf on the Persian side were also ShĪ`ite.¹

At the beginning of this century, Nāṣir Utrush, after many years of propagation of his religious mission in northern Persia, gained power in Ṭabaristan and established a kingdom which continued for several generations after him. Before Utrush, Ḥasan ibn Zayd al-`Alawī had reigned for many years in Ṭabaristan.² Also in this period, the Fatimids, who were Ismā`ilī, conquered Egypt and organized a caliphate which lasted for over two centuries (296/908-567/1171).³ Often disputation and fighting occurred in major cities like Baghdad, Cairo and Nayshapur between ShĪ`ites and Sunnis, in some of which the ShĪ`ites would gain the upper hand and come out victorious.

ShĪ`ism from the 5th/11th to the 9th/15th Centuries

From the 5th/11th to the 9th/15th centuries, ShĪ`ism continued to expand as it had done in the 4th/10th century.⁴ Many kings and rulers who were ShĪ`ite appeared in different parts of the Islāmic world and propagated ShĪ`ism. Toward the end of the 5th/11th century, the missionary activity of Ismā`ilism took root in the fort of Alamut and for nearly a century and a half

¹ *Al-Hudārah al-Islāmiyyah* of Adam Mez, Cairo, 1366, vol. I, pp. 97.

² *Murāj al-Dhahab* vol. IV, pp. 373; *al-Milal wa'l-Niḥal* of Shahrastānī, Cairo, 1368, vol. I, pp. 254.

³ *Abū'l-Fidā`*, vol. II, pp. 63 and vol. III, pp. 50.

⁴ See the books of history: *al-Kāmil* of Ibn Athīr, Cairo, 1348; *Rawdat al-Ṣafā`* and *Ḥabīb al-Siyar* of Khwand Mir, Tehran. 1333.

the Ismā'īlis lived in complete independence in the central regions of Persia. Also the Sādāt-i Mar'ashī, who were descendants of the Holy Prophet, ruled for many years in Māzandarān (Ṭabaristan).¹ Shah Muḥammad Khudabandah one of the well-known Mongol rulers, became Shī'ite and his descendants ruled for many years in Persia and were instrumental in spreading Shī'ism.² Mention must also be made of the kings of the Āq Qoyūnlū and Qara Qoyūnlū dynasties who ruled in Tabrīz and whose domain extended to Fars and Kerman,³ as well as of the Fatimid government which was ruling in Egypt.

Of course, religious freedom and the possibility of exerting religious power by the populace differed under different rulers. For example, with the termination of Fatimid rule and coming to power of the Ayyūbids, the scene changed completely and the Shī'ite population of Egypt and Syria lost its religious independence. Many of the Shī'ites of Syria were killed during this period merely on the accusation of following Shī'ism. One of these was al-Shahīd al-Awwal (the First Martyr) Muḥammad ibn Makkī, one of the great figures in Shī'ite jurisprudence, who was killed in Damascus in 786/1384.⁴ Also Shaykh al-Ishrāq Shihāb al-Dīn Sahrawardī was killed in Aleppo on the accusation that he was cultivating Bāṭinī teachings and philosophy.⁵ Altogether during this period, Shī'ism was growing from the point of view of numbers, even though its religious power and freedom depended upon local conditions and the rulers of the time. During this period, however, Shī'ism never became the official religion of any Muslim state.

¹ *Al-Kāmil* of Ibn Athīr, Cairo, 1348; *Rawḍat al-Safā'* and *Ḥabīb al-Siyar* of Khwand Mīr, Tehran, 1333.

² *Al-Kāmil* of Ibn Athīr, Cairo, 1348; *Rawḍat al-Ṣafā'* and *Ḥabīb al-Siyar* of Khwand Mīr, Tehran, 1333.

³ *Al-Kāmil* of Ibn Athīr, Cairo, 1348; *Rawḍat al-Safā'* and *Ḥabīb al-Siyar* of Khwand Mīr, Tehran, 1333.

⁴ *Rayḥānat al-Adab* of Muḥammad 'Alī Tabrīzī, Tehran 1326-32, vol. II, pp. 365, and most works on the biography of men.

⁵ *Rayḥānat al-Adab*, vol. II, pp. 380.

Shī'ism in the 10th/16th and 11th/17th Centuries

In the 10th/16th century, Ismā'īl who was of the household of Shaykh Ṣāfi al-Dīn Ardībīlī (d. 735/1334), a Sufi master and also a Shī'ite, began a revolt in Ardībīl, with three hundred Sufis who were disciples of his forefathers, with the aim of establishing an independent and powerful Shī'ite country. In this way, he began the conquest of Persia and overcame the local feudal princes. After a series of bloody wars with local rulers and also the Ottomans who held the title of caliph, he succeeded in forming Persia piece by piece into a country and in making Shī'ism the official religion in his kingdom.¹

After the death of Shah Ismā'īl, other Safavid kings reigned in Persia until the 12th/18th century and each continued to recognize Shī'ism as the official religion of the country and further to strengthen its hold upon this land. At the height of their power, during the reign of Shah 'Abbās, the Safavids were able to increase the territorial expansion and the population of Persia to twice its present size.² As for other Muslim lands, the Shī'ite population continued the same as before and increased only through the natural growth of population.

Shī'ism from the 12th/18th to the 14th/20th Centuries

During the past three centuries, Shī'ism has followed its natural rate of growth as before. At the present moment, during the latter part of the 14th/20th century, Shī'ism is recognized as the official religion of Iran, and in the Yemen and Iraq the majority of the population is Shī'ite. In nearly all lands where there are Muslims, one can find a certain number of Shī'ites. It has been said that altogether in the world today, there are about eighty to ninety million Shī'ites.

¹ *Rawdat al-Ṣafā'*, *Habīb al-Siyar* and others.

² *Tārīkh 'Ālam Āray-i 'Abbāsī* of Iskandar Bayk, Tehran, 1334 AH solar.

CHAPTER TWO

DIVISIONS WITHIN SHĪ'ISM

Each religion possesses a certain number of primary principles, which form its essential basis and other principles of secondary importance. When the followers of a religion differ as to the nature of the primary principles and their secondary aspects but preserve a common basis, the result is called division (*inshi'āb*) within that religion. Such divisions exist in all traditions and religions, and more particularly in the four "revealed" religions¹ of Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islām.

Shī'ism did not undergo any divisions during the Imāmate of the first three Imāms: `Alī, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. But after the martyrdom of Ḥusayn, the majority of the Shī'ites accepted the Imāmate of `Alī ibn Ḥusayn al-Sajjād, while a minority known as the Kaysāniyyah believed that the third son of `Alī, Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah was the fourth Imām as well as the promised Mahdī, and that he had gone into occultation in the Raḍwā mountains² and one day would reappear. After the death of Imām al-Sajjād, the majority of the Shī'ites accepted

¹ *Editor's note:* From the general theological prospective of Islām, the "revealed religions" are these possessing Divine Scriptures and usually numbered as above. This does not, however, prevent Muslims from believing in the universality of revelation which is particularly accented in Sufism. Whenever the situation arose, Muslims applied this principle outside the Semitic and Iranian monotheistic worlds, as for example when they encountered Hinduism whose divine origin many Muslim religious authorities admitted openly.

² *Editor's note:* The Raḍwā mountains are a range located near Medina and well known for the role they played in early Islāmic history.

as Imām his son, Muḥammad al-Bāqir while a minority followed Zayd al-Shahīd, another son of Imām al-Sajjād, and became known as Zaydis. Following Imām Muḥammad al-Bāqir, the Shī'ites accepted his son Ja`far al-Šādiq as Imām and after the death of Imām Ja`far, the majority followed his son Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim as the seventh Imām. However, one group followed the older son of the sixth Imām, Ismā`il, who had died while his father was still alive, and when this latter group separated from the majority of Shī'ites, it became known as Ismā`ilis. Others accepted as Imām either `Abdullah al-Aṣṭaḥ or Muḥammad, both sons of the sixth Imām. Finally, another party stopped with the sixth Imām himself and considered him as the last Imām. In the same way, after the martyrdom of Imām Mūsā al-Kāẓim, the majority followed his son, `Alī al-Riḍā, as the eighth Imām. However, some stopped with the seventh Imām and became known as the Wāqifiyyah.¹

From the eighth Imām to the twelfth, whom the majority of the Shī'ites believe to be the promised Mahdī, no division of any importance took place within Shī'ism. Even if certain events occurred in the form of division, they lasted but a few days and dissolved by themselves. For example, Ja`far the son of the tenth Imām, claimed to be Imām after the death of his brother, the eleventh Imām. A group of people followed him but scattered in a few days and Ja`far himself did not follow his claim any further. Furthermore, there are differences between Shī'ites in theological and juridical matters which must not be considered as divisions in religious schools. Also the Bābī and Bahā'ī sects, which like the Bāṭinis (the Qarāmiṭah) differ in both the principles (*uṣūl*) and branches (*furū`*) of Islām from the Muslims, should not in any sense be considered as branches of Shī'ism.

The sects which separated from the majority of Shī'ites all dissolved within a short period, except two: the Zaydi and the

¹ *Editor's note:* It must be remembered that most of the branches cited here had very few adherents and are not in any way comparable to Twelve-Imām Shī'ism or Ismā'ilism.

Ismā'īlis, which continue to exist until now. To this day, communities of these branches are active in various parts of the world such as the Yemen, India and Syria. Therefore, we shall limit our discussion to these two branches along with the majority of Shi'ites who are Twelvers.

Zaydism and Its Branches

The Zaydis are the followers of Zayd al-Shahīd, the son of Imām al-Sajjād. Zayd rebelled in 121/737 against the Umayyad caliph, Hushām ibn `Abd al-Malik, and a group paid allegiance to him. A battle ensued in Kūfah between Zayd and the army of the caliph in which Zayd was killed. The followers of Zayd regard him as the fifth Imām of the Household of the Prophet. After him his son, Yaḥyā ibn Zayd, who rebelled against the caliph Walīd ibn Yazīd and was also killed, took his place. After Yaḥyā, Muḥammad ibn `Abdullāh and Ibrāhīm ibn `Abdullāh who revolted against the `Abbāsīd caliph, Manṣūr al-Dawānīqī and were also killed, were chosen as Imāms.

Henceforth for some time, there was disorder in Zaydi ranks until Nāṣir al-Utrush, a descendant of the brother of Zayd, arose in Khurāsān. Being pursued by the governmental authorities in that region, he fled to Māzandarān (Ṭabaristan) whose people had not as yet accepted Islām. After thirteen years of missionary activity in this region, he brought a large number of people into the Zaydi branch of Islām. Then, in the year 301/913 with their aid, he conquered the region of Māzandarān, becoming himself Imām. For some time, his descendants continued to rule as Imāms in that area.

According to Zaydi belief, any descendant of Fāṭimah (the daughter of the Prophet) who begins an uprising in the name of defending the truth may become Imām if he is learned in the religious sciences, ethically pure, courageous and generous. Yet for some time after Utrush and his descendants, there was no Imām who could bring about an insurrection with the sword until recently when, about sixty years ago, Imām Yaḥyā revolted in the Yemen, which had been a part of the Ottoman Empire, made it independent, and began to rule there as Imām. His

descendants continued to rule in that region as Imāms until very recently.

At the beginning, the Zaydis, like Zayd himself, considered the first two caliphs, Abū-Bakr and `Umar, as their Imāms. But after a while, some of them began to delete the name of the first two caliphs from the list of Imāms and placed `Alī as the first Imām.

From what is known of Zaydī beliefs, it can be said that in the principles of Islām (*uṣūl*), they follow a path close to that of the Mu`tazilites, while in the branches or derivative institutions of the law (*furū`*), they apply the jurisprudence of Abū-Ḥanīfah, the founder of one of the four Sunni schools of law. They also differ among themselves concerning certain problems.¹

Ismā`īlism and Its Branches

Imām Ja`far al-Ṣādiq had a son named Ismā`īl who was the oldest of his children. Ismā`īl died during the lifetime of his father who summoned witnesses to his death, including the governor of Medina.² Concerning this question, some believed that Ismā`īl did not die but went into occultation, that he would appear again and would be the promised Mahdī. They further believed that the summoning of witnesses on the part of the Imām for Ismā`īl's death was a way of hiding the truth in fear of al-Manṣūr, the `Abbāsīd caliph. Another group believed that the true Imām was Ismā`īl whose death meant the Imāmate was transferred to his son Muḥammad. A third group also held that although he died during the lifetime of his father, he was the Imām and that the Imāmate passed after him to Muḥammad ibn Ismā`īl and his descendants. The first two groups soon became extinct, while the third branch continues to

¹ The material of this section is based on *al-Milal wa'l-Niḥal* and *al-Kāmil* of Ibn Athīr.

² The material of this section is taken from the *Kāmil*, *Rawḍat al-Ṣafā'*, *Ḥabīb al-Siyar*, *Abū'l-Fidā'*, *al-Milal wa'l-Niḥal* and some of its details from *Tārīkh Āqā Khāniyah* of Maṭba`i, Najaf, 1351.

exist to this day and has undergone a certain amount of division.

The Ismā`ilis have a philosophy in many ways similar to that of the Sabaeans (star worshippers)¹ combined with elements of Hindu gnosis. In the sciences and decrees of Islām, they believe that each exterior reality (zāhir) has an inner aspect (bāṭin) and each element of revelation (tanzil) a hermeneutic and esoteric exegesis (ta`wil).²

The Ismā`ilis believe that the earth can never exist without a Proof (*ḥujjah*) of God. The Proof is of two kinds: "speaker" (*nāṭiq*) and "silent one" (*ṣāmit*). The speaker is a prophet and the silent one is an Imām or Guardian (*walī*) who is the inheritor, or executor of the testament (*waṣī*) of a prophet. In any case, the Proof of God is the perfect theophany of the Divinity.

The principle of the Proof of God revolves constantly around the number seven. A prophet (*nabī*), who is sent by God, has the function of prophecy (*nubuwwah*), of bringing a Divine Law or Shari`ah. A prophet, who is the perfect manifestation of God, has the esoteric power of initiating men into the Divine Mysteries (*wilāyah*).³ After him, there are seven executors of his

¹ *Editor's note:* Here, Sabaeans refers to the people of Harrān who had a religion in which stars played a major role. Moreover, they were the depository of Hermetic and Neopythagorean philosophy and played an important role in the transmission to Islām of the more esoteric schools of Hellenistic philosophy as well as astronomy and arithmetic. They became extinct during the first few centuries of Islāmic history and must not be confused with the Sabaeans or Mandeans of Southern Iraq and Persia who still survive.

² *Editor's note:* The term, (*Ta`wil*), which plays a cardinal role in Shi`ism as well as Sufism, means literally to return to the origin of a thing. It means to penetrate the external aspect of any reality, whether it be sacred scripture or phenomena of nature, to its inner essence, to go from the phenomenon to the noumenon.

³ *Editor's note:* The term "walī" in Islām means saint and *wilāyah* as usually narrowed, particularly in Sufism, means sanctity. But in the context of Shi`ism, *wilāyah* (usually pronounced *wilāyah*) means the esoteric power

testament (*waṣī*) who possess the power of executing his testament (*waṣīyyah*) and the power of esoteric initiation into the Divine Mysteries (*wilāyah*). The seventh in the succession possesses those two powers and also the additional power of prophecy (*nubuwwah*). The cycle of seven executors (*waṣīs*) is then repeated with the seventh a prophet.

The Ismā'īlis say that Adam was sent as a prophet with the power of prophecy and of esoteric guidance and he had seven executors of whom the seventh was Noah, who had the three functions of *nubuwwah*, *waṣīyyah* and *wilāyah*. Abraham was the seventh executor (*waṣī*) of Noah, Moses the seventh executor of Abraham, Jesus the seventh executor of Moses, Muḥammad the seventh executor of Jesus and Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl the seventh executor of Muḥammad.

They consider the *waṣīs* of the Prophet to be: 'Alī, Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī (they do not consider Imām Ḥasan among the Imāms), 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn al-Sajjād, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, Ja'far al-Šādiq, Ismā'īl ibn Ja'far and Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl. After this series, there are seven descendants of Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl whose names are hidden and secret. After them, there are the first seven rulers of the Fatimid caliphate of Egypt the first of whom, 'Ubaydullāh al-Mahdī, was the founder of the Fatimid dynasty. The Ismā'īlis also believe that in addition to the Proof of God, there are always present on earth twelve "chiefs" (*naqīb*) who are the companions and elite followers of the Proof. Some of the branches of the Bāṭinis, however, like the Druzes, believe six of the "chiefs" to be from the Imāms and six from others.

of the Imām whereby he is able to initiate men into the Divine Mysteries and provide for them the key to attaining sanctity. The use of the two terms, therefore, is related, since on the one hand it pertains to the saintly life and on the other to the particular esoteric power of the Imām which leads man to the saintly life. In the case of the Imām, it also has other cosmic and social connotations usually not identified with *wilāyah* in the general sense of sanctity.

The Bāṭinis

In the year 278/891, a few years before the appearance of `Ubaydullāh al-Mahdī in North Africa, there appeared in Kūfah an unknown person from Khuzestan (in southern Persia) who never revealed his name and identity. He would fast during the day and worship at night and made a living from his own labor. In addition, he invited people to join the Ismā`ili cause and was able to assemble a large number of people about him. From among them he chose twelve "chiefs" (*naqīb*) and then he set out for Damascus. Having left Kūfah, he was never heard of again.

This unknown man was replaced by Aḥmad, known as the Qaramite, who began to propagate Bāṭini teachings in Iraq. As the historians have recorded, he instituted two daily prayers in place of the five of Islām, removed the necessity of ablution after sexual intercourse and made the drinking of wine permissible. Contemporary with these events, other Bāṭini leaders rose to invite people to join their cause and assembled a group of followers.

The Bāṭinis has no respect for the lives and possessions of those who were outside their group. For this reason, they began uprisings in the cities of Iraq, Bahrain, the Yemen and Syria, spilling the blood of people and looting their wealth. Many times, they stopped the caravans of those who were making the pilgrimage to Mecca, killing tens of thousands of pilgrims and plundering their provisions and camels.

Abū Ṭāhir al-Qarmaṭī, one of the Qaramite leaders who in 311/923 had conquered Basra and did not neglect to kill and plunder, set out with a large number of Bāṭinis for Mecca in 317/929. After overcoming the brief existence of government troops, he entered the city and massacred the population as well as the newly arrived pilgrims. Even within the Masjid al-ḥarām (the mosque containing the Ka`bah) and within the Holy Ka`bah itself, there flowed streams of blood. He divided the covering of the Ka`bah between his disciples. He tore away the door of the Ka`bah and took the Black Stone from its place back to the Yemen. For twenty-two years, the Black Stone was

in Qaramite hands. As a result of these actions, the majority of Muslims turned completely away from the Bāṭinis and considered them outside the pale of Islām. Even `Ubaydullāh al-Mahdī, the Fatimid ruler, who had risen in those days in North Africa and considered himself the promised Mahdī, abhorred them.

According to the view of historians, the distinguishing characteristic of the Bāṭini school is that it interprets the external aspects of Islām in an esoteric manner and considers the externals of the Sharī'ah to be only for simple-minded people of little intelligence who are deprived of spiritual perfection. Yet, occasionally, the Bāṭini Imāms did order certain regulations and laws to be practised and followed.

The Nizāriṣ, Musta`lis, Druzes and Muḡanna`ah

The Nizāriṣ. `Ubaydullāh al-Mahdī, who rose in North Africa in 292/904 and as an Ismā`ili declared his Imāmate and established Fatimid rule, is the founder of the dynasty whose descendants made Cairo the center of their caliphate. For seven generations, this sultanate and Ismā`ili Imāmate continued without any divisions. At the death of the seventh Imām, al-Mustanṣir bi'llāh Mu`idd ibn `Alī, his sons, Nizār and al-Musta`li, began to dispute over the caliphate and Imāmate. After long disputes and bloody battles, al-Musta`li was victorious. He captured his brother Nizār and placed him in prison, where he died.

Following this dispute, those who accepted the Fatimids divided into two groups: the Nizāriṣ and the Musta`lis. The Nizāriṣ are the followers of Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ who was one of the close associates of al-Mustanṣir. After Nizār's death, because of his support of Nizār Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ was expelled from Egypt by al-Musta`li. He came to Persia and after a short while appeared in the Fort of Alamut near Qazwin. He conquered Alamut and several surrounding forts. Then he established his role and also began to invite people to the Ismā`ili cause.

After the death of Ḥasan in 518/1124, Buzurg Umīd Rūdbārī and after him his son, Kiyā Muḥammad, continued to rule following the methods and ways of Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ. After Kiyā Muḥammad, his son Ḥasan `Alā' Dhikrihi'l-Islām the fourth ruler of Alamut, changed the ways of Ḥasan al-Ṣabbāḥ, who had been Nizāri, and became Bāṭini. Henceforth, the Ismā`ili forts continued as Bāṭini. Four other rulers, Muḥammad ibn `Alā' Dhikrihi'l-Islām, Jalāl al-Dīn Ḥasan, `Alā' al-Dīn, and Rukn al-Dīn Khurshah, became Sultan and Imām one after another until Hulagu, the Mongol conqueror, invaded Persia. He captured the Ismā`ili forts and put all the Ismā`ilis to death, leveling their forts to the ground.

Centuries later, in 1255/1839, the Āqā Khān of Mahalat in Persia, who belonged to the Nizāris, rebelled against Muḥammad Shāh Qājār in Kerman, but he was defeated and fled to Bombay. There, he propagated his Bāṭini-Nizāri cause which continues to this day. The Nizāris are today called the Āqā Khanids.

The Musta`lis. The Musta`lis were the followers of al-Musta`li. Their Imāmate continued during Fatimid rule in Egypt until it was brought to an end in the year 567/1171. Shortly thereafter, the Bohra sect, following the same school, appeared in India and survives to this day.

The Druzes. The Druzes, who live in the Druze mountains in Syria (and also in Lebanon), were originally followers of the Fatimid caliphs. But as a result of the missionary activity of Nashtakīn, the Druzes joined the Bāṭini sect. The Druzes stop with the sixth Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim bi'llāh, whom others believe to have been killed, and claim that he is in occultation. He has ascended to heaven and will appear once again to the world.

The Muqanna`ah. The Muqanna`ah were at first disciples of `Aṭā' al-Marwī known as Muqanna`, who according to historical sources was a follower of Abū-Muslim of Khurāsān. After the death of Abū-Muslim, Muqanna` claimed that Abū Muslim's soul had become incarnated in him. Soon, he claimed to be a prophet and later a divinity. Finally, in the year 162/777,

he was surrounded in the fort of Kabash in Transoxiana. When he became certain that he would be captured and killed, he threw himself into a fire along with some of his disciples and burned to death. His followers soon adopted Ismā'īlism and the ways of the Bāṭinis.

Differences Between Twelve-Imām Shī'ism and Ismā'īlism and Zaydism

The majority of the Shī'ites, from whom the previously mentioned groups have branched out, are Twelve-Imām Shī'ites, also called the Imāmites. As has already been mentioned, the Shī'ites came into being because of criticism and protest concerning two basic problems of Islām, without having any objections to the religious ways which through the instructions of the Prophet had become prevalent among their contemporary Muslims. These two problems concerned Islāmic government and authority in the religious sciences, both of which the Shī'ites considered to be the particular right of the Household of the Prophet.

The Shī'ites asserted that the Islāmic caliphate, of which esoteric guidance and spiritual leadership are inseparable elements, belongs to 'Alī and his descendants. They also believed that according to the specification of the Prophet, the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet are twelve in number. Shī'ism held, moreover, that the external teachings of the Qur'ān, which are the injunctions and regulations of the Sharī'ah and include the principles of a complete spiritual life, are valid and applicable for everyone at all times, and are not to be abrogated until the Day of Judgment. These injunctions and regulations must be learned through the guidance of the Household of the Prophet.

From a consideration of these points, it becomes clear that the difference between Twelve-Imām Shī'ism and Zaydism is that the Zaydis usually do not consider the Imāmate to belong solely to the Household of the Prophet and do not limit the number of Imāms to twelve. Also they do not follow the jurisprudence of the Household of the Prophet as do the Twelve-Imām Shī'ites.

The difference between Twelve-Imām Shī'ism and Ismā'ilism lies in that for the latter the Imāmate revolves around the number seven and prophecy does not terminate with the Holy Prophet Muḥammad—upon whom be blessings and peace. Also for them, change and transformation in the injunctions of the Shari'ah are admissible, as is even rejection of the duty of following the Shari'ah, especially among the Bāṭinis. In contrast, the Twelve-Imām Shī'ites consider the Prophet to be the "seal of prophecy" and believe him to have twelve successors and executors of his will. They hold the external aspect of the Shari'ah to be valid and impossible to abrogate. They affirm that the Qur'ān has both an exoteric and an esoteric aspect.

Summary of the History of Twelve-Imām Shī'ism

As has become clear from the previous pages, the majority of Shī'ites are Twelvers. They were originally the same group of friends and supporters of `Alī who, after the death of the Prophet, in order to defend the right of the Household of the Prophet in the question of the caliphate and religious authority, began to criticize and protest against prevalent views and separated from the majority of the people.

During the caliphate of the "rightly-guided caliphs" (11/632-35/656), the Shī'ites were under a certain amount of pressure which became much greater during the Umayyad Caliphate (40/661-132/750) when they were no longer protected in any way against destruction of their lives and property. Yet, the greater the pressure placed upon them, the firmly they became in their belief. They especially benefited from their being oppressed in spreading their beliefs and teachings.

From the middle of the 2nd/8th century when the `Abbāsīd caliphs established their dynasty, Shī'ism was able to gain a new life as a result of the languid and weak state prevailing at that time. Soon, however, conditions became difficult once

again and until the end of the 3rd/9th century became ever more stringent.

At the beginning of the 4th/10th century, with the rise of the influential Buyids, who were ShĪ'ites, ShĪ'ism gained power and became more or less free to carry out its activities. It began to carry out scientific and scholarly debates and continued in this manner until the end of the 5th/11th century. At the beginning of the 7th/13th century when the Mongol invasion began, as a result of the general involvement in war and chaos and the continuation of the Crusades, the different Islāmic governments did not put too great a pressure upon the ShĪ'ites. Moreover, the conversion to ShĪ'ism of some Mongol rulers in Persia and the rule of the Sādāt-i Mar`ashī (who were ShĪ'ites) in Māzandarān were instrumental in the spread of the power and territory of ShĪ'ism. They made the presence of large concentrations of ShĪ'ite population in Persia and other Muslim lands felt more than ever before. This situation continued through the 9th/15th century.

At the beginning of the 10th/16th century, as a result of the rise of the Safavids, ShĪ'ism became the official religion of the vast territories of Persia and continues in this position to the present day. In other regions of the world also there are tens of millions of ShĪ'ites.

PART II

SHĪ'ITE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

CHAPTER THREE

THREE METHODS OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

By "religious thought," we mean that form of thought which is concerned with any of the problems of a religious nature within a particular religion, in the same sense that mathematical thought is the form of thought which deals with mathematical questions and solves mathematical problems.

Needless to say, religious thought, like other forms of thought, must have reliable sources from which the raw material of its thought originates and upon which it depends. Similarly, the process of reasoning necessary for the solution of mathematical problems must have a series of established mathematical facts and principles.

The single source upon which the divinely revealed religion of Islām depends and upon which it is based, inasmuch as it is based on a revelation of celestial origin, is none other than the Holy Qur'ān. It is the Qur'ān which is the definitive testament of the universal and ever-living prophethood of the Prophet and

it is the content of the Qur'ān that bears the substance of the Islāmic call. Of course, the fact that the Qur'ān is alone the source of Islāmic religious thought does not eliminate other sources and origins of correct thinking, as will be explained later.

There are those methods of religious thought in Islam. The Holy Qur'ān in its teachings points to three paths for Muslims to follow in order to comprehend the purposes of religion and the Islāmic sciences: (1) the path of the external and formal aspect of religion (the Shari'ah); (2) the path of intellectual understanding; and (3) the path of spiritual comprehension achieved through sincerity (*ikhlas*) in obeying God.

It can be seen that the Holy Qur'ān in its formal aspect addresses all people without providing any demonstration or proof. Rather, depending on the unique sovereignty of God, it commands people to accept the principles of faith such as divine unity, prophethood, eschatology; it gives them practical injunctions such as the daily prayers, fasting, etc.; and at the same time, it prohibits them from committing certain other actions. Yet, if the Qur'ān had not provided authority for these commands, it would never have expected man to accept and obey them. It must, therefore, be said that such simple utterances of the Qur'ān are a path toward the understanding of ultimate religious ends and the comprehension of the Islāmic sciences. We call such verbal expressions as "Believe in God and His Prophet" and "Perform the prayers," the external or formal aspect of religion.

In addition to guidance in the external aspect of religion, we see that the Holy Qur'ān in many verses guides man toward intellectual understanding. It invites man to mediate, contemplate and deliberate upon the signs of God in the macrocosm and the microcosm. It explains many verities through unfettered intellectual reasoning. It must be said in truth that no sacred book praises and recommends science and intellectual knowledge for man as much as does the Qur'ān. In many of its words and utterances, the Qur'ān attests to the validity of intellectual proof and rational demonstration, that

is, it does not claim that man should first accept the validity of the Islāmic sciences and then through intellectual proofs justify these sciences. Rather, with complete confidence in the truth of its own position it proclaims that man should use his intellect to discover the truth of the Islāmic sciences, and only then accept this truth. He should seek the alternation of the words contained in the Islāmic message in the world of creation which is itself a truthful witness. And finally man should find the affirmation of his faith in the results of rational demonstration; he should not have to gain faith first and then, in obedience to it, seek proofs. Thus, philosophical thought is also a way whose validity and efficacy is confirmed by the Holy Qur'ān.¹

Also, in addition to guidance in the external and intellectual aspects of religion, we see that the Holy Qur'ān in subtle terms explains that all true religious science originates and comes from Divine Unity (*tawhīd*) and the knowledge of God and His Attributes. The perfection of the knowledge of God belongs to those whom He has drawn from all places and elevated solely to Himself. It is these men who have forgotten themselves and all things and as a result of sincerity in obedience to God have been able to concentrate all their powers and energies upon the transcendent world. Their eyes have become illuminated through the vision of the light of the Pure Creator. With the eye of discernment, they have seen the reality of things in the kingdom of heaven and earth, for through sincerity of obedience they have reached the station of certainty (*yaqīn*). As a result of this certainty, the kingdoms of heaven and earth and

¹ *Editor's note:* As indicated in the introduction, there has been in the Shi'ite world a continuous tradition of theosophy or wisdom (*hikmah*), which is also called *falsafah*, or philosophy, to which the author refers often in this book. This is however a traditional school of philosophy wedded to metaphysics and to means of spiritual realization. It should not be identified with profane or purely rationalistic modes of thought and is therefore not the same as philosophy as currently understood in the West, although it does use rational demonstrations and the laws of logic.

the immortal life of the eternal world have become revealed to them.

Deliberation upon the following holy verses illuminates fully this claim: "And We sent no messenger before thee but We inspired him (saying): There is no God save Me (Allāh), so worship Me" (Qur'ān, XXI, 25);¹ and, "Glorified be Allāh from that which they attribute (unto Him), Save single-minded slaves of Allāh" (Qur'ān, XXXVII, 159-160);² and, "Say, I am only a mortal like you. My Lord inspireth in me that your God is only One God. And whoever hopeth for the meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous work, and make none sharer of the worship due unto his Lord" (Qur'ān, XVIII, 111);³ and, "And serve the Lord till the inevitable [al-*yaqīn*] cometh unto thee" (Qur'ān, XV, 99);⁴ and God says, "Thus did We show Abraham the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he might be of those possessing certainty," (Qur'ān, VI, 76);⁵ and "Nay, but the record of the righteous is in 'Illiyīn—Ah! What will convey unto thee what 'Illiyīn is!—A written record, attested by those who are brought near (unto their Lord)" (Qur'ān, LXXXIII, 18-21);⁶ and, "Nay, would that ye knew (now) with a sure

¹ We can deduce from this verse that worship in the religion of God is subservient to Unity (*tawhīd*) and is based upon it.

² To be able to attribute and describe depends on knowledge of that which is to be described. From this verse, it can be concluded that except for those who are devoted in sincerity in God and those who have become purified, no others can come to know God in the manner in which He should be known. He therefore cannot be properly known or described by others and is beyond whatever attributes they give Him.

³ We can deduce from this verse that there is no other way to meet the Lord except through Unity and right action.

⁴ From this verse, it can be concluded that the true worship of God results in certainty (*yaqīn*).

⁵ We can conclude from this verse that one of the necessary conditions for reaching certainty is to gain a vision of the "angelic" or "archetypal" heavens and earth.

⁶ From this verse, it becomes known that the destiny of the righteous (*abrār*) is contained in a book called 'Illiyīn (the very elevated), known by those close to God through spiritual vision. The verb 'attested by'

knowledge [*'Ilm al-yaqīn*]! Ye will behold hellfire." (Qur'ān, XII, 5-6).¹

Thus, it may be said that one of the paths for the comprehension of religious verities and sciences is the purification of the carnal soul and sincerity in obedience to God.

From what has been said, it becomes clear that the Holy Qur'ān proposes three methods for the comprehension of religious truths: the external, or formal aspects of religion; intellectual reasoning; and sincerity in obedience leading to the intellectual intuition which results in the unveiling of the truth and its inward vision. Yet, it must be understood that these three methods differ from each other in several ways. For instance, since the external forms of religion are verbal expressions in the simplest language, they are in the hands of all people, and everyone benefits from them according to his own capacity.² On the other hand, the other two paths, which are appropriate to a particular group (the elite—*khawāṣṣ*) are not common to all. The path of the external form of religion leads to the understanding of the principles and the obligations of Islām and results in knowledge of the substance of the beliefs and practices of Islām, and of the principles of the Islāmic sciences, ethics and jurisprudence. This is in contrast to the other two paths. The intellectual path can discover the problems connected with faith, ethics and the general principles governing practical questions, but the intellectual method cannot discover the specific religious injunctions given in the

(*yashhaduhu* in Arabic) shows that by "a written record" is not meant a written book in the ordinary sense; rather it refers to the world of "divine proximity and elevation."

¹ From this verse, it can be understood that the science of certainty (*'Ilm al-yaqīn*) results in the vision of the final end of those who are in a state of wretchedness, this end being called *jaḥīm* or hell.

² It is with reference to this truth that the Holy Prophet in a hadith accepted by Sunnis and Shi'ites alike says, "We prophets speak to mankind according to the degree of their understanding." *Bihār al-Anwār* vol. I, pp. 37; *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, Kulayni, Tehran, 1357, vol. I, pp. 203.

Qur'ān and the Sunnah. The path of purification of the carnal soul, since it leads to the discovery of God-given spiritual truths, can have no limits nor measure of its results or of the truths revealed through this divine gift. Men who have reached this knowledge have cut themselves off from everything and forgotten everything but God and are under the direct guidance and dominion of God Himself—May His Name be Glorified. Whatever He wants and not what they want is revealed to them.

We will now take up in detail the three methods of religious thought in Islām.

First Method:

The Formal Aspect Of Religion

The Different Facets of the formal Aspect of Religion

It has become clear from what has been said thus far that the Holy Qur'ān, which is the principal source of religious thought in Islām, has given full authority to the external meanings of its words for those who give ear to its message. The same external meaning of the Qur'ānic verses has made the sayings of the Prophet complementary to the words of the Qur'ān and has declared them to be authoritative like the Qur'ān. For as the Qur'ān says: "And We have revealed unto thee the Remembrance that thou mayst explain to mankind that which hath been revealed for them" (Qur'ān, XVI, 44). And, "He it is who hath sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to make them grow, and to teach them the scripture and Wisdom (Qur'ān, LXII, 2). And, "And whatsoever the messenger giveth you, take it. And whatsoever he forbiddeth, abstain (from it)" (Qur'ān, LIX, 7). And, "Verily in in the messenger of Allāh ye have a good example" (Qur'ān, XXXIII, 21).

It is quite evident that such verses would not have any real meaning if the words and deeds of the Prophet and even his silence and approval were not authority for us just as the

Qur'ān itself is. Thus, the words of the Prophet are authoritative and must be accepted by those who have heard them orally or received them through reliable transmission. Moreover, through such a completely authentic chain of transmission, it is known that the Holy Prophet said, "I leave two things of value amidst you in trust which if you hold on to, you will never go astray: the Qur'ān and the members of my household. These will never be separated until the Day of Judgment."¹ According to this and other definitely established ḥadīths, the words of the Family and Household of the Prophet form a corpus that is complementary to the Prophetic ḥadīth. The Household of the Prophet in Islām have authority in religious sciences and are inerrant in the explanation of the teachings and injunctions of Islām. Their sayings, received orally or through reliable transmission, are reliable and authoritative.

Therefore, it is clear that the traditional source from which the formal and external aspect of religion is derived, which is an authoritative document and which is also the basic source for the religious thought of Islām, consists of two parts: The Book (the Qur'ān) and the Sunnah. By the Book is meant the external aspect of the verses of the Holy Qur'ān; and by the Sunnah, ḥadīth received from the Prophet and his revered Household.

Traditions of the Companions

In Shī'ism, ḥadīths transmitted through the companions are dealt with according to this principle: if they deal with the words and actions of the Prophet and do not contradict the ḥadīths of the Household of the Prophet, they are acceptable. If they contain only the views or opinions of the companions themselves and not those of the Prophet, they are not authoritative as sources for religious injunctions. In this respect, the ruling of the companions is like the ruling of any other Muslim. In the same way, the companions themselves

¹ The source for this ḥadīth have been retained in Part I of this work.

dealt with other companions in questions of Islāmic law as they would with any Muslim, not as someone special.

The Book and Tradition

The Book of God, the Holy Qur'ān, is the principal source of every form of Islāmic thought. It is the Qur'ān which gives religious validity and authority to every other religious source in Islām. Therefore, it must be comprehensible to all. Moreover, the Qur'ān describes itself as the light which illuminates all things. Also it challenges men and requests them to ponder over its verses and observe that there are no disparities or contradictions in them. It invites them to compose a similar work, if they can, to replace it. It is clear that if the Holy Qur'ān were not comprehensible to all there would be no place for such assertions.

To say that the Qur'ān is in itself comprehensible to all is not in any way contradictory to the previous assertion that the Prophet and his Household are religious authorities in the Islāmic sciences, which sciences in reality are only elaborations of the content of the Qur'ān. For instance, in the part of the Islāmic sciences which comprises the injunctions and laws of the Shari'ah, the Qur'ān contains only the general principles. The clarification and elaboration of their details, such as the manner of accomplishing the daily prayers, fasting, exchanging merchandise, and in fact all acts of worship (*'ibādah*) and transactions (*mu'āmalah*) can be achieved only by referring to the traditions of the Holy Prophet and his Household.

As for the other part of the Islāmic sciences dealing with doctrines and ethical methods and practices, although their content and details can be comprehended by all, the understanding of their full meaning depends on accepting the method of the Household of the Prophet. Also, each verse of the Qur'ān must be explained and interpreted by means of other Qur'ānic verses, not by views which have become acceptable and familiar to us only through habit and custom.

‘Alī has said: “Some parts of the Qur’ān speak with other parts of it revealing to us their meaning and some parts attest to the meaning of others.”¹ And the Prophet has said, “Parts of the Qur’ān verify other parts.”² And also: “Whosoever interprets the Qur’ān according to his own opinion has made a place for himself in the fire.”³

As a simple example of the commentary of the Qur’ān through the Qur’ān may be cited the story of the torture of the people of Lot about whom in one place God says, “And we rained on them a rain,” (Qur’ān, XXVI, 173) and in another place, He has changed this phrase to, “Lo! We sent a storm of stones upon them (all).” (Qur’ān, LIV, 34) By relating the second verse to the first, it becomes clear that by “rain” is meant “stones” from heaven. Whoever has studied with care the ḥadīths of the Household of the Prophet, and the outstanding companions who were the followers of the Prophet, will have no doubt that the commentary of the Qur’ān through the Qur’ān is the sole method of Qur’ānic commentary taught by the Household of the Prophet.⁴

The Outward and Inward Aspects of the Qur’ān

It has been explained that the Holy Qur’ān elucidates religious aims through its own words and gives commands to mankind in matters of doctrine and action. But the meaning of the Qur’ān is not limited to this level. Rather, behind these same expressions and within these same meanings, there are deeper and wider

¹ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 231. This question has been discussed in our work on the Qur’ān.

² *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. II, pp. 6.

³ *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi*, Mulla Muhsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, Tehran 1269, pp. 8; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. XIX, p. 28.

⁴ *Edito's note*: It may be added that this is the method employed by the author in his monumental Qur’ānic commentary, *al-Mizān*, of twenty volumes.

levels of meaning, which only the spiritual elite who possess pure hearts can comprehend.

The Prophet, who is the divinely appointed teacher of the Qur'ān, says,¹ "The Qur'ān has a beautiful exterior and a profound interior." He has also said, "The Qur'ān has an inner dimension, and that inner dimension has an inner dimension up to seven inner dimensions."² Also, in the sayings of the Imāms there are numerous references to the inner aspect of the Qur'ān.

The main support of these assertions is a symbol which God has mentioned in Chapter XIII, verse 17, of the Qur'ān. In this verse, divine gifts are symbolized by rain that falls from heaven and upon which depends the life of the earth and its inhabitants. With the coming of the rain, floods begin to flow and each river bed accepts a certain amount of the flood, depending on its capacity. As it flows, the flood is covered with foam, but beneath the foam there is that same water which is life-giving and beneficial to mankind.

As is indicated by this symbolic story, the capacity for comprehension of divine sciences, which are the source of man's inner life, differs among people. There are those for whom there is no reality beyond physical existence and the material life of this world which lasts but a few days. Such people are attached to material appetites and physical desires alone and fear nothing but the loss of material benefits and sensory enjoyment. Such people, taking into consideration the differences of degree among them, can at best accept the divine sciences on the level of believing in a summary fashion in the doctrines and performing the practical commands of Islām in a purely outward manner without any comprehension. They worship God with the hope of recompense or fear of punishment in the next world.

¹ *Tafsir al-Šafi*, pp. 4.

² This has been recounted of the Prophet in the *Tafsir al-Šafi*, pp. 15, *Safinat al-Bihār* of 'Abbās Qummi, Najaf, 1352-55, and other well-known commentaries.

There are also those who, because of the purity of their nature, do not consider their well-being to lie in attachment to the transient pleasures of the fleeting life of this world. The losses and gains and bitter and sweet experiences of this world are for them no more than an attractive illusion. Memory of those who have passed before them in the caravan of existence, who were pleasure-seekers yesterday and no more than subjects of stories today, is a warning that is continuously present before their eyes. Such men who possess pure hearts are naturally attracted to the world of eternity. They view the different phenomena of this passing world as symbols and portents of the higher world, not as persisting and independent realities.

It is at this point that through earthly and heavenly signs, signs upon the horizons and within the souls of men,¹ they "observe" in a spiritual vision the Infinite Light of the Majesty and Glory of God. Their hearts become completely enamored with the longing to reach an understanding of the secret symbols of creation. Instead of being imprisoned in the dark and narrow well of personal gain and selfishness, they begin to fly in the unlimited space of the world of eternity and advance ever onwards toward the zenith of the spiritual world.

When they hear that God has forbidden the worship of idols, which outwardly means bowing down before an idol, they understand this command to mean that they should not obey other than God, for to obey means to bow down before someone and to serve him. Beyond that meaning, they understand that they should not have hope or fear of other than God; beyond that, they should not surrender to the demands of their selfish appetites; and beyond that, that they should not concentrate on anything except God—May His Name be Glorified.

Likewise, when they hear from the Qur'ān that they should pray, the external meaning of which is to perform the particular rites of prayers, through its inner meaning they comprehend

¹ *Editor's note:* This is in reference to the Qur'ānic verve, "We shall show them our portents upon the horizons and within themselves, until it be manifest unto them that it is the Truth." (XLI, 53).

that they must worship and obey God with all their hearts and souls. Beyond that they comprehend that before God they must consider themselves as nothing, must forget themselves and remember only God.¹

It can be seen that the inner meaning present in these two examples is not due to the outward expression of the command and prohibition in question. Yet, the comprehension of this meaning is unavoidable for anyone who has begun to meditate upon a more universal order and has preferred to gain a vision of the universe of reality rather than his own ego, who has preferred objectivity to an egocentric subjectivism. From this discussion, the meaning of the outward and inward aspects of the Qur'ān has become clear. It has also become evident that the inner meaning of the Qur'ān does not eradicate or invalidate its outward meaning. Rather, it is like the soul, which gives life to the body. Islām, which is a universal and eternal religion and places the greatest emphasis upon the "reformation" of mankind, can never dispense with its external laws which are for the benefit of society, nor with its simple doctrines which are the guardians and preservers of these laws.

How can a society, on the pretense that religion is only a matter of the heart, that man's heart should be pure and that there is no value to actions, live in disorder and yet attain happiness? How can impure deeds and words cause the cultivation of a pure heart? Or how can impure words emanate from a pure heart? God says in His Book, "Vile women are for vile men, and vile men for vile women. Good women are for good men, and good men for good women." (Qur'ān, XXIV, 26) He also says, "As for the good land, its vegetation cometh forth by permission of its Lord; while as for that which is bad, only evil cometh forth (from it)." (Qur'ān, VII, 58) Thus, it becomes evident that the Holy Qur'ān has an outward and an inward aspect and the inward aspect itself has different levels of meaning. The ḥadīth

¹ *Editor's note:* This is direct reference to the practices of *dhikr* or invocation, which also means remembrance and is the fundamental technique of spiritual realization in Sufism.

literature, which explains the content of the Qur'ān, also contains these various aspects.

The Principles of Interpretation of the Qur'ān

At the beginning of Islām, it was commonly believed by some Sunnis that if there was sufficient reason one could ignore the outward meaning of Qur'ānic verses and ascribe to them a contrary meaning. Usually, the meaning which opposed the outward, literal meaning was called ta'wīl, and what is called "ta'wīl of the Qur'ān" in Sunni Islām is usually understood in this sense.

In the religious works of Sunni scholars, as well as in the controversies that have been recorded as taking place between different schools, one often observes that if a particular point of doctrine (that has been established through the consensus of the `ulamā of a school or through some other means) is opposed to the outward meaning of a verse of the Qur'ān, that verse is interpreted by ta'wīl to have a meaning contrary to its apparent meaning. Sometimes, two contending sides support two opposing views and present Qur'ānic verses in proof of their contentions. Each side interprets the verses presented by the other side through ta'wīl. This method has also penetrated more or less into Shī'ism and can be seen in some Shī'ite theological works.

Yet, sufficient deliberation upon Qur'ānic verses and the ḥadīth of the Household of the Prophet demonstrates clearly that the Holy Qur'ān with its attractive language and eloquent and lucid expression never uses enigmatic or puzzling methods of exposition and always expounds any subject in a language suitable for that subject. What has been rightly called ta'wīl, or hermeneutic interpretation, of the Holy Qur'ān is not concerned simply with the denotation of words. Rather, it is concerned with certain truths and realities that transcend the comprehension of the common run of men; yet it is from these truths and realities that the principles of doctrine and the practical injunctions of the Qur'ān issue forth.

The whole of the Qur'ān possesses the sense of ta'wīl, of esoteric meaning, which cannot be comprehended directly through human thought alone. Only the prophets and the pure among the saints of God who are free from the dross of human imperfection can contemplate these meanings while living on the present plane of existence. On the Day of Resurrection, the ta'wīl of the Qur'ān will be revealed to everyone.

This assertion can be explained by pointing to the fact that what forces man to use speech, create words and make use of expressions is nothing other than his social and material needs. In his social life, man is forced to try to make his fellow-men understand his thoughts and intentions and the feelings which exist within his soul. To accomplish this end, he makes use of sounds and hearing. Occasionally also he uses to a degree his eyes and gestures. That is why between the mute and the blind there can never be any mutual comprehension, for whatever the blind man says the deaf cannot hear, and whatever the mute makes understood through gestures the blind man cannot see.

The creation of words and the naming of objects have been accomplished mostly with a material end in view. Expressions have been created for those objects, states and conditions, which are material and available to the senses or near to the sensible world. As can be seen in those cases where the person addressed lacks one of the physical senses, if we wish to speak of matters, which can be comprehended through the missing sense we employ a kind of allegory and similitude. For example, if we wish to describe light or color to one who is born blind, or the pleasures of sex to a child that has not reached the age of adolescence, we seek to achieve our purpose through comparison and allegory and through providing appropriate examples.

Therefore, if we accept the hypothesis that in the scale of Universal Existence there are immense levels of reality which are independent of the world of matter (and this is in reality the case), and that in each generation there are among mankind but a handful who have the capability of comprehending and having a vision of these realities, then questions pertaining to these

higher worlds cannot be understood through common verbal expressions and modes of thought. They cannot be referred to except by allusion and through symbolism. Since religious realities are of this kind, the expression of the Qur'ān in such matters must of necessity be symbolic.

God says in his Book, "Lo! We have appointed it a Lecture in Arabic that haply ye may understand. And Lo! In the Source of Decrees, which We possess, it is indeed sublime, decisive." (Common comprehension cannot understand it or penetrate into it.) (Qur'ān, XLIII, 3-4) He also says, "That (this) is indeed a noble Qur'ān, In a book kept hidden, Which none toucheth save the purified" (Qur'ān, LVI, 77-79). Concerning the Prophet and his Household, He says, "Allāh's wish is but to remove uncleanness far from you, O Folk of the Household, and cleanse you with a thorough cleansing" (Qur'ān, XXXIII, 33).

As proved by these verses, the Holy Qur'ān emanates from sources beyond the comprehension of common man. No one can have a full comprehension of the Qur'ān save those servants of God whom He has chosen to purify. And the Household of the Prophet are among those pure beings. In another place God says, "Nay, but they denied that (the Qur'ān), the knowledge whereof they could not compass, and whereof the interpretation (in events) [ta'wīl] hath not yet come into them" (Qur'ān, X, 40) (meaning the day of Resurrection when the truth of things will become known). And again he says, "On the day (the Day of Resurrection) when the fulfillment [ta'wīl] thereof (of the whole Qur'ān) cometh, those who were before forgetful thereof will say: The messengers of our Lord did bring the Truth!" (Qur'ān, VII, 53)

Ḥadīth

The principle that the ḥadīth possesses validity, as attested by the Qur'ān, is not at all disputed among Shī'ites or in fact among all Muslims. But because of the failure of some of the early rulers of Islām in preserving and guarding the ḥadīth, and the excesses of a group among the companions and followers of

the Prophet in propagating ḥadīth literature, the corpus of ḥadīth came to face a certain number of difficulties.

On the one hand, the caliphs of the time prevented the writing down and recording of the ḥadīth and ordered any pages containing texts of ḥadīth to be burned. Sometimes also any increase in activity in the transmission and study of ḥadīth was forbidden.¹ In this way, a certain number of ḥadīths were forgotten or lost and a few were even transmitted with a different or distorted meaning. On the other hand, another tendency also prevailed among another group of the companions of the Holy Prophet who had had the honor of seeing his presence and actually hearing his words. This group, which was respected by the caliphs and the Muslim community, began an intense effort to propagate the ḥadīth. This was carried to such an extent that sometimes ḥadīth overruled the Qur'ān and the injunction of a Qur'ānic verse was even considered abrogated by some people through a ḥadīth.² Often the transmitters of ḥadīth would travel many miles and bear all the difficulties of traveling in order to hear a single saying.

A group of outsiders who had worn the dress of Islām and also some of the enemies within the ranks of Islām began to change and distort some of the ḥadīth and thus diminished the reliability and validity of the ḥadīth that was then heard and known.³ For this very reason, Islāmic scholars began to think of a solution. They created the sciences concerned with the biography of learned men and chains of transmission of ḥadīth

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 1, pp. 111.

² The question of the abrogation or substitution of certain verses of the Qur'ān is one of the difficult problems of the sciences of the principles of jurisprudence and at least some of the 'ulamā in Sunnism seem to have accepted abrogation. The incident of Fadak seems also to involve the question of different kinds of interpretations given to Qur'ānic verses through the use of ḥadīth.

³ The proof of this question lies in the large number of works written by traditional religious scholars on fabricated ḥadīth. Also in books dealing with the biography of learned men, some transmitters of ḥadīth have been described as unreliable and others as weak.

in order to be able to discriminate between true and false ḥadīth.¹

The Method of Shī'ism in Authenticating the Ḥadīth

Shī'ism, in addition to seeking to authenticate the chain of transmission of ḥadīth, considers the correlation of the text of the ḥadīth with the Qur'ān as a necessary condition for its validity. In Shī'ite sources, there are many ḥadīths of the Prophet and the Imāms with authentic chains of transmission which themselves assert that a ḥadīth contrary to the Qur'ān has no value. Only that ḥadīth can be considered valid which is in agreement with the Qur'ān.²

Basing itself on these ḥadīths, Shī'ism does not act upon those ḥadīths which are contrary to the text of the Qur'ān. As for ḥadīths whose agreement or disagreement cannot be established, according to instructions received from the Imāms, they are passed by in silence without being accepted or rejected.³ Needless to say there are also within Shī'ism those who, like a group among the Sunnis, act on any ḥadīth whatsoever which they happen to find in different traditional sources.

The Method of Shī'ism in Following the Ḥadīth

A ḥadīth heard directly from the mouth of the Prophet or one of the Imāms is accepted as is the Qur'ān. As for ḥadīths received through intermediaries, the majority of Shī'ites act upon them

¹ *Editor's note:* The traditional Islāmic criticism of ḥadīth literature and the creation of criteria for distinguishing between true and false ḥadīth must not be in any way confused with the criticism of European orientalisks made against the whole corpus of ḥadīth. From the Islāmic view, this is one of the most diabolical attacks against the whole structure of Islām.

² *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. I, pp. 139.

³ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. I, pp. 117.

if their chain of transmission is established at every step or if there exists definite proof concerning their truth, and, if they are concerned with principles of doctrine which require knowledge and certainty, according to the text of the Qur'ān. Other than these two kinds of ḥadīth, no other ḥadīth has any validity concerning principles of doctrine, the invalid ḥadīth being called "tradition with a single transmitter" (*khābar wāḥid*).¹ However, in establishing the injunctions of the Shari'ah, because of reasons that have been given, Shī'ites act also on a tradition which is generally accepted as reliable. Therefore, it can be said that for Shī'ism a certain and definitely established ḥadīth is absolutely binding and must be followed, while a ḥadīth which is not absolutely established but which is generally considered as reliable is utilized only in the elaboration of the injunctions of the Shari'ah.

Learning and Teaching in Islām

To acquire knowledge is a religious duty in Islām. The Prophet has said, "To seek knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim."² According to fully established ḥadīths which elucidate the meaning of this saying, knowledge here means the three principles of Islām: unity, or *tawḥīd*; prophecy, or *nubuwwah*; and eschatology, or *ma'ād*. In addition to these principles, Muslims are expected to acquire knowledge of the subsidiary branches and the details of the injunctions and laws of Islām according to their individual circumstances and needs.

It is clear that acquiring knowledge of the principles of religion, even if it be in summary fashion, is possible to a certain extent for everyone. But acquiring detailed knowledge of the injunctions and laws of religion through use of the basic documents of the Book and the Sunnah and technical reasoning based upon them (or what is called demonstrative jurisprudence, *fiqh istidlālī*) is not possible for every Muslim.

¹ See the discussion concerning "a single tradition" in works on the science of the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl*).

² *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. I, pp. 55.

Only a few persons have the capacity for demonstrative jurisprudence, nor is such acquiring of detailed knowledge required of everyone, for there are no injunctions in Islām requiring one to do what lies beyond his abilities.¹

Therefore, the study of Islāmic injunctions and laws through reasoning has been limited through the principle of "sufficient necessity" (*wājib kifā'ī*) to those individuals who have the necessary capability and are worthy of such study. The duty of the rest of the people, according to the general principle of the necessity for the ignorant to depend on the one who knows, is to seek guidance from capable and worthy men of learning, who are called *mujtahids* and *faqīhs*. This act of following mujtahids is called imitation or *taqlīd*. Of course, this imitation differs from imitation in the principles of religious knowledge which is forbidden according to the very text of the Qur'ān, "(O man), follow not that whereof thou best no knowledge." (Qur'ān, XVII, 36).

It must be known that Shī'ism does not permit imitation of a dead mujtahid. That is to say, a person who does not know the answer to a problem through *ijtihād* and through religious duty must imitate a living mujtahid and cannot depend on the view of a mujtahid who is not living, unless he had received that guidance while the mujtahid was alive. This practice is one of the factors which have kept Islāmic Shī'ite jurisprudence alive and fresh throughout the ages. There are individuals who continuously follow the path of independent judgment, *ijtihād*, and delve into the problems of jurisprudence from one generation to another.

In Sunnism, as a result of a consensus of opinion (*ijmā'*) that occurred in the 4th/10th century, it was decided that submission to one of the four schools (of Abū-Ḥanifah, Mālik, al-Shāfi'ī and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal) was necessary. Free *ijtihād* or imitation of a school other than these four (or one or two smaller schools that died out later) was not considered

¹ In these matters, one should refer to the discussions concerning *ijtihād* and *taqlīd* in works on the science of the principles of jurisprudence.

permissible. As a result, their jurisprudence has remained in the same condition as it was about 1100 years ago. In recent times, certain individuals in the Sunni world have turned away from this consensus and have begun to exercise free *ijtihād*.

Shī'ism and the Transmitted Sciences

The Islāmic sciences, which owe their existence to the 'ulamā of Islām who organized and formulated them, are divided into the two categories of intellectual (*'aqlī*) and transmitted (*naqlī*). The intellectual sciences include such sciences as philosophy and mathematics. The transmitted sciences are those which depend upon transmission from some source, such as the sciences of language, ḥadīth or history. Without doubt, the major cause for the appearance of the transmitted sciences in Islām is the Holy Qur'ān. With the exception of a few disciplines such as history, genealogy and prosody, the other transmitted sciences have all come into being under the influence of the Holy Book. Guided by religious discussions and research, Muslims began to cultivate these sciences, of which the most important are Arabic literature (grammar, rhetoric and the science of metaphors) and the sciences pertaining to the external form of religion (recitation of the Qur'ān, Qur'ānic commentary -*Tafsīr*-, ḥadīth, biography of learned men, the chain of transmission of ḥadīth and the principles of jurisprudence).

Shī'ites played an essential role in the foundation and establishment of these sciences. In fact, the founders and creators of many of these sciences were Shī'ites. Arabic grammar was put into a systematic form by Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'alī, one of the companions of the Holy Prophet, and by 'Alī. 'Alī dictated an outline for the organization of the science of Arabic grammar.¹ One of the founders of the science of eloquence (rhetoric and the science of metaphors) was Ṣāhib

¹ *Wafiyāt al-A'yān* of Ibn Khilakān, Tehran, 1284, pp. 78; *A'yān al-Shī'ah* of Muḥsin al-'Āmilī, Damascus, 1935 onward, vol. XI, pp. 231.

ibn `Abbād, a Shī`ite who was a vizier of the Buyids.¹ The first Arabic dictionary is the *Kitāb al-`Ayn* composed by the famous scholar, Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Baṣrī, the Shī`ite who founded the science of prosody. He was also the teacher of the great master of grammar, Sībawayh.

The Qur`ānic recitation of `Āṣim goes back to `Alī through one intermediary, and `Abdullāh ibn `Abbās, who in ḥadīth was the foremost among the companions, was a student of `Alī. The contributions of the Household of the Prophet and their associates in ḥadīth and jurisprudence are well known. The founders of the four Sunni schools of law are known to have associated with the fifth and sixth Shī`ite Imāms. In the principles of jurisprudence, the remarkable advances accomplished by the Shī`ite scholar, Waḥīd biḥbahānī and followed by Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī have never been matched in Sunni jurisprudence according to existing evidence.

Second Method:

The Way Of Intellection And Intellectual Reasoning

Philosophical and Theological Thought in Shī`ism

It has been mentioned before that Islām has legitimized and approved rational thought, which it considers a part of religious thought. Rational thought in its Islāmic-sense, after continuing the prophecy of the Prophet, provides intellectual demonstrations of the validity of the external aspect of the Qur`ān, which is a divine revelation, as well as of the definitely established sayings of the Prophet and his noble Household.

Intellectual proofs, which aid man in finding solutions for these problems through his God-given nature, are of two kinds:

¹ *Wafiyāt al-A`yān*, pp. 190; *A`yān al-Shi`ah* and other works on the biography of the learned men.

demonstration (*Burhān*) and dialectic (*jadal*). Demonstration is a proof whose premises are true (accord with reality) even if they be not observable or evident. In other words, it is a proposition which man comprehends and confirms by necessity through his God-given intelligence, as for example when he knows that "the number three is less than four." This type of thought is called rational thought; and in case it concerns universal problems of existence, such as the origin and end of the world and of man, it becomes known as philosophical thought.

Dialectic is a proof all or some of whose premises are based on observable and certain data, as for example the case of believers in a religion for whom the common practice is to prove their religious views within that religion by appealing to its certain and evident principles.

The Holy Qur'ān has employed both these methods and there are many verses in the Holy Book attesting to each type of proof. First of all, the Qur'ān commands free investigation and meditation upon the universal principles of the world of existence and the general principles of cosmic order, as well as upon more particular orders such as that of the heavens, the stars, day and night, the earth, the plants, animals, men, etc. It praises in the most eloquent language intellectual investigation of these matters. Secondly, the Qur'ān has commanded man to apply dialectical thought, which is usually called theological (*kalāmī*)¹ discussion, provided it is accomplished in the best manner possible, that is, with the aim of manifesting the truth without contention and by men who possess the necessary moral virtues. It is said in the Qur'ān, "Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason [*jādil*," from *jadal*] with them in the better way (Qur'ān, XVI, 125).

¹ Editor's note: *Kalām* is a special discipline in Islām; the word is usually rendered into European languages as theology, although the role and scope of *kalām* and theology are not the same. Henceforth, the *kalām* itself, which is now gradually coming into use in English, will be employed in its original Arabic form and will not be translated.

Shī'ite Initiative in Islāmic Philosophy and Kalām

As for theology, kalām, it is clear that from the beginning, when the Shī'ites separated from the Sunni majority, they began to debate with their opponents concerning their own particular point of view. It is true that a debate has two sides and that both the opponents share in it. However, the Shī'ites were continuously on the offensive, taking the initiative, while the other side played the defensive role. In the gradual growth of kalām, which reached its height in the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries with the spread of the Mu'tazilite school, Shī'ite scholars and learned men, who were students of the school of the Household of the Prophet, became among the foremost masters of kalām.¹ Furthermore, the chain of theologians of the Sunni world, whether it be the Ash'arites, Mu'tazilites or others, goes back to the first Imām of the Shī'ites, 'Alī.

As for philosophy,² those who are acquainted with the sayings and works of the companions of the Prophet (of which the names of 12,000 have been recorded and 120,000 are known to exist) know that there is little in them containing an appreciable discussion of philosophical questions. It is only 'Alī whose compelling metaphysical utterances contain the deepest philosophical thought.

The companions and the scholars who followed them, and in fact the Arabs of that day in general, were not acquainted with the intellectual discussion. There is no example of philosophical thought in the works of the scholars of the first two centuries. Only the profound sayings of the Shī'ite Imāms, particularly the first and eighth, contain an inexhaustible treasury of philosophical meditations in their Islāmic context. It is they who acquainted some of their students with this form of thought.

¹ *Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd*, beginning of vol. I.

² *Editor's note:* As pointed out before, philosophy in this context means traditional philosophy, which is based on certainty, and not the specifically modern philosophy that begins with doubt and limits the intellect to reason.

The Arabs were not familiar with philosophical thought until they saw examples of it during the 2nd/8th century in the translation of certain philosophical works into Arabic. Later, during the 3rd/9th century, numerous philosophical writings were translated into Arabic from Greek, Syriac and other languages and through them the method of philosophical thought became known to the general public. Nevertheless, most jurists and theologians did not look upon philosophy and other intellectual sciences, which were newly arrived guests, with favor. At the beginning, because of the support of the governmental authorities for these sciences, their opposition did not have much effect. But conditions soon changed and through strict orders many philosophical works were destroyed. The *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, which is the work of a group of unknown authors, is a reminder of those days and attests to the unfavorable conditions of that epoch.

After this period of difficulty, philosophy was revived at the beginning of the 4th/10th century by the famous philosopher Abū-Naṣr al-Fārābī. In the 5th/11th century, as a result of the works of the celebrated philosopher Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), peripatetic philosophy reached its full development. In the 6th/12th century, Shaykh al-Isḥrāq Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī systematized the philosophy of illumination (Isḥrāq) and because of this was executed by the order of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ayyūbī. Thereafter, philosophy ceased to exist among the Muslim majority in the Sunnī world. There was no further outstanding philosopher in that part of the Muslim world except in Andalusia at the edge of the Islāmic world where at the end of the 6th/12th century Ibn Rushd (Averros) sought to revive the study of philosophy.¹

¹ These matters are amply treated in *Akḥbār al-Hukamā'* of Ibn al-Qiṣṭī, Leipzig, 1903, *Wafiyāt al-A'yān* and other biographies of learned men.

Shī'ite Contributions to Philosophy and the Intellectual Sciences

In the same way that from the beginning Shī'ism played an effective role in the formation of Islāmic philosophical thought, it was also a principal factor in the further development and propagation of philosophy and the Islāmic sciences. Although after Ibn Rushd philosophy disappeared in the Sunni world, it continued to live in Shī'ism. After Ibn Rushd, there appeared such celebrated philosophers as Khawajah Naṣr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, Mīr Dāmād and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, who studied, developed and expounded philosophical thought one after another. In the same manner, in the other intellectual sciences, there appeared many outstanding figures such as Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī (who was both philosopher and mathematician) and Birjandi, who was also an outstanding mathematician.

All the sciences, particularly metaphysics or theosophy (*falsafah-i ilāhī* or *ḥikmat ilāhī*), made major advances thanks to the indefatigable endeavor of Shī'ite scholars. This fact can be seen if one compares the works of Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī, Shams al-Dīn Turkah, Mīr Dāmād, and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī with the writings of those who came before them.¹

It is known that the element that was instrumental in the appearance of philosophical and metaphysical thought in Shī'ism and through Shī'ism in other Islāmic circles was the treasury of knowledge left behind by the Imāms. The persistence and continuity of this type of thought in Shī'ism is due to the existence of this same treasury of knowledge, which Shī'ism has continued to regard with a sense of reverence and respect.

¹ *Editor's note:* There are all outstanding philosophers of the later period (from the 7th/13th to the 11th/17th centuries) and are nearly unknown in the West, except for Ṭūsī who is, however, known more for his mathematical works than for his philosophical contributions.

In order to clarify this situation, it is enough to compare the treasury of knowledge left by the Household of the Prophet with the philosophical works written over the course of the centuries. In this comparison, one can see clearly how each day Islāmic philosophy approached this scarce of knowledge ever more closely, until in the 11th/17th century Islāmic philosophy and this inspired treasury of wisdom converged more or less completely. They were separated only by certain differences of interpretation of some of the principles of philosophy.

Outstanding Intellectual Figures of Shī'ism

Thiqat al-Islām Muḥammad ibn Ya`qūb Kulaynī (d. 329/940) is the first person in Shī'ism to have separated the Shī'ite ḥadīths from the books called *Principles (Uṣūl)* and to have arranged and organized them according to the headings of jurisprudence and articles of faith. (Each one of the Shī'ite scholars of ḥadīth had assembled sayings he had collected from the Imāms in a book called *Aṣl*, or Principle.) The book of Kulaynī known as *al-Kāfī* is divided into three parts: Principles, Branches, and Miscellaneous Articles, and contains 16,199 ḥadīths. It is the most trustworthy and celebrated work of ḥadīth known in the Shī'ite world.

Three other works which complement the *Kāfī* are the book of the jurist Shaykh Ṣadūq Muḥammad ibn Bābuyah Qummī (d. 381/991), and *Kitāb al-Tahdhīb* and *Kitāb al-Istibṣār*, both by Shaykh Muḥammad Ṭūsī (d. 460/1068).

Abu'l-Qāsim Ja'far ibn Ḥasan ibn Yahyā Ḥilli (d. 676/1277), known as Muḥaqqiq, was an outstanding genius in the science of jurisprudence and is considered to be the foremost Shī'ite jurist. Among his masterpieces are *Kitāb Mukhtaṣar Nāfi'* and *Kitāb Sharā'ih al-Islām*, which have been passed from hand to hand for seven hundred years among Shī'ite jurists and have always been regarded with a sense of awe and wonder.

Following Muḥaqqiq, we must cite Shahīd Awwal (the First Martyr) Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Makkī, who was killed in Damascus in 786/1384 on the accusation of being Shī'ite.

Among his juridical masterpieces is his *al-Lum'ah al-Dimashqiyah* which he wrote in prison in a period of seven days. Also, we must cite Shaykh Ja'far Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' Najafī (d. 1327/1909) among whose outstanding juridical works is *Kitāb Kashf al-Ghiṭā'*.

Khwājah Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) is the first to have made kalām a thorough and complete science. Among his masterpieces in this domain is his *Tajrīd al-I'tiqād*, which has preserved its authority among masters of this discipline for more than seven centuries. Numerous commentaries have been written on it by Shī'ites and Sunnis alike. Over and above his genius in the science of kalām, he was one of the outstanding figures of his day in philosophy and mathematics as witnessed by the valuable contributions he made to the intellectual sciences. Moreover, the Marāghah Observatory owed its existence to him.

Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzi (d. 1050/1640), known as Mulla Ṣadra and Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn, was the philosopher who, after centuries of philosophical development in Islām, brought complete order and harmony into the discussion of philosophical problems for the first time. He organised and systematised them like mathematical problems and at the same time wed philosophy and gnosis, thereby bringing about several important developments. He gave to philosophy new ways to discuss and solve hundreds of problems that could not be solved through Peripatetic philosophy. He made possible the analysis and solution of a series of mystical questions which to that day had been considered as belonging to a domain above that of reason and beyond comprehension through rational thought. He clarified and elucidated the meaning of many treasures of wisdom, contained in the exoteric sources of religion and in the profound metaphysical utterances of the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet, that for centuries had been considered as insoluble riddles and usually believed to be of an allegorical or even unclear nature. In this way, gnosis, philosophy and the exoteric aspect of religion were completely harmonized and began to follow a single course.

By following the methods he had developed, Mulla Ṣadra succeeded in proving "transubstantial motion" (*ḥarakat jawhariyah*)¹ and in discovering the intimate relation of time to the three spatial dimensions in a manner that is similar to the meaning given in modern physics to the "fourth dimension" and which resembles the general principles of the theory of relativity (relativity of course in the corporeal world outside the mind, not in the mind), and many other noteworthy principles. He wrote nearly fifty books and treatises. Among his greatest masterpieces is the four-volume *Asfār*.

It should be noted here that before Mulla Ṣadra certain sages like Suhrawardī, the 6th/12th century philosopher and author of *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, and Shams al-Dīn Turkah, a philosopher of the 8th/14th century, had taken steps toward harmonizing gnosis, philosophy and exoteric religion, but credit for complete success in this undertaking belongs to Mulla Ṣadra.

Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī Shushtarī (d. 1281/1864) reorganised the science of the principles of jurisprudence upon a new foundation and formulated the practical principles of this science. For over a century, his school has been followed diligently by Shī'ite scholars.

¹ *Editor's note:* Earlier Muslim philosophers believed, like Aristotle, that motion is possible only in the accidents of things, not in their substance. Mulla Ṣadra assessed, on the contrary, that whenever something partakes of motion (in the sense of medieval philosophy), its substance undergoes motion and not just its accidents. There is thus a becoming within things through which they ascend to the higher orders of universal existence. This view, however, should not be confused with the modern theory of evolution.

Third Method *Intellectual Intuition Or Mystical* *Unveiling*

Man and Gnostic Comprehension¹

Even though most men are occupied with gaining a livelihood and providing for their daily needs and show no concern for spiritual matters, there lies within the nature of man an innate urge to seek the ultimately Real. In certain individuals, this force which is dormant and potential becomes awakened and manifests itself openly, thus leading to a series of spiritual perceptions.

Every man believes in a permanent Reality despite the claim of sophists and skeptics, who call every truth and reality illusion and superstition. Occasionally when man views with a clear mind and a pure soul the permanent Reality pervading the universe and the created order, and at the same time sees the impermanence and transient character of the diverse parts and elements of the world, he is able to contemplate the world and its phenomena as mirrors which reflect the beauty of a permanent reality. The joy of comprehending this Reality obliterates every other joy in the eye of the viewer and makes everything else appear as insignificant and unimportant.

This vision is that same gnostic "divine attraction" (*jadhbalh*) which draws the attention of the God-centered man toward the

¹ *Editor's note:* Islāmic esotericism is called Sufism (*taṣawwuf*) or gnosis (*'Irfān*); the first word concerns more the practical and the second the theoretical aspect of the same reality. It has been common among Shi'ite religious scholars since the Safavid period to refer to Islāmic esotericism more often as *'Irfān* than as *Taṣawwuf*. This is due to historical reasons connected with the fact that the Safavids were at first a Sufi order and later gained political power, with the result that many worldly men sought to put on the garb of Sufism in order to gain political or social power, therefore discrediting Sufism in the eyes of the devout.

transcendent world and awakens the love of God in his heart. Through this attraction, he forgets all else. All his manifold desires and wishes are obliterated from his mind. This attraction guides man to the worship and praise of the Invisible Deity who is in reality more evident and manifest than all that is visible and audible. In truth, it is this same inner attraction that has brought into being the different religions within the world, religions which are based on the worship of God. The gnostic (*'ārif*) is the one who worships God through knowledge and because of love for Him, not in hope of reward or fear of punishment.¹

From this exposition, it becomes clear that we must not consider gnosis as a religion among others, but as the heart of all religions. Gnosis is one of the paths of worship, a path based on knowledge combined with love, rather than fear. It is the path for realizing the inner truth of religion rather than remaining satisfied only with its external form and rational thought. Every revealed religion and even those that appear in the form of idol-worship have certain followers who march upon the path of gnosis. The polytheistic religions² and Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islām all have believers who are gnostics.

Appearance of Gnosis (Sufism) in Islām

Among the companions of the Prophet, 'Alī is known particularly for his eloquent exposition of gnostic truths and the stages of the spiritual life. His words in this domain

¹ The sixth Imām has said, "There are three kinds of worship: a group worship God in fear and that is the worship of slaves, a group worship God in order to receive rewards and that is the worship of mercenaries; and a group worship God because of their love and devotion to Him and that is the worship of free man. That is the best form of worship." *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. XV, pp. 208.

² *Editor's note*: The author has here in mind the religions of India and the Far East in which different aspects of the Divinity are symbolized by mythical and symbolic forms and deities and which therefore appear in the eye of Muslims in general as "polytheism".

comprise an inexhaustible treasury of wisdom. Among the works of the other companions which have survived, there is not a great deal of material that concerns this type of question. Among the associates of `Alī, such as Salmān Fārsī, Uways Qur`ānī, Kumayl ibn Ziyād, Rushayd Hājārī, Maytham Tammār and Rabi` ibn Khaytham.

However, there are figures who have been considered by the majority of the Sufis, Sunni and Shī`ite alike, as the heads of their spiritual chain (*silsilah*) after `Alī.

After this group, there appeared others, such as Tāwūs Yamāni, Shaybān Rā`ī, Mālik ibn Dīnār, Ibrāhīm Adham and Shaqīq Balkhī, who were considered by the people to be saints and men of God. These men, without publicly talking about gnosis and Sufism, appeared externally as ascetics and did not hide the fact that they had been initiated by the earlier group and had undergone spiritual training under them.

After them there appeared at the end of the 2nd/8th century and the beginning of the 3rd/9th century men such as Bāyazīd Basāmī, Ma`rūf Karkhī, Junayd Baghdādī and others like them, who followed the Sufi path and openly declared their connection with Sufism and gnosis. They divulged certain esoteric sayings based on spiritual vision which, because of their repellent external form, brought upon them the condemnation of some of the jurists and theologians. Some of them were imprisoned, flogged and even occasionally killed.¹ Even so, this group persisted and continued its activities despite its opponents. In this manner, gnosis and the "Way" (Ṭarīqah, or Sufism) continued to grow until in the 7th/13th and 8th/14th centuries it reached the height of its expansion and power. Since then, sometimes stronger and at other times less so, it has continued its existence to this very day within the Islāmic world.

¹ See the works on the biographies of learned men and also *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā`* of `Attār, Tehran, 1321 AH, solar) and *Ṭarā`iq al-Ḥaqā`iq* of Ma`sum `Ali Shāh, Tehran, 1318.

Gnosis or Sufism as we observe it today first appeared in the Sunni world and later among the Shī'ites. The first men who openly declared themselves to be Sufis and gnostics, and were recognized as spiritual masters of Sufi orders, apparently followed Sunnism in the branches (*furū'*) of Islāmic law. Many of the masters who followed them and who expanded the Sufi orders were also Sunnis in their following of the law.

Even so, these masters traced their spiritual chain, which in the spiritual life is like the genealogical chain of a person, through their previous masters to `Alī. Also the results of their visions and intuitions as transmitted to us convey mostly truths concerning divine unity and the stations of the spiritual life which are found in the sayings of `Alī and other Shī'ite Imāms. This can be seen provided we are not affected by some of the striking and even sometimes shocking expressions used by these Sufi masters and consider the total content of their teachings with deliberation and patience. Sanctity¹ resulting from initiation into the spiritual path, which Sufis consider as the perfection of man, is a state which according to Shī'ite belief is possessed in its fullness by the Imām and through the radiance of his being can be attained by his true followers. And the Spiritual Pole (*qutb*)² whose existence at all times is considered necessary by all the Sufis—as well as the attributes associated with him—correlates with the Shī'ite conception of the Imām. According to the saying of the Household of the Prophet, the Imām is, to use the Soft expression, Universal Man, the manifestation of the Divine Names and the spiritual guide of the lives and actions of men. Therefore, one could say, considering the Shī'ite concept of *wilāyah*, that Sufi masters are "Shī'ite" from the point of view of the spiritual life and in

¹ In the language of the gnostics, when the gnostic forgets himself, he comes annihilated in God and surrenders to His guidance or *wilāyah*.

² The gnostics say that through the Divine Names, the world has gained an apparent existence and thus runs its course. All the Divine Names are derived from the "Complete and Supreme Name." The Supreme Name is the station (*maqām*) of the Universal Man who is also called the spiritual pole (*qutb*) of the Universe. In no time can the world if man be without a *qutb*.

connection with the source of *wilāyah* although, from the point of view of the external form of religion, they follow the Sunni schools of law.

It is necessary to mention that even in classical Sunni treatises, it has sometimes been said that the spiritual method of the "Path,"¹ or the "techniques" whereby one comes to know and realize himself, cannot be explained through the external forms and teachings of the Sharī`ah. Rather, these sources claim that individual Muslims themselves have discovered many of these methods and practices, which then have become accepted by God, such as is the case with monasticism in Christianity.² Therefore, each master has devised certain actions and practices which he has deemed necessary in the spiritual method, such as the particular type of ceremony of being accepted by the master the details of the way in which the invocation is given to the new adept along with a rope, and the use of music, chanting and other methods of inducing ecstasy during the invocation of the Divine Name. In some cases, the practices of the Ṭarīqah have outwardly become separated from those of the Sharī`ah and it may seem difficult for an outsider to see the intimate and inward relation between them. But by taking into consideration the theoretical principles of Shī`ism and then studying in depth the basic sources of Islām, namely the Qur`ān and the Sunnah, he will soon realize that it is impossible to say that this spiritual guidance has not been provided by Islām itself or that Islām has remained negligent in clarifying the nature of the spiritual program to be followed.

¹ *Editor's note:* The spiritual path in Islām is called *sayr wa sulūk* (meaning traveling and wayfaring) to indicate the way or journey which symbolises the movement from man to God.

² God, Exalted by His Name, says, "But monasticism they [the Christians] invented—We ordained it not to them only seeking Allāh's pleasure, and they observed it not with right observance." (Qur`ān, LVII, 27).

Guidance Provided by the Qur'ān and Sunnah for Gnostic Knowledge

God—Exalted be His Name—has commanded man in several places in the Qur'ān to deliberate upon the Holy Book and be persistent in this effort and not to be satisfied with a merely superficial and elementary understanding of it. In many verses, the world of creation and all that is in it without exception are called portents (*āyāt*), signs and symbols of the Divine.¹ A degree of deliberation upon the meaning of portents and signs and penetration into their real significance will reveal the fact that things are called by these names because they manifest and make known not so much themselves but a reality other than themselves. For example, a red light placed as a sign of danger, once seen, reminds one completely of the idea of danger so that one no longer pays attention to the red light itself. If one begins to think about the form or quiddity of the light or its color, there will be in his mind only the form of the lamp or its glass or color rather than the conception of danger. In the same manner, if the world and its phenomena are all and in every aspect signs and portents of God, the Creator of the Universe, they have no ontological independence of their own. No matter how we view them they display nothing but God.

He who through guidance of the Holy Qur'ān is able to view the world and the people of the world with such an eye will apprehend nothing but God. Instead of seeing only this borrowed beauty, which others see in the attractive appearance of the world, he will see an Infinite Beauty, a Beloved who manifests Himself through the narrow confines of this world. Of course, as in the example of the red light, what is contemplated and seen in "signs" and "portents" is God the Creator of the

¹ *Editor's note:* There is an difference between a sign which signifies a meaning through agreement and a symbol which reveals the meaning symbolized through an essential and ontological bond between the symbol and the symbolized. Here the author is using the concept of signs and portents (*āyāt*) in the world in the sense of true symbols.

world and not the world itself. The relation of God to the world is from a certain point of view like $(1 + 0)$ not $(1 + 1)$ nor (1×1) (that is, the world is nothing before God and adds nothing to him). It is at the moment of realization of this truth that the harvest of man's separative existence is plundered and in one stroke man entrusts his heart to the hands of Divine love. This realization obviously does not take place through the instrument of the eye or the ear or the other outward senses, nor through the power of imagination or reason, for all these instruments are themselves signs and portents and of little significance to the spiritual guidance sought here.¹

He who has attained the vision of God and who has no intention but to remember God and forget all else, when he hears that in another place in the Qur'ān God says, "O ye who believe! Ye have charge of your own souls. He who erreth cannot injure you if you are rightly guided" (Qur'ān, V, 105), then he understands that the sole royal path which will guide him fully and completely is the path of "self-realization." His true guide who is God Himself obliges him to know himself, to leave behind all other ways and to seek the path of self-knowledge, to see God through the window of his soul, gaining in this way the real object of his search. That is why the Prophet has said, "He who knows himself verily knows the Lord."² And also he has said, "Those among you know God better who know themselves better."³

As for the method of following this path, there are many verses of the Qur'ān which command man to remember God, as for example where He says, "Therefore remember Me, I will remember you" (Qur'ān, II, 152) and similar sayings. Man is also commanded to perform right actions which are described

¹ Imām 'Alī has said, "God is not that which can enter under one of the categories of knowledge. God is That which guides reasoning toward Himself." *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. II, pp. 186.

² A famous ḥadīth repeated especially in works of well known Sufis and gnostics, Shī'ite and Sunni alike.

³ This ḥadīth is also found in many gnostic works, both Shī'ite and Sunni.

fully in the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. At the end of this discussion of right actions, God says, "Verily, in the Messenger of Allāh ye have a good example" (Qur'ān, XXXIII, 21).

How can anyone imagine that Islām could discover that a particular path is the path which leads to God without recommending this path to all the people? Or how could it make such a path known and yet neglect to explain the method of following it? For God says in the Qur'ān, "And We reveal the Scripture unto thee as an exposition of all things" (Qur'ān, XVI, 89).

PART III
ISLAMIC BELIEFS FROM THE
SHĀ`ITE POINT OF VIEW

CHAPTER FOUR
ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

*The World Seen from the Point of View of
Being and Reality; The Necessity of God*

Consciousness and perception, which are intertwined with man's very being, make evident by their very nature the existence of God as well as the world. For, contrary to those who express doubt about their own existence and everything else and consider the world as illusion and fantasy, we know that a human being at the moment of his coming into existence, when he is already conscious and possesses perception, discovers himself and the world. That is to say, he has no doubt that "He exists and things other than he exist." As long as man is man, this comprehension and knowledge exist in him and cannot be doubted, nor do they undergo any change.

The perception of this reality and existence which man affirms through his intelligence, in opposition to the views of the sophist and skeptic, is immutable and can never be proven false. That is to say, the claim of the sophist and the skeptic which negates reality can never be true, because of man's very existence. There is within the immense world of existence a permanent and abiding reality which pervades it and which reveals itself to the intelligence.

Yet, each of the phenomena of this world, which possesses the reality that we discover in conscious and perceiving human beings, loses its reality sooner or later and becomes nonexistent. From this fact itself, it is evident that the visible world and its parts are not the essence of reality (which can never be obliterated or destroyed). Rather, they rely upon a permanent Reality through which they gain reality and by means of which they enter into existence. As long as they are connected and attached to it, they possess existence and as soon as they are cut off from it, they become nonexistent.¹ We call this Immutable Reality, which is imperishable (that is, the Necessary Being), God.

Another Point of View Concerning the Relation Between Man and the Universe

The path chosen in the previous section to prove the existence of God is a very simple and evident one, which man treads with his God-given nature and intelligence without any complication. Yet, for the majority of people, because of their continuous preoccupation with material things and their being drowned in the pleasures of the senses, it has become very difficult to return to their God-given, simple, primordial and untainted nature. That is why Islām, which describes itself as universal, and which believes all people to be equal in religion,

¹ In the Book of God, reference is made at this reasoning in the verse "Can there be doubt concerning Allāh, the Creator of the heavens and the earth?" (Qur'an, XIV, 10)

has made it possible for such people to find another way to prove the existence of God. It seeks to speak to them and to make God known to them by means of the very path through which they have turned away from their simple, primordial nature.

The Holy Qur'ān instructs the multitude of men in the knowledge of God through different ways. Most of all, it draws their attention to the creation of the world and the order which reigns over it. It invites men to contemplate the "horizons" and "their own souls,"¹ for man in his few days of earthly life, no matter what path he chooses or what state he loses himself in, will never step outside the world of creation and the order, which reigns over it. He is intelligence and power of comprehension cannot overlook the marvelous scenes of heaven and earth, which he observes.

This vast world of existence, which stretches before our eyes is, as we know, in its parts and as a whole continuously in the process of change and transformation. At each moment, it manifests itself in a new and unprecedented form. It becomes actualized under the influences of laws, which know no exception. From the farthest galaxies to the smallest particles, which form the parts of this world, each part of creation possesses an inward order and runs its course in a most amazing manner under laws, which do not admit any exceptions. The world extends its domain of activity from the lowest to the most perfect state and reaches its own goal of perfection.

Above these particular orders stand more universal orders and finally the total cosmic order which brings together the countless parts of the universe and relates the more particular

¹ *Editor's note:* This is again in reference to the Qur'ānic verse, "We shall show them our portents..." referred to above. Both the phenomena of nature and the realities within the human soul are "signs" of God. See S. H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islāmic Cosmological Doctrines*, Cambridge (U.S.A.), 1964, introduction.

orders with each other, and which in its continuous course accepts no exceptions and permits no breaches.

The order of creation is such that if, for example, it places a man upon the earth, it constitutes him in such a way that he can live in harmony with his environment. It arranges the environment in such a way that it raises him like a loving nurse. The sun, the moon, the stars, water and earth, the night and the day, the seasons of the year, the clouds, wind and rain, the treasures beneath the earth and on its surface, in other words all the forces of nature, use their energy and resources in providing well-being and peace of mind for him. Such a relation and harmony can be discovered among all phenomena and also between man and his neighbors near and far, as well as within man's own habitat.

Such a continuity and harmony can also be observed within the internal structure of every phenomenon in the world. If creation has given man bread, it has also given him feet to seek it, hands to grasp it, a mouth to eat it and teeth to chew it. It has related man through a series of means, which are connected with each other like the links of a chain, to the final goal envisaged for this creature, which is subsistence and perfection.

Many men of science have no doubt that the countless relations among things which they have discovered as a result of several thousand years of effort are but humble samples and a foretaste of the secrets of creation and their myriad ramifications. Each new discovery declares to man the existence of an endless number of unknown elements. Could anyone say that this vast world of existence, all of the parts of which either separately or in unity and interconnection bear witness to an infinite knowledge and power, need not have a creator and could have come into being without reason and cause? Or could it be said of these particular and universal domains of order and equilibrium, and finally of this total cosmic order which through innumerable interrelations has made the world a single unit running its course according to laws which know no exceptions, that all this has occurred without plan and only through accident and chance? Or could anyone say that each of

the phenomena and domains in the cosmos has chosen for itself, before coming into being, an order and law which it puts into effect after coming into being? Or could anyone claim that this world, which is a single unit and which possesses complete unity, harmony and the interconnection of parts, could be the result of multiple and different commands issuing from different sources?

Obviously, an intelligent man, who relates every event and phenomenon to a cause, and who sometimes spends long periods in investigation and efforts to gain knowledge of a cause, that is unknown to him, will never accept the possibility of a world existing without a Being as its cause. Such a person, who by observing a few bricks placed upon one another in an orderly manner considers them to be the effect of an agent possessing knowledge and power and who denies the possibility of chance and accident in the putting of the bricks together and therefore concludes that a plan and purpose must have existed beforehand, will not regard the cosmic order as being the result of an accident or the play of chance.

A deeper awareness of the order reigning in the world is enough to show that the world, along with the order reigning over it, is the creation of an omnipotent Creator who has brought it into being through His limitless knowledge and power and who directs it toward an end. All the partial causes which bring about individual events in the world ultimately end in Him. They are in every way under His dominance and are guided by His wisdom. Everything that exists is in need of Him, while He has need of nothing and does not depend on any causes or conditions.

God, the Exalted, says, "Lo! In the heavens and the earth are portents for believers. And in your creation and all the beasts that He scattereth in the earth, are portents for a folk whose faith is sure. And the difference of night and day and the provision that Allāh sendeth down from the sky and thereby quickeneth the earth after her death, and the ordering of the winds, are portents for a people who have sense. These are the portents of Allāh which we recite unto thee (Muḥammad) with

truth. Then in what fact, after Allāh and His portents, will they believe?" (Qur'ān, XLV, 3-6).

Every reality in this world, which we can possibly imagine is a limited reality, that is, one whose actualization depends upon certain necessary causes and conditions. If these do not exist, that reality cannot exist in the world. Every reality has a boundary beyond which it cannot extend its existence. Only God is such that He has no limit or boundary, for His reality is absolute and He exists in His Infinity no matter how we try to conceive of Him. His Being does not depend upon and is not in need of any causes or conditions. It is clear that in the case of something limitless, we cannot conceive of multiplicity, for any supposedly second reality will be other than the first, as a result of which each would be limited and bound and would set a boundary to the reality of the other. For example, if we consider a limitless volume, we cannot conceive another limitless volume alongside it. And if we do suppose another, it will be the same as the first. Therefore, God is one and has no partner.

We have already mentioned the Bedouin who approached 'Alī in the middle of the fighting during the Battle of the Camel and asked if he asserted that God was one. In answer, 'Alī said, "To say that God is one has four meanings: Two of those meanings are false and two correct. As for the two incorrect meanings, one is that one should say 'God is one' and be thinking of number and counting. This meaning is false because that which has no second cannot enter into the category of number. Do you not see that those who said that God is the third of a trinity [i.e., the Christians] fell into infidelity? Another meaning is to say that so and so is one of this people, namely a species of this genus or a member of this species. This meaning also is not correct when applied to God, for it implies likening something to God and God is above all likeness. As for the two meanings which are correct when applied to God, one is that it should be said that God is one in the sense that there is no likeness unto Him among things. God possesses such uniqueness. And one is to say that God is one in the sense that there is no multiplicity or division conceivable in Him, neither outwardly nor in the

mind nor in the imagination. God possesses such a unity." (*Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. II, pp. 65)

‘Alī has also said, "To know God is to know His Oneness." (*Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. II, pp. 186) This means that to prove that the Being of God is unlimited and infinite suffices to prove His Oneness for to conceive a second for the Infinite is impossible. There is therefore no need of any other proofs, although there exist many others.

The Divine Essence and Qualities

If we analyze the nature of a human being, we see that he has an essence which is his individual humanity and also qualities through which his essence is known, such as the quality of being born in such a land, or being the son of such a person, or being learned and capable, or tall and handsome; or he possesses the contrary of these qualities. Some of these qualities, like the first and second, can never be separated from the essence, and others, like being learned or capable, have the possibility of separation and alternation. Yet, all are different from the essence and at the same time different from each other.

This point, namely the difference between the essence and qualities and between the qualities themselves, is the best proof that an essence that has qualities, and a quality that makes known an essence, are both limited and finite. For if the essence were limitless and infinite, it would encompass the qualities as well, and also the qualities would include each other, and as a result all would become one. For example, the essence of man would be the same as capability and also capability the same as knowledge; height and beauty would be the same; and all of these would possess the same meaning.

From this example, it is clear that the Divine Essence cannot be conceived to have qualities in the sense that human beings have qualities. A quality can come about only through setting limits and the Divine Essence transcends all limitations (even the limitation of this transcendence, which in reality is a quality).

The Meaning of the Divine Qualities

In the world of creation, we are aware of many perfections, which appear in the form of qualities. These are positive qualities which, wherever they appear, make the object of which they are the quality more perfect and increase its ontological value, as can be seen clearly in the comparison between the live being such as man and a lifeless one such as a stone. Doubtless God has created and bestowed these perfections upon creatures; if He had not possessed them in their fullness Himself, He could not have bestowed them upon others and perfected others through them. Therefore, if we follow the judgment of sound reasoning, we must conclude that God, the Creator, has knowledge, power and every other real perfection. Furthermore, as has already been mentioned, the marks of His knowledge and power and, as a result, the marks of life are seen in the order of the cosmos.

But because the Divine Essence is limitless and infinite, these perfections which are shown to be His Qualities are in reality the same as His Essence and one with each other. The difference observed between the Essence and the Qualities and at the same time between the Qualities themselves is only on the plane of concepts. Essentially, there is but one Reality involved which is one and indivisible.¹

In order to avoid the inadmissible error of limiting the Essence through attributing qualities to it or denying the principle of perfection in it, Islām has commanded its followers to preserve a just balance between affirmation and negation. It has ordered them to believe that God has knowledge but not like the

¹ The fifth and sixth Imāms have said, "God has an immutable Being. His knowledge was Himself when there was nothing to be known. His hearing was Himself when there was nothing audible. His vision was Himself when there was nothing visible. His power was Himself when there was nothing over which to exercise power." *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. II, pp. 125. There is innumerable traditions of the Household of the Prophet on this question. See *Nahj al-Balāghah*, *Tawḥīd* of Ṣadūq, Tehran, 1375; *ʿUyūn al-Akḥbār* of Ibn Qutaybah, Cairo, 1925-35; and *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. II.

knowledge of others. He has power but not like the power of others. He hears but not with ear. He sees but not with eyes like those of men, and so on.¹

Further Explanations Concerning the Qualities

Qualities in general are of two types: qualities of perfection, and qualities of imperfection. Qualities of perfection, as mentioned above, are of a positive nature and give higher ontological value and greater ontological effect to the object that they qualify. This is clear from the comparison between a live, knowing and capable being and a dead being which lacks knowledge and capability. Qualities of imperfection are the reverse of such qualities. When we analyze these imperfect qualities, we see that they are negative and show a lack of perfection, such as ignorance, impatience, ugliness, illness and the like. Therefore, it can be said that the negation of the quality of imperfection is the quality of perfection. For example, the negation of ignorance is knowledge and the negation of impotence is power and capability.

For this reason, the Holy Qur'ān has related each positive quality directly to God and negated every quality of imperfection from Him, attributing the negation of such imperfections to Him, as He says: "He is the knower, the Omnipotent," or He says, "He is the Alive" or "Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him," or "Know that ye cannot frustrate Allāh."

¹ The fifth and sixth Imāms has said, "God is a light that is not mixed with darkness, a knowledge into which ignorance cannot penetrate, a life in which there is no death." (*Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. II, pp. 129) The eighth Imām has said, "Considering the question of Divine Attributes, people have followed three paths. A first group considers God to have Attributes similar to those of others. A second group negates the Attributes. The correct path is that of the third group who affirm the existence of the Attributes without their resemblance to the attributes of creatures." *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. II, pp. 94.

The point that must never be forgotten is that God, the Most Exalted, is Absolute Reality without any limit or boundary. Therefore, a positive quality attributed to Him will not possess any limitation. He is not material and corporeal or limited to space and time. While possessing all positive qualities, He is beyond every quality and state which belongs to creatures. Every quality which in reality belongs to Him is purified from the notion of limitedness, as He says. "Naught is as His likeness." (Qur'ān, XLII, 11)¹

Qualities of Action

In addition, qualities are also divided into qualities of essence and qualities of action. A quality sometimes depends only on the qualified itself, such as life, knowledge and power, which depend on the person of a living, knowing and capable human being. We can conceive of man in himself possessing these qualities without taking into consideration any other factor.

At other times, a quality does not depend only on the qualified in itself, but, in order to qualify, it also requires the existence of something external as in the case of writing, conversation, desire and the like. A person can be a writer if he possesses ink, pen and paper, and he can converse when there is someone with whom to speak. In the same way, he can desire when there is an object of desire. The sole existence of man is not sufficient to bring these qualities into existence.

From this analysis, it becomes clear that the Divine Qualities which are the same as God's Essence, as already pointed out, are only of the first kind. As for the second kind, whose actualization depends upon an external factor, they cannot be considered as Qualities of the Essence and the same as the Essence, for all that is other than God is created by Him and so being situated in the created order, comes after Him.

¹ The sixth Imām has said, "God cannot be described by time, space, motion, translation or rest; rather He is the creator of time, space, motion, translation and rest." *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. II, pp. 96.

Qualities that pertain to God after the act of creation such as creator, omnipotent, giver of life, giver of death, sustainer, etc., are not the same as His Essence but are additional to it; they are Qualities of Action. By Quality of Action is meant that after the actualization of an act, the meaning of a quality is understood from that act, not from the Essence (that performs the act), such as "Creator," which is conceived after the act of creation has taken place. From the creation is understood the quality of God as Creator. That quality depends upon creation, not upon the sacred Essence of God, the Most Exalted, Himself, so that the Essence does not change from one state to another with the appearance of that quality. Shī'ism considers the two qualities of will (*irādah*) and speech (*kalām*) in their literal meaning as Qualities of Action (will meaning wanting something and speech meaning conveying a meaning through an expression). Most of the Sunni theologians consider them as implying knowledge and thereby take them to be Qualities of Essence.¹

Destiny and Providence

The law of causality reigns throughout the world of existence without any breach or exception.² According to this law, each phenomenon in this world depends for its coming into being

¹ The sixth Imām has said, "God was forever knowing in his Essence when there was nothing to be known and was powerful when there was nothing over which He could exercise power." The transmitter of the tradition recounts, "I said, 'And He had speech.' He replied, 'The Word (*kalām*) is created. God was, and He had no speech. Then He created and brought into being the Word (*kalām*).'" *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. II, pp. 147. And the eighth Imām has said, "Will comes from the inner being of people and following it action appear. In the case of God, there is only His act of bringing into being, for unlike us, God does not possess intention, purpose and discursive thought." *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. II, pp. 144.

² *Editor's note:* Needless to say, this assertion holds true whether there is strict causality on the microphysical level or not, because on the rophysical plane strict casuality is observed and is of the greatest importance for the understanding of the nature of this plane of existences. Causality also dominates over higher levels of existence than the corporeal.

upon causes and conditions, which make its actualization possible. If all of these causes, which we called the complete cause (the sufficient and necessary cause), are actualized, the coming into being of that phenomenon, or the assumed effect, becomes determined and necessary. And assuming the lack of all or some of these causes, the actualization of the phenomenon is impossible. Investigation and analysis of this thesis will clarify this point for us.

(1) If we compare a phenomenon (or effect) with the whole, complete (or sufficient) cause, and also with the parts of the complete cause, its relation to the complete cause is based on necessity and on a completely determined relationship. At the same time, its relation to each of the parts of the complete cause (which are called incomplete or partial causes) is one of possibility and lack of complete determinism. These causes provide the effect only with the possibility of existence, not with its necessity.

The world of existence, in its totality, therefore, is governed throughout by necessity because each of its parts has a necessary connection with its complete cause by the very fact of coming into being. Its structure is composed of a series of necessary and certain events. Yet, the character of possibility is preserved in its parts if we consider each part separately and in itself in the phenomena which are related and connected to partial causes which are other than their complete cause.

The Holy Qur'ān in its teachings has called this reign of necessity Divine Destiny (*qaḍā'*), for this necessity issues from that Source that gives existence to the world and is therefore a command (*ḥukm*) and "Divine Decree" that is certain and is impossible to breach or disobey. It is based on justice and accepts no exception or discrimination. God the Almighty says, "His verity is all creation and commandment" (Qur'ān, VII, 54), and "When He decreeth (*qaḍā'*) a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! And it is" (Qur'ān, II, 117), and also "(When) Allāh doometh there is none that can postpone His doom [*ḥukm*] (Qur'ān, XIII, 41).

(2) Each part of the cause provides the appropriate measure and "model" for the effect, and the coming into being of the effect is in accordance with the totality of the measures determined for it by the complete cause. For example, the causes that make respiration possible for man do not cause respiration in the absolute and unconditioned sense; rather they send a determined amount of the air around the mouth and nose through the respiratory channel to the area of the lungs in a determined time and with a determined shape. Likewise, the causes of man's vision (including man himself) do not bring into being vision as such without limits or conditions, but rather a vision which, through the means and organs provided, is limited and measured for men in every respect. This truth is to be found without exception in all the phenomena of the world and all the events that occur in it.

The Holy Qur'ān has called this aspect of the truth "Providence" (*qadar*) and has related it to God the Almighty who is the origin of creation, as has been said, "And there is not a thing but with Us are the stores thereof. And we send it at not down save in appointed measure [*qadar*]." (Qur'ān, XV, 21)¹

In the same way that according to Divine Destiny the existence of each phenomenon and event which occurs in the cosmic order is necessary and cannot be avoided, so also according to Providence each phenomena and event that occurs will never trespass or disobey in the least degree the measure which God has provided for it.

Man and Free Will

The action which man performs is one of the phenomena of the world of creation and its appearance depends, completely, like other phenomena in the world, upon its cause. And since man is a part of the world of creation and has an ontological relation

¹ The sixth Imām has said, "When God, the Exalted, wills a thing, He makes it predestined, and when He has made it predestined, He decrees it, and when He decrees it, He executes it and puts it into effect." *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. III, p 34.

with other parts of the cosmos, we cannot accept the premise that other parts should not have an effect upon his actions. For example, when a man takes a bite of bread, he needs not only the instruments of his hands, feet, mouth as well as knowledge, power and will, but also the existence of the bread in the external world, its availability, the lack of obstacles and other temporal and spatial conditions. If any of these causes were not actualized, the action would not be possible. Conversely, with the actualization of all of them (the complete cause) the occurrence of the action becomes completely necessary. The necessity of the action in relation to all of the parts of the complete cause is not contradictory to the possibility of the relation of the action with respect to man, who is one of the parts of the complete cause. Man has the possibility or free will (*ikhtiyār*) to perform the act. The necessity existing in the relation between the action and all of the parts of the cause does not mean that the relation of the action to some of the parts of the cause, of which man is one, should also be that of necessity and determinism.

Man's simple and untainted comprehension also confirms this point of view, for we see that people through their God-given nature and intelligence distinguish between such things as eating, drinking, coming and going on the one hand, and on the other, such things as health and illness, age and youth or the height of the body. The first group, which is directly related to man's will, is considered to be performed according to the free choice of the individual so that people command and prohibit them and blame or condemn them. But concerning the second group, man has no duty and is not under any Divine command because he cannot exercise a free choice over them.

At the beginning of Islām among the Sunnis there were two schools that were concerned with the theological aspects of human action. One group, holding the view that human action is the result of the unbreakable will of God, considered man to be determined in his actions and held human free will to be devoid of any value and sense. The other group believed man to be independent in his actions, which did not depend upon the

Divine will and were outside of the command of Providence (*qadar*).

But according to the instruction of the Household of the Prophet, which is also in conformity with the literal instructions of the Qur'ān, man is free (*mukhtār*) in his actions but not independent (*mustaqill*). Rather, God the Almighty through free will has willed the act. According to our previous analysis, God, the Exalted, has willed and made necessary the act through all of the parts of the complete cause, of which one is the will and free choice of man. As a result of this kind of Divine will, the action is necessary but in it man has also free will, that is, the action is necessary with respect to all the parts of its cause, and possible and free in choice with respect to one of those parts which is man.¹ The sixth Imām—upon him be peace—has said, "It is neither determination nor free will, but something between the two."

The fifth and sixth Imāms have said that "God loves His creation so much that He will not force it to commit sin and then punish it. And God is so powerful that whatever He

¹ *Editor's note:* The question of free will and determinism is one of the most difficult to solve theologically because it comprises a reality that transcends the dichotomy of discursive reason. With respect to Absolute Reality, there is no free will because there is no partial reality independent of the Absolute. But of the extent that man is real in the relative sense, he possesses free will. From the point of view of causality, there is determination in relation to the total cause but freedom with respect to man's action which is part of that total cause.

CHAPTER FIVE ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROPNET

Toward the Goal: General Guidance

A grain of wheat that is placed within the bosom of the earth under appropriate conditions begins to grow and enters upon a path of development in which at every moment it takes on a new form and state. Following a particular order and sequence, it treads this path until it becomes a grown plant with spikes of wheat; if once again one of the seeds were to fall upon the ground, it would begin the previous cycle all over again until it reached the final goal. Likewise, if the seed is that of a fruit placed within the bosom of the soil, it begins its transformation, breaking its shell, from which a green stem shoots out. It follows an orderly and distinct path of transformation until finally it becomes a fully grown tree, green and full of fruit. Or if it is the sperm of an animal, it begins to develop within the egg or in the womb of the mother, following the line of development peculiar to that animal until it becomes a perfected individual of that animal species.

This distinct path and orderly development is to be observed in each species of creatures in this world and is determined by the inner nature of that species. The green wheat plant which has sprang up from the grain will never bear oats or become a sheep, a goat or an elephant, and an animal that has become pregnant from its male will never bear spikes of wheat or a plane tree. Even if an imperfection were to occur in the organs or the natural functions of the newly born, or if a lamb were to be born without an eye, or a wheat plant develop without spikes of wheat, we would have no doubt that such an occurrence was

due to some pest or plague or to Unnatural causes. Continuous order and regularity in the development and generation of things, and the belonging of each species of creatures in its generation and development to a particular order and rule, is an undeniable fact.

From this evident thesis two conclusions can be drawn. (1) Between the various stages that each species of creatures traverses from the beginning to the end of its existence there is continuity and interconnection, as if that species in each stage of its development were pushed from behind and attracted by what is to come. (2) Due to the above-mentioned continuity and interconnection, the last rage in the development of each species is from the beginning of its generation the goal and point of "existential attention" of that species. For example, the "attention" of the walnut that sends out a green shoot from below the earth is centered from that very moment on a fully grown walnut tree. And a sperm in the egg or the womb is from the moment of its generation moving toward the state of the perfected animal.

The Holy Qur'ān, which teaches that the creation and the preservation of things belong absolutely to God, considers this movement and attraction, which each species in creation possession in treading its path of development, to be derived from Divine guidance. As He says, "Our Lord is He Who gave unto everything its nature, then guided it aright" (Qur'ān, XX, 50).¹ And also, "Who createth, then disposeth; who measureth then guideth" (Qur'ān, LXXXVII, 2-3). And He refers to the result of these sayings in these words: "And each one hath a goal toward which he turneth" (Qur'ān, II, 148).² And also "And We created not the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them in play. We created them not save with truth, but most of them know not." (Qur'ān, XLIV, 38 -39).³

¹ By this is meant guidance toward the goal of life and of creation.

² For each person, there exists a goal which he pursues.

³ Creation with truth means that there is a goal and purpose to creation.

Special Guidance

Obviously, the human species is not an exception to this general rule. The same guidance which rules over all species of creatures governs man as well. In the same way that each species through its particular nature follows its path of perfection and is guided to it, so must man with the help of this guidance be guided toward that which is his real perfection.

Although man shares many elements with other species of animals and with plants, the one special characteristic which distinguishes him is intellect.¹ It is with the help of his intellect and reason that man is able to think and to make use of every means possible for his own benefit, to fly into the endless spaces of the sky or swim in the depth of the sea, or to bring under his service and command all kinds of created things, whether they be minerals, plants or animals on the surface of the earth, and to benefit even from members of his own species to the greatest extent possible.

Owing to his primordial nature, man sees his happiness and perfection in gaining complete freedom. Yet, he must of necessity sacrifice some of his freedom because he is created as a social being and has endless demands which by himself he can never satisfy, and also because he is in cooperation and social intercourse with other members of his species who themselves have the same instinct of self-centeredness and love of freedom that he has. For the sake of the benefit he gains from others, he must in turn be of benefit to them. Equivalent to what he reaps from the toil of others he must give of his own work. Or, in summary, he must of necessity accept a society based upon mutual cooperation.

¹ *Editor's note:* The author uses the Persian word '*khirad*' which like '*aql*' means both intellect and reason depending on how it is used. But it certainly does not mean just reason or the modern understanding of intellect as being synonymous with reason. The traditional meaning of intellect as a faculty of immediate perception transcending reason, yet not irrational, is inherent in it.

This point is clear in the case of newborn babies and children. At the beginning, when desiring anything, they make use of no other means but force and crying and refuse to accept any constraint or discipline. But gradually, as a result of mental development, they realize that one cannot succeed in the problems of life only through rebellion and force; therefore, slowly they approach the condition of social beings. Finally they reach the age when they become social individuals with developed mental powers and are ready to obey the social regulations of their environment.

When man comes to accept the necessity for mutual cooperation among members of society he also recognizes the necessity for laws which rule over society, clarifying the duty of each individual and specifying the punishment for each offender. He accepts laws through whose application each individual in society can realize real happiness and find felicity in proportion to the social value of his efforts. These laws are the same universal and applicable laws which man, from the first day of this existence until today, has been continuously seeking and to which he has always been attracted in the foremost among all his desires. If the attainment of such a thing were not possible and were not written upon the tablet of human destiny, it would not have been the perennial yearning of man.¹

God, the Exalted, has referred to this reality of human society, saying, "We have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of the world, and raised some of them above others in rank that some of them may take labor from others" (Qur'ān,

¹ Even the simplest and most thoughtless of men wish by their nature as human beings that human society should be such that all can live in comfort, peace and tranquillity. From the philosophical point of view, want, love, attraction, appetite and the like are relative qualities connecting two sides, such as that which wishes with that which is wished, or the lover and the beloved. It is clear that if there were to be no one to love, love would have no meaning. Ultimately, all this returns to the understanding of the meaning of imperfection. If there were to be no perfection, imperfection would have no meaning.

LXIII, 32).¹ Concerning man's selfishness and desire to monopolize things to himself, He says, "Lo! Man was created anxious, fretful when evil befalleth him, and when good befalleth him, grudging" (Qur'ān, LXX, 19-21).²

Reason and Law

If we delve into the matter carefully, we will discover that man seeks continuously those laws which can bring him happiness in the world; that people as individuals and in groups recognize, in accordance with their God-given nature, the necessity for laws which provide felicity for them without discrimination or exception, laws which establish a general norm of perfection among mankind. Obviously, up to now, during the different periods of human history, there have not come into being any such laws which were devised by human reason. If the laws of existence had placed the burden of creating such human laws upon the shoulders of human reason, then during the long period of history such laws would have been established. In that case, each individual who possesses the power of reasoning would comprehend this human law in detail in the same way that everyone realizes the necessity for such laws in society.

In other words, if it had been in the very nature of things that it be the duty of human reason to create a perfect common law which must provide happiness for human society, and that man should be guided to that perfect law through the process of creation and the generation of the world itself, then such laws would have been apprehended by each human being through his reason in the same way that man knows what is of benefit or detriment to him throughout the determined course of daily life. There is, however, as yet no sign of the presence of such laws. Laws which have come about by themselves, or have been

¹ This means that each individual is responsible for a part of life and receives an appointed portion of livelihood. Men are of different ranks in the sense that the manager dominates over the worker, the director over his subordinates, the owner over the tenant or the buyer over the seller.

² The anxiety mentioned here is related to man's being covetous.

devised by a single ruler, or individuals, or nations, and have become prevalent in different societies are considered by some as certain, and by others as doubtful. Some are aware of these laws and others are ignorant of them. Never has it come to pass that all people, who in their basic structure are the same in that they are endowed by God with reason, should have a common awareness of the details of the laws which can bring about happiness in the world of man.

That Mysterious Wisdom and Consciousness Called Revelation

Thus, in the light of the discussion above, it becomes clear that the laws which can guarantee the happiness of human society cannot be perceived by reason. Since according to the thesis of general guidance running throughout creation the existence of an awareness of these laws in the human species is necessary, there must be another power of apprehension within the human species which enables man to understand the real duties of life and which places this knowledge within the reach of everyone. This consciousness and power of perception, which is other than reason and sense, is called the prophetic consciousness, or the consciousness of revelation.

Of course the presence of such a power in mankind does not mean that it should necessarily appear in all individuals, in the same way that although the power of procreation has been placed in all human beings, the awareness of the enjoyment of marriage and being prepared for this enjoyment is possible only for those who have reached the age of puberty. In the same way that the consciousness of revelation is a mysterious and unknown form of consciousness for those who do not possess it, the apprehension of the joy of sexual union is a mysterious and unknown feeling for those who have not reached the age of puberty.

God, the Exalted, makes reference in His Word to the revelation of His Divine Law (Shari'ah) and the inability of human reason to comprehend this matter in the verses: "Lo! We inspire thee

as We inspired Noah and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham, and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and We imparted unto David the Psalms; and messengers We have mentioned unto thee before and messengers We have not mentioned unto thee and Allāh spoke directly unto Moses; Messengers of good cheer and of warning, in order that mankind might have no argument against Allāh after the messengers (Qur'ān, IV, 163-165).¹

The Prophets-Inerrancy of Prophecy

The appearance of prophets affirms the conception of revelation outlined above. The prophets of God were men who propagated the call of revelation and prophecy and brought definitive proofs for their call. They propagated among people the elements of the religion of God (which is the same divine law that guarantees happiness) and made it available to all men.

Since in all periods of history, the number of people endowed with the power of prophecy and revelation has been limited to a few individuals, God—the Most Exalted—has completed and perfected the guidance of the rest of mankind by placing the mission of the propagation of religion upon the shoulders of His prophets. That is why a prophet of God must possess the quality of inerrancy (*'iṣmah*). In receiving the revelation from God, in guarding it and in making possible its reaching the people, he must be free from error. He must not commit sin (*ma 'siyah*). The reception of revelation, its preservation and its propagation are three principles of ontological guidance; and error in existence itself is meaningless. Furthermore, sin and opposition to the claims of the religious call and its propagation are impossible in a prophet for they would be a call against the original religious mission; they would destroy the confidence of the people, their reliance upon the truth and the validity of the

¹ This verse clarifies the insufficiency of human reason without prophecy and revelation. If reason were sufficient to provide argument for the existence of God, then would be no need of prophets.

call. As a result, they would destroy the purpose of the religious call itself.

God, the Exalted, refers in His word to the inerrancy of the prophets, saying, "And We chose them and guided them unto a straight path" (Qur'ān, VI, 88).¹ And also, "(He is) the Knower of the Unseen, and He revealeth unto none His secret, save unto every messenger whom He hath chosen, and then He maketh a guard to go before him and guard behind him, that He may know that they have indeed conveyed the messages of their Lord" (Qur'ān, LXXII, 26-28).²

The Prophets and Revealed Religion

What the prophets of God received through revelation and as a message from God and conveyed to mankind was religion (*Dīn*),³ that is, a way of life and human duties which guarantee the real happiness of man.

Revealed religion in general consists of two parts: doctrine and practice or method. The doctrinal part of revealed religion consists of a series of fundamental principles and views concerning the real nature of things upon which man must establish the foundations of his life. It is comprised of the three universal principles of unity (*tawḥīd*), prophecy (*nubuwwah*), and eschatology (*ma'ād*). If there is any confusion or disorder in one of these principles, the religion will not be able to gain any following.

¹ To have guided the prophet unto a straight path means that they are directed wholly toward God and obey only Him.

² A guard before and a guard behind refers to conditions before and after the revelation or the event of the life of the prophet himself.

³ *Editor's note:* As we have already indicated, *dīn* is a most universal term in Arabic and Persian and should be translated as religion only if we understand the latter term in the widest sense possible, not as one thing among others, but as a total way of life based upon transcendent principles, or a tradition in the true sense of the word.

The practical part of revealed religion consists of a series of moral and practical injunctions covering the duties man has before God and human society. That is why the secondary duties which have been ordered for man in different Divine laws are of two kinds: morals (*akhlāq*) and action, (*a'māl*). The morals and actions related to the Divine are of two kinds, such as: first, the quality of faith, sincerity, surrender to God, contentment and humility; and second, the daily prayers, fasting, and sacrifice (called acts of worship and symbolizing the humility and servitude of man before the Divine Throne). The morals and actions related to human society are also of two kinds, such as: first, the quality of love for other men, wishing well for others, justice and generosity; and second, the duty to carry out social intercourse, trade and exchange, etc. (called transactions).

Another point that must be considered is that since the human species is directed toward the gradual attainment of perfection, and human society through the passage of time becomes more complete, the appearance of a parallel development must also be seen in revealed laws.¹ The Holy Qur'ān affirms this gradual development, which reason has also discovered. It can be concluded from its verses that each Divine Law (Shari'ah) is in reality more complete than the Shari'ah before; for instance, in this verse where He says, "And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it." (Qur'ān, V, 48)²

Of course, as scientific knowledge also confirms and the Qur'ān states, the life of human society in this world is not eternal and

¹ *Editor's note:* Islām bases its argument upon the gradual development of man and therefore "perfection" of successive revelations although from another point of view it considers all prophets as equal. In any case, this argument should not be confused with modern evolutionism and belief in indelicate historical progress which are the very antithesis of the Islāmic conception of time and history.

² The Scripture at the beginning of the verse refers to the Holy Qur'ān, while the second Scripture copes to such sacred books as the Torah and the Gospels.

the development of man is not endless. As a result, the general principles governing the duties of man from the point of view of doctrine and practice must of necessity stop at a particular stage. Therefore, prophecy and the Sharī'ah will also one day come to an end when in the perfection of doctrine and expansion of practical regulations they have reached the final stage of their development. That is why the Holy Qur'ān, in order to make clear that Islām (the religion of Muḥammad) is the last and most complete of the revealed religions, introduces itself as a sacred book that cannot be abrogated (*naskh*), calls the Prophet the "Seal of the Prophets" (*Khātam al-Anbiyā*), and sees the Islāmic religion as embracing all religious duties. As He says, "And Lo! It is an unassailable Scripture. Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or behind it." (Qur'ān, XLI, 41-42)¹ And also, "Muḥammad is not the father of any man among you but he is the messenger of Allāh and the Seal of the prophets." (Qur'ān, XXXIII, 40).² And, "We reveal the scripture unto thee as an exposition of all things" (Qur'ān, XVI, 89).³

The Prophets and Proof of Revelation and Prophecy

Many modern scholars who have investigated the problem of revelation and prophecy have tried to explain revelation, prophecy and questions connected with them by using the principles of social psychology. They say that the prophets of God were men of a pure nature and strong will who had great love for humanity. In order to enable mankind to advance spiritually and materially and in order to reform decadent societies, they devised laws and regulations and invited mankind to accept them. Since people in those days would not

¹ The "Unassailable Scripture" is the Holy Qur'ān.

² The idea of the finality of the Qur'ān as a sacred book which cannot be abrogated and the aspect of the Prophet as the "Seal of prophecy" are essentially aspects of the same truth.

³ The Qur'ān, according to the Islāmic view, contains the principle of all knowledge, and through it every domain can be clarified and elucidated.

accept the logic of human reason, in order to make them obey their teachings the prophets, according to such modern scholars, claimed that they and their thoughts came from the transcendent world. Each prophet called his own pure soul the Holy Spirit; the teachings which he claimed came from the transcendent world were called "revelation and prophecy"; the duties which resulted from the teachings were called "revealed Shari`ah"; and the written record of these teachings and duties were called a "revealed book."

Anyone who views with depth and impartiality the revealed books and especially the Holy Qur`ān, and also the lives of the prophets, will have no doubt that this view is not correct. The prophets of God were not political men. Rather, they were "men of God," full of truthfulness and purity. What they perceived they proclaimed without addition or diminution. And what they uttered they acted upon. What they claimed to possess was a mysterious consciousness which the invisible world had bestowed upon them. In this way, they came to know from God Himself what the welfare of men was in this world and the next, and propagated this knowledge among mankind.

It is quite clear that in order to confirm and ascertain the call of prophecy there is need of proof and demonstration. The sole fact that the Shari`ah brought by a prophet conforms to reason is not sufficient in determining the truthfulness of the prophetic call. A man who claims to be a prophet, in addition to the claim of the truth of his Shari`ah, claims a connection through revelation and prophecy with the transcendent world, and therefore claims that he has been given by God the mission to propagate the faith. This claim in itself is in need of proof. That is why (as the Holy Qur`ān informs us) the common people with their simple mentality always sought miracles from the prophets of God in order that the truthfulness of their call might be confirmed.

The meaning of this simple and correct logic is that the revelation, which the prophet claims is his cannot be found among others who are human beings like him. It is of necessity an invisible power which God miraculously bestows upon His

prophets, through which they hear His word and are given the mission to convey this word to mankind. If this be true, then the prophet should ask God for another miracle so that people would believe the truth of his prophetic call.

It is thus clear that the request for miracles from prophets is according to correct logic and it is incumbent upon the prophet of God to provide a miracle at the beginning of his call, or according to the demand of the people, in order to prove his prophecy. The Holy Qur'ān has affirmed this logic, relating miracles about many prophets at the beginning of their mission or after their followers requested them.

Of course many modern investigators and scientists have denied miracles, but their opinions are not based upon any satisfactory reasons. There is no reason to believe that the causes which until now have been discovered for events through investigation and experiment are permanent and unchanging, or that no event ever occurs for reasons other than those which usually bring it about. The miracles related about the prophets of God are not impossible or against reason (as is, for example, the claim that the number three is even). Rather they are a "break in what is habitual" (*kharq al-'ādah*)¹ an occurrence which, incidentally, has often been observed in a lower degree among people following ascetic practices.

The Number of the Prophets of God

It is known through tradition that in the past many prophets appeared, and the Holy Qur'ān affirms their multitude. It has mentioned some of them by name or by their characteristics,

¹ *Editor's note:* Miracle in Persian as in Arabic is in fact called *khāriq al-'Ādah* that is, that which breaks the habitual relation between causes and effects in this world which because of its recurrence and persistence appears to us as a closed and unbreakable net of causality. The miracle represents the intrusion into this habitual world of a cause from another world or state of being with naturally different effects from what we have been accustomed to in our everyday experience. It is therefore the "break of habit" or of what has been habitual.

but has not given their exact number. Through definitive traditions also it has not been possible to determine their number except in the well-known saying which Abū-Dharr Ghifārī has recited from the Holy Prophet, according to which their number has been set at 124,000.

The Prophets Who are Bringers of Divine Law

From what can be deduced from the Qur'ān, it can be concluded that all the prophets of God did not bring a Shari'ah. Rather, five of them—Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and the Prophet Muḥammad—"possessors of determination" (*ulu'l-'azm*), those who have brought a Shari'ah. Other prophets follow the Shari'ah of those who "possess determination." God has said in the Qur'ān, "He hath ordained for you that religion which He commended unto Noah, and that which We inspire in thee (Muḥammad), and that which We commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus" (Qur'ān, XLII, 13).¹ He has also said, "And when We exacted a covenant from the Prophets, and from thee (O Muḥammad) and from Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus son of Mary, We took from them a solemn covenant" (Qur'ān, XXXIII, 7).²

¹ This verse is in the form of an obligation. It is clear that in this case if there were prophets other than the five mentioned in this verse who had brought a new Shari'ah, they would have been mentioned.

² There is again reference to the same Prophets who brought new Shari'ah into the world.

The Prophecy of Muḥammad

The last prophet of God is Hadrat Muḥammad¹—upon whom be blessings and peace—who possesses a book and a Shari`ah and in whom Muslims have placed their faith. The Prophet was born fifty three years before the beginning of the hegira calendar² in Mecca in the Ḥijāz amidst the family of Banū-Hāshim of the Tribe of Quraysh, who were considered the most honored of the Arab families. His father was called `Abdullāh and his mother, Āminah. He lost both parents at the beginning of childhood and was placed under the care of his paternal grandfather, `Abd al-Muṭṭalib, who also soon passed away. At this time, the Prophet's uncle, Abū-Ṭālib, took charge of him and became his guardian, taking him into his own house. The Prophet grew up in his uncle's house and even before reaching the age of adolescence used to accompany his uncle on journeys by caravan.

The Prophet had not received any schooling and therefore did not know how to read and write. Yet, after reaching the age of maturity, he became famous for his wisdom, courtesy and trustworthiness. As a result of his sagacity and trustworthiness, one of the women of the tribe of Quraysh, well-known for her wealth, appointed him as the custodian of her possessions and left in his hands the task of conducting her commercial affairs

The Prophet once journeyed to Damascus with her merchandise and as a result of the ability he displayed was able to make an outstanding profit. Before long, she asked to become his wife and the Prophet accepted her proposal. After the marriage,

¹ *Editor's note:* In Persian and other Muslim languages, the name of the Prophet is usually preceded by the honorific title Ḥaḍrat and followed by the formula, "upon whom be blessings and peace" (*ṣall Allāhu `alayhi wa sallam*). Ḥaḍrat is also used for other prophets, for Shī'ite Imāms and even for some very eminent religious authorities.

² *Editor's note:* The Islāmic calendar begins with the migration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina and is thus called the Hegira Calendar, from the Arabic word *hijrah*, meaning emigration.

which occurred when he was twenty five years old, the Prophet began the life of a manager of his wife's fortunes, until the age of forty, gaining meanwhile a widespread reputation for wisdom and trustworthiness. He refused, however, to worship idols, as was the common religious practice of the Arabs of the Ḥijāz. And occasionally he would make spiritual retreats (*khalwah*) in which he prayed and discoursed secretly with God.

At the age of forty, in the cave of Ḥirā', in the mountains of the Tihāmah region near Mecca, when he was in spiritual retreat, he was chosen by God to become a prophet and was given the mission of propagating the new religion. At that moment, the first chapter of the Qur'ān ('The Blood-Clot' [*Sūrah 'Alaq*]) was revealed to him. That very day, he returned to his house and on the way met his cousin, `Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib, who after bearing the account of what had occurred declared his acceptance of the faith. After the Prophet entered the house and told his wife of the revelation, she likewise accepted Islām.

The first time the Prophet invited people to accept his message, he was faced with a distressing and painful reaction. Of necessity he was forced henceforth to propagate his message in secret for some time until he was ordered again by God to invite his very close relatives to accept his message. But this call was also fruitless and no one heeded it except `Alī ibn `Abī-Ṭālib, who in any case had already accepted the faith. (But in accordance with documents transmitted from the Household of the Prophet and extant poems composed by Abū-Ṭālib, Shī`ites believe that Abū-Ṭālib had also embraced Islām; however, because he was the sole protector of the Prophet, he hid his faith from the people in order to preserve the outward power he had with the Quraysh.)

After this period, according to Divine instruction, the Prophet began to propagate his mission openly. With the beginning of open propagation, the people of Mecca reacted most severely and inflicted the most painful afflictions and tortures upon the Prophet and the people who had become newly converted to Islām. The severe treatment dealt out by the Quraysh reached such a degree that a group of Muslims left their homes and

belongings and migrated to Abyssinia. The Prophet and his uncle, Abū-Ṭālib, along with their relatives from the Banū-Hāshim, took refuge for three years in the "mountain pass of Abū-Ṭālib," a fort in one of the valleys of Mecca. No one had any dealings or transactions with them and they did not dare to leave their place of refuge.

The idol-worshippers of Mecca, although at the beginning they considered inflicting all kinds of pressures and tortures such as striking and beating, insult, ridicule and defamation on the Prophet, occasionally would also show kindness and courtesy toward him in order to have him turn away from his mission. They would promise him great sums of money or leadership and the rule of the tribe. But for the Prophet their promises and their threats only resulted in the intensification of his will and determination to carry out his mission. Once, when they came to the Prophet promising him wealth and power, the Prophet told them, using metaphorical language, that if they were to put the sun in the palm of his right hand and the moon in the palm of his left hand he would not turn away from obeying the unique God or refrain from performing his mission. About the tenth year of his prophecy, when the Prophet left the mountain pass of Abū-Ṭālib," his uncle Abū-Ṭālib, who was also his sole protector, died, as did also his devoted wife. Henceforth, there was no protection for his life nor any place of refuge. Finally the idol-worshippers of Mecca devised a secret plan to kill him. At night they surrounded his house from all sides with the aim of forcing themselves in at the end of the night and cutting him into pieces while he was in bed. But God, the Exalted, informed him of the plan and commanded him to leave for Yathrib. The Prophet placed `Alī in place of himself in his bed and at night left the house under Divine protection, passing amidst his enemies, and taking refuge in a cave near Mecca. After three days when his enemies, having looked everywhere, gave up hope of capturing him and returned to Mecca, he left the cave and set out for Yathrib.

The people of Yathrib, whose leaders had already accepted the message of the Prophet and swore allegiance to him, accepted him with open arms and placed their lives and property at his

disposal. In Yathrib for the first time the Prophet formed a small Islāmic community and signed treaties with the Jewish tribes in and around the city as well as with the powerful Arab tribes of the region. He undertook the task of propagating the Islāmic message and Yathrib became famous as "*Madīnat al-Rasūl*" (the city of the Prophet).

Islām began to grow and expand from day to day. The Muslims, who in Mecca were caught in the mesh of the injustice and inequity or the Quraysh, gradually left their homes and property and migrated to Medina, revolving around the Prophet like moths around a candle. This group became known as the "immigrants" (*muhājirūn*) in the same way that those who aided the Prophet in Yathrib gained the name of "helpers" (*ansār*).

Islām was advancing rapidly but at the same time the idol-worshippers of Quraysh, as well as the Jewish tribes of the Hijāz, were unrestrained in their harassment of the Muslims. With the help of the "hypocrites" (*manāliqūn*) of Medina who were amidst the community of Muslims and who were not known for their holding any particular positions, they created new misfortunes for the Muslims every day until finally the matter led to war. Many battles took place between the Muslims and the Arab polytheists and Jews, in most of which the Muslims were victorious. There were altogether over eighty major and minor battles. In all the major conflicts such as the battles of Badr, Uḥud, Khandaq, Khaybar, Ḥunayn, etc., the Prophet was personally present on the battle scene. Also in all the major battles and many minor ones, victory was gained especially through the efforts of `Alī. He was the only person who never turned away from any of these battles. In all the wars that occurred during the ten years after the migration from Mecca to Medina, less than two hundred Muslims and less than a thousand infidels were killed.

As a result of the activity of the Prophet and the selfless effort of the *muhājirūn* and *ansār* during this ten-year period, Islām spread through the Arabian peninsula. There were also letters written to kings of other countries such as Persia, Byzantium and Abyssinia inviting them to accept Islām. During this time

the Prophet lived in poverty and was proud of it.¹ He never spent a moment of his time in vain. Rather, his time was divided into three parts: one spent for God, in worshipping and remembering Him; a part for himself and his household and domestic needs; and a part for the people. During this part of his time, he was engaged in spreading and teaching Islām and its sciences, administrating to the needs of Islāmic society and removing whatever evils existed, providing for the needs of the Muslims, strengthening domestic and foreign bonds, and similar matters.

After ten years of stay in Medina, the Prophet fell ill and died after a few days of illness. According to existing traditions, the last words on his lips were advice concerning slaves and women.

The Prophet and the Qur'ān

It was demanded of the Prophet, as it had been of other prophets, that he produce a miracle. The Prophet himself also confirmed the power of prophets to produce miracles as has been asserted clearly by the Qur'ān. Many miracles by the Prophet have been recounted, the transmission of some of which is certain and can be accepted with confidence. But the enduring miracle of the Prophet, which is still alive, is the sacred book of Islām, the Holy Qur'ān. The Holy Qur'ān is a sacred text consisting of six thousand and several hundred verses (*āyah*) divided into one hundred and fourteen large and small chapters (*Sūrah*). The verses of the Holy Qur'ān were revealed gradually during the twenty-three year period of prophecy and mission of the Prophet. From less than one verse to a whole and complete chapter were revealed under different circumstances, both at day and night, on journeys or at home, in war or peace, during days of hardship or moments of rest.

¹ In a famous hadith the Prophet, he has said, "Poverty (*faqr*) is my glory." concerning the material of this section, see the *Sirah* of Ibn Hushām, Cairo, 1355-56; *Sirah* of Ḥalabi, Cairo, 1320; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. VI, and other traditional sources of the life of the Holy Prophet.

The Holy Qur'ān in many of its verses introduces itself in unambiguous language as a miracle. It invited the Arabs of that day to rivalry and competition in composing writings of comparable truth and beauty. The Arabs, according to the testimony of history, had reached the highest stages of eloquence and elegance of language, and in the sweetness of language and flow of speech, they ranked foremost among all people. The Holy Qur'ān claims that if it be thought of as human speech, created by the Prophet himself or learned through instruction from someone else, then the Arabs should be able to produce its like¹ or ten chapters like it,² or a single one of its Verses,³ making use of whatever means were at their disposal to achieve this end. The celebrated Arab men of eloquence claimed in answer to this request that the Qur'ān was magic and it was thus impossible for them to produce its like.⁴

Not only does the Qur'ān challenge and invite people to compete with its eloquence and elegant language, but also it occasionally invites rivalry from the point of view of its meaning and thus challenges all the mental powers of men and jinn,⁵ for the Qur'ān, is a book containing the total program for

¹ As He says, "Then let them procure speech the like thereof, if they are truthful." (Qur'ān, LII, 34).

² As He says, "Or they say: He [Muhammad] has invented it. Say: Then bring ten Surahs, the like thereof, invented, and call on everyone ye can beside Allāh, if ye are truthful." (Queen, XI, 13).

³ As He says, "Or they say: He hath invented it? Say: then bring a surah like unto it." (Qur'ān, X, 39).

⁴ As He recounts from the saying of one of the Arab men of letters, "And said: This is naught else than magic from of old; this is naught else than speech of mortal man." (Qur'ān, LXXIV, 24-25).

⁵ *Editor's note:* The jinn referred to in the Qur'ān are interpreted traditionally as conscious, psychic forces that inhabited this world before the Fall of Adam and who still exist on the subtle plane. The terms *jinn* and *ins* (mankind) are thus often used together in Islāmic sources to refer to the totality of conscious beings possessing mental faculties in this world. See Appendix IV.

human life.¹ If we investigate the matter carefully, we will discover that God has made this vast and extensive program which embraces every aspect of the countless beliefs, ethical forms and actions of mankind and takes into account all of their details and particularities, to be the "Truth" (*ḥaqq*) and to be called the religion of the truth (*Dīn al-ḥaqq*). Islām is a religion whose injunctions are based on the truth and the real welfare of mankind, not the desires and inclinations of the majority of men or the whims of a single, powerful ruler.

At the foundation of this vast program is placed the most cherished word of God which is belief in His Unity. All the principles of the sciences are deduced from the principle of Unity (*tawḥīd*). After that, the most praiseworthy human ethical and moral virtues are deduced from the principles of the religious sciences and included in the program. Then, the countless principles and details of human action, and individual and social conditions of man are investigated, and the duties pertaining to them which originate from the worship of the One are elaborated and organized. In Islām, the relation and continuity between the principles (*uṣūl*) and their applications (*furū'*) are such that each particular application in whatever subject it may be, if it is brought back to its source, returns to the principle of Unity or *tawḥīd*, and Unity if applied and analysed becomes the basis for the particular injunction and rule in question.

Of course, the final elaboration of such an extensive religion with such unity and interconnection, or even the preparation of an elementary index for it, is beyond the normal powers of the best authorities on law in the world. But here we speak of a man who in a short span of time was placed amidst a thousand difficulties concerning his life and property, caught in bloody battles and faced with internal and external obstacles and furthermore placed alone before the whole world. Moreover, the Prophet had never received instruction nor learned how to read and writer.² He had spent two-thirds of his life before becoming

¹ As He says, "Say: Verily, though mankind and the Jinn should assemble to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof though they were helpers one of another." (Qur'an, XVII, 88).

² As He recounts from the tongue of the Holy Prophet, "I dwelt among you whole lifetime before it (came to me). Have ye then no sense?" (Qur'an, X

a prophet among a people who possessed no learning and had had no taste of civilization. He passed his life in a land without water or vegetation and with burning air, among a people who lived in the lowest social conditions and were dominated by neighboring political powers.

Besides the above, the Holy Qur'ān challenges men in another way.¹ This book was revealed gradually, during a period of twenty-three years, under totally different conditions in periods of difficulty or comfort, war or peace, power or weakness, and the like. If it had not come from God but had been composed and expounded by man, many contradictions and contrasts would be observed in it. Its ending would of necessity be more perfect than its beginning, as is necessary in the gradual perfection of the human individual. Instead, the first Meccan verses are of the same quality as the Medinan verses and there is no difference between the beginning and end of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is a book whose parts resemble each other and whose awe-inspiring power of expression is of the same style and quality throughout.

17). And He says, "And thou (O Muḥammad) was not a reader of any scripture before it, nor didst thou write it with thy right hand" (Qur'an, XXIX, 48). He also says, "And if ye are in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto Our slave (Muḥammad), then produce a Sūrah of the like thereof, and call your witnesses besides Allāh if ye are truthful" (Qur'an, II, 23).

¹ As He says, "Will they not then ponder on the Qur'ān? If it had been from other than Allāh, they would have found herein much incongruity" (Qur'an, IV, 82).

CHAPTER SIX ESCHATOLOGY

Man is Composed of Spirit and Body

Those who are acquainted to a certain extent with the Islāmic science know that within the teachings of the Holy Book and the traditions of the Prophet there are many references to spirit and corpus, or soul and body. Although it is relatively easy to conceive of the body and what is corporeal, or that which can be known through the senses, to conceive of spirit and soul is difficult and complicated.

People given to intellectual discussions, such as the theologians and philosophers, Shi'ite and Sunni alike, have presented different views concerning the reality of the spirit (*rūḥ*). Yet, what is to some extent certain is that Islām considers spirit and body to be two realities opposed to each other. The body through death loses the characteristics of life and gradually disintegrates, but it is not so with the spirit. Rather, life in its origin and principle belongs to the spirit. When the spirit is joined to the body, the body also derives life from it, and when the spirit separates from the body and cuts its bond to the body—the event that is called death—the body ceases to function while the spirit continues to live.

From what can be learned through deliberation upon the verses of the Holy Qur'ān and the sayings of the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet, the spirit of man is something immaterial which has some kind of relation and connection with the material body. God the Almighty in His Book says, "Verity We created man from a product of wet earth; Then

placed him as a drop (of seed) in a safe lodging; Then fashioned We the drop a clot, then fashioned We the clot a little lump, then fashioned We the little lump bones, Then clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it as another creation" (Qur'ān, XXIII, 12 -14). From the order of these verses, it is clear that at the beginning the gradual creation of matter is described and then, when reference is made to the appearance of the spirit, consciousness and will, another kind of creation is mentioned which is different from the previous form of creation.

In another place it is said, in answer to skeptics who ask how it is possible for the body of man, which after death becomes disintegrated and whose elements become dispersed and lost, to have a new creation and become the original man, "Say: The angel of death, who hath charge concerning you, will gather you, and afterwards unto your Lord ye will be returned" (Qur'ān, XXXII, 11). This means that your bodies disintegrate after death and are lost amidst the particles of the earth, but you yourselves, namely, your spirits, have been taken from your bodies by the angel of death and remain protected with Us.

Besides such verses the Holy Qur'ān in a comprehensive explanation expresses the immateriality of the spirit in itself when it asserts, "They will ask thee concerning the Spirit. Say: The Spirit is by command of my Lord" (Qur'ān, XVII, 85).

In another place in explaining His command (*amr*) He says, "But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that He saith unto it: Be! And it is. Therefore glory be to Him in Whose hand is the dominion over all things!" (Qur'ān, XXXVI, 81-82). The meaning of these verses is that the command of God in the creation of things is not gradual nor is it bound to the conditions of time and space. Therefore, the spirit which has no reality other than the command of God is not material and in its being does not have material characteristics; that is, it does not have the characteristics of divisibility, change and situation in time and space.

A Discussion of Spirit from Another Perspective

Intellectual investigation confirms the view of the Holy Qur'ān about the spirit. Each of us is aware of a reality within himself which he interprets as "I" and this awareness exists continuously within man. Sometimes man even forgets his head, hands, feet and other members or the whole of the body. But as long as his self exists, the consciousness of "I" does not leave his awareness. This perception cannot be divided or analyzed. Although the body of man is continuously undergoing change and transformation and chooses different locations in space for itself and passes through different moments of time, the reality of "I" remains fixed. It does not undergo any change or transformation. It is clear that if the "I" were material, it would accept the characteristics of matter which are divisibility, change and situation in time and space.

The body accepts all the characteristics of matter and, because of the relation of the spirit and the body, these characteristics are also considered to belong to the spirit. But if we pay the least attention, it becomes evident to man that this moment in time and the next, this point in space or another, this shape or another shape, this direction of motion or any other, are all characteristics of the body. The spirit is free from them; rather each of these determinations reaches the spirit through the body. This same reasoning can be applied in reverse to the power of consciousness and apprehension or knowledge which is one of the characteristics of the spirit. Obviously if knowledge were a material quality, according to the conditions of matter, it would accept divisibility and analysis, and be determined by time and space.

Needless to say, this intellectual discussion could go on at length and there are many questions and answers related to it which cannot be considered in the present context. The brief discussion presented here is only an indication of the Islāmic

belief concerning body and spirit. A complete discussion will be found in works on Islāmic philosophy.¹

Death from the Islāmic Point of View

Although a superficial view would regard death as the annihilation of man and see human life as consisting of only the few days that stand between birth and death, Islām interprets death as the transfer of man from one stage of life to another. According to Islām, man possesses eternal life, which knows no end. Death, which is the separation of the spirit from the body, introduces man to another stage of life in which felicity or disappointment depends upon good or evil deeds in the stage of life before death. The Holy Prophet has said, "You have been created for subsistence, not annihilation. What happens is that you will be transferred from one house to another."²

Purgatory

From what can be deduced from the Holy Book and prophetic traditions, it can be concluded that between death and general resurrection man possesses a limited and temporary life, which is the intermediate stage (*barzakh*), and link between the life of this world and eternal life. After death man is interrogated concerning the beliefs he has held and the good and evil deeds he has performed in this life. After a summary account and judgement, he is subjected to either a pleasant and felicitous life, or an unpleasant and wretched one, depending on the results of the account and judgment. With this newly acquired life, he continues in expectation until the day of general

¹ *Editor's note:* By this reference, the author means especially the writings of Sadr al-Dīn Shīrāzi (Mulla Ṣadra) and the later Islāmic philosophers of Persia, who have discussed the question of the soul and its becoming much more thoroughly than the earlier philosophers. Yet, in the question of the immateriality of the spirit, substantial intellectual proofs are also offered in the writings of Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna).

² *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. III, pp. 161, from the *I'tiqādāt* of Ṣadūq.

resurrection. The condition of man in the life of the intermediate state (purgatory) is very similar to the condition of a person who has been called before a judicial organization in order to have the acts he has committed investigated. He is questioned and investigated until his file is completed. Then he awaits trial.

The soul of man in the intermediate state possesses the same form as in his life in this world.¹ If he be a man of virtue, he lives in happiness and bounty in the proximity of those who are pure and close to the Divine Presence. If he be a man of evil, he lives in affliction and pain and in the company of daemonic forces and "leaders of those who have gone astray."²

God, the Most Exalted, has said concerning the condition of a group of those in the state of felicity, "Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allāh, as dead. Nay, they are living. With their Lord, they have provision. Jubilant (are they) because of that which Allāh hath bestowed upon them of His bounty, rejoicing for the sake of those who have not joined them but are left behind: that there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve. They rejoice because of favor from Allāh and kindness, and that Allāh wasteth not the wage of the believers" (Qur'ān, III, 169-171). And in describing the condition of another group who in the life of this world do not make legitimate use of their wealth and possessions, He says, "Until, when death cometh onto one of them, he saith: My Lord! Send me back, that I may do right in that which I have left behind! But nay! It is but a word that he speaketh; and behind them is a barrier (*barzakh*) until the day when they are raised" (Qur'ān, XXIII, 99-100).

The Day of Judgment—Resurrection

Among sacred texts the Qur'ān is the only one to have spoken in detail about the Day of Judgment. Although the Torah has not mentioned this Day and the Gospels have only alluded to it, the Qur'ān has mentioned the Day of Judgment in hundreds of

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. IV, *Bāb al-Barzakh*.

² *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. IV, *Bāb al-Barzakh*.

places, using different names. It has described the fate awaiting mankind on this Day sometimes briefly and on other occasions in detail. It has reminded mankind many times that faith in the Day of Recompense (Day of Judgment) is on the same scale in its importance as faith in God and is one of the three principles of Islām. It has mentioned that he who lacks this faith, that is, who denies resurrection, is outside the pale of Islām and has no destiny other than eternal perdition.

And this is the truth of the matter because if there were to be no reckoning in God's actions and no reward or punishment, the religious message, which consists of an assemblage of God's decrees and what He has commanded and forbidden, would not have the least effect. Thus, the existence or nonexistence of prophecy and the religious mission would be the same. In fact, its nonexistence would be preferable to its existence, for to accept a religion and follow the regulations of a Divine Law is not possible without the acceptance of restrictions and loss of what appears as "freedom." If to submit to it were to have no effect, people would never accept it and would not give up their natural freedom of action for it. From this argument, it becomes clear that the importance of mentioning and recalling the Day of Judgment is equivalent to that of the principle of the religious call itself.

From this conclusion, it also becomes evident that faith in the Day of Recompense is the most effective factor which induces man to accept the necessity of virtue and abstention from unbecoming qualities and great sins, in the same way that to forget or lack faith in the Day of Judgment is the essential root of every evil act and sin. God the Almighty has said in His Book, "Lo! Those who wander from the way of Allāh have an awful doom, forasmuch as they forgot the Day of Reckoning" (Qur'ān, XXXVIII, 27). As can be seen in this sacred verse, the forgetting of the Day of Judgment is considered to be the root of every deviation. Meditation on the purpose of the creation of man and the Universe, or on the purpose and end of Divine Laws, makes it evident that there will be a Day of Judgment.

When we meditate on creation, we see that there is no action (which of necessity is also a kind of motion) without an immutable end and purpose. Never is the action, considered independently and in itself, the end. Rather, action is always the prelude to an end and exists by virtue of that end. Even in actions, which superficially appear to be without purpose such as instinctive actions or the play of children and the like, if we study them carefully, we will discover purposes in conformity with the kind of action in question. In instinctive actions, which are usually a form of motion, the end toward which the motion takes place is the purpose and aim of the action. And in the play of children there is an imaginary end, the attainment of which is the purpose of playing. The creation of man and the world is the action of God and God is above the possibility of performing a senseless and purposeless act such as creating, nourishing, taking away life and then again creating, nourishing and taking away life, that is, of making and destroying, without there being an immutable end and a permanent purpose which He pursues in these acts. There must of necessity be a permanent aim and purpose in the creation of the world and of man. Of course, its benefit does not accrue to God, who is above every need, but rather to the creatures themselves. Thus it must be said that the world and man are directed toward a permanent reality and a more perfect state of being which knows no annihilation and corruption.

Also, when we study with care the condition of men from the point of view of religious education and training, we see that as a result of Divine guidance and religious training people become divided into the two categories of the virtuous and the evil. Yet in this life, there is no distinction made between them. Rather, on the contrary, success usually belongs to those who are evil and unjust. To do good is combined with difficulty and hardship and every kind of privation and endurance of oppression. Since this is so, Divine Justice requires the existence of another world in which each individual receives the just reward his actions deserve, and lives a life in conformity with his merits.

Thus, it is seen that careful consideration of the purpose of creation and of the Divine Laws leads to the conclusion that the Day of Judgment will come for every person. God, the Exalted, makes this clear in His Book, saying, "And We created not the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in play. We created them not save with truth; but most of them know not" (Qur'ān, XLIV, 38-39). Also, "And We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in vain. That is the opinion of those who disbelieve. And woe unto those who disbelieve, from the fire! Shall We treat those who believe and do good works as those who spread corruption in the earth; or shall We treat the pious as the wicked?" (Qur'ān, XXXVIII, 28-29). In another place He says, "Or do those who commit ill-deeds suppose that We shall make them as those who believe and do good works, the same in life and death? Bad is their judgment! And Allāh hath created the heavens and the earth with truth, and that every soul may be repaid what it hath earned. And they will not be wronged" (Qur'ān, XLV, 21-22).

Another Explanation

In discussing the outward and inward meaning of the Qur'ān, we pointed out that the Islāmic sciences are explained in the Qur'ān through different means and that these are in general divided into the two dimensions of the exoteric and the esoteric. The exoteric explanation is the one that conforms to the level of the simple thought patterns and understanding of the majority, in contrast to the esoteric, which belongs to the elite alone and which can be comprehended only with the aid of the vision which comes through the practice of the spiritual life.

The explanation that emanates from the exoteric view presents God as the absolute ruler of the world of creation, all of which is His dominion. God has created many angels, whose number is legion, to carry out and execute the commands He issues for

every aspect of creation. Each part of creation and its order is connected to a special group of angels who are the protectors of that domain. The human species is His creation and human beings are His servants who must obey His commands and prohibitions; and the prophets are the bearers of His messages, the conveyors of the laws and regulations, which He has sent to mankind and has demanded that mankind obey. God has promised reward and recompense for faith and obedience, and punishment and painful retribution for infidelity and sin, and will not break His promise. Also since He is just, His justice demands that in another state of being the two groups of virtuous and evil men, who in this world do not have a mode of life in accordance with their good and evil nature, become separated, the virtuous to possess a good and happy life and the evil a bad and wretched existence.

Thus, God, according to His Justice and the promises He has made, will resurrect all men who live in this world after their death, without exception, and will investigate in detail their beliefs and works. He will judge them according to the truth and give everyone who has a right his due. He will carry out justice on behalf of all who have been oppressed. He will render to each person the reward for his own actions. One group will be assigned to eternal heaven and the other group to eternal hell.

This is the exoteric explanation of the Holy Qur'ān. Of course, it is true and correct. But its language is composed of terms and images born of man's social life and thought in order that its benefit might be more general and the radius of its action more widespread. Those who have penetrated into the spiritual meaning of things and are to a certain extent familiar with the esoteric language of the Holy Qur'ān, however, understand from these sayings meanings which lie above the level of simple and popular comprehension. The Holy Qur'ān, amidst its simple and

uncomplicated expositions, occasionally alludes to the esoteric aim and purpose of its message. Through many allusions, the Holy Qur'ān affirms that the world of creation with all its parts, of which man is one, is moving in its "existential becoming" which is always in the direction of perfection toward God.¹ A day will come when this movement will come to an end and will lose completely its separate and independent existence before the Divine Majesty and Grandeur.

Man, who is a part of the world and whose special perfection is through consciousness and knowledge, is also moving with haste toward God. When he reaches the end of this becoming, he will observe plainly the Truth and Oneness of the Unique God. He will see that power, dominion and every other quality of perfection belong exclusively to the sacred Divine Essence; the reality of each thing as it is will be revealed to him. This is the first stage in the world of eternity. If, through his faith and good works in this world, man is able to have communication, relation, familiarity and friendship with God and the beings in His proximity, then with a felicity and joy that can never be described in human language he will live near God and in the company of the pure beings of the world above. But if, because of desire and attachment to the life of this world and its transient and baseless pleasures, he is cut off from the world above and has no familiarity with or love for God and the pure beings of His Presence, then he becomes afflicted with painful torment and eternal adversity. It is true that a man's good and evil acts in this world are transient and disappear, but the forms of these good and evil acts become established in the soul of man and accompany him everywhere. They are the capital of his future life, be it sweet or bitter.

¹ *Editor's note:* As it has been mentioned before this metaphysical principle should not in any way be confused with the modern theories of evolution or progress as these terms are usually understood.

These affirmations can be drawn from the following verses: God says, "Lo! Unto thy Lord is the (absolute) return" (Qur'ān, XCVI, 8). And He says, "Beware all things reach Allāh at last?" (Qur'ān, XLII, 53); and "The (absolute) command on that day is Allāh's" (Qur'ān, LXXXII, 19). Also in the account of the address made to certain members of the human race on the Day of Judgment, He says, "(And unto the evildoer it is said): Thou wast in heedlessness of this. Now We have removed from thee thy covering, and piercing is thy sight this day" (Qur'ān, L, 22).

Concerning the hermeneutic interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of the Holy Qur'ān (the truth from which the Holy Qur'ān originates) God says, "Await they aught save the fulfillment [*ta'wīl*] thereof? On the day when the fulfillment thereof cometh, those who were before forgetful thereof will say: The messengers of our Lord did bring the Truth! Have we any intercessors, that they may intercede for us? Or can we be returned (to life on earth), that we may act otherwise than we used to act? They have lost their souls, and that which they devised hath failed them" (Qur'ān, VII, 53). He says, "On that day, Allāh will pay them their just due, and they will know that Allāh, He is the Manifest Truth" (Qur'ān, XXIV, 25). And, "Thou verily, O man, art working toward thy Lord a work which thou wilt meet (in His presence)" (Qur'ān, LXXXIV, 6). Also, "Whose looketh forward to the meeting with Allāh (let him know that) Allāh's reckoning is surely nigh" (Qur'ān, XXIX, 5). And, "And whoever hopeth for the meeting with his Lord, let him do righteous work, and make none sharer of the worship due unto his Lord" (Qur'ān, XVIII, 111). And, "But ah! Thou soul at peace! Return unto thy Lord, content in His good pleasure! Enter thou among My bondmen! Enter thou My Garden!" (Qur'ān, LXXXIX 27-30). Also, He says, "But when the great disaster cometh, The Day when man will call to mind his (whole) endeavor, And hell will stand forth visible to him who seeth, Then, as for him who rebelled, And chose the life of the world, Lo! Hell will be his home. But as for

him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from lust, Lo! The Garden will be his home" (Qur'ān, LXXIX 34-41).

Concerning the identity of the reward of actions, God says, "(Then it will be said); O ye who disbelieve! Make no excuses for yourselves this day. Ye are only being paid for what ye used to do" (Qur'ān, LXVI, 7).

The Continuity and Succession of Creation

This world of creation which we observe does not possess an endless and perpetual life. A day will come when the life of this world and its inhabitants will come to an end as confirmed by the Holy Qur'ān. God says, "We created not the heavens and the earth and all that is between them save with truth, and for a term appointed" (Qur'ān, XLVI, 3).

One could ask if before the creation of this world and the present race of humanity there had been another world and another human race; or, if after the life of this world and its inhabitants terminates, as the Holy Qur'ān declares, that it will, another world and humanity will be created. The direct response to these questions cannot be found in the Holy Qur'ān. There, one can only discover allusions to the continuity and succession of creation. But in the traditions (*riwāyāt*) of the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet transmitted to it is asserted that creation is not limited to this visible world. Many worlds have existed in the past and will exist in the future. The sixth Imām has said, "Perhaps you think God has not created a humanity other than you. No, I swear to God that He has created thousands upon thousands of mankind and You are the last among them."¹

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. XIV, pp. 79.

And the fifth Imām has said, "God—the Exalted—since creating the world has created seven kinds none of whom were at the race of Adam. He created them from the surface of the earth and set each being one after another with its kind upon the earth. Then, He created Adam, the father of mankind, and brought his children into being from him."¹ And also the sixth Imām has said, "Do not think that after the passing away of the affair of this world and the Day of Judgment and the placing of the virtuous in heaven and the evil in hell there will no longer be anyone to worship God. No, never! Rather, again God will create servants without the marriage of the male and the female to know His Oneness and to worship Him."²

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. XIV, pp.79.

² *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. XIV, pp.79.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE IMĀM (IMĀMOLOGY)

The Meaning of Imām

Imām or leader is the title given to a person who takes the lead in a community in a particular social movement or political ideology or scientific or religious form of thought. Naturally, because of his relation to the people he leads, he must conform his actions to their capabilities in both important and secondary matters.

As is clear from the preceding chapters, the sacred religion of Islām takes into consideration and gives directives concerning all aspects of the life of all men. It investigates human life from the spiritual point of view and guides man accordingly, and it intervenes on the plane of formal and material existence from the point of view of the life of the individual. In the same way it intervenes on the plane of social life and its regulation (i.e., on the plane of government)

Thus the Imāmate and religious leadership in Islām may be studied from three different perspectives: from the perspective of Islāmic government, of Islāmic sciences and injunctions and of leadership and innovative guidance in the spiritual life. Shī'ism believes that since Islāmic society is in dire need of guidance in each of these three aspects, the person who occupies the function of giving that guidance and is the leader of the community in these areas of religious concern must be appointed by God and the Prophet. Naturally, the Prophet himself was also appointed by Divine Command.

The Imāmate and Succession

Man through his God-given nature realizes without any doubt that no organized society, such as a country or city or village or tribe or even a household consisting of a few human beings, can continue to subsist without a leader and ruler who puts the wheel of the society in motion and whose will governs each individual's will and induces the members of that society to perform their social duty. Without such a ruler, the parts of this society become dispersed in a short time and disorder and confusion reign. Therefore, he who is the radar and governor of a society, whether it be great or small, if he is interested in his own position and the continued existence of his society, will appoint a successor for himself if he is to be absent from his function temporarily or permanently. He will never abandon the domain of his role and be oblivious to its existence or annihilation. The head of a household who bids farewell to his house and household for a journey of a few days or months will appoint one of the members of the household or someone else as his successor and will leave the affairs of the house in his hands. The head of an institution, or the principal of a school, or the owner of a shop, if he is to be absent even for a two hours will select someone to represent him.

In the same way, Islām is a religion which according to the text of the Holy Book and the Sunnah is established upon the basis of the primordial nature of things. It is a religion concerned with social life as has been seen by every observer near and far. The special attention God and the Prophet have given to the social nature of this religion can never be denied or neglected. It is an incomparable feature of Islām. The Holy Prophet was never oblivious to the problem of the formation of social groupings wherever the influence of Islām penetrated. Whenever a city or village fell into Muslim hands, he would, in the shortest time possible, appoint a governor or ruler in whose hands he would leave the affairs of the Muslims.¹ In very

¹ *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 60- 61; *Sirah of Ibn Hushām*, vol. IV, pp. 197.

important military expeditions ordered for the Holy War (*jihād*) he would appoint more than one leader and commander, in order of succession. In the war of Mut`ah, he even appointed four leaders, so that if the first were to be killed the second would be recognized as the head and his command accepted and if the second were to be killed, then the third, and so on.¹

The Prophet also displayed great interest in the problem of succession and never failed to appoint a successor when necessary. Whenever he left Medina he would appoint a governor in his own place.² Even when he migrated from Mecca to Medina and there was as yet no idea as to what would occur, in order to have his personal affairs managed in Mecca for those few days and to give back to people what had been entrusted to him, he appointed `Alī—may peace be upon him—as his successor.³ In the same way, after his death `Alī was his successor in matters concerning his debts and personal affairs.⁴ The Shi`ites claim that for this very reason it is not conceivable that the Prophet should have died without appointing someone as his successor, without having selected a guide and leader to direct the affairs of Muslims and to turn the wheels of Islāmic society.

Man's primordial nature does not doubt the importance and value of the fact that the creation of a society depends on a set of common regulations and customs which are accepted in practice by the majority of the groups in that society, and that the existence and continuation of that society depend upon a just government which agrees to carry out these regulations completely. Anyone who possesses intelligence does not neglect or forget this fact. At the same time, one can doubt neither the breadth and detailed nature of the Islāmic Shari`ah nor the

¹ *Tārīkh Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 52-59; *Sirah of Ibn Hushām*, vol. II, pp. 223.

² *Tārīkh Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 44 and 59-60; *Sirah of Ibn Hushām*, vol. II, pp. 251, vol. IV, pp. 173 and 272.

³ *Tārīkh Ya`qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 29; *Tārīkh Abū'l-Fidā'* vol. I, pp. 126; *Sirah of Ibn Hushām*, vol. II, pp. 98.

⁴ *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 664, from the Musnad of Ahmad and others.

importance and value the Prophet considered it to possess, so that he made many sacrifices for its application and preservation. Nor can one debate about the mental genius, perfection of intelligence, perspicacity of vision or power of deliberation of the Prophet (beside the fact that this is affirmed through revelation and prophecy).

According to established traditions in both Sunni and Shī`ite collections of hadīth (in the chapter on temptations and seditious and others) transmitted from the Prophet, the Prophet foretold seditions and tribulations which would entangle Islāmic society after his death, and the forms of corruption which would penetrate the body of Islām, and later worldly rulers who would sacrifice this pure religion for their own impure, unscrupulous ends. How is it possible that the Prophet should not neglect to speak of the details of events and trials of years or even thousands of years after him, and yet would neglect the condition that had to be brought into being most urgently after his death? Or that he should be negligent and consider as unimportant a duty that is on the one hand simple and evident and on the other significant to such a degree? How could he concern himself with the most natural and common acts such as eating, drinking and sleeping and give hundreds of commands concerning them, yet remain completely silent about this important problem and not appoint someone in his own place?

Even if we accepted the hypothesis (which Shī`ism does not accept) that the appointment of the ruler of Islāmic society is given by the Shari`ah to the people themselves, still it would be necessary for the Prophet to give an explanation concerning this matter. He would have had to give the necessary instructions to the community so that they would be aware of the problem upon which the existence and growth of Islāmic society and the life of religious symbols and observances depended and relied. Yet there is no trace of such a prophetic explanation or religious instruction. If there had been such a thing, those who succeeded the Prophet and held the reins of power in their hands would not have opposed it. Actually, the first caliph transferred the caliphate to the second caliph by bequest. The

second caliph chose the third caliph through a six-man council of which he was himself a member and whose order of procedure he had himself determined and ordered. Mu`āwiyah forced Imām Ḥasan to make peace and in this way carried away the caliphate. After this event, the caliphate was converted into an hereditary monarchy. Gradually many religious observances identified with the early years of Islāmic rule (such as holy war, commanding what is lawful and prohibiting what is forbidden, the establishment of boundaries for human action) were weakened or even disappeared from the political life of the community, nullifying in this domain the efforts of the Prophet of Islām. Shi`ism has studied and investigated the primordial nature of man and the continuous tradition of wisdom that has survived among men. It has penetrated into the principal purpose of Islām, which is to revivify man's primordial nature, and has investigated such things as the methods used by the Prophet in guiding the community; the troubles which entangled Islām and the Muslims and which led to division and separation; and the short life of the Muslim governments of the early centuries, which were character by negligence and lack of strict religious principles. As a result of these studies, Shi`ism has reached the conclusion that there are sufficient traditional texts left by the Prophet to indicate the procedure for determining the Imām and successor of the Prophet. This conclusion is supported by Qur`ānic verses and ḥadīths which Shi`ism consider, as sound, such as the verse on wilāyah and the ḥadīths of Ghadīr, Safīnah, Thaḳalayn, Ḥaqq, Manzilah, Da`wat `Ashīrah Aqrabīn and others.¹ But of course these ḥadīths, most of which are also accepted by Sunnism, have not been understood in the same way by Shi`ism and Sunnism. Otherwise, the whole question of succession would not have arisen. Whereas these ḥadīths appear to Shi`ites as a clear

¹ *Editor's note:* These refer to different sayings of the Prophet in which the question of the Imām is discussed. The most famous of these, *Ḥadīth Ghadīr*, as mentioned above is the traditional basis for the celebration of the "Feast of Ghadīr." Since the Safavid period, this feast has acquired a particular political significance in Iran, since it marks the formal transfer of political power to 'Alī and under whose aegis all Shi`ite kings have ruled.

indication of the Prophet's intention in the question of succession, they have been interpreted by Sunnis in quite another way so as to leave this question open and unanswered.

To prove the caliphate of `Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib, Shī'ites have had recourse to Qur'ānic verses, including the following: "Your friend (*walī*) can be only Allāh; and His messenger and those who believe, who establish worship and pay the poor-due, and bow down (in prayer) [or, and this reading is accepted by `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī: "... pay the poor-due while bowing down (in prayer)"]" (Qur'ān, V, 55). Shī'ite and Sunni commentators alike agree that this verse was revealed concerning `Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib and many Shī'ite and Sunni traditions exist as supporting this view. Abū-Dharr Ghifārī has said: "One day, we prayed the noontime prayers with the Prophet. A person in need asked people to help but no one gave him anything. The person raised his hands to the sky saying, Oh God! Be witness that in the mosque of the Prophet no one gave me anything. `Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib was in the position of genuflection in the prayers. He pointed with his finger to the person who took his ring and left. The Prophet, who was observing the scene raised his head toward heaven and said: 'Oh God! My brother Moses said to Thee, "Expand my breast and make easy my tasks and make my tongue eloquent as that they will comprehend my words, and make my brother, Aaron, my helper and vizier," [cf. Qur'ān, XXVIII, 351.] Oh God! I am also Thy prophet; expand my breast and make easy my tasks and make `Alī my vizier and helper.' Abū Dharr says, "The words of the Prophet had not as yet finished when the verse [cited above] was revealed."¹

Another verse which the Shī'ites consider as proof of the caliphate of `Alī is this: "This day are those who disbelieve in despair of (ever harming) your religion; so fear them not, fear Me. This day have I perfected your religion for you and

¹ Ṭabari, *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, Cairo, 1356, pp. 16. This ḥadīth has been recorded with a slight variation in *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. II, pp. 293. In his *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 103, Baḥrānī cites 24 ḥadīths from Sunni sources and of Shī'ite sources concerning the conditions and reasons for the revelation of this Qur'ānic verse.

completed My favor unto you, and have chosen to you as religion AL-ISLĀM V, 3). The obvious meaning of this verse is that before that particular day the infidels had hoped that a day would come when Islām would die out, but God through the actualization of a particular event made them lose forever the hope that Islām would be destroyed. This very event was the cause of the strength and perfection of Islām and of necessity could not be a minor occasion such as the promulgation of one of the injunctions of religion. Rather, it was a matter of such importance that the continuation of Islām depended upon it.

This verse seems to be related to another verse which comes toward the end of the same chapter: "O Messenger! Make known that which hath been revealed unto thee from thy Lord, for if thou do it not, thou will not have conveyed His message. Allāh will protect thee from mankind." (Qur'ān, V, 67). This verse indicates that God commanded a mission of great concern and importance to the Prophet which if not accomplished would endanger the basis of Islām and prophecy. But the matter was so important that the Prophet feared opposition and interference and in awaiting suitable circumstances delayed it, until there came a definite and urgent order from God to execute this command without delay and not to fear anyone. This matter also was not just a particular religious injunction in the ordinary sense, for to preach one or several religious injunctions is not so vital that if a single one of them were not preached it would cause the destruction of Islām. Nor did the Prophet of Islām fear anyone in preaching the injunction and laws of religion.

These indications and witnesses add weight to the Shī'ite traditions which assert that these verses were revealed at Ghadīr Khumm and concern the spiritual investiture (wilāyah) of `Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib. Moreover, many Shī'ite and Sunni commentators have confirmed this point.

Abū-Sa`id Khidri says: "The Prophet in Ghadīr Khumm invited people toward `Alī and took his arm and lifted it a high that the white spot in the armpit of the Prophet of God could be seen. Then this verse was revealed: "This day have I perfected your

religion for you and completed My favor unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLĀM.' Then the Prophet said, 'God is great (*Allāhu Akbar*) that religion has become perfected and that God's bounty has been completed. His satisfaction attained and the wilāyah of `Alī achieved.' Then he added, 'For whomever I am the authority and guide `Alī is also his guide and authority. Oh God! Be friendly with the friends of `Alī and the enemy of his enemies. Whoever helps him, help him, and whoever leaves him, leave him.'"¹

In summary, we can say that the enemies of Islām who did everything possible to destroy it, when they lost all hope of achieving this end, were left with only one hope. They thought that since the protector of Islām was the Prophet, after his death Islām would be left without a guide and leader and would thus definitely perish. But in Ghadīr Khumm, their wishes were brought to nought and the Prophet presented `Alī as the guide and leader of Islām to the people. After `Alī, this heavy and necessary duty of guide and leader was left upon the shoulders of his family.²

Some of the ḥadīths pertaining to Ghadīr Khumm, the investiture of `Alī, and the significance of the Household of the Prophet are cited here:

Ḥadīth Ghadīr

The Prophet of Islām upon returning from the farewell pilgrimage stopped in Ghadīr Khumm, assembled the Muslims and, after delivering a sermon, chose `Alī as the leader and guide of Muslims.

Barā' says: "I was in the company of the Prophet during the farewell pilgrimage. When we reached Ghadīr Khumm, he

¹ Bahrānī, *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 336, where six Sunni and fifteen Shi'ite hadiths concerning the occasion and reason for the revelation of the above Qur'anic verse are cited.

² For further explanation see `Allāmah Ṭabaṭabā'i, *Tafsīr Mizān*, vol. V, Tehran, 1377, pp. 177-214, and vol. VI, Tehran, 1377, pp. 50-64.

ordered that place to be cleaned. Then he took `Alī's hand and placed him on his right side. Then he said, 'Am I the authority whom you obey?' They answered, 'We obey your directions.' Then he said, 'For whomever I am his master (*mawlā*) and the authority whom he obeys, `Alī will be his master. Oh God! Be friendly with the friends of `Alī and enemy of the enemies of `Alī.' Then `Umar ibn al-Al-Khaṭṭāb said to `Alī, 'May this position be pleasing to you, for now you are my master and the master of all the believes.'¹

Ḥadīth Safīnah

Ibn `Abbās says, "The Prophet said, 'My household is like the ship of Noah; whoever embarks upon it will be saved and whoever turns away from it will be drowned.'²

Ḥadīth Thaqaalayn

Zayd ibn Arqam has recounted that the Prophet said, "It seems that God has called me unto Himself and I must obey His call. But I leave two great and precious things among you: the Book of God and My Household. Be careful as to how you behave toward them. These two will never be separated from each other until they encounter me at Kawthar (in Paradise.)"³ Ḥadīth

¹ *Al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, vol. V, pp. 208 and vol. VII, pp. 346; *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, pp. 67; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah* of Ibn Ṣabbāgh, Najaf, 1950, vol. II, pp. 23; *Khaṣā'is* of Nasā'ī, Najaf, 1369, pp. 31. In his *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 79, Bahrānī has cited eighty nine different chains of transmission for this ḥadīth from Sunni sources and forty three from Shi'ite sources.

² *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, p. 20; *al-Sawā'iq al-Muḥriqah* of Ibn Ḥajar, Cairo, 1312, pp. 150 and 184; *Tārikh al-Khulafā'* of Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī, Cairo, 1952, pp. 307; *Nūr al-Abṣār* of Shiblijanjī, Cairo, 1312, pp. 114. In his *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 237, Bahrānī cites eleven chains of transmission for this ḥadīth from Sunni sources and seven from Shi'ite sources.

³ *Al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, vol. V, pp. 209; *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā* pp. 16; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 22; *Khaṣā's*, pp. 30; *al-Sawā'iq al-Muḥriqah*, pp. 147. In *Ghāyat al-Marām*, thirty nine versions of this ḥadīth

Thaqalayn is one of the most strongly established ḥadīths, and has been transmitted through many chains of transmission and in different versions. Shī'ites and Sunnis agree concerning its authenticity. Several important points can be deduced from this ḥadīth and its like: (1) In the same way that the Holy Qur'ān will remain until the Day of Judgment, the progeny of the Holy Prophet will also remain. No period of time will be without the existence of the figure which calls the Imām, the real leader and guide of men. (2) Through these two great trusts (*amānat*), the Prophet has provided for all the religious and intellectual needs of the Muslims. He has introduced his Household to Muslims as authorities in knowledge and has pronounced their words and deeds to be worthy and authoritative. (3) One must not separate the Holy Qur'ān from the Household of the Prophet. No Muslim has a right to reject "sciences" of the members of the Household of the Prophet and remove himself from under their direction and guidance. (4) If people obey the members of the Household and follow their words, they will never be led astray. God will always be with them. (5) The answers to the intellectual and religious needs of men are to be found in the hands of the members of the Household of the Prophet. Whoever follows them will not fall into error and will reach true felicity; that is, the members of the Household are free from error and sin and are inerrant. From this, it can be concluded that by "Members of the Household" and "progeny" is not meant all the descendants and relatives of the Prophet. Rather, specific individuals are meant who are perfect in the religious sciences and are protected against error and sin so that they are qualified to guide and lead men. For Shī'ism, these individuals consist of 'Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib and his eleven descendants who were chosen to the Imāmate one after another. This interpretation is also confirmed by the Shī'ite traditions. For example, Ibn 'Abbās has said, "I said to the Prophet, 'Who are your descendant whose love is obligatory [upon Muslims]?' He

said, "Alī, Fāṭimah, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn."¹ Jābir has transmitted that the Prophet has said, "God placed the children of all prophets in their 'backbone' but placed my children in the backbone of 'Alī."²

Ḥadīth Ḥaqq

Umm-Salamah has said, "I heard from the Prophet of God who said, "Alī is with the Truth (ḥaqq) and the Qur'ān, and the Truth and the Qur'ān are also with 'Alī, and they will be inseparable until they come upon me at Kawthar."³

Ḥadīth Manzilah

Sa'd ibn Waqqāsh has said, "The Prophet of God said to 'Alī, 'Are you not satisfied to be to me what Hārūn (Aaron) was to Moses except that after me there will not be another prophet?'"⁴

Ḥadīth Da'wat 'Ashīrah

The Prophet invited his relatives to luncheon and after the meal told them, "I know of no one who has brought to his people better things than I have brought to You. God has commanded me to invite you to draw toward Him. Who is there who will assist me in this matter and be my brother and inheritor (*wasī*) and vicegerent (*khalīfah*) among you?" All remained silent, but 'Alī, who was the youngest of all, exclaimed, "I shall be your

¹ *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah* of Sulaymān ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qundūzī, Tehran, 1308, pp. 311.

² *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, pp. 318.

³ *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 539, where the substance of this ḥadīth has been recounted in fifteen versions from Sunni sources and eleven from Shi'ite sources.

⁴ *Al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, vol. VII, pp. 339; *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqba*, pp. 63; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 21; *Kifayāt al-Ṭālib* of Kanjī Shafī'i, Najaf, 1356, pp. 148-154; *Khaṣā's*, pp. 19-25; *al-Ṣawā'iq al-Muhriqah*, pp. 177. In *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 109, one hundred versions of this ḥadīth have been recounted in Sunni sources and seventy from Shi'ite sources.

deputy and aide." Then the Prophet put his arms around him and said, "He is my brother, inheritor and vicegerent. You must obey him." Then the group began to depart laughing and telling Abū-ʿĀlib, "Muḥammad has ordered you to obey your son."¹

Hudhayfah has said, "The Prophet of God said, 'If you make ʿAlī my vicegerent and successor—which I do not think you will do—you will find him a perspicacious guide who will direct you toward the straight path!'"²

Ibn Mardawayh has said that the Prophet said, "Whoever wishes that his life and death be like mine and that he enter paradise should after me love ʿAlī and follow my household, for they are my descendants and have been created from my clay. My knowledge and understanding have been bestowed upon them. Therefore, woe unto those who deny their virtues. My intercession [on the Day of Judgement] will never include them."³

Affirmation of the Previous Section

Much of the argument of Shī'ism concerning the succession to the Prophet rests on the belief that during the last days of his illness, the Prophet in the presence of some of his companions asked for some paper and ink⁴ so that something could be written which, if obeyed by the Muslims, would prevent them from going astray. Some of those present considered the Prophet to be too ill to be able to dictate anything and said, "The Book of God is sufficient for us." There was so much clamor raised over this matter that the Holy Prophet told those present

¹ *Tārīkh Abi'l-Fidā'*, vol. I, pp. 116.

² *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*, of Abū-Nu'aym Iṣfahānī, vol. I, Cairo, 1351, pp. 64; *Kifāyat al-Ṭālib*, pp. 67.

³ *Muntakhab Kanz al-'Ummāl*, on the margin of *Musnad Aḥmad*, Cairo, 1368, vol. V, pp. 94.

⁴ *Al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihāyah*, vol. V, pp. 227; *al-Kāmil*, vol. II, pp. 217; *Tārīkh Ṭabarī*, vol. II, pp. 436; *Sharḥ* of Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd vol. I, pp. 133.

to leave, for in the presence of a prophet there should not go any noise or clamor.

Considering what has been said above about ḥadīths concerning succession and the events that followed upon the death of the Prophet, especially the fact that `Alī was not consulted in the question of selecting the Prophet's successor, Shī`ites conclude that the Holy Prophet had wanted to dictate his definitive views about the person who was to succeed him but was not able to do so.

The purpose of the utterances of some of those present seems to have been to cause confusion and prevent this final decision from being clearly announced. Their interruption of the Holy Prophet's discourse does not seem to be what it appears outwardly, that is concern with the possibility that the Prophet might utter incongruous words due to the intensity of his illness. For, first of all, throughout his illness the Holy Prophet was not heard to have uttered any meaningless or incongruous words and no such thing has been transmitted concerning him. Moreover, according to the principles of Islām, the Prophet is protected by God from uttering delirious or senseless words and is inerrant.

Secondly, if the words mentioned by some of those present on that occasion before the Prophet were meant to be of a serious nature, there would have been no place for the next phrase, "The Book of God is sufficient for us." In order to prove that the Prophet might utter incongruous words under unusual circumstances the reason of his serious illness would have been used rather than the claim that with the Qur`ān there was no need of the Prophet's words. For it could not be hidden from any Muslim that the very text of the Book of God considers the obedience to the Holy Prophet to be obligatory and his words to be in a sense like the Word of God. According to the text of the Holy Qur`ān, Muslims must obey the injunctions of both God and the Prophet.

Thirdly, an incident involving illness occurred during the last days of the life of the first caliph, who in his last will and testament chose the second caliph as his successor. When

`Uthmān was writing the will according to the order of the caliph, the caliph fainted. Yet the second caliph did not repeat the words that had been uttered in the case of the Prophet according to the ḥadīth of "Pen and Paper."¹ This fact has been confirmed in a ḥadīth related by Ibn `Abbās.² And it has been accounted of the second caliph that he said, "Alī deserved the caliphate but the Quraysh would not have been able to bear his caliphate, for had he become caliph, he would have forced the people to accept the pure truth and follow the right path. Under his caliphate, they would not have been able to transgress the boundaries of justice and thus would have sought to engage in war with him."³

Obviously, according to religious principles, one must force him who has deviated from the truth to follow the truth; one must not abandon the truth for the sake of one who has abandoned it. When the first caliph was informed⁴ that some of the Muslim tribes had refused to pay religious tax, he ordered war and said, "If they do not give me the tithes which they gave to the Prophet, I shall fight against them." Evidently by this saying he meant most of all that truth and justice must be revived at all costs. Surely the problem of the legitimate caliphate was more important and significant than tithes, and Shī'ism believes that the same principle applied by the first caliph to this matter should have been applied by the whole early community to the problem of succession to the Holy Prophet.

The Imāmate and Its Role in the Exposition of the Divine Sciences

In the discussion of prophecy, it was mentioned that, according to the immutable and necessary law of general guidance, each created species is guided through the path of genesis and

¹ *Al-Kāmil*, vol. II, pp. 292; *Sharḥ* of Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd vol. I, pp. 54.

² *Sharḥ* of Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, vol. I, pp. 134.

³ *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 137.

⁴ *Al-Bidāyah wa'l-Nihayah*, vol. VI, pp. 311.

generation toward the perfection and felicity of its own kind. The human species is not an exception to this general law. Man must be guided through the very "instinct" of seeking reality and through thought concerning his life in society in such a way that his well being in this world and the next is guaranteed. In other words, to attain human happiness and perfection, man must accept a series of doctrines and practical duties and base his life upon them.

It has, moreover, already been said that the way to understand that total program for life called religion is not through reason but through revelation and prophecy, which manifests itself in certain pure beings among mankind who are called prophets. It is the prophets who receive from God, through revelation, the knowledge of men's duties and obligations as human beings and who make these known to men so that by fulfilling them men may attain felicity.

It is evident that in the same way that this reasoning proves the necessity for knowledge to guide men to the attainment of happiness and perfection, it also proves the necessity for the existence of individuals who preserve intact the total body of that knowledge and who instruct the people when necessary. Just as the Divine Compassion necessitates the existence of persons who come to know the duties of mankind through revelation, so also it makes it necessary that these human duties and actions of celestial origin remain forever preserved in the world and as the need arises be presented and explained to mankind. In other words, there must always be individuals who preserve God's religion and expound it when necessary.

The person who bears the duty of guarding and preserving the Divine message after it is revealed and is chosen by God for this function is called the Imām, in the same way that the person who bears the prophetic spirit and has the function of receiving Divine injunctions and laws from God is called the Prophet. It is

possible for the Imāmate¹ and prophecy (*nubuwwah*) either to be joined in one person or to be separate.

The proof given previously to demonstrate the inerrancy of prophets, also demonstrates the inerrancy of the Imāms, for God must preserve His true religion intact and in such a state that it can be propagated among mankind at all times. And this is not possible without inerrancy, without Divine protection against error.

The Difference Between Prophet and Imām

The previous argument about the reception of Divine injunctions and laws by the prophets only proves the basis of prophecy, namely the receiving of Divine injunctions. The argument does not prove the persistence and continuity of prophecy, even though the very fact that these prophetic injunctions have been preserved naturally raises the idea of persistence and continuity. That is why it is not necessary for a prophet (*nabī*) always to be present among mankind, but the existence of the Imām, who is the guardian of Divine religion, is on the contrary a continuous necessity for human society. Human society can never be without the figure whom Shi'ism calls the Imām whether or not he is recognized and known. God, the Most Exalted, has said in His Book: "So if these disbelieve in it, We have already entrusted it to a people [i.e., the Imāms] who do not disbelieve in it" (Qur'ān, VI, 90).²

¹ *Editor's note:* In this context of course Imāmate refers to the specific Shi'ite conception of Imām and not to the general Sunni usage of the term which in most instances is the same as caliph.

² *Editor's note:* The translation of this Qur'ānic verse is that of A. J. Arberry, *The Qur'ān Interpreted*, London, 1964, which corresponds more closely to the Arabic original than Pickthall's which is as follows "But if these disbelieve therein, then indeed We shall entrust it to a people who will not be disbelievers therein."

As mentioned above, the functions of prophecy and Imāmate may be joined in one person who is then appointed to the functions of both prophet and Imām, or to both the reception of the Divine law and its preservation and explanation. And sometimes they can be separated, such as in periods during which there is no prophet living but when there is a true Imām living among men. It is obvious that the number of God's prophets is limited and the prophets have not been present in every period and age.

It is also of significance to note that in God's Book, some of the prophets have been introduced as Imāms such as the Prophet Abraham, about whom is said, "And (remember) when his Lord tried Abraham with (His) commands, and he fulfilled them, He said: Lo! I have appointed thee a leader [*imām*] for mankind. (Abraham) said: And of my offspring (will there be leaders)? He said: My covenant includeth not wrongdoers" (Qur'ān, 11, 124). And God has also said, "And We made them chiefs [*imāms*] who guide by Our command..." (Qur'ān, XXI, 73).

The Imāmate and Its Role in the Esoteric Dimension of Religion

In the same way that the Imām is the guide and leader of men in their external actions so does he possess the function of inward and esoteric leadership and guidance. He is the guide of the caravan of humanity which is moving inwardly and esoterically toward God. In order to elucidate this truth, it is necessary to run to the following two introductory comments. First of all, without any doubt, according to Islām as well as other Divine religions, the sole means of attaining real and eternal happiness or misery, felicity or wretchedness, is by means of good or evil actions which man comes to recognize through the instruction of Divine religion as well as through his own primordial and God-given nature and intelligence. Second, through the means of revelation and prophecy, God has praised or condemned man's actions according to the language of human beings and the society in which they live. He has promised those Who do good and obey and accept the teachings

of revelation a happy eternal life in which are fulfilled all desires that accord with human perfection. And to the evildoers and the iniquitous, He has given warning of a bitter perpetual life in which is experienced every form of misery and disappointment.

Without any doubt God, who stands in every way above all that we can imagine, does not, as we do, possess "thought" moulded by a particular social structure. The relations of master and servant, ruler and ruled, command and prohibition, reward and punishment, do not exist outside our social life. The Divine Order is the system of creation itself, in which the existence and appearance of everything is related solely to its creation by God according to real relations and to that alone. Furthermore, as has been mentioned in the Holy Quran¹ and prophetic ḥadith, religion contains truths and verities above the common comprehension of man, which God has revealed to us in a language we can comprehend on the level of our understanding.

It can thus be concluded that there is a real relationship between good and evil actions and the kind of life that is prepared for man in eternity, a relation that determines the happiness or misery of the future life according to the Divine Will. Or in simpler words, it can be said that each good or evil action brings into being a real effect within the soul of man which determines the character of his future life. Whether he understands it or not, man is like a child who is being trained. From the instructions of the teacher, the child hears nothing but do's and don'ts but does not understand the meaning of the actions he performs. Yet, when he grows up, as a result of virtuous mental and spiritual habits attained inwardly during the period of training, he is able to have a happy social life. If, however, he refuses to submit to the instructions of the teacher, he will undergo nothing but misery and unhappiness. Or he is

¹ For example: "By the Scripture which maketh plain. Lo! We have appointed it a Lecture in Arabic that haply ye may understand. And lo! in the Source of Decrees, which We possess, it is indeed sublime, decisive" (Qur'ān, XLIII, 2-4).

like a sick person who, when in the care of a physician, takes medicine, food and special exercises as directed by the physician and who has no other duty than to obey the instructions of his doctor. The result of this submission to his orders is the creation of harmony in his constitution which is the source of health as well as every form of physical enjoyment and pleasure. To summarize, we can say that within his outward life, man possesses an inner life, a spiritual life, which is related to his deeds and actions and develops in relation to them, and that his happiness or misery in the hereafter is completely dependent upon this inner life.

The Holy Qur'ān also confirms this explanation.¹ In many verses, it affirms the existence of another life and another spirit for the virtuous and the faithful, a life higher than this life and a spirit more illuminated than the spirit of man as we know it here and now. It asserts that man's acts have inner effects upon his soul that remain always with him. In prophetic sayings there are also many references to this point. For example, in the Ḥadīth *Mi'rāj* (ḥadīth of the nocturnal ascension) God addresses the Prophet in these words: "He who wishes to act according to My satisfaction must possess three qualities: he must exhibit a thankfulness that is not mixed with ignorance, a remembrance upon which the dust of forgetfulness will not settle, and a love in which he does not prefer the love of creatures rather than My love. If he loves Me, I love him; I will open the eye of his heart with the sight of My majesty and will not hide from him the allies of My creatures. I will confide in

¹ Such as these verses: "And every soul cometh along with it a driver and a witness, (And unto the evildoers it is said): Thou wast in heedlessness of this. Now We have removed from thee thy covering, and piercing is thy sight this day." (Qur'ān, I, 21-22) "Whosoever doeth right, whether male or female, and is a believer, him verily We shall quicken with good life." (Qur'ān, XVI, 91) "Obey Allāh and the messenger when He calleth you to that which quickeneth you." (Q.... VIII, 24) "On the day when every soul will find itself confronted with all that it hath done of good and evil." (Qur'ān, III, 30) "Lo! We it is Who bring the dead to life. We record that which they send before (them) and their footprints. And all things We have kept in a clear register." (Qur'ān, XXXVI, 12).

him in the darkness of the night and the light of the day until conversation and intercourse with creatures terminates. I will make him hear My word and the word of My angels. I will reveal to him the secret which I have veiled from My creatures. I will dress him with the robe of modesty until the creatures feel ashamed before him. He will walk upon the earth having been forgiven. I will make his heart possess consciousness and vision and I will not hide from him anything in Paradise or in the Fire. I will make known to him whatever people experience on the Day of Judgement in the way of terror and calamity."¹

Abū-`Abdullāh—may peace be upon him—has recounted that the Prophet of God—may peace and blessing be upon him—received Hārithah ibn Mālik ibn al-Nu'mān and asked him, "How art thou, Oh Hārithah?" He said, "Oh Prophet of God, I live as a true believer." The Prophet of God said to him, "Each thing possesses its own truth. What is the truth of thy word?" He said, "Oh Prophet of God! My soul has turned away from the world. My nights are spent in a state of awakedness and my days in a state of thirst. It seems as if I am gazing at the Throne of my Lord and the account has been settled, and as if I am gazing at the people of paradise who are visiting each other in heaven, and as if I hear the cry of the people of hell in the fire." Then the Prophet of God said, "This is a servant whose heart God has illuminated."²

It must also be remembered that often one of us guides another in a good or evil matter without himself carrying out his own words. In the case of the prophets and Imāms, however, whose guidance and leadership is through Divine Command, such a situation never occurs. They themselves practice the religion whose leadership they have undertaken. The spiritual life toward which they guide mankind is their own spiritual life,³ for

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. XVII, pp. 9.

² *Al-Wāfi* by Mulla Muhsin Fayḍ Kāshāni, Tehran, 1310-14, vol. III, pp. 33.

³ "Is He who leadeth to the Truth more deserving that He should be followed, or he who findeth not the way unless he (himself) be guided. What aileth you is How judge ye?" (Qur'ān, X, 36)

God will not place the guidance of others in someone's hand unless He has guided him Himself. Special Divine guidance can never be violated or infringed upon.

The following conclusions can be reached from this discussion:

(1) In each religious community, the prophets and Imāms are the foremost in the perfection and realization of the spiritual and religious life they preach, for they must and do practice their own teachings and participate in the spiritual life they profess.

(2) Since they are first among men and the leaders and guides of the community, they are the most virtuous and perfect of men.

(3) The person upon whose shoulders lies the responsibility for the guidance of a community through Divine Command, in the same way that he is the guide of man's external life and acts, is also the guide for the spiritual life, and the inner dimension of human life and religious practice depends upon his guidance.¹

The Imāms and Leaders of Islām

The previous discussions lead us to the conclusion that in Islām, after the death of the Holy Prophet, there has continuously existed and will continue to exist within the Islāmic community (*ummah*) an Imām (a leader chosen by

¹ "And We made them chiefs [Imāms] who guide by Our command, and We inspired in them the doing of good deeds." (Qur'ān, XXI, 73). "And when they became steadfast and believed firmly in Our revelations, We appointed from among them leaders [Imāms] who guided by Our command." (Qur'ān, XXXI, 24) One can conclude from these that, besides being an outward leader and guide, the Imām possesses also a kind of spiritual power to guide and attract which belongs to the world of the Spirit. He influences and conquers the hearts of people of capability through the Truth, the light and the inner aspect of his being and thus guides them toward perfection and the ultimate goal of existence.

God). Numerous prophetic ḥadīths¹ have been transmitted in Shī'ism concerning the description of the Imāms, their number, the fact that they are all of the Quraysh and of the Household of the Prophet, and the fact that the promised Mahdī is among them and the last of them. Also, there are definitive words of the Prophet concerning the Imāmate of 'Alī and his being the first Imām and also definitive utterances of the Prophet and 'Alī concerning the Imāmate of the second Imām the same way the Imāms before have left definitive statements concerning the Imāmate of these who were to come after them.² According to these utterances contained in Twelve-Imām Shī'ite sources, the Imāms are twelve in number and their holy names are as follows: (1) 'Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib; (2) Ḥasan ibn 'Alī; (3) Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī; (4) 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn; (5) Muḥammad ibn 'Alī (6) Ja'far ibn Muḥammad; (7) Mūsā ibn Ja'far (8) 'Alī ibn Mūsā; (9) Muḥammad ibn 'Alī; (10) 'Alī ibn Muḥammad; (11) Ḥasan ibn 'Alī; and (12) the Mahdī.

¹ "Jābir ibn Samarah has said that he heard the Prophet of God say, 'Until the time of twelve vicegerents (*khalīfah*), this religion will continue to be powerful.' Jābir said, 'The people repeated the formula 'Allāh is Great' and cried. Then the Prophet said something softly. I asked my father, 'Oh Father, what did he say?' My father answered, 'The Prophet said, 'All the vicegerents will be from Quraysh.'" *Ṣaḥīḥ of Abū-Dāwūd*, Cairo, 1348, vol. II, pp. 207; *Musnad Aḥmad*, vol. V, pp. 92. Several other ḥadīths resembling this are also found. And Salmān Fārsī said, 'I came upon the Prophet and saw Ḥusayn—upon whom be peace—on his knees as he was kissing his eyes and mouth and saying, 'Thou art a noble man, son of a noble man, an Imām, son of an Imām, a 'Proof' (*ḥujjah*), son of 'Proof,' the father of the nine 'Proofs' of which the ninth is their 'Support' (*qā'im*).'" *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, pp. 308.

² See *al-Ghadīr; Ghāyat al-Marām, Ithbāt al-Hudāt* of Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, Qum, 1337-39; *Dhakhā'ir al-Uqūbā: Manāgib of Khwārzmi*, Najaf, 1385; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣ* of Sibṭ ibn Jawzī, Tehran, 1285; *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah; al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah; Dalā'il al-Imāmah* of Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Tabarī, Najaf, 1369; *al-Naṣṣ wa'l-Ijtihād* of Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn Mūsawī, Najaf, 1375; *Uṣūl al-Kāfi* vol. I; and *Kitāb al-Irshād* of Shaykh Mufīd, Tehran, 1377.

A Brief History Of The Lives Of The Twelve Imams

The First Imām

Amīr al-mu'minīn `Alī¹—upon whom be peace—was the son of Abū-Ṭālib, the Shaykh of the Banū-Hāshim. Abū-Ṭālib was the uncle and guardian of the Holy Prophet and the person who had brought the Prophet to his house and raised him like his own son. After the Prophet was chosen for his prophetic mission, Abū-Ṭālib continued to support him and repelled from him the evil that came from the infidels among the Arabs and especially the Quraysh.

According to well-known traditional accounts, `Alī was born ten years before the commencement of the prophetic mission of the Prophet. When six years old, as a result of famine in and around Mecca, he was requested by the Prophet to leave his father's house and come to the house of his cousin, the Prophet. There he was placed directly under the guardianship and custody of the Holy Prophet.²

A few years later, when the Prophet was endowed with the Divine gift of prophecy and for the first time received the Divine revelation in the cave of Ijirā', as he left the cave to return to town and his own house he met `Alī on the way. He told him what had happened and `Alī accepted the new faith.³ Again in a gathering when the Holy Prophet had brought his relatives together and invited them to accept his religion, he said the first person to accept his call would be his vicegerent and inheritor and deputy. The only person to rise from his place and

¹ *Editor's note:* As mentioned above in Shi'ite Islām, the title Amīr al-Mu'minīn is preserved for `Alī and is never used in the case of others.

² *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 14; *Manāqib* of Khwārzmi, pp. 17.

³ *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, pp. 58; *Manāqib* of Khwārzmi, pp. 16-22; *Yanābi' al-Mawaddah*, pp. 68-72.

accept the faith was `Alī and the Prophet accepted his declaration of faith.¹ Therefore, `Alī was the first man in Islām to accept the faith and is the first among the followers of the Prophet to have never worshipped other than the One God.

`Alī was always in the company of the Prophet until the Prophet migrated from Mecca to Medina. On the night of the migration to Medina (hijrah) when the infidels had surrounded the house of the Prophet and were determined to invade the house at the end of the night and cut him to pieces while he was in bed, `Alī slept in place of the Prophet while the Prophet left the house and set out for Medina.² After the departure of the Prophet, according to his wish `Alī gave back to the people the trusts and charges that they had left with the Prophet. Then he went to Medina with his mother, the daughter of the Prophet and two other women.³ In Medina also, `Alī was constantly in the company of the Prophet in private and in public. The Prophet gave Fāṭimah, his beloved daughter from Khadījah, to `Alī as his wife and when the Prophet was creating bonds of brotherhood among his companions, he selected `Alī as his brother.⁴

`Alī was present in all the wars in which the Prophet participated, except the battle of Tabūk when he was ordered to stay in Medina in place of the Prophet.⁵ He did not retreat in any battle nor did he turn his face away from any enemy. He

¹ *Kitāb al-Irshād* of Mufid, pp. 4; *Yanābi' al-Mawaddah* pp.122.

² *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah* pp. 28-30; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ* pp. 34; *Yanābi' al-Mawaddah*, pp. 105; *Manāqib* of Khwārzmi, pp. 73-74.

³ *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah* pp. 43.

⁴ *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah* pp. 20; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 20-24; *Yanābi' al-Mawaddah*, pp. 63-65.

⁵ *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah* pp. 21; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 18; *Manāqib* of Khwārzmi, pp. 47.

never disobeyed the Prophet, so that the Prophet said, "‘Alī is never separated from the Truth nor the Truth from ‘Alī."¹

On the day of the death of the Prophet, ‘Alī was thirty-three years old. Although he was foremost in religious virtues and the most outstanding among the companions of the Prophet, he was pushed aside from the caliphate on the claim that he was too young and that he had many enemies among the people because of the blood of the polytheists he had spilled in the wars fought alongside the Prophet. Therefore, ‘Alī was almost completely cut off from public affairs. He retreated to his house where he began to train competent individuals in the Divine sciences and in this way he passed the twenty-five years of the caliphate of the first three caliphs who succeeded the Prophet. When the third caliph was killed, people gave their allegiance to him and he was chosen as caliph.

During his caliphate of nearly four years and nine months, ‘Alī followed the way of the Prophet and gave his caliphate the form of a spiritual movement and renewal and began many different types of reforms. Naturally, these reforms were against the interests of certain parties that sought their own benefit. As a result, a group of the companions (foremost among whom were Ṭalḥah and Zubayr, who also gained the support of ‘Ā’ishah and especially Mu‘āwiyah) made a pretext of the death of the third caliph to raise their heads in opposition and began to revolt and rebel against ‘Alī.

In order to quell the civil strife and sedition, ‘Alī fought a war near Basra, known as the "Battle of the Camel," against Ṭalḥah and Zubayr in which ‘Ā’ishah, "the Mother of the Faithful," was also involved. He fought another war against Mu‘āwiyah on the border of Iraq and Syria which lasted for a year and a half and is famous as the "Battle of Ṣiffīn." He also fought against the

¹ *Manāqib Āl Abi-Ṭālib*, by Muhammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Shahrāshūb, Qum, n.d., vol. III, pp. 62 and 218; *Ghāyat al-Marām*, pp. 539; *Yanābi‘ al-Mawaddah*, pp. 104.

Khawārij¹ at Nahrawān, in a battle known as the "Battle of Nahrawān." Therefore, most of the days of 'Alī's caliphate were spent in overcoming internal opposition. Finally, in the morning of the 19th of Ramaḍān in the year 40 AH, while praying in the mosque of Kūfah, he was wounded by one of the Khawārij and died as a martyr during the night of the 21st.² According to the testimony of friend and foe alike, 'Alī had no shortcomings from the point of view of human perfection. And in the Islāmic virtues he was a perfect example of the upbringing and training given by the Prophet. The discussions that have taken place concerning his personality and the books written on this subj act by Shī'ites, Sunnis and members of other religions, as well as the simply curious outside any distinct religious bodies, are hardly equaled in the case of any other personality in history. In science and knowledge, 'Alī was the most learned of the companions of the Prophet and of Muslims in general. In his learned discourses, he was the first in Islām to open the door for logical demonstration and proof and to discuss the "divine sciences" or metaphysics (*ma'arif ilāhiyah*). He spoke concerning the esoteric aspect of the Qur'ān and devised Arabic grammar in order to preserve the Qur'ān's form of expression. He was the most eloquent Arab in speech (as has been mentioned in the first part of this book).

The courage of 'Alī was proverbial. In all the wars in which he participated during the lifetime of the Prophet, and also afterward, he never displayed fear or anxiety. Although in many battles such as those of Uḥud, Ḥunayn, Khaybar and Khandaq the aides to the Prophet and the Muslim army trembled in fear or dispersed and fled, he never turned his back to the enemy. Never did a warrior or soldier engage 'Alī in battle and come out of it alive. Yet, with full chivalry he would never slay a weak enemy nor pursue those who fled. He would not engage in surprise attacks or in turning streams of water upon the enemy.

¹ *Editor's note:* The Khawārij, literally those who stand "outside," refers to a group who opposed both 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah after the Battle of Siffin and later formed an extremist group that disobeyed established authority and was adamantly opposed by both the Sunnis and the Shī'ites.

² *Manāqib Āl Abī-Tālib*, vol. III, pp. 312; *al-Fuḍūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 113-123; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 172-180.

It has been definitively established historically that in the Battle of Khaybar in the attack against the fort he reached the ring of the door and with sudden motion tore off the door and cast it away.¹

Also on the day when Mecca was conquered, the Prophet ordered the idols to be broken. The idol "Hubal" was the largest idol in Mecca, a giant stone statue placed on the top of the Ka`bah. Following the command of the Prophet, `Alī placed his feet on the Prophet's shoulders, climbed to the top of the Ka`bah, pulled "Hubal" from its place and cast it down.²

`Alī was also without equal in religious asceticism and the worship of God. In answer to some who had complained of `Alī's anger toward them, the Prophet said, "Do not reproach `Alī for he is in a state of Divine ecstasy and bewilderment."³ Abū'l-Dardā', one of the companions, one day saw the body of `Alī in one of the palm plantations of Medina lying on the ground as stiff as wood. He went to `Alī's house to inform his noble wife, the daughter of the Prophet, and to express his condolences. The daughter of the Prophet said, "My cousin (`Alī) has not died. Rather, in fear of God he has fainted. This condition overcomes him often."

There are many stories told of `Alī's kindness to the lowly, compassion for the needy and the poor, and generosity and munificence toward those in misery and poverty. `Alī spent all that he earned to help the poor and the needy, and himself lived in the strictest and simplest manner. `Alī loved agriculture and spent much of his time digging wells, planting trees and cultivating fields. But all the fields that he cultivated or wells that he built he gave in endowment (*waqf*) to the poor. His endowments, known as the "alms of `Alī," had the noteworthy income of twenty-four thousand gold dinars toward the end of his life.⁴

¹ *Tadhkirat al-Khawāss*, pp. 27.

² *Tadhkirat al-Khawāss*, pp. 27 and *Manāqib* of Khwārzmi, pp. 71.

³ *Manāqib Āl Abi-Tālib*, vol. III, pp. 221; *Manāqib* of Khwārzmi, pp. 92.

⁴ *Nahj al-Balāghah*, part III, book 24.

The Second Imām

Imām Hasan Muḥtabā—upon whom be peace—was the second Imām. He and his brother Imām Ḥusayn were the two sons of Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī and Ḥaḍrat Fāṭimah, the daughter of the Prophet. Many times the Prophet had said, "Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are my children." Because of these same words, 'Alī would say to his other children, "You are my children and Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are the children of the Prophet."¹

Imām Ḥasan was born in the year 3 AH in Medina² and shared in the life of the Prophet for somewhat over seven years, growing up during that time under his loving care. After the death of the Prophet which was no more than three, or according to some, six months earlier than the death of Ḥaḍrat Fāṭimah, Ḥasan was placed directly under the care of his noble father. After the death of his father, through Divine Command and according to the will of his father, Imām Ḥasan became Imām; he also occupied the outward function of caliph for about six months, during which time he administered the affairs of the Muslims. During that time, Mu'āwiyah, who was a bitter enemy of 'Alī and his family and had fought for years with the ambition of capturing the caliphate, first on the pretext of avenging the death of the third caliph and finally with an open claim to the caliphate, marched his army into Iraq, the seat of Imām Ḥasan's caliphate. War ensued during which Mu'āwiyah gradually subverted the generals and commanders of Imām Ḥasan's army with large sums of money and deceiving promises until the army rebelled against Imām Ḥasan.³ Finally, the Imām was forced to make peace and to yield the caliphate to Mu'āwiyah, provided it would again return to Imām Ḥasan

¹ *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 21 and 26; *Dhakhā'ir al-'Uqbā*, pp. 67 and 121.

² *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 28; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 60; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 133; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 193; *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, pp. *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 461.

³ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 172; *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 33; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 144.

after Mu'āwiyah's death and the Imām's household and partisans would be protected in every way.¹

In this way, Mu'āwiyah captured the Islāmic caliphate and entered Iraq. In a public speech, he officially made null and void all the peace conditions² and in every way possible placed the severest pressure upon the members of the Household of the Prophet and the Shī'ah. During all the ten years of his Imāmate, Imām Ḥasan lived in conditions of extreme hardship and under persecution, with no security even in his own house. In the year 50 AH, he was poisoned and martyred by one of his own household who, as has been accounted by historians, had been motivated by Mu'āwiyah.³

In human perfection, Imām Ḥasan was reminiscent of his father and a perfect example of his noble grandfather. In fact, as long as the Prophet was alive, he and his brother were always in the company of the Prophet who even sometimes would carry them on his shoulders. Both Sunni and Shi'ite sources have transmitted this saying of the Holy Prophet concerning Ḥasan and Ḥusayn: "These two children of mine are Imāms whether they stand up or sit down." (allusion to whether they occupy the external function of caliphate or not).⁴ Also there are many traditions of the Holy Prophet and 'Alī concerning the fact that Imām Ḥasan would gain the function of Imāmate after his noble father.

The Third Imām

Imām Ḥusayn (Sayyid al-Shuhadā', "the lord among martyrs"), the second child of 'Alī and Fāṭimah, was born in the year 4 AH

¹ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 172; *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 33; *al-Imāmah wa'l-Siyāsah* of 'Abdullāh ibn Muslim ibn Qutaybah, Cairo, 1327-31, vol. I, pp. 163; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 145; and *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 197.

² *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 173; *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 35; and *al-Imāmah wa'l-Siyāsah*, vol. 1, pp. 164.

³ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 174; *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 42; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 146; and *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 211.

⁴ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 181; and *Ithbāt al-Hudāt*, vol. V, pp 129 and 134.

and after the martyrdom of his brother, Imām Ḥasan Muḥtabā, became Imām through Divine Command and his brother's will.¹ Imām Ḥusayn was Imām for a period of ten years, all but the last six months coinciding with the caliphate of Mu'āwiyah. Imām Ḥusayn lived under the most difficult outward conditions of suppression and persecution. This was due to the fact that, first of all, religious laws and regulations had lost much of their weight and credit, and the edicts of the Umayyad government had gained complete authority and power. Secondly, Mu'āwiyah and his aides made use of every possible means to put aside and move out of the way the Household of the Prophet and the Shī'ah, and thus obliterate the name of 'Alī and his family. And above all, Mu'āwiyah wanted to strengthen the basis of the caliphate of his son, Yazīd, who because of his lack of principles and scruples was opposed by a large group of Muslims. Therefore, in order to quell all opposition, Mu'āwiyah had undertaken newer and more severe measures. By force and necessity Imām Ḥusayn had to endure these days and to tolerate every kind of mental and spiritual agony and affliction from Mu'āwiyah and his aiders until in the middle of the year 60 AH, Mu'āwiyah died and his son Yazīd took his place.²

Paying allegiance (*bay'ah*) was an old Arab practice which was carried out in important matters such as that of kingship and governorship. Those who were ruled, and especially the well-known among them, would give their hand in allegiance, agreement and obedience to their king or prince and in this way would show their support for his actions. Disagreement after allegiance was considered as disgrace and dishonor for a people and, like breaking an agreement after having signed it officially, it was considered as a definite crime. Following the example of the Holy Prophet, people believed that allegiance, when given by free will and not through force, carried authority and weight.

¹ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 179; *Ithbāt al-Hudāt*, vol. V, pp. 168-212; and *Ithbāt al-Waḥīyah* of Mas'ūdī, Tehran, 1320, pp. 125.

² *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 182; *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. II, pp. 226-228; and *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 163.

Mu`āwiyah had asked the well-known among the people to give their allegiance to Yazīd, but had not imposed this request upon Imām Ḥusayn.¹ He had especially told Yazīd in his last will that if Ḥusayn refused to pay allegiance he should pass over it in silence and overlook the matter, for he had understood correctly the disastrous consequences which would follow if the issue were to be pressed. But because of his egoism and recklessness, Yazīd neglected his father's advice and immediately after the death of his father ordered the governor of Medina either to force a pledge of allegiance from Imām Ḥusayn or send his head to Damascus.²

After the governor of Medina informed Imām Ḥusayn of this demand, the Imām, in order to think over the question, asked for a delay and overnight started with his family toward Mecca. He sought refuge in the sanctuary of God which in Islām is the official place of refuge and security. This event occurred toward the end of the month of Rajab and the beginning of Sha`bān of 60 AH. For nearly four months Imām Ḥusayn stayed in Mecca in refuge. This news spread throughout the Islāmic world. On the one hand many people who were tired of the iniquities of Mu`āwiyah's rule and were even more dissatisfied when Yazīd became caliph, corresponded with Imām Ḥusayn and expressed their sympathy for him. On the other hand a flood of letters began to flow, especially from Iraq and particularly the city of Kūfah, inviting the Imām to go to Iraq and accept the leadership of the populace there with the aim of beginning an uprising to overcome injustice and iniquity. Naturally such a situation was dangerous for Yazīd.

The stay of Imām Ḥusayn in Mecca continued until the season for pilgrimage when Muslims from all over the world poured in groups into Mecca in order to perform the rites of the ḥajj. The Imām discovered that some of the followers of Yazīd had

¹ *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 88.

² *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 88; *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 182; *al-Imāmah wa'l-Siyāsah*, vol. I, 203; *Tārīkh Ya`qūbi*, vol. II, pp. 229; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 163; and *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 235.

entered Mecca as pilgrims (*hajjīs*) with the mission to kill the Imām during the rites of *hajj* with the arms they carried under their special pilgrimage dress (*iḥrām*).¹

The Imām shortened the pilgrimage rites and decided to leave. Amidst the vast crowd of people, he stood up and in a short speech announced that he was setting out for Iraq.² In this short speech, he also declared that he would be martyred and asked Muslims to help him in attaining the goal he had in view and to offer their lives in the path of God. On the next day, he set out with his family and a group of his companions for Iraq.

Imām Ḥusayn was determined not to give his allegiance to Yazīd and knew full well that he would be killed. He was aware that his death was inevitable in the face of the awesome military power of the Umayyads, supported as it was by corruption in certain sectors, spiritual decline and lack of will power among the people, especially in Iraq. Some of the outstanding people of Mecca stood in the way of Imām Ḥusayn and warned him of the danger of the move he was making. But he answered that he refused to pay allegiance and give his approval to a government of injustice and tyranny. He added that he knew that wherever he turned or went he would be killed.³ He would leave Mecca in order to preserve the respect for the house of God and not allow this respect to be destroyed by having his blood spilled there.

While on the way to Kūfah and still a few days' journey away from the city, he received news that the agent of Yazīd in Kūfah had put to death the representative of the Imām in that city and also one of the Imām's determined supporters who was a well-known man in Kūfah. Their feet had been tied and they had been dragged through the streets.⁴ The city and its surroundings were placed under strict observation and

¹ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 201.

² *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 89.

³ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 204; and *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 168.

⁴ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 204; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 170; and *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyin* of Abū'l-Faraj Isfahānī, second edition, p. 73.

countless soldiers of the enemy were awaiting him. There was no way open to him but to march ahead and to face death. It was here that the Imām expressed his definitive determination to go ahead and be martyred; and so he continued on his journey.¹

Approximately seventy kilometres from Kūfah, in a desert named Karbalā', the Imām and his entourage were surrounded by the army of Yazīd. For eight days they stayed in this spot during which the circle narrowed and the number of the enemy's army increased. Finally the Imām, with his household and a small number of companions were encircled by an army of thirty thousand soldiers.² During these days, the Imām fortified his position and made a final selection of his companions. At night, he called his companions and during a short speech stated that there was nothing ahead but death and martyrdom. He added that since the enemy was concerned only with his person, he would free them from all obligations so that anyone who wished could escape in the darkness of the night and save his life. Then he ordered the lights to be turned out and most of his companions, who had joined him for their own advantage, dispersed. Only a handful of those who loved the truth—about forty of his close aides—and some of the Banū-Hāshim remained.³

Once again the Imām assembled those who were left and put them to a test. He addressed his companions and Hāshimite relatives saying again that the enemy was concerned only with his person. Each could benefit from the darkness of the night and escape the danger. But this time the faithful companions of the Imām answered each in his own way that they would not deviate for a moment from the path of truth of which the Imām was the leader and would never leave him alone. They said they

¹ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 205; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 171; and *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, p. 73.

² *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 98.

³ *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 98.

would defend his household to the last drop of their blood and as long as they could carry a sword.¹

On the ninth day of the month, the last challenge to choose between "allegiance or war" was made by the enemy to the Imām. The Imām asked for a delay in order to worship overnight and became determined to enter battle on the next day.²

On the tenth day of Muharram of the year 61/680, the Imām lined up before the enemy with his small band of followers, less than ninety persons consisting of forty of his companions, thirty some members of the army of the enemy that joined him during the night and day of war, and his Hāshimite family of children, brothers, nephews, nieces and cousins. That day they fought from morning until their final breath, and the Imām, the young Hāshimites and the companions were all martyred. Among those killed were two children of Imām Ḥasan, who were only thirteen and eleven years old; and a five-year-old child and a suckling baby of Imām Ḥusayn.

The army of the enemy, after ending the war, plundered the *ḥaram* of the Imām and burned his tents. They decapitated the bodies of the martyrs, denuded them and threw them to the ground without burial. Then they moved the members of the *ḥaram*, all of whom were helpless women and girls, along with the heads of the martyrs, to Kūfah.³ Among the prisoners there were three male members; a twenty-two year old son of Imām Ḥusayn who was very ill and unable to move, namely 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn, the fourth Imām; his four year old son, Muḥammad ibn 'Alī, who became the fifth Imām; and finally Ḥasan Muthannā the son of the second Imām who was also the son-in-law of Imām Ḥusayn and who, having been wounded during the war, lay among the dead. They found him near death and through the intercession of one of the generals did not cut off his head.

¹ *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 99; and *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 214.

² *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 98; and *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 214.

³ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. X, pp. 200, 202 and 203.

Rather, they took him with the prisoners to Kūfah and from there to Damascus before Yazīd.

The event of Karbalā', the capture of the women and children of the Household of the Prophet, their being taken as prisoners from town to town and the speeches made by the daughter of 'Alī, Zaynab, and the fourth Imām who were among the prisoners, disgraced the Umayyads. Such abuse of the Household of the Prophet annulled the propaganda which Mu'āwiyah had carried out for years. The matter reached such proportions that Yazīd in public disowned and condemned the actions of his agents. The event of Karbalā' was a major factor in the overthrow of Umayyad rule although its effect was delayed. It also strengthened the roots of Shī'ism. Among its immediate results were the revolts and rebellions combined with bloody wars which continued for twelve years. Among those who were instrumental in the death of the Imām not one was able to escape revenge and punishment.

Anyone who studies closely the history of the life of Imām Ḥusayn and Yazīd and the conditions that prevailed at that time and analyzes this chapter of Islāmic history, will have no doubt that in those circumstances there was no choice before Imām Ḥusayn but to be killed. Swearing allegiance to Yazīd would have meant publicly showing contempt for Islām, something which was not possible for the Imām, for Yazīd not only showed no respect for Islām and its injunctions but also made a public demonstration of impudently treading under foot its basis and its laws. Those before him, even if they opposed religious injunctions, always did so in the guise of religion, and at least formally respected religion. They took pride in being companions of the Holy Prophet and the other religious figures in whom people believed. From this, it can be concluded that the claim of some interpreters of these events is false when they say that the two brothers, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, had two different tastes and that one choose the way of peace and the other the way of war, so that one brother made peace with Mu'āwiyah although he had an army of forty thousand while the other went to war against Yazīd with an army of forty. For we see that this same Imām Ḥusayn, who refused to pay allegiance to Yazīd for

one day, lived for ten years under the rule of Mu`āwiyah, in the same manner as his brother who also had endured for ten years under Mu`āwiyah, without opposing him.

It must be said in truth that if Imām Ḥasan or Imām Ḥusayn had fought Mu`āwiyah, they would have been killed without there being the least benefit for Islām. Their deaths would have had no effect before the righteous appearing policy of Mu`āwiyah, a competent politician who emphasized his being a companion of the Holy Prophet, the "scribe of the revelation," and "uncle of the faithful" and who used every stratagem possible to preserve a religious guise for his role. Moreover, with his ability to set the stage to accomplish his desires, he could have had them killed by their own people and then assumed a state of mourning and sought to revenge their blood, just as he sought to give the impression that he was avenging the killing of the third caliph.

The Fourth Imām

Imām Sajjād (ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn entitled Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn and Sajjād) was the son of the third Imām and his wife, the queen among women, the daughter of Yazdigird the king of Iran. He was the only son of Imām Ḥusayn to survive, for his other three brothers ʿAlī Akbar, aged twenty-five, five-year-old Jaʿfar and ʿAlī Aṣghar (or ʿAbdullāh) who was a suckling baby were martyred during the event of Karbalā'.¹ The Imām had also accompanied his father on the journey that terminated fatally in Karbalā', but because of severe illness and the inability to carry arms or participate in fighting he was prevented from taking part in the holy war and being martyred. So he was sent with the womenfolk to Damascus. After spending a period in imprisonment, he was sent with honor to Medina because Yazīd wanted to conciliate public opinion. But for a second time, by the order of the Umayyad caliph, ʿAbd al-Malik, he was chained

¹ *Maqātil al-Tālibiyyīn*, p. 52 and 59.

and sent from Medina to Damascus and then again returned to Medina.¹

The fourth Imām, upon returning to Medina, retired from public life completely, closed the door of his house to strangers and spent his time in worshipp. He was in contact only with the elite among the Shī`ites such as Abū-Ḥamzah Thumālī, Abū-Khālīd Kābulī and the like. The elite disseminated among the Shī`ah the religious sciences they learned from the Imām. In this way, Shī`ism spread considerably and showed its effects during the Imāmate of the fifth Imām. Among the works of the fourth Imām is a book called *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*. It consists of fifty-seven prayers concerning the most sublime Divine sciences and is known as "The Psalm of the Household of the Prophet."

The fourth Imām died (according to some Shī`ite traditions poisoned by Walīd ibn `Abd al-Malik through the instigation of the Umayyad caliph Hushām²) in 95/712 after thirty-five years of Imāmate.

The Fifth Imām

Imām Muḥammad ibn `Alī al-Bāqir (the word *bāqir* meaning he who cuts and dissects, a title given to him by the Prophet)³ was the son of the fourth Imām and was born in 57/675. He was present at the event of Karbalā' when he was four years old. After his father, through Divine Command and the decree of those who went before him, he became the Imām. In the year 114/732 he died, according to some Shī`ite traditions poisoned by Ibrāhīm ibn Walīd ibn `Abdullāh the nephew of Hushām, the Umayyad caliph.

¹ *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 324; *Ithbāt al-Hudāt*, vol. V, pp. 242.

² *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 176; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 80; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 190.

³ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 246; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 193; and *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 197.

During the Imāmate of the fifth Imām, as a result of the injustice of the Umayyads, revolts and wars broke out in some corner of the Islāmic world every day. Moreover, there were disputes within the Umayyad family itself which kept the caliphate busy and to a certain extent left the members of the Household of the Prophet alone. From the other side, the tragedy of Karbalā' and the oppression suffered by the Household of the Prophet, of which the fourth Imām was the most noteworthy embodiment, had attracted many Muslims to the Imāms.¹ These factors combined to make it possible for people and especially the Shī'ites to go in great numbers to Medina and to come into the presence of the fifth Imām. Possibilities for disseminating truths about Islām and the sciences of the Household of the Prophet, which had never existed for the Imāms before him, were presented to the fifth Imām. The proof of this fact is the innumerable traditions recounted from the fifth Imām and the large number of illustrious men of science and Shī'ite scholars who were trained by him in different Islāmic sciences. These names are listed in books of biographies of famous men in Islām.²

The Sixth Imām

Imām Ja'far ibn Muḥammad, the son of the fifth Imām, was born in 83/702. He died in 148/765 according to Shī'ite tradition, poisoned and martyred through the intrigue of the 'Abbāsīd caliph Maṣṣūr. After the death of his father, he became Imām by Divine Command and decree of those who came before him.

¹ *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 469, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 245; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 202; *Tārīkh Ya'qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 63; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 340; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp.94; *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshub, vol. IV, pp. 210.

² *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 245-253. See also *Kitāb Rijāl al-Kashshī* by Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz Kashshī, Bombay, 1317, *Kitāb Rijāl al-Tūsī* by Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan Tūsī, Najaf, 1381; *Kitāb al-Fihrist* of Tūsī, Calcutta, 1281; and other books of biography.

During the Imāmate of the sixth Imām, greater possibilities and a more favorable climate existed for him to propagate religious teachings. This came about as a result of revolts in Islāmic lands, especially the uprising of the Muswaddah to overthrow the Umayyad caliphate, and the bloody wars which finally led to the fall and extinction of the Umayyads. The greater opportunities for Shi'ite teachings were also a result of the favorable ground the fifth Imām had prepared during the twenty years of his Imāmate through the propagation of the true teachings of Islām and the sciences of the Household of the Prophet.

The Imām took advantage of the occasion to propagate the religious sciences until the very end of his Imāmate, which was contemporary with the end of the Umayyad and beginning of the `Abbāsīd caliphates. He instructed many scholars in different fields of the intellectual and transmitted sciences, such as Zurārah, Muḥammad ibn Muslim, Mu'min al-Ṭāq, Hushām ibn Ḥakam, Abān ibn Taghlib, Hushām ibn Sālim, Ḥurayz, Hushām Kalbī (al-Nassābah) and Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, the alchemist. Even some important Sunni scholars such as Sufyān Thawrī, Abū-Ḥanīfah, the founder of the Ḥanafī school of law, Qāḍī Sukūnī, Qāḍī Abū-Bakhtarī and others, had the honor of being his students. It is said that his classes and sessions of instruction produced four thousand scholars of ḥadīth and other sciences.¹ The number of traditions preserved from the fifth and sixth Imāms is more than all the ḥadīths that have been recorded from the Prophet and the other ten Imāms combined.

But toward the end of his life, the Imām was subjected to severe restrictions placed upon him by the `Abbāsīd caliph Manṣūr, who ordered such torture and merciless killing of many of the descendants of the Prophet who were Shi'ite that his actions

¹ *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 472, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 254; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 212; *Tārikh Ya'qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 119; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 346; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 111; *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 280.

even surpassed the cruelty and heedlessness of the Umayyads. At his order, they were arrested in groups, some thrown into deep and dark prisons and tortured until they died, while others were beheaded or buried alive or placed at the base of or between walls of buildings, and walls were constructed over them.

Hushām, the Umayyad caliph, had ordered the sixth Imām to be arrested and brought to Damascus. Later, the Imām was arrested by Abu'l-'Abbās al-Saffāh, the 'Abbāsīd caliph, and brought to Iraq. Finally, Manṣūr had him arrested again and brought to Sāmarrā' where he had the Imām kept under supervision, was in every way harsh and discourteous to him, and several times thought of killing him.¹ Eventually, the Imām was allowed to return to Medīna where he spent the rest of his life in hiding until he was poisoned and martyred through the intrigue of Manṣūr.²

Upon hearing the news of the Imām's martyrdom, Manṣūr wrote to the governor of Medīna instructing him to go to the house of the Imām on the pretext of expressing his condolences to the family, to ask for the Imām's will and testament and read it. Whoever was chosen by the Imām as his inheritor and successor should be beheaded on the spot. Of course, the aim of Manṣūr was to put an end to the whole question of the Imāmate and to Shī'ite aspirations. When the governor of Medīna, following orders, read the last will and testament, he saw that the Imām had chosen four people rather than one to administer his last will and testament: the caliph himself, the governor of Medīna, 'Abdullāh al-Afṭah, the Imām's older son, and Mūsā, his younger son. In this way, the plot of Manṣūr failed.³

¹ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 254; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 204; and *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 247.

² *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 212; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 111; and *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyah*, pp. 142.

³ *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 310.

The Seventh Imām

Imām Mūsā ibn Ja`far al-Kāzim, the son of the sixth Imām, was born in 128/744 and was poisoned and martyred in prison in 183/799.¹ He became Imām after the death of his father, through Divine Command and the decree of his forefathers. The seventh Imām was contemporary with the `Abbāsīd caliphs, Manṣūr, Hādī, Mahdī and Hārūn. He lived in very difficult times, in hiding, until finally Hārūn went on the ḥajj and in Medina had the Imām arrested while praying in the Mosque of the Prophet. He was chained and imprisoned, then taken from Medina to Basra and from Basra to Baghdad where for years he was transferred from one prison to another. Finally, he died in Baghdad in the Sindī ibn Shāhik prison through poisoning² and was buried in the cemetery of the Quraysh which is now located in the city of Kāzimayn.

The Eighth Imām

Imām al-Riḍā (`Alī ibn Mūsā) was the son of the seventh Imām and according to well-known accounts was born in 148/765 and died in 203/817.³ The eighth Imām reached the Imāmate, after the death of his father, through Divine Command and the decree of his forefathers. The period of his Imāmate coincided with the caliphate of Hārūn, and then his sons Amīn and Ma'mūn. After the death of his father, Ma'mūn fell into conflict with his brother Amīn which led to bloody wars and finally the

¹ *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 310; *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 270; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 214-223; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 146-148; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 348-350; *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 324; and *Tārikh Ya'qūbi*, vol. III, pp. 150.

² *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 279-283; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 222; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 148 and 154; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 348-350; *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 323; and *Tārikh Ya'qūbi*, vol. III, pp. 188.

³ *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 468; *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 284-295; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 225-246; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 175-177; and *Tārikh Ya'qūbi*, vol. III, pp. 188.

assassination of Amīn, after which Ma'mūn became caliph.¹ Until that day the policy of the 'Abbāsīd caliphate toward the Shī'ites had been increasingly harsh and cruel. Every once in a while one of the supporters of 'Alī ('*alawīs*) would revolt, causing bloody wars and rebellions which were of great difficulty and consequence for the caliphate.

The Shī'ite Imāms would not cooperate with those who carried out these rebellions and would not interfere with their affairs. The Shī'ites of that day, who comprised a considerable population, continued to consider the Imāms as their religious leaders to whom obedience was obligatory and believed in them as the real caliphs of the Holy Prophet. They considered the caliphate to be far from the sacred authority of their Imāms, for the caliphate had come to seem more like the courts of the Persian kings and Roman emperors and was being run by a group of people more interested in worldly rule than in the strict application of religious principles. The continuation of such a situation was dangerous for the structure of the caliphate and was a serious threat to it.

Ma'mūn thought of finding a new solution for these difficulties which the seventy-year old policy of his 'Abbāsīd predecessors had not been able to solve. To accomplish this end, he chose the eighth Imām as his successor, hoping in this way to overcome two difficulties: first of all to prevent the descendants of the Prophet from rebelling against the government since they would be involved in the government themselves, and secondly, to cause the people to lose their spiritual belief and inner attachment to the Imāms. This would be accomplished by having the Imāms become engrossed in worldly matters and the politics of the caliphate itself, which had always been considered by the Shī'ites to be evil and impure. In this way, their religious organization would crumble and they would no longer present any dangers to the caliphate. Obviously, after

¹ *Usūl al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, pp. 488; and *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 237.

accomplishing these ends, the removal of the Imām would present no difficulties to the `Abbāsids.¹

In order to have this decision put into effect, Ma'mūn asked the Imām to come to Marw from Medina. Once he had arrived there, Ma'mūn offered him first the caliphate and then the succession to the caliphate. The Imām made his apologies and turned down the proposal, but he was finally induced to accept the successorship, with the condition that he would not interfere in governmental affairs or in the appointment or dismissal of government agents.²

This event occurred in 200/814. But soon Ma'mūn realized that he had committed an error, for there was a rapid spread of Shī'ism, a growth in the attachment of the populace to the Imām and an astounding reception given to the Imām by the people and even by the army and government agents. Ma'mūn sought to find a remedy for this difficulty and had the Imām poisoned and martyred. After his death, the Imām was buried in the city of Tūs in Iran, which is now called Mashhad.

Ma'mūn displayed great interest in having works on the intellectual sciences translated into Arabic. He organized gatherings in which scholars of different religions and sects assembled and carried out scientific and scholarly debates. The eighth Imām also participated in these assemblies and joined in the discussions with scholars of other religions. Many of these debates are recorded in the collections of Shī'ite ḥadith.³

¹ *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 197; and *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 363.

² *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 489; *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 290; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 237; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 352; and *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 363.

³ *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 351; *Kitāb al-Iḥtijāj* of Aḥmad ibn `Ali ibn Abī-Tālib al-Ṭabrasī, Najaf, 1385, vol. II, pp. 170-237.

The Ninth Imām

Imām Muḥammad (ibn 'Alī) al-Taḳī (sometimes called al-Jawād and Ibn al-Riḏā) was the son of the eighth Imām. He was born in 195/809 in Medina and according to Shī'ite traditions was martyred in 220/835, poisoned by his wife, the daughter of Ma'mūn at the instigation of the 'Abbāsīd caliph Mu'taṣīm. He was buried next to his grandfather, the seventh Imām, in Kāzimayn. He became Imām after the death of his father through Divine Command and by the decree of his forefathers. At the time of the death of his father, he was in Medina. Ma'mūn called him to Baghdad which was then the capital of the caliphate and outwardly showed him much kindness. He even gave the Imām his daughter in marriage and kept him in Baghdad. In reality, he wanted in this way to keep a close watch upon the Imām from both outside and within his own household. The Imām spent some time in Baghdad and then with the consent of Ma'mūn set out for Medina where he remained until Ma'mūn's death. When Mu'taṣīm became the caliph, he called the Imām back to Baghdad and, as we have seen, through the Imām's wife had him poisoned and killed.¹

The Tenth Imām

Imām 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Naḳī (sometimes referred to by the title of al-Hādī), was the son of the ninth Imām. He was born in 212/827 in Medina and according to Shī'ite accounts was martyred through poisoning by Mu'tazz the 'Abbāsīd caliph, in 254/868.²

¹ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 297; *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 492-497; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 201-9, *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 377-399; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 247-258; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 358.

² *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 307; *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 497-502; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 216-222, *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, vol. IV, pp. 401-420; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*, pp. 259-265; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 362.

During his lifetime, the tenth Imām was contemporary with seven of the `Abbāsīd caliphs: Ma'mūn, Mu`taşim, Wāthiq, Mutawakkil, Muntaşir, Musta`in and Mu`tazz. It was during the rule of Mu`taşim in 220/835 that his noble father died through poisoning in Baghdad. At that time, `Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Naqī was in Medīna. There he became the Imām through Divine Command and the decree of the Imāms before him. He stayed in Medina teaching religious sciences until the time of Mutawakkil. In 243/857, as a result of certain false charges that were made, Mutawakkil ordered one of his government officials to invite the Imām from Medina to Sāmarrā' which was then the capital. He himself wrote the Imām a letter full of kindness and courtesy asking him to come to the capital where they could meet.¹ Upon arrival in Sāmarrā', the Imām was also shown certain outward courtesy and respect. Yet at the same time Mutawakkil tried by all possible means to trouble and dishonor him. Many times he called the Imām to his presence with the aim of killing and disgracing him and had his house searched.

In His enmity toward the Household of the Prophet, Mutawakkil had no equal among the `Abbāsīd caliphs. He was especially opposed to `Alī, whom he cursed openly. He even ordered a clown to ridicule `Alī at voluptuous banquets. In the year 237/850, he ordered the mausoleum of Imām Ḥusayn in Karbalā' and many of the houses around it to be torn down to the ground. Then water was turned upon the tomb of the Imām. He ordered the ground of the tomb to be plowed and cultivated so that any trace of the tomb would be forgotten.² During the life of Mutawakkil, the condition of life of the descendants of `Alī in the Hijāz had reached such a pitiful state that their womenfolk had no veils with which to cover themselves. Many of them had only one old veil which they wore at the time of the

¹ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 307-313; *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 501; *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshub, vol. IV, pp. 417; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 261; *Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣṣ*, pp. 359; *Ithbāt al-Waṣīyyah*, pp. 176; and *Tārīkh Ya`qūbī*, vol. III, pp. 217.

² *Maqātil al-Tālibiyyin*, pp. 395.

daily prayers. Pressures of a similar kind were put on the descendants of `Alī who lived in Egypt.¹ The tenth Imām accepted in patience the tortures and afflictions of the `Abbāsīd caliph Mutawakkil until the caliph died and was followed by Muntaṣir, Musta`in and finally Mu`tazz, whose intrigue led to the Imām's being poisoned and martyred.

The Eleventh Imām

Imām Ḥasan ibn `Alī al-`Askarī, the son of the tenth Imām, was born in 232/845 and according to some Shī'ite sources was poisoned and killed in 260/872 through the instigation of the `Abbāsīd caliph Mu'tamid.² The eleventh Imām gained the Imāmate, after the death of his noble father, through Divine Command and through the decree of the previous Imāms. During the seven years of his Imāmate, due to untold restrictions placed upon him by the caliphate, he lived in hiding and dissimulation (*taqiyyah*). He did not have any social contact with even the common people among the Shī'ite population. Only the elite of the Shī'ah were able to see him. Even so, he spent most of his time in prison.³

There was extreme repression at that time because the Shī'ite population had reached a considerable level in both numbers and power. Everyone knew that the Shī'ah believed in the Imāmate, and the identity of the Shī'ite Imāms was also known. Therefore, the caliphate kept the Imāms under its close supervision more than ever before. It tried through every possible means and through secret plans to remove and destroy them. Also, the caliphate had come to know that the elite among the Shī'ah believed that the eleventh Imām, according to tradition, cited by him as well as his forefathers, would have a

¹ *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyin*, pp. 395-396.

² *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 315; *Dalā'il al-Imāmah*, pp. 223; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 226; *Manāqib of Ibn Shahrāshūb*, vol. IV, pp. 422; *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 503.

³ *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 324; *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, 512; *Manāqib of Ibn Shahrāshūb*, vol. IV, pp. 429-430.

son who was the promised Mahdī. The coming of the Mahdī had been foretold in authenticated ḥadīths of the Prophet in both Sunni and Shī'ite sources.¹ For this reason, the eleventh Imām, more than other Imāms, was kept under close watch by the caliphate. The caliph of the time had decided definitely to put an end to the Imāmate in Shī'ism through every possible means and to close the door to the Imāmate once and for all.

Therefore, as soon as the news of the illness of the eleventh Imām reached Mu'tamid, he sent a physician and a few of his trusted agents and judges to the house of the Imām to be with him and observe his condition and the situation within his house at all times. After the death of the Imām, they had the house investigated and all his female slaves examined by the midwife. For two years, the secret agents of the caliph searched to the successor of the Imām until they lost all hope.² The eleventh Imām was buried in his house in Sāmarrā' next to his noble father.

Here it should be remembered that during their lifetimes, the Imāms trained many hundreds of scholars of religion and ḥadīth, and it is these scholars who have transmitted to us information about the Imāms. In order not to prolong the matter, the list of their names and works and their biographies have not been included here.³

¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Tirmidhī, Cairo, 1350-52, vol. IX, chapter "Mā jā'a fi'l-ḥudā"; *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Abū-Dāwūd, vol. II, *Kitāb al-Mahdī*; *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Ibn Mājah, vol. II, chapter "Khurūj al-Mahdī"; *Yanābī' al-Mawaddah*, *Kitāb al-Bayān fi Akhbār Ṣāhib al-Zamān* of Kanjī Shāfi'i, Najaf, 1380; *Nūr al-Aḥsār*; *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ*, of Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh al-Khaṭīb, Damascus, 1380; *al-Sawā'iq al-Muḥriqah*; *Is'āf al-Rāghibīn*, of Muḥammad al-Ṣabbān, Cairo, 1281; *al-Fuṣūl al-Muḥimmah*; *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim; *Kitāb al-Ghaybah* by Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nu'mānī, Tehran, 1318; *Kamāl al-Dīn* by Shaykh Sadūq, Tehran, 1301; *Iḥbāt al-Hudāt*; and *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. LI and LII.

² *Kitāb al-Irshād*, pp. 319; and *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, vol. I, pp. 505.

³ See also *Kitāb Rijāl al-Kashshī* by Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz Kashshī, Bombay, 1317; *Kitāb Rijāl al-Ṭusi* by Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan Ṭūsī, Najaf, 1381; *Kitāb al-Fihrist* of Ṭūsī, Calcutta, 1281; and other books of biography.

The Twelfth Imām

The promised Mahdī, who is usually mentioned by his title of Imām al-`Aṣr (the Imām of the "Period") and Šāḥib al-Zamān (the Lord of the Age), is the son of the eleventh Imām. His name is the same as that of the Holy Prophet. He was born in Sāmarrā' in 256/868 and until 260/872 when his father was martyred, lived under his father's care and tutelage. He was hidden from public view and only a few of the elite among the Shī'ah were able to meet him.

After the martyrdom of his father, he became Imām and by Divine Command went into occultation (*ghaybah*). Thereafter, he appeared only to his deputies (*nā'ib*) and even then only in exceptional circumstances.¹

The Imām chose as a special deputy for a time `Uthmān ibn Sa`īd `Umarī one of the companions of his father and grandfather who was his confidant and trusted friend. Through his deputy, the Imām would answer the demands and questions of the Shī'ah. After `Uthmān ibn Sa`īd, his son Muḥammad ibn `Uthmān `Umarī was appointed the deputy of the Imām. After the death of Muḥammad ibn `Uthmān, Abū'l-Qāsim Ḥusayn ibn Rūḥ Nawbakhtī was the special deputy, and after his death, `Alī ibn Muḥammad Simarī was chosen for this task.²

A few days before the death of `Alī ibn Muḥammad Simarī in 329/939, an order was issued by the Imām stating that in six days, `Alī ibn Muḥammad Simarī would die. Henceforth, the special deputation of the Imām would come to an end and the major occultation (*ghaybah kubrā*) would begin and would continue until the day God grants permission to the Imām to manifest himself.

The occultation of the twelfth Imām is, therefore, divided into two parts: the first, the minor occultation (*ghaybah ṣuḡhrā*)

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. LI, pp. 2-34 and pp. 343-66; *Kitāb al-Ghaybah* of Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan Ṭūsī, Tehran, 1324, pp. 214-243; *Ithbāt al-Hudāt*, vol. VI and VII.

² *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. LI, pp. 360-1; *Kitāb al-Ghaybah* of Ṭūsī, pp. 242.

which began in 260/872 and ended in 329/939, lasting about seventy years; the second, the major occultation which commenced in 329/939 and will continue as long as God wills it. In a ḥadīth upon whose authenticity everyone agrees, the Holy Prophet has said, "If there were to remain in the life of the world but one day, God would prolong that day until He sends in it a man from my community and my household. His name will be the same as my name. He will fill the earth with equity and justice as it was filled with oppression and tyranny."¹

On the Appearance of the Mahdī

In the discussion on prophecy and the Imāmate, it was indicated that as a result of the law of general guidance which governs all of creation, man is of necessity endowed with the power of receiving revelation through prophecy, which directs him toward the perfection of the human norm and the well-being of the human species. Obviously, if this perfection and happiness were not possible for man, whose life possesses a social aspect, the very fact that he is endowed with this power would be meaningless and futile. But there is no futility in creation.

In other words, ever since he has inhabited the earth, man has had the wish to lead a social life filled with happiness in its true sense and has striven toward this end. If such a wish were not to have an objective existence, it would never have been imprinted upon man's inner nature, in the same way that if there were no food, there would have been no hunger. Or if there were to be no water, there would be no thirst and if there were to be no reproduction, there would have been no sexual attraction between the sexes.

Therefore, by reason of inner necessity and determination, the future will see a day when human society will be replete with justice and when all will live in peace and tranquillity, when

¹ This particular version is related from 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimmah*, pp. 271.

human beings will be fully possessed of virtue and perfection. The establishment of such a condition will occur through human hands but with Divine succor. And the leader of such a society, who will be the savior of man, is called in the language of the ḥadīth, the Mahdī.

In the different religions that govern the world such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islām, there are references to a person who will come as the savior of mankind. These religions have usually given happy tidings of his coming, although there are naturally certain differences in detail that can be discerned when these teachings are compared carefully. The ḥadīth of the Holy Prophet upon which all Muslims agree, "The Mahdī is of my progeny," refers to this same truth.

There are numerous ḥadīths cited in Sunnī and Shī'ite sources from the Holy Prophet and the Imāms concerning the appearance of the Mahdī, such as that he is of the progeny of the Prophet and that his appearance will enable human society to reach true perfection and the full realization of spiritual life.¹ In addition, there are numerous other traditions concerning the fact that the Mahdī is the son of the eleventh Imām, Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī. They agree that after being born and undergoing a long occultation, the Mahdī will appear again, filling with justice the world that has been corrupted by injustice and iniquity.

As an example, ʿAlī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (the eighth Imām) has said, in the course of a ḥadīth, "The Imām after me is my son, Muḥammad, and after him his son, ʿAlī, and after ʿAlī his son,

¹ Abū-Jaʿfar (the fifth Imām) has said, "When our 'support' (qā'im) rises, Allāh will place his hand upon the heads of His servants. Then through him their minds will come together and through him their intellects will become perfected." (*Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. LII, pp. 328 and 336.) And Abū-ʿAbdullah (the sixth Imām) has said, "Knowledge is comprised of twenty-seven letters, and all that has been brought by the prophets is comprised of two letters; and men have not gained knowledge of anything but these two letters. When our 'support' (qā'im) comes forth, he will make manifest the other twenty-five letters to them so that they become propagated in the form of twenty-seven letters." (*Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. LII, pp. 336.)

Ḥasan, and after Ḥasan his son, al-Ḥujjah al-Qā'im, who is awaited during his occultation and obeyed during his manifestation. If there remains from the life of the world but a single day, Allāh will extend that day until he becomes manifest and fill the world with justice in the same way that it had been filled with iniquity. But when? As for news of the 'hour,' verily my father told me, having heard it from his father who heard it from his father who heard it from his ancestors who heard it from `Alī, that it was asked of the Holy Prophet, "Oh Prophet of God, when will the "support" (qā'im) who is from thy family appear?" He said, "His case is like that of the Hour (of the Resurrection). "He alone will manifest it at its proper time. It is heavy in the heavens and the earth. It cometh not to you save unawares." (Qur'ān, VII, 187).¹

Ṣaqr ibn Abī-Dulaf said, "I heard from Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn `Alī al-Riḍā [the ninth Imām] who said, 'The Imām after me is my son `Alī; his command is my command; his word is my word; to obey him is to obey me. The Imām after him is his son, Ḥasan. His command is the command of his father; his word is the word of his father; to obey him is to obey his father.' After these words, the Imām remained silent. I said to him, 'Oh son of the Prophet, who will be the Imām after Ḥasan?' The Imām cried hard, then said, 'Verify, after Ḥasan his son is the awaited Imām who is 'al-Qā'im bi'l-Ḥaqq (He who is supported by the Truth).'"²

Mūsā ibn Ja'far Baghdādī said, "I heard from the Imām Abū-Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn `Alī [the eleventh Imām] who said, 'I see that after me, differences will appear among you concerning the Imām after me. Whoso accepts the Imāms after the Prophet of God but denies my son is like the person who accepts all the prophets but denies the prophethood of Muḥammad, the Prophet of God—upon whom be peace and blessing. And whoso denies [Muḥammad] the Prophet of God is like one who has denied all the prophets of God, for to obey the last of us is like

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. LI, pp. 154.

² *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. LI, pp. 154.

obeying the first and to deny the last of us is like denying the first. But beware! Verily for my son there is an occultation during which all people will fall into doubt except those whom Allāh protects."¹

The opponents of Shī'ism protest that according to the beliefs of this school the Hidden Imām should by now be nearly twelve centuries old, whereas this is impossible for any human being. In answer, it must be said that the protest is based only on the unlikelihood of such an occurrence, not its impossibility. Of course, such a long lifetime or a life of a longer period is unlikely. But those who study the ḥadīths of the Holy Prophet and the Imāms will see that they refer to this life as one possessing miraculous qualities. Miracles are certainly not impossible nor can they be negated through scientific arguments. It can never be proved that the causes and agents that are functioning in the world are solely those that we see and know and that other causes which we do not know or whose effects and actions we have not seen nor understood do not exist. It is in this way possible that in one or several members of mankind there can be operating certain causes and agents which bestow upon them a very long life of a thousand or several thousand years. Medicine has not even lost hope of discovering a way to achieve very long life pans. In any case, such protests from "peoples of the Book" such as Jews, Christians and Muslims are most strange for they accept the miracles of the prophets of God according to their own sacred scriptures.

The opponents of Shī'ism also protest that, although Shī'ism considers the Imām necessary in order to expound the injunctions and verities of religion and to guide the people, the occultation of the Imām is the negation of this very purpose, for an Imām in occultation who cannot be reached by mankind cannot be in any way beneficial or effective. The opponents say that if God wills to bring forth an Imām to reform mankind, He is able to create him at the necessary moment and does not

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. LI, pp. 160.

need to create him thousands of years earlier. In answer, it must be said that such people have not really understood the meaning of the Imām, for in the discussion on the Imāmate it became clear that the duty of the Imām is not only the formal explanation of the religious sciences and exoteric guidance of the people. In the same way that he has the duty of guiding men outwardly, the Imām also bears the function of wilāyah and the esoteric guidance of men. It is he who directs man's spiritual life and orients the inner aspect of human action toward God. Clearly, his physical presence or absence has no effect in this matter. The Imām watches over men inwardly and is in communion with the soul and spirit of men even if he be hidden from their physical eyes. His existence is always necessary even if the time has not as yet arrived for his outward appearance and the universal reconstruction that he is to bring about.

The Spiritual Message of Shī`ism

The message of Shī`ism to the world can be summarized in one sentence: "To know God." Or in other words, it is to instruct man to follow the path of Divine realization and the knowledge of God in order to gain felicity and salvation. And this message is contained in the very phrase with which the Holy Prophet commenced his prophetic mission when he said: "Oh men! Know God in His Oneness (And acknowledge Him) so that you will gain salvation."¹

As a summary explanation of this message, we will add that man is attached by nature to many goals in this worldly life and to material pleasures. He loves tasty food and drink, fashionable dress, attractive palaces and surroundings, a beautiful and pleasing wife, sincere friends and great wealth. And in another direction, he is attracted to political power, position, reputation, the extension of his rule and dominion and

¹ *Editor's note:* Slavation (from the root *salaha*) in this sense does not mean only salvation in the current purely exoteric sense it has acquired but also means deliverance and spiritual realization in the highest sense of the word.

the destruction of anything that is opposed to his wishes. But in his inner and primordial God-given nature, man understands that all these are means created for man, but man is not created for all these things. These things should be subservient to man and follow him and not vice versa. To consider the stomach and the region below it as a final end of life is the logic of cattle and sheep. To tear up, cut and destroy others is the logic of the tiger, the wolf and the fox. The logic inherent in human existence is the attainment of wisdom and nothing else.

This logic based upon wisdom with the power which it possesses to discern between reality and the unreal, guides us toward the truth and not toward things our emotions demand or toward passions selfishness and egoism. This logic considers man as a part of the totality of creation without any separate independence or the possibility of a rebellious self-centeredness. In contrast to the current belief that man is the master of creation and tames rebellious nature and conquers it to force it to obey his wishes and desires, we find that in reality man himself is an instrument in the hand of Universal Nature and is ruled and commanded by it. This logic based upon wisdom invites man to concentrate more closely upon the apprehension he has of the existence of this world until it becomes clear to him that the world of existence and all that is in it does not issue from itself but rather from an Infinite Source. He will then know that all this beauty and ugliness, all these creatures of the earth and the heavens, which appear outwardly as independent realities, gain reality only through another Reality and are manifested only in Its Light, not by themselves and through themselves. In the same way that the "realities" as well as the power and grandeur of yesterday have no greater value than tales and legends of today, so are the "realities" of today no more than vaguely remembered dreams in relation to what will appear as -realitytomorrow. In the last analysis, everything in itself is no more than a tale and a dream. Only God is Reality in the absolute sense, the One Who does not perish. Under the protection of His Being, everything gains existence and becomes manifested through the Light of His Essence.

If man becomes endowed with such vision and power of apprehension, then the tent of his separative existence will fall down before his eyes like a bubble on the surface of water. He will see with his eyes that the world and all that is in it depend upon an Infinite Being who possesses life, power, knowledge and every perfection to an infinite degree. Man and every other being in the world are like so many windows which display according to their capacity the world of eternity which transcends them and lies beyond them.

It is at this moment that man takes from himself and all creates the quality of independence and primacy and returns these qualities to their Owner. He detaches himself from all things to attach himself solely to the One God. Before His Majesty and Grandeur, he does nothing but bow in humility. Only then does he become guided and directed by God so that whatever he knows he knows in God. Through Divine guidance he becomes adorned with moral and spiritual virtue and pure actions which are the same as Islām itself, the submission to God, the religion that is in the primordial nature of things.

This is the highest degree of human perfection and the station of the perfect man (the Universal Man; *insān kāmil*) namely the Imām who has reached this rank through Divine grace. Furthermore, those who have reached this station through the practice of spiritual methods, with the different ranks and stations that they possess, are the true followers of the Imām. It becomes thus clear that the knowledge of God and of the Imām are inseparable in the same way that the knowledge of God is inextricably connected to the knowledge of oneself. For he who knows his own symbolic existence has already come to know the true existence which belongs solely to God who is independent and without need of anything whatsoever.

APPENDIX ONE

TAQIYYAH OR DISSIMULATION

By: `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī

One of the most misunderstood aspects of Shī`ism is the practice of dissimulation or taqiyyah. With the wider meaning of taqiyyah, "to avoid or shun any kind of danger," we are not concerned here. Rather, our aim is to discuss that kind of taqiyyah in which a man hides his religion or certain of his religious practices in situations that would cause definite or probable danger as a result of the actions of those who are opposed to his religion or particular religious practices.

Among followers of the different schools of Islām, Shī`ites are well known for their practice of taqiyyah. In case of danger, they dissimulate their religion and hide their particular religious and ritual practices from their opponents.

The sources upon which the Shī`ites base themselves in this question include the following verse of the Holy Qur`ān: "Let not the believers take disbelievers for their friends in preference to believers. Whoso doeth that hath no connection with Allāh unless (it be) that ye but guard yourselves against them [*tattaqū minhum*, from the same root as *taqiyyah*], taking (as it were) security [*tuqātan*, again from the same root as *taqiyyah*]. Allāh biddeth you beware (only) of Himself. Unto Allāh is the journeying" (Qur`ān, III, 28). As is clear from this sacred verse, God, the Most Exalted, forbids with the utmost emphasis wilāyah (meaning in this case friendship and amity to the extent that it affects one's life) with unbelievers and orders man to be wary and have fear in such a situation.

In another place He says, "Whoso disbelieveth in Allāh after his belief—save him who is forced thereto and whose heart is still content with Faith—but whoso findeth ease in disbelief: On them is wrath from Allāh. Theirs will be an awful doom" (Qur`ān, XVI, 106). As mentioned in both Sunni and Shī`ite sources, this verse was revealed concerning `Ammār ibn Yāsir. After the migration (hijrah) of the Prophet, the infidels of Mecca imprisoned some of the Muslims of that city and tortured them, forcing them to leave Islām and to return to their former religion of idolatry. Included in this group who were tortured were `Ammār and his father and mother. `Ammār's parents refused to turn away from Islām and died under torture. But `Ammār, in order to escape torture and death, outwardly left Islām and accepted idol-worship, thereby escaping from danger. Having become free, he left Mecca secretly for Medina. In Medina, he went before the Holy Prophet—upon whom be blessings and peace—and in a state of penitence and distress concerning what he had done asked the Prophet if by acting as he did he had fallen outside the sacred precinct of religion. The Prophet said that his duty was what he had accomplished. The above verse was then revealed.

The two verses cited above were revealed concerning particular cases but their meaning is such that they embrace all situations in which the outward expression of doctrinal belief and religious practice might bring about a dangerous situation. Besides these verses, there exist many traditions from the members of the Household of the Prophet ordering taqiyyah when there is fear of danger.

Some have criticised Shī`ism by saying that to employ the practice of taqiyyah in religion is opposed to the virtues of courage and bravery. The least amount of thought about this accusation will bring to light its invalidity, for taqiyyah must be practiced in a situation where man faces a danger which he cannot resist and against which he cannot fight. Resistance to such a danger and failure to practice taqiyyah in such circumstances shows rashness and foolhardiness, not courage and bravery. The qualities of courage and bravery can be applied only when there is at least the possibility of success in

man's efforts. But before a definite or probable danger against which there is no possibility of victory—such as drinking water in which there is probably poison or throwing oneself before a cannon that is being fired or lying down on the tracks before an onrushing train—any action of this kind is nothing but a form of madness contrary to logic and common sense. Therefore, we can summarize by saying that taqiyyah must be practiced only when there is a definite danger which cannot be avoided and against which there is no hope of a successful struggle and victory.

The exact extent of danger which would make permissible the practice of taqiyyah has been debated among different mujtahids of Shi'ism. In our view, the practice of taqiyyah is permitted if there is definite danger facing one's own life or the life of one's family, or the possibility of the loss of the honor and virtue of one's wife or of other female members of the family, or the danger of the loss of one's material belongings to such an extent as to cause complete destitution and prevent a man from being able to continue to support himself and his family. In any case, prudence and the avoidance of definite or probable danger which cannot be averted is a general law of logic accepted by all people and applied by men in all the different phases of their lives.

APPENDIX TWO

MUT`AH OR TEMPORARY MARRIAGE

By: `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā`ī and Sayyid Ḥusayn Naṣr

Another of the misunderstood practices of Shī`ism that has often been criticized especially by some of the moderns, is temporary marriage or mut`ah.

It is a definitely established historical fact that at the beginning of Islām, namely between the commencement of the revelation and the migration of the Holy Prophet to Medina, temporary marriage, called mut`ah was practiced by Muslims along with permanent marriage. As an example one can cite, the case of Zubayr (the companion of the Prophet) who married Asmā', the daughter of Abū-Bakr, in a temporary marriage; from this union were born `Abdullāh ibn Zubayr and `Urwah ibn Zubayr. These figures were all among the most famous companions of the Holy Prophet. Obviously, if this union were to have been illegitimate and categorized as adultery, which is one of the most grievous sins in Islām and entails heavy punishments, it would never have been perfumed by people who were among the foremost of the companions.

Temporary marriage was also practiced from the time of the migration until the death of the Holy Prophet. And even after that event during the rule of the first caliph and part of the rule of the second, Muslims continued to practice it until it was banned by the second caliph, who threatened those who practiced it with stoning. According to all of the sources, the second caliph made the following statement: "There are two mut`ahs which existed in the time of the Prophet of God and Abū-Bakr which I have banned, and I will punish those who

disobey my orders. These two mut`ahs are the mut`ah concerning the pilgrimage¹ and the mut`ah concerning women. Although at first some of the companions and the followers were opposed to this ban by the second caliph, since that time the Sunnis have considered mut`ah marriage to be unlawful. The Shī`ites, however, following the teachings of the Imāms of the Household of the Prophet, continued to consider it legitimate as it was during the lifetime of the Prophet himself.

In the Qur`ān, God says concerning the believers: "And who guard their modesty—save from their wives or the (slaves) that their right hands possess, for then they are not blameworthy, But whoso craveth beyond that, such are the transgressors—" (Qur`ān, XXIII, 5-7). Also, "And those who preserve their chastity; Save with their wives and those whom their right hands possess, for thus they are not blameworthy; But whoso seeketh more than that, those are they who are transgressors" (Qur`ān, LXX, 29-31). These verses were revealed in Mecca and from the time of their revelation until the hegira, it is well known that mut`ah marriage was practiced by Muslims. If mut`ah marriage had not been a true marriage and women who had married according to it had not been legitimate wives, certainly according to these Qur`ānic verses they would have been considered to be transgressors of the law and would have been forbidden to practice mut`ah. It is thus clear that since temporary marriage was not forbidden by the Prophet, it was a legitimate marriage and not a form of adultery.

The legitimacy of the mut`ah marriage continued from the time of the Hijra until the death of the Holy Prophet as this verse, revealed after the Hijra, proves, "And those of whom ye seek content [*istamta`tum*, from the same root as *mut`ah*] (by marrying them), give unto them their portions as a duty (Qur`ān, IV, 24). Those opposed to Shī`ism contend that this verse from the "Chapter on Women" was later abrogated but the Shī`ah do not accept this view. In fact, the words of the second

¹ The Ḥajj al-Mut`ah is a kind of pilgrimage which was legislated at the end of the lifetime of the Prophet.

caliph cited above are the best proof that up to the time of his ban such marriages were still practiced. It is inconceivable that if mut`ah had been abrogated and forbidden, it would have continued to be commonly practiced by Muslims during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet and after his death until the time of the second caliph; that if mut`ah had been abrogated, no action would have been taken to forbid it. We cannot accept the claim that the only thing that the second caliph did was to put into action an order of prohibition and abrogation of mut`ah given by the Holy Prophet, for such a possibility is negated by the clear words of the second caliph, "There are two mut`ahs which existed in the time of the Prophet of God and Abū-Bakr which I have banned, and I will punish those who disobey my orders."

From the point of view of legislation and the preservation of public interest also, we must consider the legitimacy of temporary marriage, like that of divorce, one of the noteworthy features of Islām. It is obvious that laws and regulations are executed with the aim of preserving the vital interests of the people in a society and providing for their needs. The legitimization of marriage among mankind from the beginning until today is an answer to the instinctive urge for sexual union. Permanent marriage has been continuously practiced among the different peoples of the world. Yet despite this fact, and all the campaigns and efforts at public persuasion that are carried out against it, there exist throughout the countries of the world, in large and small cities, both hidden and public places where illegitimate sexual union or fornication takes place. This in itself is the best proof that permanent marriage cannot fulfill the instinctive sexual desires of everyone and that a solution must be sought for the problem.

Islām is a universal religion and in its legislation takes all types of human beings into consideration. Considering the fact that permanent marriage does not satisfy the instinctive sexual urge of certain men and that adultery and fornication are according to Islām among the most deadly of poisons, destroying the order and purity of human life, Islām has legitimized temporary marriage under special conditions by virtue of which it becomes

distinct from adultery and fornication and free of their evils and corruptions. These conditions include the necessity for the woman to be single, to become married temporarily to only one man at one time, and after divorce to keep a period during which she cannot be remarried (*'iddah*) half of the time that is required after the permanent marriage. The legitimizing of temporary marriage in Islām is done with the aim of allowing within the sacred law possibilities that minimize the evils resulting from the passions of men, which if not channeled lawfully manifest themselves in much more dangerous ways outside the structure of religious law.

APPENDIX THREE

RITUAL PRACTICES IN SHĪ ISM

By: Sayyid Ḥusayn Naṣr

The religious rites practiced by Twelve-Imām Shī`ites are essentially the same as those of the Sunnis with certain minor modifications of posture and phrasing which are little more than the differences that are to be found among the Sunni schools (*madhhabs*) themselves, except in the addition of two phrases in the call to prayer. For Shī`ism, like Sunnism, the major rite consists of the daily prayers (*ṣalāt* in Arabic, *namaz* in Persian and Urdu) comprised of the prayers of sunrise, noon, afternoon, evening and night. Altogether they consist of seventeen units (*rak`ahs*) divided in the ratio of 2, 4, 4, 3 and 4 for the respective five prayers. The only singular quality of Shī`ite practice in this respect is that instead of performing the five prayers completely separately, usually Shī`ites say the noon and afternoon prayers together, as well as the evening and the night prayers.

Shī`ites also perform supererogatory prayers and prayers on special occasions such as moments of joy, fear and thanksgiving, or when visiting a holy place of pilgrimage. In these practices also there is little difference between Shī`ism and Sunnism. However, we can sense a distinction in the Friday congregational prayers. Of course, these prayers are performed in both worlds but they definitely have a greater social and political significance in the Sunni world. In Shī`ism, although these prayers are performed in at least one mosque in every city and town, in the absence of the Imām, who according to Shī`ism is the true leader of these prayers, their importance is

somewhat diminished and more emphasis is placed upon individual prescribed prayers.

As for the second basic Islāmic rite of fasting, it is practiced by Shī`ites in a manner that is nearly identical with that of Sunnis and differs only in the fact that Shī`ites break their fast a few minutes later than Sunnis, when the sun has set completely. All those capable of fasting and above the age of puberty must abstain from all drinking and eating during the month of Ramaḍān from the first moments of dawn until sunset. The moral and inward conditions that accompany the fast are also identical for the two branches of Islām. Likewise, many Shī`ites, like Sunnis, fast on certain other days during the year, especially at the beginning, middle and end of the lunar month, following the example of the Holy Prophet.

Also, for the pilgrimage (ḥajj), Shī`ite and Sunni practices have only very minor differences. It is the pilgrimage to other holy places that is emphasized more in Shī`ism than in Sunnism. The visit to the tombs of Imāms and saints plays an integral role in the religious life of Shī`ites, one which in fact is compensated for in a way in the Sunni world by visits to the tombs of saints or what in North Africa are called tombs of marabouts. Of course, these forms of pilgrimage are not obligatory rites such as the prayers, fasting and ḥajj, but they play such an important religious role that they can hardly be overlooked.

There are certain religious practices besides the basic rites which are specifically Shī`ite, yet curiously enough found also in certain parts of the Sunni world. There is the *rawḍah-khānī*, that combination of sermon, recitation of poems and Qur`ānic verses and drama which depicts the tragic life of the different Imāms, particularly Imām Ḥusayn. Although the *rawḍah* began to be practiced widely only during the Safavid period, it has become one of the most widespread and influential of religious acts in the Shī`ite world and leaves a profound mark upon the whole community. The *rawḍah* is perfumed most of all during the Islāmic months of Muḥarram and Ṣafar during which the tragedy of Karbalā' and its aftermath took place. The *rawḍah*

does not exist in Sunni Islām in the exact form it has taken in Shī`ism but other forms of elegy (*marāthī*) and dramas depicting the tragedy of Karbalā' are seen during Muḥarram as far away as Morocco.

Connected with the rawḍah during Muḥarram is the passion play (*ta`ziyah*), which has become an elaborate art in both Persia and the Indo-Pakistani world. It is no longer directly a religious rite in the sense of the prayers, yet it too is a major manifestation of religious life as it traverses the depth and breadth of society. There are also at this time elaborate street processions in which people chant, cry and sometimes beat themselves in order to participate in the passion of the Imām. In this matter also, equivalences in the Sunni world must be sought in the Sufi processions, which have become rarer in many Muslim countries during the past few years.

On the popular level, there are certain Shī`ite religious practices which must be mentioned because of their wide popularity. These include almsgiving, in addition to the religious tax (*zakāt*) promulgated by the Sharī`ah, petitioning God for the acceptance of something asked in a prayer by giving to the poor, arranging special religious tables whose food is given to the poor, and many other practices of the kind which carry religion to the intimate activities of everyday life.

The recitation of the Holy Qur`ān is a rite *par excellence* and it is a basic Shī`ite practice as much as a Sunni one. The Qur`ān is chanted during special occasions such as weddings, funerals and the like, as well as at different moments of the day and night during one's daily routine. In addition, the Shī`ites place much emphasis upon the reading of prayers of great beauty in Arabic from the prophetic ḥadīth and from the sayings of Imāms as contained in the *Nahj al-Balāghah*, *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, etc. Some of these prayers, like the *Jawshan Kabīr* and *Kumayl*, are long and take several hours. They are recited only by the especially pious, on certain nights of the week, particularly Thursday night and the nights of Ramaḍān. Other believers remain satisfied with shorter prayers. But the whole practice of reciting litanies and prayers of

different kinds constitutes an important aspect of the rites of Muslims and their religious devotions in both the Shī'ite and Sunni worlds. And in both worlds, these devotional prayers and litanies come from the works of the saints, who in the Shī'ite world are identified with the Imāms and the Household of the Prophet and in the Sunni world with Sufism in general.

APPENDIX FOUR A NOTE ON THE JINN

By: Sayyid Ḥusayn Naṣr

One of the least understood aspects of Islāmic teachings in the modern world concerns that class of beings called the jinn and referred to several times in the Qur'ān. The reason for misunderstanding comes from the post-Cartesian materialistic conception of the Universe, which excludes the subtle and psychic world, where in fact the beings called jinn belong in the traditional schemes of cosmology. To understand the meaning of jinn, one must therefore go beyond a conception of reality which includes only the world of matter and the mind (this paralyzing dualism which makes an understanding of traditional doctrines impossible) to an awareness of a hierarchic reality made up of the three worlds of spirit, psyche and matter. The jinn can then be identified as beings that belong to the psychic or intermediary world, the *barzakh*, situated between this world and the world of pure Spirit.

In Qur'ānic terminology and the ḥadīth literature, the jinn are usually coupled with *ins* or mankind and often the phrase *al-jinn wa'l-ins* (the jinn and men) is used as referring to that class of creatures to which God's commands and prohibitions address themselves. Man was made of clay into which God breathed (*nafakha*) His Spirit. The jinn in Islāmic doctrines are that group of creatures which was made of fire rather than earth, and into which God also breathed His Spirit. Hence, like man they possess a spirit and consciousness and have Divine commands revealed to them. On their own level of existence, they are central creatures just as men are central creatures in this world. But in contrast to men they possess a volatile and

"unfixed" outer form and so can take on many shapes. This means that they are essentially creatures of the psychic rather than the physical world and that they can appear to man in different forms and shapes.

Having been endowed with a spirit, the jinn, like men, possess responsibility before God. Some are "religious" and "Muslim." These are intermediate angels, the psychic forces that can lead man from the physical to the spiritual world through the labyrinth of the intermediate world as *barzakh*. Others are malefic forces that have rebelled against God, in the same way that some men rebel against the Divinity. Such jinn are identified with "the armies of Satan" (*junūd al-Shayṭān*) and are the evil forces which by inducing the power of apprehension (*wahim*) and imagination (*khayāl*) in its negative aspect lead man away from the Truth which his intelligence perceives by virtue of the innate light that dwells within him.

In the religious cosmos of the traditional Muslim, which is filled with material, psychic and spiritual creatures of God, the jinn play their own particular role. By the elite they are taken for what they are, namely, psychic forces of the intermediate world of both a beneficent and an evil nature: On the popular level, the jinn appear as concrete physical creatures of different shapes and forms against which men seek the aid of the Spirit, often by chanting verses of the Qur'ān. The jinn and all that pertains to them hence enter on the popular level into the domain of demonology, magic, etc., and are a vivid reality for men whose minds are still open towards the vast world of the psyche in its cosmic aspect. The Muslim of this type of mentality lives in a world in which he is aware of God and also of both the angelic forces representing the good and the demonic forces representing the evil. He sees his life as a struggle between these two elements within him and about him. Although the jinn are of both kinds, the good and the evil, most often in his thought he identifies them with the demonic forces that lead men astray. They are personifications of psychic forces that work within his mind and soul. On the theological and metaphysical level of Islām, the order of the jinn becomes understood as a necessary element in the hierarchy of

existence, an element which relates the physical world to higher orders of reality. The jinn are, moreover, especially akin to men in that, as was mentioned above, into them also was breathed the Spirit of God. And some of God's prophets, like Solomon, ruled over both men and jinn, as attested to by the Holy Qur'ān.

For the Western student of Islām, the meaning of the jinn cannot be understood except through an understanding of traditional metaphysics, cosmology and psychology. Only through this understanding do these beings and their function, which in fact have their correspondences in other religions, become meaningful. We cannot reduce the belief in jinn to superstition simply because we no longer understand what they signify.

If a traditional Muslim were asked to give his opinion concerning all the interest in the modern world in psychic phenomena, the exploration of the psychic world through drugs and other means, and the phenomena of a psychic origin that became ever more recurrent nowadays, he would answer that much of this is connected to what he would understand by the jinn. He would add that most of the jinn involved in these cases are, alas, of the malefic and demonic kind before whom there is no means of protection save the grace that issues forth from the world of pure Spirit.

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QUR'ĀN IN ISLAM

ITS IMPACT AND INFLUENCE ON THE LIFE OF MUSLIMS

BY

'ALLĀMAH SAYYID MUḤAMMAD ḤUSAYN ṬABĀṬABĀ'Ī

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ASSADULLAH AD-DAAKIR YATE

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH

THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ
يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ حَكِيمٍ حَمِيدٍ .

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE ALL-BENEFICENT, THE ALL-MERCIFUL
And indeed it is a Book of exalted power; No falsehood
can approach it from before or behind it: It is sent down
by One Full of Wisdom, Worthy of all Praise.

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FOREWORD

Over a quarter of a century has passed since this book was written by 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in Persian – with the express purpose of being translated into English, as part of a trilogy whose aim was to make Shi'ism better known in the Western world.¹ Commissioned originally by Professor Kenneth Morgan of Collegiate University in New York, who came to Iran with the aim of launching the project, this trilogy was written and assembled in a short period by 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in Persian and – in the case of the sayings of the Imams – Arabic. But is it only now, with the appearance of this translation, that the goal of the project is finally achieved, long after the author has left this abode of transience.

It was our task to collaborate with the 'Allāmah, to achieve the completion of the two works of this trilogy which he had set out to write himself, namely *Shi'ah dar Islām* and *Qur'ān dar Islām*. Our role was to point out to this venerable master the

¹ The other two volumes in the trilogy, *Shi'ah in Islam*, edited and translated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, London, Allen & Unwin, and Albany, New York, SUNY Press, 1975; and *A Shi'ite Anthology*, selected and with a foreword by 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, translated with explanatory note by William Chittick and introduction by S. H. Nasr, London, Muhammadi Trust, and Albany, New York, SUNY Press, 1981, have already become well known as important sources in English for the study of Shi'ism.

questions which a Western audience needed to have treated and the types of discussion that such works needed to consider, while he himself set out to compose these books in his masterly and at the same time unassuming style. Only after the composition of these works did he begin to select the sayings of the Imams, which were to be collected and translated in the anthology.

The completion of *Shi'ah dar Islām* – after many journeys made by us between Tehran and Qum, where the `Allāmah resided, as well as meetings in the cool mountain retreats surroundings Tehran – turned out to be a major event for the study of Shi'ism, not only in the West but also within Iran itself. Even before we completed the edition and translation of the work in English, the Persian edition with our humble introduction appeared in Iran, and soon became one of the most widely Western audience in mind also bore a message of great significance for Shi'ite themselves.

While we were translating and editing *Shi'ite Islam*, `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'i terminated *Qur'ān dar Islām*; on his advice, it was decided to have this also published in Persian as soon as possible. This work, likewise, became instantly popular and, like *Shi'ah dar Islām*, has gone into numerous editions besides being translated into other Islamic languages. Meanwhile, we began the translation of *Qur'ān dar Islām* as soon as the publication of Shiite Islam in both its English and American editions was accomplished. Many sessions were spent with the `Allāmah over various questions of translation, and the work progressed slowly because of both the `Allāmah's busy program and our own crowded schedule. Over half of the work was translated when our library - and with it the manuscript of the translation - was lost during the events of 1979. It is, therefore, particularly gratifying finally to see the appearance of the translation of this work in English and the realization of the goal which was intended from the beginning.

The author of this book, `Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i - may God shower His blessings upon his soul - was one of the great masters of the traditional sciences in Iran

during this century.¹ He was born in 1903 into a distinguished family of scholars in Tabriz, where he also carried out his earliest religious studies. Like many Shī'ite scholars, he pursued more advanced studies in Najaf and then returned to Tabriz. But in 1945, following the Soviet occupation of Azerbaijan, he came to Qum, where he settled until his death in 1982. From this centre of Shī'ite learning the light of his knowledge and presence began to disseminate, and continued to spread, among students not only of that city but also throughout Iran, and even beyond.

From the 1950s onward, his journeys to Tehran became a weekly or bi-weekly event, and he taught and conducted intellectual discussions with a small group of students, of which we had the honor of being one. This activity complemented his teaching activities in Qum. The circle in Tehran, which included not only such well-known Shī'ite scholars as Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, but also (during the fall season) Henry Corbin, and occasionally other Western scholars of Islam, helped to spread the influence of the 'Allāmah's teachings further, and soon he became recognized as one of the major intellectual figures of Shī'ism, at once master of the religious sciences (especially Qur'ānic commentary), Islamic philosophy and gnosis ('irfān).

Despite eye-problems which continued to hamper his activities to the very end, 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī was an extremely prolific author. In addition to teaching throughout the week and training countless students, he wrote nearly every day, and important books and articles continued to flow from his pen. After writing such major philosophical works as *Uṣūl-i falsify-i Ri'āliṣm* in five volumes, he edited the *Asfār* of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī with his own commentary, and a selection of commentaries on other masters prior to Shirāzī, in seven volumes. Later, at our request, he composed two masterly summaries of Islamic philosophy: the *Badāyi' al-Ḥikmah* and the *Nihāyat al-Ḥikmah*.

¹ We have already dealt with his life in our preface to *Shī'ite in Islam*, pp. 22-5.

Meanwhile, parallel with all this activity in the domain of traditional philosophy and gnosis (about which he wrote less in a direct manner but alluded to frequently in his Philosophical works and certain shorter treatises), 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī continued to work indefatigably on his Qur'ānic commentary, *Tafsīr al-Mizān*, which he finally completed in his mid-seventies. This monumental commentary, consisting of some twenty-seven volumes (written in Arabic, but also translated into Persian), is one of the most important Qur'ānic commentaries of this century and is a blinding witness to the remarkable mastery of its author in the domain of Qur'ānic sciences. This commentary, based on the principle of having one part of the Qur'ān interpret other parts (*al-Qur'ān yufassiru ba'dahū ba'dan*) is a *summa* of Islamic religious thought, in which the sciences of the Qur'ān, theology, philosophy, gnosis, sacred history and the social teachings of Islam are all brought together.

The present volume is in a sense the synthesis of the venerable master's life-long study of the Noble Qur'ān. Although the book is written in a simple language and it may appear to be introductory, it is a work of great depth and synthetic quality. It treats many questions concerning the sacred text, which have rarely been discussed together in a single work. The book, although short, distils many volumes into its pages and is like the synopsis of a major commentary. It brings out the significances of the Qur'ān for the life of Muslims, the features of the sacred text which seem enigmatic, the inner and outer levels of meaning of the Text and the sciences of Qur'ānic exegesis. It also treats in a dear and direct manner the Shī'ite understanding of the Qur'ān and the role of the Imāms in its interpretation. It is a veritable prolegomenon to the study of the Sacred Book, and is perhaps the most accessible introduction available in English to the study of the Qur'ān as traditionally understood by the mainstream of Shī'ite thought, in fact Islamic exegetical thought in general.

This book reflects, moreover, not only the learning of the author but also his spiritual qualities. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī was not only an outstanding scholar but also a person of great

spiritual realization who lived constantly in the remembrance of God. During the twenty years during which we had the honor of being his student, and observing him in all kinds of circumstances - from being alone with him in a room, to sitting at his feet in a mosque filled with hundreds of students - never did he cease to remember God and invoke Him. His countenance always reflected a light which seemed to shine from the world beyond, while his gentle voice seemed to issue from the other shore of existence. In his presence, one could not but think of God and the world of the Spirit. The reality of the Qur'ān, which he had studied and written about for so many years, seemed to have penetrated into his very being, enabling him to speak of a knowledge that was always wed to spirituality and rooted in the sacred.

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʿī was at once one of the greatest of Qur'ānic commentators, a leading contemporary Islamic philosopher in the tradition of Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, and Mullā Ṣadrā, and a gnostic who was at home in both the metaphysical works of Ibn ʿArabī and the incebriating poetry of Rūmī and Ḥāfiẓ. In him, intelligence, scholarship, piety and the love of God met in a union which is encountered rarely in any age, and especially this period of the eclipse of the Spirit. His soul was embellished with the virtues extolled by the Qur'ān and the prophetic Sunnah, while his mind explored like a soaring eagle the vast expanses of Islamic thought. To have met him was to have met the veritable Islamic scholar (or *ʿālim*), and to gain a taste of what traditional Islamic learning must have been when the whole of the Islamic intellectual tradition was fully alive. The *Qur'ān in Islam*, as well as the other works by the ʿAllāmah, should be read now more than ever before, because the current aberrations propagated in the name of Islam in general, and Shīʿism in particular, necessitate an uncompromising and clear statement of the traditional Islamic perspective, as expounded by such masters as ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʿī. Moreover, the present book marks an important addition to literature in English on the central theophany of Islam, the Noble Qur'ān. May all those interested in the understanding of Islam be able to benefit from this book, and also come to gain some insight into the mind

and soul of a great contemporary Muslim scholar who lived and died in constant awareness of God, and who saw in His Word as contained in the Noble Book at once a guide for life, the basic source of all knowledge, the sword of discernment between truth and falsehood and a "presence" whose experience makes possible here a taste of the realities of paradise.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr
Bethesda, Maryland
December 1986

INTRODUCTION

We are placing before the reader a book which discusses the profoundest document of the sacred religion of Islam. Among the themes of this book are the following:

- The position of the Glorious Qur'ān in the Islamic world
- What do we mean when we speak of "the Qur'ān?"
- What value does the Qur'ān hold for Muslims?
- The Qur'ān as a book whose importance is global and eternal
- The Qur'ān as a revelation from a divine, not a human, source
- The relationship between the Qur'ān and the sciences
The characteristics *and* features of the Qur'ān

We are investigating the importance of a book which Muslims have never ceased to respect and venerate and whose validity they have never rejected. They are able to use it to support any claim made in the name of Islam, despite being troubled by inner conflicts and sectarian splintering, as are the other major world religions.

The purpose of this work is to define the position of the Qur'ān in such a way that the Holy Book explains itself, rather than merely giving our own opinions concerning it. There is clearly a great difference between these two ways of approaching the matter.

In other words, the position we attribute to the Holy Qur'ān, through reason or lack of it, if found to be contrary to the Qur'ānic views, will not be valid. If it is something about which the Qur'ān is silent, in view of the existing differences of opinion among the Muslims, a unanimous acceptance of such a view would not be possible. The only position which may be acceptable is what is denoted by the Holy Qur'ān itself.

Therefore, in this inquiry and discussion, we must answer the question as to what the Holy Qur'ān says in this connection, and not what we, who follow a certain school of Islamic law, say about the Holy Qur'ān.

THE VALUE OF THE QUR'ĀN IN THE EYES OF THE MUSLIMS

The Qur'ān Contains a Pattern of a Complete Way of Life for Man

The religion of Islam is superior to any other in that it guarantees happiness in man's life. For Muslims, Islam is a belief system with moral and practical laws that have their source in the Qur'ān.

God, may He be exalted, says, "*Indeed this Qur'ān guides to the path which is clearer and straighter than any other.*" [XVII:9], He also says, "*We have revealed to you the book which clarifies every matter.*" [XVI:89].

These references exemplify the numerous Qur'ānic verses (*āyāt*) which mention the principles of religious belief, moral virtues and, a general legal system governing all aspects of human behavior.

A consideration of the following topics will enable one to understand that the Qur'ān provides a comprehensive program of activity for man's life.

Man has no other aim in life but the pursuit of happiness and pleasure, which manifests itself in much the same way as love of ease or wealth. Although some individuals seem to reject this happiness, for example, by ending their lives in suicide, or by turning away from a life of leisure, they too, in their own way, confirm this principle of happiness; for, in seeking an end to

their life or of material pleasure, they are still asserting their own personal choice of what happiness means to them. Human actions, therefore, are directed largely by the prospects of happiness and prosperity offered by a certain idea, whether that idea be true or false.

Man's activity in life is guided by a specific plan or program. This fact is self-evident, even though it is sometimes concealed by its very apparentness. Man acts according to his will and desires; he also weighs the necessity of a task before undertaking it.

In this, he is promoted by an inherent scientific law, which is to say that he performs a task for "himself" in fulfilling needs which he perceives are necessary. There is, therefore, a direct link between the objective of a task and its execution.

Any action undertaken by man, whether it be eating, sleeping or walking, occupies its own specific place and demands its own particular efforts. Yet an action is implemented -according to an inherent law, the general concept of which is stored in man's perception and is recalled by motions associated with that action. This notion holds true whether or not one is obliged to undertake the action or whether or not the circumstances are favorable.

Every man, in respect of his own actions, is as the state in relation to its individual citizens, whose activity is controlled by specific laws, customs and behavior. Just as the active forces in a state are obliged to adapt their actions according to certain laws, so is the social activity of a community composed of the actions of each individual. If this were not the case, the different components of society would fall apart and be destroyed in anarchy in the shortest time imaginable.

If a society is religious, its government will reflect that religion; if it is secular, it will be regulated by a corresponding code of law. If a society is uncivilized and barbaric, a code of behavior imposed by a tyrant will appear; otherwise, the conflict of various belief-systems within such a society will produce lawlessness.

Thus man, as an individual element of society, has no option but to possess and pursue a goal. He is guided in the pursuit of his goal by the path which corresponds to it and by the rules which must necessarily accompany his program of activity. The Qur'ān affirms this idea when it says that "every man has a goal to which he is turning, so compete with each other in good action." [II:48]. In the usage of the Qur'ān, the word 'dīn' is basically applied to a way, a pattern of living, and neither the believer nor the non-believer is without a path, be it prophetic or man-made.

God, may He be exalted, describes the enemies of the divine *dīn* (religion) as those "who prevent others from the path of God and would have it crooked." [VII:45].

This verse shows that the term *Sabil Allāh* - the path of God - used in the verse refers to the *dīn* of *fitrah* - the inherent pattern of life intended by God for man). It also indicates that even those who do not believe in God implement His *dīn*, albeit in a deviated form; this deviation, which becomes their *dīn*, is also encompassed in God's program.

The best and firmest path in life for man is the one which is dictated by his innate being and not by the sentiments of any individual or society. A close examination of any part of creation reveals that, from its very inception, it is guided by an innate purpose towards fulfilling its nature along the most appropriate and shortest path; every aspect of each part of creation is equipped to do so, acting as a blueprint for defining the nature of its existence. Indeed all, of creation, be it animate or inanimate, is made up in this manner.

As an example, we may say that a green-tipped shoot, emerging from a single grain in the earth, is "aware" of its future existence as a plant which will yield an ear of wheat. -By means of its inherent characteristics, the shoot acquires various mineral elements for its growth from the soil and changes, day

¹ Usually translated to mean religion, the word strongly implies transaction between the Debtor (God) and the indebted (man). Hence, living the *dīn* means repaying one's debt to the Creator.

by day, in form and strength until it becomes a fully-matured grain-bearing plant - and so comes to the end of its natural cycle.

Similarly, if we investigate the life-cycle of the walnut tree, we observe that it too is "aware", from the very beginning, of its own specific purpose in life, namely, to grow into a big walnut tree. It reaches this goal by developing according to its own distinct inherent characteristics; it does not, for example, follow the path of the wheat-plant in fulfilling its goal just as the wheat-plant does not follow the life pattern of the walnut tree.

Since every created object which makes up the visible world is subject to this same general law, there is no reason to doubt that man, as a species of creation, is not. Indeed his physical capabilities are the best proof of this rule; like the rest of creation, they allow him to realize his purpose, and ultimate happiness, in life.

Thus, we observe that man, in fact, guides himself to happiness and well-being merely by applying the fundamental laws inherent in his own nature.

This law is confirmed by God in the Qur'ān, through His Prophet Moses, when he says, "*Our Lord is He who gave everything its nature, then guided it.*" [XX:50]. It is further explained in LXXXVIL2-3 as "*He who created and fashioned in balanced proportion and He who measures and guides.*"

As to the creation and the nature of man, the Qur'ān says, "*By the soul and Him who fashioned it and then inspired it with wrong action and fear of God; he is truly successful who causes it to grow and purifies it and he is a failure who corrupts and destroys it.*" [XCI:7-10].

God enjoins upon man the duty to "*strive towards a sincere application of the dīn,*" (that is, the *fiṭrah* of God, or the natural code of behavior upon which He has created mankind), since "*there is no changing (the laws of) the creation of God.*" [XXX:30].

He also says that "*In truth, the only dīn recognized by God is*

*Islam** [III:19]. Here, Islam means submission, the method of submission to these very laws. The Qur'ān further warns that "the actions of the man who chooses a *dīn* other than Islam will not be accepted." [111:85]

The gist of the above verses, and other references on the same subject, is that God has guided every creature - be it man, beast or vegetable - to a state of well-being and self-fulfillment appropriate to its individual make-up.

Thus the appropriate path for man lies in the adoption of personal and social laws particular to his own *fiṭrah* (or innate nature), and in avoiding people who have become "denaturalized" by following their own notions or passions. It is clearly underlined that *fiṭrah*, far from denying man's feelings and passions, accords each its proper due and allows man's conflicting spiritual and material needs to be fulfilled in a harmonious fashion.

Thus, we may conclude that the intellect *'aql* should rule man in matters pertaining to individual or personal decisions, rather than his feelings. Similarly, truth and justice should govern society and not the whim of a tyrant or even the will of a majority, if that be contrary to a society's true benefit.

From this we may conclude that only God is empowered to make laws, since the only laws useful to man are those which are made according to his inherent nature.

It also follows that man's needs, arising from his outward circumstance and his inner reality, are fulfilled only by obeying God's instructions (or laws). These needs may arise through events beyond man's control or as a result of the natural demands of his body.

Both are encompassed in the plan of life that God has designated for man. For, as the Qur'ān says, the "decision rests with God only." [XII:40,67] which is to say that there is no governance (of man or society, of the inner or the outer) except that of God.

Without a specific creational plan, based on the innate disposition of man, life would be fruitless and without

meaning. We may understand this only through belief in God and a knowledge of his Unity, as explained in the Qur'ān.

From here we may proceed to an understanding of the Day of Judgment, when man is rewarded or punished according to his deeds. Thereafter, we may arrive at knowledge of the prophets and of prophetic teachings, since man cannot be judged without being first instructed in the matter of obedience and disobedience. These three fundamental teachings are considered to be the roots of the Islamic way of life.

To these we may add the fundamentals of good character and morals which a true believer must possess, and which are a necessary extension of the three basic beliefs mentioned above. The laws governing daily activity not only guarantee man's happiness and moral character but, more importantly, increase his understanding of these beliefs and of the fundamentals of Islam.

It is clear that a thief, a traitor, a squanderer, or a libertine do not possess the quality of innocence; nor can a miser, who hoards money, be called a generous person. Similarly, someone who never prays or remembers God cannot be called a believer in God and the Last Day, nor be described as His servant.

From this we may conclude that good character flourishes when joined to a pattern of correct actions; morals are to be found in the man whose beliefs are in harmony with these fundamentals. A proud man cannot be expected to believe in God nor be humble in respect to the Divine; nor can the man, who has never understood the meaning of humanity, justice, mercy or compassion, believe in the Day of Rising and the judgment.

Chapter XXXV: 10 speaks of the relationship between a sincere system of belief and a fitting character:

Pure speech rises up to Him and He raises up good deeds still further.

In chapter XXX:10 we learn again of this relationship between belief and action:

Then evil was the consequence of those who do wrong action because they denied the signs of Allah and the made a mock of them.

To summarize, the Qur'ān is composed of the following Islamic fundamentals which together form an interlocking whole: a primary system of belief in the Unity of God, Prophethood and the Day of Reckoning, accompanied by a second group of beliefs, namely, belief in the Tablet, the Pen (which delineates the sequence of cosmic events), the rule of destiny and the decree (without implying pre-determination), the angels, the throne of the Creator, and, finally., in the creation of the sky, the earth and everything between them.

Thereafter, we observe that man's well-being lies in his character being in harmony with these principles.

The shari'ah, namely the laws and code of behavior explained in the Qur'ān and commented upon in every detail by the model of the Prophet's life, is the means whereby a man may practice these principles. At this point we should add that the Prophet's family are his chosen heirs and are entrusted with the task of exemplifying and explaining further the prophetic message and the shari'ah after the Prophet's death. The Prophet himself has shown that the tradition, *Ḥadīth*,¹ known as the *Ḥadīth al-thaqalayn* which all sects of Islam accept, refers specifically to this matter of succession.

The Qur'ān as a Document of Prophethood

The Qur'ān refers on several occasions to the fact that it is the word of God, that it issues from a divine source in the very words in which the Prophet received them and which he later transmitted. The divine nature of the Qur'ān is affirmed in several verses.

¹ A report of the words or deeds of the Prophet which has been transmitted to us intact by a chain, or numerous chains, of trustworthy narrators. The tradition in question here possessed an unbroken chain of transmission back to the Prophet himself; these verses confirm the miraculous quality of the book and state that it is beyond the power of man to produce such a work.

In LII:33-34 we read, "or they say that (the Prophet) is inventing it. Indeed they do not believe. If they are truthful then let them produce words like it". Likewise in XVII:88 "*Say (O Muhammad), if all the jinn and mankind were to join forces to produce something like this Qur'ān they could not product it even if they were to help one another.*" Again, in XL 13 "*or they say he has invented it! Say: then product ten verses like it which you have invented,*" and again in X:38, "*or they say he has invented it. Say: produce a single chapter like it,*" we find further proof.

The following challenge is made in Chapter II:23 "*and if you are in doubt concerning that which we have revealed to Our slave then produce a chapter like it.*"

Here it should be noted that the Qur'ān is addressing those who grew up with Muhammad, the man they knew to be unlettered and untutored in the matters spoken about in the Qur'ān. Despite this knowledge, they still doubt.

Another challenge is issued, (to those who would find contradictions in the Qur'ān, but obviously cannot):

Will they not reflect upon the Qur'ān? If it had been from other than God, they would have found in it much incongruity [IV:82].

Since everything in the world is in a state of growth and self-perfection, then the Qur'ān would of necessity lack harmony since it was revealed over a period of twenty-three years; it would lack harmony that is if we were to suppose that it was the work of a man rather than of a prophet. The Qur'ān, whose messages announce and confirm that it is the work of God, also teaches us that Muhammad is a messenger, sent by God, thus confirming the authenticity of the Prophet. In chapter XIII:43, God speaks Himself, as on many occasions, confirming that He is witness and testimony to the prophecy of Muhammad: "*Say God is sufficient witness between you and me.*" The verse refers to disbelievers and defies their disbelief. In another verse, the testimony of angels is added to that of God's:

"But God testifies concerning that which he has revealed to you; He has revealed it in His knowledge; and the Angels also testify. And God is sufficient witness." [IV: 166].

THE TEACHINGS OF THE QUR'ĀN

The Universal Import of the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān is not directed towards any one particular nation, such as the Arabs, or to a particular sect of Muslims, but to non-Islamic societies as well as the Muslim nation as a whole. There are numerous references to non-believers and idol-worshippers, to the People of the Book (namely, the Jews, or the Tribe of Israel, and the Christians), exhorting each one to strive towards a true understanding of the Qur'ān and of Islam.

The Qur'ān calls each group to Islam by providing proofs and never stipulates that they be of Arab stock. Referring to idol-worshippers, God says, "*If they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then they are your brothers in religion*" [IX:11]. Likewise, God talks about the People of the Book, (Jews, Christians and we include here the Zoroastrians), without referring to them as Arabs:

Say O People of the Book come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but God and that we shall ascribe no partners to Him and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. [III:64].

It is true that before Islam spread beyond the Arabian peninsula, Qur'ānic injunctions were obviously directed towards the Arab nation. From the sixth year after the *hijrah* (the migration of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina), when the *dīn* of Islam was being propagated beyond the peninsula, there are references which demonstrate that the Qur'ān is addressing

itself to mankind in general; for example, in VI:19, "*This Qur'ān has been revealed to me that I may warn you and whomever it may reach.*" and in LXVIII:52 God says, "*It is nothing else but a reminder to the worlds.*"

We read too in LXXIV:35-36, "*In truth this is one of the greatest signs, being a warning unto men.*"

History has amply demonstrated that Islam has been embraced by a number of leading members of other religions, including the idol-worshippers of Mecca, Jews, Christians and by people from diverse communities, such as Salmān of Persia, Ṣuhayb from the Roman people, and Bilāl of Ethiopia.

The Perfection of the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān shows man the way to a realization of his goal on earth; it describes this path in the most complete terms. It is a way of correctly viewing the reality of things; a vision – personal, social and cosmic – based on a correct manner of behavior and a precise method of interaction between men.

In XLVI:30, we read that the Qur'ān "*guides to the truth and a right road,*" meaning the road of right belief and correct action. On another occasion, mentioning the Torah and the New Testament, God says, "*We have revealed this Book to you with the Truth, confirming whatever Book was before it, and We keep watch over it*" [V:48].

The Qur'ān thus affirms the truth of the ways of guidance taught by the earlier prophets. In chapter XLII:13, "*He has ordained for you that religion which He commended to Noah and that which We reveal to you (Muhammad) and that We commended to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.*" and in chapter XVI:89, "*And We revealed the book to you as an exposition of all things.*"

Thus we understand from these verses that the Qur'ān not only encompasses the meanings and teachings of all divine books revealed before it, but also adds to and completes them. Every thing which a man needs, both in terms of his spiritual and his social life, is contained and explained in the Qur'ān.

The Eternal Quality of the Qur'ān

The perfection and completeness of the Qur'ān prove that in its validity is not restricted to a particular time or place, since anything perfect is in need of nothing to complete it.

In chapter LXXXVI:13-14, God confirms that the Qur'ān is "a conclusive word" and not a mere "pleasantry." It contains the purest of teachings concerning belief in life-after-death, together with an exposition of the realities of existence, while, at the same time, encompassing the fundamentals of correct human behavior.

Since laws governing transactions between men are directly linked to their beliefs, such a book can obviously not be annulled or changed with the passage of time. As He says in XVII:105, "We have revealed the Qur'ān with Truth and it has descended with the Truth," meaning that the revelations and their ongoing validity are inseparable from the Truth.

Thus in X:32, "After the Truth what is there except error," and in XLI:41-42, "In truth it is an impenetrable book, error may not enter in it from before it or behind it."

In other words the Qur'ān repulses, by its own perfection and completeness, any attempt to alter it; and neither now nor later can it be annulled or superseded. Many studies have been made of the permanence of the validity of the laws given in the Qur'ān.

The reader is advised to consult them if he requires additional knowledge of the subject; to pursue the matter here, (namely, the position of the Qur'ān in the lives of Muslims and the manner in which it demonstrates this), would be outside the scope of this book.

The Qur'ān as a Self-Contained Proof

The Qur'ān, being composed of words and meanings like any other book, explains itself. It does not remain silent when the situation of the text demands proof. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that Qur'ānic terms mean anything other than the actual words being used. This means that every man,

possessing a certain knowledge of the Arabic language, may clearly understand the meaning of the Qur'ān just as he understands any other words written in Arabic.

There are many verses which are directed towards a specific group, such as the Tribe of Israel, or the Believers, or the non-believers and, sometimes, man in general; (they are addressed in phrases such as "O you who *disbelieve*" or "*o people of the Book.*" or "o tribe of Israel" or "*o Mankind*"). The Qur'ān discourses with them, offering them proof of its validity or challenging them to produce a book similar to it if they doubt it to be the Word of God.

Obviously it makes no sense to address people in terms which they do not understand or to demand that they produce something similar to that which has no meaning for them. In chapter XLVII:24, we read, "*Why do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān,*" implying that if it was from other than God, people would have found in it many inconsistencies.

It is clearly indicated in the Qur'ān that verses which have a subtlety or particularity of meaning demand that the reader reflect upon them to remove any seeming differences of interpretation or incongruities that may appear at first inspection.

It also follows that if the verses themselves contained no apparent meaning, there would be no point in reflecting upon them in order to clarify the apparent problem of their interpretation. There are no indications from other sources, (such as the traditions of the Prophet), that demand a rejection of the outwardly manifest meaning of the Qur'ān.

Some have argued that one should only refer to the commentaries of the Prophet in elucidating the meanings of the Qur'ān. This argument is unacceptable, however, since the basis of the Prophet's commentary and of the Imams of his family must be sought for in the Qur'ān.

It is difficult to imagine that the validity of the Qur'ān is dependent on the commentaries of the Prophet or the Imams of his family. Rather, affirmation of prophecy and imamate must

be contained in the Qur'ān, which itself is the authentic proof and document of prophecy. This does not, however, contradict the fact that the Prophet and the Imams of his family were responsible for clarifying those details of the sharī'ah law (Divinely revealed law) which were not apparent from the actual text of the Qur'ān.

They were, likewise, entrusted with teaching the knowledge contained in the Book, as seen in the following verse.

And We have revealed to you the Remembrance so that you may explain to mankind that which has been revealed for them. [XVI:44].

A similar reflection occurs in chapter LIX:7, where, in reference to the code of practice and law brought by the Prophet to mankind, it states, "*And take whatever the messenger gives you. And abstain from whatever he forbids.*"

In chapter IV:64 it says, "*We sent no messenger save that he should be obeyed by God's Leave.*" and, again, in chapter LXII:2, "*He it is who has sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite to them His revelations and to make them grow and to teach them the Book and Wisdom.*" According to these verses, the Prophet is the appointed explainer of the details of the sharī'ah law as well as the teacher of the Qur'ān.

Moreover, according to the tradition known as *thaqalayn*, which was authenticated by an uninterrupted chain of narrators, the Prophet has appointed the Imams of his own family as his successors. This is not to deny that others also, by correctly applying the learnings of sincere teachers, may understand the meaning of the Qur'ān.

The Inner and Outer Dimensions of the Qur'ān

In chapter IV:36, God says, "*And serve God and ascribe nothing as a Partner to Him.*" The verse prohibits pre-Islamic Arabs from their worship of idols, just as chapter XXII:30 urges them to "*shun the filth of idols, and shun lying speech.*" On reflection it becomes clear that an idol may exist in any

form; therefore, idol-worship is forbidden because it involves submission to an entity other than God.

In chapter XXXVI:60 God treats the devil as an idol when He says, "*Did I did not charge you, O you sons of Adam, that you do not worship the devil.*" It also becomes clear that another form of idol-worship is submission to one's desires or to the will of others, over and above the will of God; this is indicated in XLV:23 which refers to "*him who makes his desire his God.*"

Thus it becomes apparent that one should turn to none other for help than God Himself and not forget Him in any circumstances, since to do otherwise would be to direct one's attention away from God. To submit to others is to belittle Him and this is the very essence of idol-worship. Thus, in chapter VII:179, God says of those who refused to worship Him, "*Already We have urged into hell many of the jinn and humankind, ... These are the neglectful.*" The verse, "*ascribe nothing to Him,*" clearly forbids worships of idols; that is to say, man may not, without God's permission, submit himself to others including his own desires, since any such submission would render him neglectful of God.

In this way, the simple, apparent text of the verse unfolds multiple meanings and exemplifies, a feature to be found throughout the Qur'ān. Thus the saying of the Prophet,

(related in the books of Ḥadīth and commentary), become clear:

In truth the Qur'ān possesses an inner and outer, and the inner contains seven dimensions.¹

The Wisdom Contained in the Two Facets of the Qur'ān: The Inner and the Outer

Man's primary life, namely, the temporal life of this world, is as a bubble on the immense sea of the material; and since all his transactions concern the material, he is throughout his life, at

¹ See al-Fayd al-Kāshānī, *al-Ṣāfi fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, pp. 38-41; 'Abbās al-Qummī, *Safinat al-Bihār*, s.v. "Baṭn".

the mercy of the moving waves. All his senses are occupied with the material and his thoughts influenced by sensory information. Eating, drinking, standing, speaking, listening, like all other human actions, take place in the sphere of the material and not in the sphere of thought.

Moreover, in reflecting upon such concepts as love, enmity, ambition and nobility, one comes to better understand them by translating them into language derived from the senses or from actual material objects; for example, the magnetic attraction of lovers, a burning ambition, or a man's being a mine of wisdom.

Capacity to comprehend the world of meaning, which is vaster than that of the material, varies from man to man. For one person it may be almost impossible to imagine the world of meanings; another may perceive it only in the most superficial terms and, yet another, may comprehend with ease the most profound of spiritual concepts.

One may say that the greater a man's capacity to understand meanings, the lesser he is attached to the world of the material and its alluring, deceiving appearance. By his very nature, each person possesses a potential for understanding meanings and, provided that he does not deny this capacity, it may be cultivated and increased further.

It is not a simple matter to reduce meaning from one level of understanding to another without losing its sense. This is particularly true for meanings possessing great subtlety which cannot be transmitted, especially to ordinary people, without adequate explanation. As one example, we may mention the Hindu religion: anyone reflecting deeply upon the Vedic scriptures of India and studying the different aspects of its message will ultimately see that its basic aim is the worship of one God.

Unfortunately this aim is explained in such a complicated manner that the concept of oneness reaches the minds of ordinary people in the form of idol-worship and the recognition of many gods. To avoid such problems, it becomes necessary to communicate meanings hidden beyond the material world in a

language which is rooted in the material and readily comprehensible world.

Indeed some religions deprive their adherents of rights accorded to them by the religion itself: women, for example, in Hinduism; Jews and Christians who, in general, are denied access to knowledge of their holy books. Islam does not deprive anyone of their rights in the *din*, and both man and woman, scholar and layman, black and white are equal in being accorded access to their religion.

God affirms this in chapter III:195, *"Indeed I do not allow the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost,"* and, again, in chapter XLIX:13, *"O mankind! Truly we have created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that You may know one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the best in conduct."*

In this manner, the Qur'ān addresses its teachings to mankind at large and affirms that every man may increase himself in knowledge and, thereby, perfect his own behavior. In fact, the Qur'ān addresses its teachings specifically to the world of man. Since, as mentioned earlier, each man has a different capacity of understanding and since the expounding of subtle knowledge is not without danger of misinterpretation, the Qur'ān directs its teachings primarily at the level of the common man.

In this manner, the subtlest of meanings can be explained and multiple meanings and ideas expressed, to the ordinary person, by co-relating them to concrete sensory meanings; meaning, therefore, is always inherent in the letter of the words.

The Qur'ān reveals itself in a way suitable for different levels of comprehension so that each benefits according to his own capacity. In chapter XLIII:3-4 God emphasizes this idea:

Truly we have appointed it a lecture in Arabic so that you may perhaps understand and indeed in the source of the Book, which we possess, it is sublime, decisive.

God describes the different capacities of man's comprehension in the following metaphor in chapter XIII:17

He sends down water from the sky so that valleys flow according to their measure;

and the Prophet, in a famous tradition¹ says: "*We, prophets, talk to the people according to the capacity of their intellects.*"

Another result of the multiple meanings within the Qur'ān is that the verses take on a significance beyond their immediate text. Certain verses contain metaphors which indicate divine gnosis far beyond the common man's understanding but which, nevertheless, become comprehensible through their metaphorical form.

God says in chapter XVII:89, "*And indeed We have displayed for mankind in this Qur'ān all kind of similitudes, but most of mankind refuse everything except disbelief.*" And again in chapter XXIX:43, God talks of metaphors as a means of expression, "*As for these similitudes, We coin them for mankind, but none will grasp their meanings except the wise.*"

Consequently, we must conclude that all Qur'ānic teachings which deal with subtle profound knowledge, are in the form of similitudes.

The Two Kinds of Qur'ānic Verses: The Explicit and the Implicit

In chapter XL:1, God says of the Qur'ān, "*This is a book whose meanings are secure.*" From this we may draw the meaning to read "*whose meanings are perfected, expanded, firm and strong.*" In chapter XXXIX:23, it reads,

God has revealed the fairest of statements (consistent with and in relation to each other) and arranged in pairs (according to meaning) which cause the flesh of those who fear their Lord to creep.

In chapter III:7, He says, "*He it is who Am revealed to you the Book in which are clear revelations, (that is, verses whose meaning is immediately clear and which Muslims use for guidance). They are the substance of the Book and others*

¹ Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisīy, *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 1, p.37.

which are allegorical. But those in whose heart is doubt indeed follow the allegorical seeking dissension by seeking to explain it. None knowest its explanation except God and those who are of sound instruction say: We believe in it, it is all from our Lord.

The first of the verses describes those sections of the Qur'ān whose meaning is explicit, clear and unambiguous, and safe from misinterpretation. The second verse refers to all those verses whose meanings are implicit, and which are considered allegorical. It then proceeds to indicate that both types of verses, (the explicit, or clear and the implicit, or allegorical), share certain common qualities: beauty and sweetness of language, and a miraculous power of expression which are present in the entire Qur'ān. The third verse under consideration divides the Qur'ān into two parts: the explicit and the implicit, the clear and the allegorical, or, in Qur'ānic terms, the *muḥkam* and the *mutashābih*.

The *muḥkam* and those verses which are explicit, clear and immediate in their message and, therefore, incapable of being misinterpreted; the *mutashābih* verses are not of this nature. It is the duty of every firm believer to believe in and act according to the verses which are *muḥkam*.

It is also his duty to believe in the verses which are *mutashābih*, but he must abstain from acting upon them; this injunction is based on the premise that only those whose heart is corrupt and whose belief is false follow the implicit, *mutashābih*, verses, fabricating interpretations and, thereby, deceiving common people.

The meanings of the Explicit and the Implicit Verses, According to the Commentators and Scholars

There is much difference of opinion amongst the Islamic scholars concerning the meaning of explicit and implicit verses, with almost twenty different views on the matter. We can, however, conclude from the views of commentators, ranging from the time of the Prophet to the present day, that the explicit verses are clear and unambiguous, and that one is obliged to believe in and act according to them.

The implicit verses, on the other hand, are those which outwardly seem to express a meaning, but which contain a further truer meaning whose interpretation is known only to God; man has no access to it. However, he is enjoined to believe in them but to avoid acting upon them.

This view is held amongst the Sunni scholars. It is also maintained by the Shī'ite scholars except that they believe that the Prophet and the Imams of his family also understood the hidden meanings. They also maintain that the ordinary man must seek knowledge of the implicit verses from God, the Prophet and the Imams.

This view, although held by most commentators, is in several aspects 'not in accord with the text of the verse beginning.

He it is who has revealed to you the Book in which are explicit verses (whose meanings are immediately clear)...

The Method of Guidance and Explanation used in the Rest of the Qur'ān

This we may attribute, firstly, to the fact that there is no verse whose meaning is totally obscure since the Qur'ān describes itself as a light, as a guidance and as an explanation. Thus it is not befitting that there be verses which fail to reveal their meaning, or to illuminate the Qur'ān as a whole.

We should examine again the verse,

Will they not ponder on the Qur'ān? If it had been from other than God they would have found much inconsistency in it. [IV:82].

Thus reflection on the Qur'ān would remove all kinds of seeming inconsistencies making it unacceptable to say, as do most of the scholars, that the implicit verses cannot be totally understood and that apparent inconsistencies cannot be resolved.

Other scholars say that what is meant by the implicit verses are the letters found at the beginning of certain chapters. (These are known as the *muqatta'ah*-letters, like *Alif, Lām, Mīm, Alif, Lām Rā', Hā, Mīm*, whose real meaning is unknown).

We must, however, remember that the implicit verses are so-called when read in relation to the explicit verses. This denotes that, accompanying the hidden meaning of the implicit, there is a surface (or literal) meaning whereby the real and the apparent meanings come together in intricate relationship with one another.

It should be understood that the letters at the opening of certain chapters do not have any literal meaning. It seems that a group of misguided men use the implicit verses to mislead people, but never in Islam has one heard of anyone trying to use the *muqatta'ah*-letters to do so.

Some commentators say that the meaning of the word *mutashābih*, (in the verse), refers to the famous story of the Jews who wanted to find an indication of the duration of Islam within the order of the letters, but the Prophet used to read the letters one after the other and so confuse their calculations.

This view is also without substance since, even if the story is true it is not of sufficient impact nor conviction to be considered as an interpretation of the implicit verses. Whatever the Jews talked, it contained no malice because, even if the religion, *dīn*, of Islam was for a limited period of time (and, thus, subject to abrogation), their remarks would in no way be a criticism of the purity and reality of Islam considering that all religions revealed by God prior to Islam were for a specific period and open to abrogation.

Secondly, this view implies that the word *ta'wil* (which may be translated as "interpretation") in the verse refers to a meaning other than the apparent literal meaning and that it is used only as a reference to the implicit verses. This is incorrect, as we shall see in a later chapter dealing with exegesis *ta'wil*, and revelation, *tanzīl* (the actual text or letter of the verse) how exegesis in Qur'ānic terminology does not refer to one meaning but to several, encompassing such terms as realization, fulfillment, interpretation and explanation.

We shall also discuss how all Qur'ānic verses have a specific interpretation, *ta'wil* and not just their explicit and implicit

definitions. On examination, the words of the explicit verses (*āyāt muḥkamah*), are seen to describe the phrase "They are the source of the Book," meaning that the explicit verses include the most important subjects of the Book, and the theme of the rest of the verses is secondary and dependent upon them.

This implies that the real point intended to be conveyed by the implicit verses refers back to the explicit verses. Thus, the meanings of the implicit are illuminated by referring back to the source (or explicit) verses.

Thus we are left with no verses which have no obvious indication as to their true meaning; they are either immediately clear by virtue of their being in the class of explicit verses or, in the case of the implicit, made clear by the other explicit verses. As for the *muqatta'ah*-letters at the beginning of the chapters, they do not have any apparent meaning since they are not words in the normal sense and possess no meaning comprehensible to man; thus, they are outside of the classification of explicit and implicit.

Again, we would refer the reader to an examination of the following verse in order to emphasize the truth of our view: "And so why do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān or are there locks upon their hearts." And, likewise, the verse, "and why do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān, if it were from other than God they would have found much inconsistency in it."

The Commentary of the Imams of the Prophet's Family concerning the Explicit and the Implicit Verses

It is made clear from the different commentaries of the Imams that there is always a way to discover the real meaning and aim of the implicit verses. Each verse, even if its meaning is not apparent, can be explained by reference to other verses. Thus the real meaning of the implicit verses can be found in relation to the explicit verses.

For instance, the verse "The Beneficent One who is established on the throne" [XX:5] and again the verse, "And your Lord came," [LXXXIX:22] appear to ascribe bodily characteristics to God, but when compared with the verse, "Nothing is as His

likeness," [XLII:11] it becomes clear that the "sitting" on the throne or the "coming" of God has a meaning other than a physical one. The Prophet, describing the Qur'ān, says

*In truth, the Qur'ān was not revealed so that one part may contradict the other but rather was revealed so that one part may verify the other so that what you understand of it then act accordingly and that which is unclear for you then simply believe in it.*¹

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī, said that one part of the Qur'ān bears witness to another and one part clarifies the other.² The sixth Imam said the explicit verse is that which one acts in accordance with, and the implicit is that which is unclear only for the man who is ignorant of its real meaning.³

From these narrations, we may conclude that the question of explicit and implicit is relative; it is possible that a verse may seem explicit to one person and implicit to another. It is said of the eighth Imam that he considered, "the person who refers to the implicit, *mutashābih*, verses in the Qur'ān to the corresponding clarifying explicit verses," as having 'found guidance to the right path.'

He is also reported to have said,

*In truth, in our traditions are recorded implicit verses like the explicit of the Qur'ān, so refer the implicit to its corresponding explicit verse, or tradition, and do not follow the implicit and go astray.*⁴

Thus it is clear from the traditions and, in particular, the last tradition, that the implicit verse is one which does not contain a clear meaning without reference to the explicit verse, and not that there exists no means to understand it.

¹ Al-'Ayyāshiy, *Kitāb al-Tafsir*, vol.19 p. 16; al-Qummī, *Tafsir*, beginning of the commentary on Surat al-Baqarah; al-Ḥuwayziy, *Tafsir al-Thaqalayn*, vol.1, p.22.

² Al-'Āmiliy, *al-Durr almanthūr*, vol. 2, p.8.

³ Al-Sharif al-Raḍiy, *Nahj al-balāghah*, Discourse no. 131, Al-'Ayyāshiy, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 162.

⁴ Ibn Bābawayh, *Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, p.290.

The Qur'ān Possesses Revelation and Exegesis

We shall discuss the word, exegesis, *ta'wil*, in relation to three Qur'ānic verses. Firstly, in the verses concerning the implicit *mutashābih* and the explicit verses:

But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue, in truth, that which is allegorical talking dissension by seeking to explain it. None knows its explanation except God. [III:7].

Secondly, the verses,

In truth, we have brought them a scripture which we expound with knowledge, a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe. Do they await anything but the fulfillment of it?

(Here the word *ta'wil* is used connoting the appearance or clarification of meaning).

On the day when the fulfillment of it comes, those who are forgetful of it will say: the messenger of our Lord brought the truth. [VII:52-53].

Thirdly, the verse

*And this Qur'ān is not such as could ever be invented... but they denied that, the knowledge of which they could not encompass and the interpretation (*ta'wil*) of which had not yet come to them. Even so it was that those before them deny. Then see what the consequence in the wrongdoers was. [X:37-39].*

In conclusion, we should note that the word exegesis *ta'wil* comes from the word *awl*, meaning a return. As such, *ta'wil* indicates that particular meaning towards which the verse is directed. The meaning of revelation *tanzil*, as opposed to *ta'wil*, is clear or according to the obvious meaning of the words as they were revealed.

The Meaning of Exegesis, According to the Commentators and Scholars

There is considerable disagreement as to the meaning of exegesis, *ta'wil*, and it is possible to count more than ten different views. There are, however, two views which have gained general acceptance. The first is that of the early

generation of scholars who used the word exegesis, *ta'wil*, as a synonym for commentary, or *tafsir*.

According to this view, all Qur'ānic verses are open to *ta'wil* although according to the verse, "nobody knows its interpretation (*ta'wil*) except God," it is the implicit verses whose interpretation (*ta'wil*) is known only to God. For this reason, a number of the early scholars said that the implicit verses are those with *muqatta'ah*-letters at the beginning of the chapter since they are the only verses in the Qur'ān whose meaning is not known to everyone.

This interpretation has been demonstrated in the previous section as being incorrect, a view which is shared by certain of the late scholars. They argued that since there is a way of finding out the meaning of any verse, particularly since the *muqatta'ah*-letters are obviously not in the same classification as the implicit verses then the distinction between the two (*muqatta'ah* and implicit, *mutashābih*) is clear.

Secondly, the view of the later scholars is that exegesis refers to the meaning of a verse beyond its literal meaning and that not all verses have exegesis; rather only the implicit, whose ultimate meaning is known only to God. The verses in question here are those which refer to the human qualities of

coming, going, sitting, satisfaction, anger and sorrow apparently attributed to God and, also, those verses which apparently ascribe faults to the messengers and Prophets of God (when in reality they are infallible).

The view that the word exegesis refers to a meaning other than the apparent one has become quite accepted. Moreover, within the divergence of opinion amongst scholars, exegesis has come to mean "to transfer" the apparent meaning of a verse to a different meaning by means of a proof called *ta'wil*; this method is not without obvious inconsistencies.¹

¹ Since explaining the meaning of exegesis (*ta'wil*) and at the same time recognizing that no one but God knows that *ta'wil* meaning, is self-contradictory, the scholars in question have put forward this view as a

Although this view has gained considerable acceptance, it is incorrect and cannot be applied to the Qur'ānic verses for the following reasons. Firstly, the verses,

Do they await anything but the fulfillment of it. [VII:53]

and,

but they denied that, the knowledge of which they could not encompass and the interpretation of which had not yet come to them. [X:39]

indicate that the whole Qur'ān has exegesis, not just the implicit verses as claimed by this group of scholars.

Secondly, implied in this view is that there are Qur'ānic verses whose real meaning is ambiguous and hidden from the people, only God knowing their real meaning. However, a book which declares itself as challenging and excelling in its linguistic brilliance could hardly be described as eloquent if it failed to transmit the meaning of its own words.

Thirdly, if we accept this view, then the validity of the Qur'ān comes under question since, according to the verse,

Why do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān, if it were from other than God they would have found in it many inconsistencies.

One of the proofs that the Qur'ān is not the speech of man is that, despite having been revealed in widely varying and difficult circumstances, there is no inconsistency in it, neither in its literal meaning nor in its inner meaning, and any initial inconsistency disappears upon reflection.

If it is believed that a number of the implicit verses disagree with the sound, or *muḥkam*, or explicit, verses this disagreement may be resolved by explaining that what is intended is not the literal meaning but rather another meaning known only to God. However, this explanation will never prove that the Qur'ān is "not the speech of man." If by exegesis we change any inconsistency in the explicit, or sound (*muḥkam*) verses to another meaning beyond the literal, It is clear that we may also do this for the speech and writing of man.

Fourthly, there is no proof that exegesis indicates a meaning other than the literal one and that, in the Qur'ānic verses which mention the word exegesis, the literal meaning is not intended.

On three occasions in the story of Joseph, the interpretation of his dream¹ is called *ta'wīl* (exegesis). It is clear that the interpretation of a dream is not fundamentally different from the actual appearance of the dream; rather, it is the interpretation of what is portrayed in a particular form in the dream. Thus Joseph saw his father, mother and brother falling to the ground in the form of the sun, the moon and the stars.

Likewise, the king of Egypt saw the seven-year drought in the form of seven lean cows eating the seven fat cows and also, the seven green ears of corn and the seven dry ears. Similarly, the dreams of Joseph's two fellow-inmates in the prison: one saw himself pouring wine for the king (in the form of the first pressing of wine), while the second saw himself crucified (in the form of birds eating from the breadbasket on his head).

The dream of the king of Egypt is related in the same chapter, verse 43 and its interpretation, from Joseph, in verses 47-49 when he says,

You will sow seven years as usual, but whatever you reap leave it in the ear, all except a little which you will eat. Then after that will come a year when people will have plentiful crops and then they will press (meaning wine and oil).

The dream of Joseph's fellow-inmates in the prison occurs in verse 36 of the same chapter. One of the two young men says to Joseph, "I dreamt that I was carrying upon my head bread which the birds were eating." The interpretation of the dream is related by Joseph in verse 41:

¹ Joseph's dream is mentioned in the third verse of chapter XII, "Joseph" (When he says to his father: 'O father! I saw in a dream eleven stars, the Sun and the Moon making prostration to me') and its interpretation is related by Joseph in verse 100: "Joseph placed his parents on the dais when they arrived from Egypt after years of separation and then his parents and his brothers fell down before him prostrate and he said: 'O My father! This is the interpretation of my dream.'"

O my two fellow-prisoners! As for one of you he will pour out wine for his Lord to drink and as for the other, he will be crucified so that the birds will eat from his head.

In a similar fashion, God relates the story of Moses and Khidr in the chapter "The Cave" [XVIII:71-82]. Khidr made a hole in the boats; thereafter, killed a boy and, finally, straightened a leaning wall. After each event, Moses protested and Khidr explained the meaning and reality of each action which he had carried out on the orders of God; this he referred to, as *ta'wil*.

Thus it is clear that the reality of the event and the dream-picture which portrayed the event-to-be are basically the same: the *ta'wil*, or interpretation, does not have a meaning other than the apparent one.

Likewise, God says, talking about weights and measures, "*Fill the measure when you measure and weigh with a right balance. That is proper and better in the end*" (that is, more fitting in the final determination of the Day of Reckoning) [XVII:35],

It is clear that the word *ta'wil* used here in respect to the measuring and weighing refers to fair dealing in business practices. Thus the *ta'wil* used in this way is not different from the literal meaning of the words "measuring" and "weighing"; it merely deepens and extends the significance of the mundane to include a spiritual dimension.

This spiritual dimension is of significance for the believer who has in mind the reckoning of the final day together with his own day-to-day reckoning in the affairs of trade.

In another verse, God again uses the word *ta'wil*,

And if you have an dispute concerning any matter, refer it to God and the messenger... that is better and more fitting in the end. [IV:59]

It is clear that the meaning of *ta'wil* and the referring of the dispute to God and His messenger is to establish the unity of society and to show how each action or event in a community has a spiritual significance.

Thus, the *ta'wīl* refers to a tangible ordinary reality and is not in opposition to the actual text in the verses which refers to the dispute.

In all, there are sixteen occasions in the Qur'ān in which the word *ta'wīl* is used but on no occasion does it have a meaning other than the literal text. We may say, therefore, that the word *ta'wīl* is used to extend the idea expressed to include a further meaning which, (as will be made clear in the next section), is still in accordance with the actual word *ta'wīl* occurring in the verse.

Thus, in the light of these examples, there is no reason why we should take the word *ta'wīl* in the verse about the explicit *muhkam*, and implicit, *mutashābih*, meanings to indicate "a meaning *basically other than the apparent meaning*."

The Meaning of Exegesis in the Tradition of the Qur'ānic Sciences

What is apparent from the verses in which the word *ta'wīl* occurs is that *ta'wīl* does not indicate a literal meaning. It is clear that the actual words of the dream described in chapter XII, "Joseph", do not in themselves contain the literal interpretation of the dream; the meaning of the dream becomes clear from the interpretation.

And, likewise, in the story of Moses and Khidr, the actual words of the story are not the same as the interpretation which Khidr gave Moses. Moreover, in the verse,

fill the measure when you measure and weigh with a right balance

the language does not in itself indicate the particular economic conditions which we are intended to understand. Again, in the verse

And if you have a dispute concerning any matter then refer it to God and the messenger

there is no immediate literal indication that what is meant is the Unity of Islam.

Thus, although the words indicate something not essentially different from their literal meaning, there is, nevertheless, in all the verses the same shifting of perspective, namely, from the actual words to the intended meaning.

Moreover, all the meanings are based on a real situation, an actual physical event. In the case of the dream, the interpretation has an external reality which appears before its actual occurrence in a special form to the dreamer. Likewise, in the story of Moses and Khidr, the interpretation that the latter gives is in fact, a reality which is to take place as a result of his action.

Therefore, the interpretation of the event is rooted in the event. In the verse which orders man to fair dealing and measuring, the aspect of the verse is a reality which appears as a social benefit. Thus the order is connected to the effect it is supposed to have in the raising up of society and, in particular, of trade. In the verse concerning referral of the dispute to God and His messenger, the meaning is again fixed to reality, namely, the spiritualization of the life of the community.

To conclude, we may say that interpretation of each verse springs from a reality; the interpretation looks forward to or, in a subtle way, actually brings into being the reality it is talking about. Thus its meaning both contains and springs from a future or ulterior event just as the interpreter makes the interpretation meaningful, so the manifestation of the interpretation is already a reality for the interpreter.

The idea is also present in the form of the Qur'ān since this sacred book has as its source realities and meanings other than the material and physical or, we may say, beyond the sensory level. Thus it expresses meanings which are more expansive than those contained in the words and phrases used by man in the material world. Although these realities and meanings are not contained in the literal explanation of man, the Qur'ān uses the same language to inform man of the unseen and to produce correct belief and good action.

Thus, through belief in the unseen, in the last day and in the meeting with God, man adopts a system of morals and a quality of character which allows him to achieve happiness and well-being. In this way the Qur'ān produces a spiritual effect which, in turn, produces a physical social change, the importance of which will become clear on the Day of Resurrection and the meeting with God.

There is further reference to this same theme when God says in chapter XLIII:2-4,

By the Book which makes plain. Take heed, we have appointed it a lecture in Arabic that perhaps you will understand. And indeed the source of the Book which we possess, it is indeed sublime, decisive.

It is sublime, in that the ordinary understanding cannot fully comprehend it, and decisive in that it cannot be faulted.

The relationship of the last part of the verse to the meaning of exegesis *ta'wil*, (as we have discussed above) is clear. It says, in particular, that "*perhaps you will understand*," implying that one may or may not understand it; it does not imply that one will understand the book fully, merely by studying it.

As we have seen in the verse concerning the explicit *muḥkam*, and the implicit *mutashābih*, knowledge of exegesis *ta'wil*, is particular to God; moreover, when in this same verse corrupt men are blamed for following the implicit, *mutashābih*, verses and for intending to sow dissension and conflict by searching for an exegesis, *ta'wil*, or special interpretation, it does not state that they necessarily find it.

The exegesis of the Qur'ān is a reality, or several realities, which are to be found in the Source Book, the Book of Decrees with God; the Source Book is part of the unseen and far from the reach of corrupters. The same idea is treated again in chapter LVI:75-80 when God says,

Indeed I swear by the places of the Stars - And truly that is surely a tremendous oath if you but knew - that this is indeed a noble Qur'ān, in a book kept hidden, which none touch except the purified, a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds.

It is clear that these verses establish for the Qur'ān two aspects, namely the position of the hidden book protected from being touched and the aspect of revelation which is understandable by the people. What is of particular interest to us in this verse is the phrase of exception, "*except the purified.*"

According to this phrase, we can arrive at an understanding of the reality of the exegesis of the Qur'ān.

This positive view of man's capability to understand the Qur'ān does not conflict with the negation of the verse, "*And no one knows its ta'wīl except God.*" Since the comparison of the two verses produces a whole which is independent and harmonious. Thus we understand that God is alone in understanding these realities, yet one may come to know these truths by His leave and teaching.

Knowledge of the unseen is, according to many verses, the special domain of God but in chapter LXXII:26-27, those who are worthy are excepted from this: "*He is the knower of the unseen and He reveals to no one His secret except to every messenger whom He has chosen.*" Again we conclude that knowledge of the unseen is particular to God and that it is fitting for no one except Him and for those he gives leave to.

Thus the purified amongst men take the verse concerning the "*purified ones*" as leave to enter into contact with the reality of the Qur'ān. In a similar way, we read in chapter XXXIII:33, "*God's wish is but to remove uncleanness from you, O people of the Household, and clean you with a thorough cleaning.*" This verse was revealed, (according to a sound tradition with an unbroken chain of transmission), specifically with regard to the family of the Prophet.

The Existence of Abrogating and Abrogated Verses in the Qur'ān

Among the verses in the Qur'ān containing orders or laws, there are verses that abrogate verses previously revealed and acted upon. These abrogating verses are called *nāsikh* and those whose validity they terminate are called *mansūkh*.

For example, at the beginning of the Prophet's mission, Muslims were ordered to cultivate peace and friendship with the people of the Book, "*Forgive and be indulgent (towards them) until God gives command,*" [II:109]. Some time later, fighting was allowed and the order to establish peace was abrogated:

Fight against such as those who have been given the Book but who believe not in God nor the last day and do not forbid that which God has forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the religion of truth... [XI:29].

The common notion of abrogation, that is, a canceling of one law or code by another, is based on the idea that a new law is needed because of a mistake or shortcoming in the previous one. It is clearly inappropriate to ascribe a mistake in law-making to God, Who is perfect, and whose creation admits of no flaws.

However, in the Qur'ān, the abrogating verses mark the end of the validity of the abrogated verses because their heed and effect was of a temporary or limited nature. In time the new law appears and announces the end of the validity of the earlier law. Considering that the Qur'ān was revealed over a period of twenty-three years in ever-changing circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine the necessity of such laws.

It is in this light that we should regard the wisdom of abrogation within the Qur'ān:

And when we put a revelation in place of (another) revelation and God knows best what He reveals they say: you are just inventing it. Most of them do not know. Say: The Holy Spirit (Gabriel) has revealed it from your hand with truth and as a guidance and good news for those who have surrendered (to God), [XVI:101-102].

Applicability and Validity of the Qur'ān

Bearing in mind that the Qur'ān is valid for all times, the verses revealed in special circumstances informing Muslims of their specific duties are also valid for those who, in future,

experience the same circumstances. Similarly, those verses which praise or reproach certain qualities, and promise reward or threaten punishment accordingly, are applicable to all ages and places. Thus the meaning of a verse is not limited to the circumstances or the times of its revelation.

Similar circumstances occurring subsequent to the revelation of a verse are to be followed; this is known in Qur'ānic Science as *jary*, or applicability. The fifth Imam said, "*Were a verse after its revelation to pass away with the passing away of that people, then nothing would have remained of the Qur'ān.*" As long as the heavens and the earth exist, there are verses for every people, wherever they be, which they may read and act upon for the benefit or reject at their loss.¹

Qur'ānic Commentary: Its Advent and Development

Commentary on the words and expressions used in the Qur'ān began at the time of the first revelation. The Prophet himself undertook the teaching of the Qur'ān and the explanation of its meanings and intent.

Thus, in chapter XVI:44, God says, "*And we have revealed to you the Remembrance that you may explain to mankind that which has been revealed for them.*" And He says in LXII:2, "*He it is Who has sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite to them His revelations and to make them grow and to teach them the Scriptures and wisdom.*"

At the time of the Prophet a group of men, on his orders, were instructed to read, record and learn the Qur'ān by heart. When the Prophet's companions passed away, other Muslims took over the responsibility of learning and teaching the Qur'ān; and so it has continued until the present day.

The Science of Qur'ānic Commentary and the Different Groups of Commentators

After the death of the Prophet a group of his companions, including Ubayy ibn Ka'b, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Jābir ibn

¹ Al-'Ayyāshiy, op. cit. vol. 1, p. 10.

'Abdullāh al-Anṣāriy, Abū-Sa'īd al-Khudriy, 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, Anas, Abū-Hurayrah, Abū-Mūsā, and, above all, the famous 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, were occupied with the Science of Commentary just as they had heard the Prophet explaining the meanings of the verses, they would transmit it orally to other trustworthy persons.

The traditions specifically concerned with the subject of Qur'ānic verses number over two hundred and forty; many were transmitted through weak chains of transmission and the texts of some have been rejected as incorrect or forged. Sometimes the transmission would include commentaries based on personal judgments rather than on a narration of the actual sayings, *Hadīths*, from the Prophet.

The later Sunni commentators considered this kind of commentary as part of the body of Sayings of The Prophet, since the companions were learned in the science of Qur'ānic commentary. They argued that these companions had acquired their knowledge of this science from the Prophet himself and that it was unlikely they would say anything which they themselves had invented.

There is, however, no absolute proof for their reasoning large proportion of these sayings, or traditions, about the reasons and historical circumstances of the revelation of verses do not possess an acceptable chain of narration. It should be noted that many of the narrators like Ka'b al-Aḥbār, were learned companions who had belonged to the Jewish faith before accepting Islam.

Moreover, it should not be overlooked that Ibn 'Abbās usually expressed the meanings of verses in poetry. In one of his narrations over two hundred questions of Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq are replied to in the form of poetry; al-Suyūṭiy in his book, "*al-ltqān*", related one hundred and ninety of these questions.

It is evident, therefore, that many of the narrations made by the commentators amongst the companions cannot be counted as actual narrations from the Prophet himself; therefore, such additional material related by the companions must be rejected.

The second group of commentators were the companions of the followers (*tābi`ūn*), who were the students of the companions. Amongst them we find Mujāhid, Sa`īd ibn Jubayr, `Ikrimah and Ḍaḥḥāk. Also from this group were al-Ḥasan al-Baṣriy, `Aṭā' ibn Abī-Rabāḥ, `Aṭā' ibn Abī-Muslim, Abū'l-`Āliyah, Muḥammad ibn Ka`b al-Quraziy, Qatādah, `Aṭiyyah, Zayd ibn Aslam, Ṭāwūs al-Yamāniy.¹

The third group were comprised of the students of the second group, namely, Rabī` ibn Anas, `Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Zayd ibn Aslam, Abū-Ṣāliḥ al-Kalbiy and others.² The *tābi`ūn* sometimes narrated the commentary on a verse as a tradition of the Prophet or of the companions and, sometimes, they explained its meaning without attributing a narrator to the source, this they did especially when there was any doubt as to the identity of the narrator. The later commentators treat these narrations as traditions of the Prophet, but count them as *mawqūf* in their science of the levels of *Ḥadiths* (that is as a tradition whose chain of narration does not reach back to the Prophet).

¹ Mujāhid, a famous commentator, died 100 or 103 A.H. (al-Nawawiy, *Tahdhīb al-asmā'*). Sa`īd ibn Jubayr, a pupil of Ibn `Abbās, was martyred at the hands of al-Ḥajjāj in 94 A.H. (*Tahdhīb*). `Ikrimah, a pupil of Saeed ibn Jubayr, died 104 A.H. (*Tahdhīb*). Ḍaḥḥāk was a pupil of `Ikrimah (Ibn Ḥajar al-`Asqalāniy, (*Lisān al-Mizān*)). al-Ḥasan al-Baṣriy, an ascetic and commentator died in 110 A.H. (*Tahdhīb*). `Aṭā' ibn Abī-Muslim was a pupil of Ibn Jubayr and `Ikrimah and died in 133 A.H. (*Tahdhīb*). `Aṭā' ibn Abī-Rabāḥ, a commentator and jurist, a pupil of Ibn `Abbās, died 115 A.H. (*Tahdhīb*). Muḥammad ibn Ka`b al-Qarthī, a well-known commentator, was a descendant of a Jewish tribe, Banū-Qurayzah, (*Tahdhīb*). Qatādah, one of the greatest commentators, was a pupil of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣriy and `Ikrimah, and died in 117 A.H. (*Tahdhīb*). `Aṭiyyah was a *rāwī* (transmitter) of Ibn `Abbās (*Lisān*). Zayd ibn Aslam, a freed slave of `Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, died 136 A.H. (*Tahdhīb*). Ṭāwūs al-Yamāniy, a great scholar of his time, a pupil of Ibn `Abbās, died 106 A.H. (*Tahdhīb*).

² `Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Zayd, son of Zayd ibn Aslam, is regarded as a commentator. Abu-Ṣāliḥ al-Kalbiy, a genealogist and commentator, lived in the second century A.H.

The fourth group comprised the first compilers of commentaries, like Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah,¹ Wakī' ibn al-Jarrāh, Shu'bah al-Ḥajjāj and 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd; others from this group include Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabariy, the author of the famous Qur'ānic Commentary.²

This group recorded the sayings of the companions and the followers of the companions with a chain of narrators in their works of commentary; they avoided expressing personal opinions except, perhaps, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabariy who sometimes expressed his views by indicating his preference when discussing two similar traditions. The basis of the work of later groups may be traced to this group.

The fifth group omitted the chain of narrators in their writings and contented themselves with a simple relation of the text of the traditions. Some scholars regard these commentators as the source of varying views in the commentaries by connecting many traditions to a companion or a follower without verifying their validity or mentioning their chain of narration. Consequently, confusion has arisen allowing many false traditions to enter the body of traditions, thus undermining the reputation of this section of *Hadīth* literature.

Careful examination of the chains of transmission of the traditions leaves one in doubt as to the extent of the deceitful additions and false testimonies. Many conflicting traditions can be traced to one companion or follower and many traditions, which are complete fabrications may be found amongst this body of narrations.

Thus, reasons for the revelation of a particular verse, including the abrogating and abrogated verses, do not seem to accord with the actual order of the verses. No more than one or two of the traditions are found to be acceptable when submitted to such an examination.

¹ Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah of Mecca, belongs to the second group of *tābi'ūn*. died 198 (*Tahdhīb*). Wakī' ibn al-Jarrāh of Kufa, like Sufyān belongs to the second group, died 197 A.H. (*Tahdhīb*). To the same group also belongs 'Abd ibn Ḥumayd, died in 160 A.H. (*Tahdhīb*).

² Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabariy (died 310 A.H.) was one of the great Sunni scholars (*Lisān*).

It is for this reason that Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, who himself was born before this generation of narrators, said, "Three things have no sound base: military virtues, bloody battles and the traditions pertaining to Qur'ānic commentary." Imam al-Shāfi'iy relates that only about one hundred traditions from Ibn 'Abbās have been confirmed, as valid.

The sixth group consists of those commentators who appeared after the growth and development of the various Islamic Sciences and each undertook the study of Qur'ānic commentary according to his specialization: al-Zajjāj studied the subject from the grammatical point of view; al-Wāḥidiy and Ibn Ḥayyān¹ investigated the verses by studying the inflection of the verbs, the vowels and the diacritical points.

There is also commentary on the rhetoric and eloquence of the verses by al-Zamakhshariy² in his work entitled "*al-Kashshāf*." There is a theological discussion in the "*Grand Commentary (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)*" of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāziy.³ The gnosis of Ibn al-'Arabiyy and 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī⁴ treated in their commentaries. Other narrators, like al-Tha'labiy, record the history of transmission of the traditions.⁵ Some commentators, among them al-Qurṭubiy,⁶ concentrate on aspects of *fiqh* (jurisprudence).

¹ Al-Zajjāj, a grammarian, died 310 A.H. (al-Tabriziy, *Rayḥānat al-adab*). Al-Wāḥidiy, a grammarian and commentator, died 468 A.H. (*Rayḥānat*). Abū-Ḥayyān al-Andalusiy, a grammarian, commentator and reciter of the Qur'ān, died in Cairo 745 A.H. (*Rayḥānat*).

² Al-Zamakhshariy, the author of *tafsīr al-kashshāf*, died in 538 A.H. (Ḥajjī Khalifah, *Kashf al-Zunūn*).

³ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāziy, a theologian and commentator, the author of a *tafsīr* entitled *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, died 606 A.H. (*Kashf al-Zunūn*).

⁴ 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, a famous Sufi, died 720 or 751 A.H. (*Rayḥānah*).

⁵ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'labiy, the author of a well-known commentary (*tafsīr*) on the Qur'ān, died 426 or 427 A.H. (*Rayḥānah*).

⁶ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abi-Bakr al-Qurṭubiy, died in 668 A.H. (*Rayḥānah*).

There also exists a number of commentaries composed of many of these sciences, such as *Rūḥ al-Bayān* by Shaykh Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī,¹ *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī* by Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ālūsiy al-Baghdādiy,² *Gharā'ib al-Qur'ān* by Niẓām al-Dīn al-Naysābūriy.³ This group rendered a great service to the Science of Qur'ānic commentary in that it brought the Science out of a state of stagnation (characteristic of the fifth group before it), and developed it into a Science of precise investigation and theory.

However, if one were to examine closely the precision of this group's research, one would see that much of its Qur'ānic commentary imposes its theories onto the Qur'ān rather than allowing the content of the verses to speak for themselves.

The Methods Used by the Shī'ite Commentators and their Different Groupings

All the groups mentioned above are Sunni commentators. Their method, used in the earliest commentaries of this period, was based on *ijtihād*, that is, the reports of the companions and the followers of the companions were examined according to certain rules in order to reach an acceptable understanding of the text. This resulted in varying opinions amongst those making *ijtihād* and caused disorder, contradiction and, even, fabrication to enter into the body of the traditions.

The method employed by the Shī'ite commentators, however, was different, with the result that the patterning of the groups was also different. The Shī'ite commentators in their study of a verse of the Qur'ān, viewed the explanation given by the Prophet as proof of the meaning of the verse, they did not accept the saying of the companions, or the followers, as indisputable proof that the tradition was from the Prophet.

¹ Written by Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī (died 1137 A.H., *dhayl* (annotation of) *kashf al-Zunūn*).

² Written by Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ālūsiy (died 1270 A.H., *dhayl kashf al-Zunūn*).

³ Al-Naysābūriy died 728 A.H. (*dhayl kashf al-Zunūn*).

The Shī'ite commentators only recognized as valid an unbroken chain of narration from the Prophet and through members of his family. Accordingly, in using and transmitting the verses concerning Qur'ānic commentary, they restricted themselves to the use of traditions transmitted by the Prophet and by the Imams of the Prophet's family. This has given rise to the following groups:

The first group comprises those who have learned these traditions from the Prophet and from the Imams of the Prophet's family, studying and recording them according to their own method but not in any particular order. Among them we may mention such scholars as Zurārah, Muḥammad ibn Muslim, Ma'rūf and Jarīr who were companions of the fifth and sixth Imams.¹

The group comprises the first compilers of the commentaries, like Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kūfiy, Abū-Ḥamzah al-Thumālīy, Muḥammad al-'Ayyāshiy, 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummiy and al-Nu'māniy who lived between the second and fourth centuries after *Hijrah*.² The method of this group was similar to that of the fourth Sunni group of Commentators.

Thus, they avoided any kind of *ijtihād* or passing of judgment. We should remember that the Imams of the Prophet's family were living amongst Muslims and available for questioning (on

¹ Zurārah ibn A'yūn and Muḥammad ibn Muslim were special companions of Imam al-Bāqir and Imam al-Ṣādiq. Ma'rūf ibn Kharbūdh as well as Jarīr were special companions of Imam al-Ṣādiq.

² Furāt ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kūfiy, known for his commentary on the Qur'ān, was one of the teachers of 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummiy (*Rayḥānah*). Abū-Ḥamzah al-Thumālīy was a special companion of Imam al-Sajjād and Imam al-Bāqir (*Rayḥānah*). Muḥammad ibn Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshiy al-Kūfiy al-Samarqandiy was one of the great Shī'ite scholars who lived in the second half of the third century A.H. (*Rayḥānah*). 'Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummiy, who lived at the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century A.H., was one of the great teachers of Shī'ite tradition. Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nu'māniy, a student of al-Kulayniy, lived at the beginning of the fourth century A.H. (*Rayḥānah*).

matters of commentary, for example) for a period of almost three hundred years. Thus the first groups were not divided chronologically but rather according to their relationship with the Imams.

There are very few who recorded the tradition without a chain of transmission. As an example, we should mention one of the students of al-'Ayyāshiy who omitted to record the chains of transmission. It was his work, instead of the original of al-'Ayyāshiy which came into common use.

The third group comprises masters of various sciences, like al-Sharīf al-Raḍiy¹ who provided a commentary concerned with Qur'ānic language and Shaykh al-Ṭūsiy who wrote a commentary and analysis on metaphysical matters.² Included, too, is Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's philosophic work,³ al-Maybudiyy al-Khūnābādiyy's gnostic commentary⁴ and 'Abd 'Alī al-Ḥuwayziyy's commentary *Nūr al-Thaqalayn*.⁵ Hāshim al-Baḥrāniyy composed the commentary *al-Burhān*⁶ and al-Fayḍ al-Kāshāniyy compiled the work known as *al-Ṣāfi*.⁷

There were others who brought together many different themes to their commentaries, like Shaykh al-Ṭabarsiyy who in his

¹ Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mūsawiy al-Sharīf al-Raḍiy (died in 404 or 406 A.H.), a great Shī'ite scholar, known for his compilation of *Nahj al-balāghah* (*Rayḥānah*).

² Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifah Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsiyy, the author of *al-Taḥdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār*, the well-known canonical books of the Shī'ah. He died in 460 A.H. (*Rayḥānah*).

³ Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ibrahim al-Shīrāziyy, a famous philosopher, the author of *Asrār al-āyāt* and *Majmū'at al-tafāsīr*, died in 1050 A.H. (Muḥammad Bāqir al-Khānsāriyy, *Rawḍat al-Jannāt*, vol. 4, pp. 120-122).

⁴ Rashīd al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maybudiyy, the author of *Kashf al-asrār*, lived in the sixth century A.H.

⁵ 'Abd 'Alī al-Ḥuwayziyy al-Shīrāziyy died in 1112 A.H. (*Rayḥānah*).

⁶ Hāshim al-Baḥrāniyy died in 1107 A.H. (*Rayḥānah*).

⁷ Muḥammad Muḥsin ibn al-Murtadā al-Fayḍ al-Kāshāniyy, the author of *al-Ṣāfi* and *al-Aṣfā*, died in 1091 A.H. (*Rayḥānah*).

*Majma' al-Bayān*¹ researches different fields of language, grammar, Qur'ān recitation, gnosis of death, after-life and paradise, and knowledge of the traditions.

How Does the Qur'ān Lend Itself to Interpretation?

The answer to this question is contained in the previous section where we discussed the eternal validity of the Qur'ān: it speaks to, instructs and guides man now as it did in the past. As we have seen, the whole text of the Qur'ān is a challenge to mankind and particularly to the enemies of Islam in that the Qur'ān itself is proof of its own argument; it announces itself as a light, an illumination and an explanation of all things.

Thus a document which states and demonstrates that it is self-illuminating, hardly needs others to illuminate it. As proof that it is not the speech of man, the Qur'ān says that it is a harmonious speech, without the slightest inconsistency and any seeming inconsistency may be removed through reflection on the Qur'ān itself. If it were not the word of God, the Qur'ān would not be as clear as it is.

Moreover, if such speed needed something or someone else to explain its meaning and purpose, it would neither be the proof nor the absolute authority that it is so obviously is. This clarity is absolute, even if a seemingly contradictory passage becomes the object of dispute; it could be understood by cross-reference to the text of the Qur'ān.

For instance, at the time of the Prophet, such matters could be referred to him since his knowledge of the Qur'ān was perfect and he did not need to refer to other verses for clarification. Those who insisted on disagreeing, or disbelieving in the Prophet's fallibility, were not satisfied.

Therefore, commentaries, which solve problems of interpretation by quoting the commentaries of the Prophet, without giving proofs from other Qur'ānic verses, are useful only for those who believe in Prophethood and the Prophet's infallibility. These people do not go unmentioned in the Qur'ān; we are familiar with the following verse,

¹ Al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsiy died in 548 A.H. (*Rayḥānah*).

if it had been from other than God, then they would have found many inconsistencies in it.

This is a clear argument against those who would seek for inconsistencies in the Qur'ān and find fault with the Prophet.

The Qur'ān itself declares that the commentary and explanation of the Prophet is valid while the Prophet himself has confirmed the validity of the Qur'ānic commentary of the Imams. We may summarize this by saying that in the Qur'ān some verses may be explained by comparison with other verses and some by using the instructions and teachings of the Prophet and the Imams. The latter commentaries are not, of course different from the explanation which is produced by comparing and analyzing different verses.

Conclusion

There are three roads open to us when making commentary upon the Qur'ān. Firstly, by using knowledge that one already possesses.

Secondly, with the help of the sayings of the Prophet or Imams.

Thirdly, by using a combination of methods: by reflection and analysis, or by allowing the verse to become clarified by comparing it to other verses, or by use of the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams, whenever possible.

The third way is the one which we have outlined in the last section and it is this way which the Prophet himself and the Imams of his family indicate in their teachings?¹ As we have seen, the Prophet said, *"The verses were revealed to confirm each other,"* and Imam 'Alī said, *"One part of the Qur'ān explains another and one part witnesses to the other."*

It is, moreover, clear that this method of commentary is other than that warned against by the Prophet when he said, *"Whoever makes a commentary upon the Qur'ān according to*

¹ See the beginning of al-'Ayyāshiy's *Kitāb al-tafsīr*, al-Fayd al-Kāshānī's *al-Ṣāfi*, al-Baḥrānī's *al-Burhān* and al-Majlisī's *Bihār al-Anwār*.

his own opinion prepares for himself a place in the Fire."¹ This method uses the Qur'ān to explain itself and is not based merely on explanation arising from whim or fancy.

The first method is unacceptable and exemplifies commentary based on opinion, except in cases where it agrees with the third method. The second method is the one used by the early scholars and for many centuries afterwards, and is still in use amongst both Sunni and Shi'ite scholars of the traditions of the Prophet. This method is limited, considering the vast nature of the subject and the countless number of questions, (both general and particular), arising from over six thousand verses.

Where, one asks, is the answer to such questions? Where is the solution to so many intricate and perplexing questions? Or, should we refer to the body of tradition concerning the verses?

Let us not forget that the total number of traditions of the Prophet accepted and transmitted by the Sunni scholars number no more than two hundred and fifty; we should also remember that many of them are weak and some even totally unacceptable. It is true that the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams transmitted by the Shi'ite scholars number a thousand and that amongst them are to be found a considerable number which are fully trustworthy.

Consideration of these traditions is not enough, however, given the countless questions which arise and the many Qur'ānic verses that are not even mentioned in this body of traditions. Should one refer in such matters to the appropriate verses?

As we have explained, this is not acceptable according to the method under consideration here. Should one simply abstain from investigation and imagine that the need for knowledge is nonexistent? In this case, what is one to understand by the verse,

And we reveal the Book to you as an exposition of all things,
[XVI:89].

¹ Al-Majlisiy, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 137 (chapter on *ikhtilāf al-akhbār*).

which is clear proof that the Qur'ān itself is not a mystery that rather explains, among other things, itself, by its own light.

Chapter IV:82 contains the injunction, "*Will they not ponder on the Qur'ān?*" Similarly, in chapters XLVII:24 and XXXVIII:29 "*(This book) is a Book that we have revealed to you, full of blessing, that you may ponder its revelation and the men of understanding may reflect.*" Likewise in Chapter XXIII:68, "*Have they not pondered the word, or has something come to them which did not come to their forefathers?*"

What are we intended to understand by these verses? How are we to act in the light of the totally trustworthy traditions of the Prophet and the Imams in which they advise us to refer to the Qur'ān itself in case of problems of interpretation and discordance of opinion? According to many well known traditions of the Prophet, transmitted in unbroken chains of transmission, one is obliged to refer the tradition to the Book of God; if the tradition is in accordance with the Book, then it is accepted and used in commentary and, if in disagreement, it is rejected.

It is clear that the meaning of these traditions is applicable when one discovers through the Science of Commentary that the inner meaning of one verse is contrary to what is contained in another verse. In this case, one must reject what one has discovered through the study of commentaries.

These traditions are the best proof that the Qur'ān, like speech or writing in general, has meaning and will always have meaning, even when studied independently of the traditions. Thus it is the duty of the commentators to take into account and reflect upon the traditions of the Prophet and Imams concerning Qur'ānic verses but only use those traditions which are in accordance with the verse under scrutiny.

An Example of Commentary on the Qur'ān with the Aid of the Qur'ān

On four occasions in the Qur'ān, God says "*Allah is the creator of all beings.*" [XXXIX:62]. The meaning is clear on each occasion; God is stating that everything man may possibly

imagine in the world has been created by him and is sustained by Him. However, one should not ignore the fact that in hundreds of verses the Qur'ān affirms the existence of cause and effect and attributes the action of every doer to the immediate cause.

Thus the effect of the burning of fire is a direct result of the fire itself, the growing of plants, the action of the plants, the falling rain caused by the state of the sky; the actions which man chooses to undertake are, according to the Qur'ān, the result (and consequent responsibility) of man. We may also say that the doer of any action is the one responsible for that action, but God is the giver of existence, the Creator of deeds and the owner of deeds.

Keeping in mind this general relationship between the Creator and His creation, we may read in chapter XXXII:7 "*Who made all things beautiful and good which We created.*" When we join this verse to the previous one we see that beauty and goodness necessarily accompany His creation and so anything which has existence in the cosmos is also good and beautiful.

We should not forget, however, that in many verses, the Qur'ān affirms the existence of good and its opposite, evil, useful things and harmful things, beauty and ugliness; and it enumerates many bad actions, wrong doers and bad events.

These are all, however, negative aspects of the human character and are mentioned as a measure of man; they are relative and not intended as proof that the creation of man is basically bad. For example, the snake or the serpent is harmful but only to man and animals that suffer the effects of its sting; to stones and earth it is harmless. Bitter taste and foul smell are unpleasant, but only to the human sense of taste and smell, not to all animals. Certain behavior may at times appear wrong but this is often the result of observing human behavior in relation to one particular society of men; in another society or circumstance it may not be considered wrong.

Indeed, if we dispense for a moment with those negative aspects of man's character which are secondary or relative to the miracle and perfection of His creation, we witness only the beautiful symmetry and proportion of the cosmos in its entirety and the amazing beneficence of the Creator. Words are not able to describe this beauty since they themselves are part of this world of beauty.

In reality the abovementioned verses awake man to an awareness of the relative nature of beauty and ugliness; they invite him to a comprehension of absolute beauty and prepare him for an understanding of creation as a whole. In fact, there are Qur'ānic verses which explain or comment upon the different aspects of creation in the universe, either as isolated individual examples or as groupings and classes. Each creation, whether a single manifestation or joined to a larger structure and patterning, is a sign and indication of God. Whichever way we regard creation, it all points to the existence of God.

This way of understanding or seeing the universe and its signs, leads to an appreciation of the stupendous beauty which encircles the whole world and allows us to realize that it is His beauty, emanating from the domain of His power, and made visible in the signs of the skies and the earth. Each aspect of the cosmos lends beauty and dimension to everything surrounding it, yet at the same time it "is insignificant in relation to the whole.

The Qur'ān affirms in other verses that perfection and beauty manifest themselves from the domain of his power; thus He says in chapter XL:65 "*He is the Living One. There is no god save Him,*" and in II:165 "*...power belongs completely to God,*" and in IV:139, "*Truly all power belongs to God,*" and "*He is the knower, the All-powerful.*" On another occasion, we read "*And He is the Hearer, the Seer,*" and in XX:8, "*Allah! There is no god save Him. His are the most beautiful names.*"

We realize from these verses that the beauty which manifests itself in the visible world has its reality in the domain of His power and grandeur. All other beauty, all other power, is illusory or metaphorical of His power.

In affirmation of this explanation, the Qur'ān states that the beauty and perfection created by man is limited and temporal but that of God boundless and eternal. God emphasizes that all creation is from Him and under His power. In chapter LIV:49, *"Truly, we have created everything by measure"* and in the chapter XV:21, *"And there is not a thing with us but there are stores of it. And we do not send it down except in appointed measure."*

Careful observation reveals that the Book itself declares its own perfection and beauty, that it encompasses all aspects of creation and the Creator, and that there is no fault or shortcoming in it. Such is the perfection of the Qur'ān, which itself is one of the signs of God, that it makes the reader forget himself in rapturous appreciation of its beauty.

This we read in II:165 *"Those who believe are stauncher in their love of God."* Love, of its very nature, demands the self and the giving over of the self to God: It demands the handing over of one's affairs completely to Him and allowing Him to be one's Lord: *"And Allah is the protecting Friend of the believers."* [III:68].

This idea is also contained in II:257 which declares, *"God is the Protecting Friend of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into light,"* and also in VI:122, *"Is he who was dead and We have raised him to life and set for him a light in which he walks among men?"* Likewise, we read in LVIII:22, *"As for such, He has written faith upon their hearts and has strengthened them with a spirit from Him."*

This spirit, this new life and light, is given by God to the man who perceives reality and truth and who understands the path of happiness and wellbeing in society. In another verse in LVII:28, He explains the effect of such light: *"O you who believe! Be mindful of your duty to God and put faith in His Messenger. He will give you twofold of His mercy and will appoint for you a light in which you shall walk."*

Again, in another verse, He makes a commentary on "faith in the Prophet" by explaining it as submission and obedience to

Him; chapter III:31, "Say (O Muḥammad, to mankind): If you love God, follow me; God will love you."

The nature of this path is explained in chapter VII:157,

Those who follow the messenger the Prophet who can neither read nor write whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospels (which are) with them. He will rejoin in them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul; and He will relieve them of their burden and the fetters they used to wear.

Still more vividly, the path is explained in another verse which is also a commentary on the previous verse [XXX:30],

So let your purpose (O Muḥammad) for the din (of Islam) as a man by nature upright - the nature of God on which he has created man. There is no altering God's creation. That is the right way of life, but most men do not know...

The right way of life, or *din*, refers to the correct path for society to follow for its wellbeing and happiness. According to this verse, the way of Islam is also the way desired by the Creator for man.

In other words, the legislative framework given to man by God is the very framework which is appropriate for the creature man. This divine law is in complete harmony with the nature of man, living a life of piety and obedience.

God says in another verse [XCI:7-8], "And a soul and Him who perfected it. And inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right." The Qur'ān is the only revealed book which equates the happiness and wellbeing of man with a pure and sincere way of life.

Moreover, unlike other religions, Islam does not separate worship of God from the actual program of living; it establishes the word *din* to mean not only religion but also life in general as well, the actual day to day routine of man, both on a personal and social level.

The Qur'ān establishes a program of living which is in accord with the functioning and the reality of the cosmos, and the Qur'ān mentions many of the benefits and virtues to be expected by the man of God and the lovers of Truth, including a certainty of faith and tranquility of the heart.

The Validity of the Commentary of the Prophet and the Imams

From an indication in the Qur'ān itself, the commentary of the Prophet and the Imams, (as discussed in the previous sections), is established as being absolutely true. Authentication of the sayings of the Prophet and the Imams is clearly established by the existence of fully trustworthy chains of transmissions. A tradition may not, however, be recognized as totally acceptable if it has been transmitted by one chain of narration only.

The validity of the tradition may be disputed amongst the Muslim Scholars of Commentary: amongst the Sunni's a tradition of a single chain of transmission, classified in their terms as *Ṣaḥīḥ* (sound), must be accepted and acted upon; among the Shī'ite scholars a tradition with a single undisputed chain of transmission is also accepted as a proof. However, in the laws of the sharī'ah it is not valid and must be investigated and checked before use as a proof.

Author's Note: The previous section has been specifically about the use of commentary or explanation in order to arrive at the true meaning of a verse. This includes study of the literal meanings and those hidden in metaphor. It does not include an explanation or a discussion of the linguistic and literal aspects or the science of Qur'ān recitation since these do not affect the meaning.

THE REVELATION OF THE QUR'ĀN

General Beliefs of Muslims concerning the Revelation of the Qur'ān

More than any other revealed book, especially the Torah and the New Testament, the Qur'ān describes the details of the revelation, the transmittance and even accounts of the experience of the revelation. The general belief of Muslims concerning the revelation, based on the Qur'ān, is that the text of the Qur'ān is the actual speech of God transmitted to the Prophet by one of His chosen angels.

The name of this angel, or heavenly being, is Gabriel or the Faithful Spirit. He transmitted the word of God over a period of twenty-three years to the Prophet. He would bring the divine instructions to the Prophet, who would relate them faithfully to the people using the same words in the form of a verse.

The Prophet thus used the meaning of the verses to call the people to an understanding of faith, of belief, of social laws and of individual duties. These instructions from God to His messenger are known as the Prophecy, or the message; the Prophet transmitted this message without making any addition to or detraction from it in any way.

The View of Contemporary Non-Muslim Writers concerning the Revelation and Prophecy

Most contemporary writers who take an interest in different religions and ideologies adopt the following view of the Qur'ān: they say the Prophet was a social genius who appeared to save society from the throes of decline into savagery and to raise it up in the cradle of civilization and freedom. They claim also that he called men to his own ideas of pure and sincere behavior by giving them a comprehensive religious form and order. They affirm that he had a pure soul and tremendous ambition; that he lived in a particularly dark and ignorant age, where only the law of force and foolish singing of verse, social chaos and selfishness, stealing, marauding and savagery were to be seen.

They describe how he was troubled by witnessing such things and, sometimes when overcome by the pain of such sights, he would withdraw from men and pass days alone in the cave in the Tihāmah mountains; he would marvel at the sky and its shining stars, the earth, the mountains, the sea, the desert and all the precious means placed at the disposal of man by the Creator; he would be grieved at the bad behavior and ignorance of those around him, who had thrown away a life of wellbeing and happiness for a tormented succession of bestial habits.

This feeling was always present with the Prophet; he bore this pain and vexation up to his fortieth year when, according to these contemporary non-Muslim writers, he formed a plan to save his fellowmen from their miserable state of nomadic wandering, rebellious independence, selfishness and lawlessness.

This plan, called the religion of Islam, was the most suitable one for the times. The Prophet being of pure and sincere character, realized that his chaste thoughts were the Word of God and Divine Revelation which were infused in him through his virtuous nature. His good will and benevolent spirit from which his thoughts exuded and established peace in his heart were called the Spirit of Trustworthiness and Gabriel, the angel of revelation.

Furthermore, according to this contemporary view of Muḥammad, he perceived the forces of good and happiness in nature-as Angels and all the forces of bad as Satan and the jinn (invisible entities). He called his own task, which he had undertaken according to his own conscience, Prophethood and himself, the deliverer of the divine message.

This explanation, however, comes from those writers who affirm the existence of God or at least some kind of nature force, and attach a certain importance to the religion of Islam, albeit in the name of just and unbiased assessment. Those, however, who deny outright the existence of a Creator see Prophecy, revelation, divine duties, reward and punishment, the fire and the garden as mere religious politics, a lie in the name of religion to further one's own ends.

They say that the prophets were reformers who brought about social change in the name of religion. They argued that since men of past ages were drowned in ignorance and superstitious worship the prophets contained the religious order within a framework of superstitious beliefs about the origin of Creation and the day of reckoning in order to further their prospects of reform.

What the Qur'ān Itself Says concerning this Matter

Scholars who explain the power of revelation and prophecy using the above explanation, attach great importance to the Science of nature and the visible world, and claim that everything in the world works according to the laws of nature. They view historical events, right up to the present day, as the developing and constantly changing face of nature.

Likewise, they view all revealed religions as social manifestations. Thus they would agree that if one of the geniuses of history, like Cyrus, Darius or Alexander, had announced himself as having been chosen by God as an executor of divine' commands, their explanation would have been no different than that given above.

We do not intend here to establish the existence of the unseen, of the world beyond the visible world of nature; we are not

saying to other scholars or scientists that any one science may only be discussed by remaining within the strict limits of that particular science. We are not suggesting that the modern sciences which investigate the properties and effects of the material world, (whether or not they be positively or negatively disposed to the creation), do not have the right to enter into an investigation of the metaphysical.

What we are saying is that any explanation they propose must be in accordance with the explanation of society, existence, nature and the cosmos given by the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān is an authentic document of prophecy and is the basis of all social, metaphysical and scientific discussion; the explanation of the Qur'ān contains proofs against their arguments which we can enumerate and reflect upon. These proofs are connected to different Qur'ānic verses discussed below.

Divine Revelation

According to the explanation of modern non-Muslims and atheists, the Prophet's nature was pure through which came to him the word of God, meaning that the divine system of thought was alive in his own thoughts; the idea of divinity manifested itself in his thoughts because he was pure and holy; it was natural (in the minds of these Scholars) for prophets to attribute these thoughts to God for, in this way, they ennobled and exalted their own task.

The Qur'ān, however, strongly and convincingly denies that it is the speech or the ideas of the prophet or, indeed, of any other man. In chapters X:38 and XI:13 the Qur'ān declares that if it is the word of man then detractors of Islam should produce similar words about every subject treated in the Qur'ān, namely, belief in the afterlife, morals, laws, stories of past generations and other prophets, wisdom and advice. The Qur'ān urges them to seek help anywhere if they do not realize that it is the word of God and not of man, but adds that even if jinn and man joined forces together they would not be able to produce a Qur'ān like it.

In chapter II:23, the Qur'ān challenges those who consider it merely the speech of Muhammad to produce a book similar to it or even just one chapter like it. The force of this challenge becomes clear when we realize that it is issued for someone whose life should resemble that of Muhammad, namely, the life of an orphan, uneducated in any formal sense, not being able to read or write and grew up in the unenlightened age of the *jāhiliyyah* period (the age of ignorance) before Islam.

In IV:82, the Qur'ān asks why no inconsistencies or changes appeared in the verses considering that neither the wording nor the meaning of the verses has altered despite being revealed over a period of twenty-three years. If it was the word of man and not the word of God, then it would have certainly been affected by change like all other things in the temporal world of nature and matter.

It is clear that this challenge and these explanations are not mere empty words of exultation; rather they present the Qur'ān for what it is, namely the word of God.

The Qur'ān establishes its own miraculous nature in hundreds of verses. This miracle is still unexplained by normal literacy standards used to "grasp" a text. Indeed successive prophets established their Prophethood through similar verses revealed by God. If prophecy was merely the call of an individual conscience or the inspiration of a pure and sincere soul, then there would be no sense in claiming it as divine proof or seeking help in its miraculous nature as the Prophet, in fact, did.

Some writers interpret the many miracles of the Qur'ān in terms of undisguised mockery. When we investigate the subject of their mockery we inevitably discover that the Qur'ān means something other than that which they have understood.

It is not our intention to try and prove the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān nor to demonstrate the soundness and authenticity of its narration; rather, we would point out that the Qur'ān clearly describes the miracles of the past Prophets, like Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The stories related in the Qur'ān can only be understood and interpreted in the light of miraculous guidance.

Why, we may ask, if the prophets were mere men, inspired by the purity of their character, was it necessary to establish the existence of this miraculous guidance?

The Angel Gabriel

According to the explanation of the abovementioned writers, the Prophet referred to his own pure soul as the "Faithful Spirit" or the giver of revelation. The Qur'ān, however, does not support this view and names Gabriel as the deliverer of the verses.

God says in chapter II:97, "*Say (O Muhammad, to mankind): Who is an enemy to Gabriel, for it is he who has revealed (this book) to your heart by God's permission.*" This verse refers to Jews who wanted to know who had revealed the Qur'ān to the Prophet. He replied that it was Gabriel. They said, "*We are enemies of Gabriel as he it was who gave us (the tribe of Israel) the laws and legal punishments and as we are enemies to him, we do not believe in the book which he has brought.*" Thus, God replies to them in the verse that Gabriel revealed the Qur'ān to the Prophet by God's permission. God further says that the Qur'ān is to be believed in, and that it is not the speech of Gabriel. It is important to note that the Qur'ān, in the words of the above verse was revealed "to the heart" of the Prophet Muhammad by Gabriel.

In another verse [XXVI:193-4], we read that it was transmitted by the Faithful Spirit, "*which the Faithful Spirit has brought down upon your heart.*"¹ By comparison of these two verses it becomes evident that it is the angel Gabriel who is meant here by the words, "Faithful Spirit."

In chapter LXXXL 19-23, God describes the transmittance of revelation:

¹ Because both verses relate the descension of the Qur'ān before the Holy Prophet. It says, "*Upon your hearts*" and not "their hearts" and the heart, in the usage of the Holy Qur'ān is the soul because in several places, understanding and awareness comes from the soul and is related to the heart. XXVI:193-195.

That this is in truth the word of an honored messenger (Gabriel), Mighty established in the presence of the Lord of the Throne, one to be obeyed and trustworthy and your comrade (the Prophet) is not mad. Surely he saw him on the clear horizon.

These verses show that Gabriel was one of the intimates of God, possessing great power and trust. Again in chapter XL:7, we read, "Those who bear the power, and all who are around Him, Praise their Lord and believe in Him and ask forgiveness for those who believe." Such characteristics as belief in God and seeking forgiveness from him are only to be expected from independent, sentient creatures.

In chapter IV: 172-173 we read,

The Messiah will never disdain to be a servant of God, nor will the favored angels. Whoever disdains His service and is proud, He will gather them all to Himself, then as for those who believe and do good, He will pay them fully their rewards and give them more out of His grace, and as for those who disdain and are proud, He will punish them with a painful doom. And they will not find for themselves besides Allah a guardian or a helper.

It is clear that although the Messiah, Jesus, and the favored angels do not disobey the commands of God they are, nevertheless, warned of a painful punishment on the day of reckoning if they were to commit a wrong. The possibility of neglect of their duties or committing wrong action is necessarily dependent on their being sentient beings, possessed of free will and entrusted with the task of transmitting the revelation of God.

Thus we learn from the Qur'ān that Gabriel is the Faithful Soul: he is trustworthy and to be obeyed because he is obeyed by angels in his task. An indication of these obedient angels comes in the verse,

But truly it is a warning; so let whoever will pay heed to it, on honored leaves exalted, purified (set down by scribes) noble and righteous [LXXX:11-16]

The Angels and the Devils

According to the explanation of contemporary non-Muslim writers, angel is the name given to forces in nature which represent goodness, and happiness and devils are forces in nature representing evil and unhappiness. What we understand from the Qur'ān, however, is that they are beings existing beyond our sense-range, who possess feelings and an independent freewill. To the verses above, (indicating that angels possess independence and freewill), may be added many other verses which confirm these same qualities.

The refusal of Satan to prostrate himself before Adam and the dialogue between Satan and God occurs several times in the Qur'ān. Satan, after having been expelled from intimacy with God, says in chapter XXXVIII:82-83, *"I surely will lead every one of them astray except your sincere slaves among them."* And God replies *"I shall fill hell with you and with those who follow you, together"* [XXXVIII:85].

It is clear, that punishment can only take place if the punished understand the reason for the punishment. God in chapter XXXIV:20, says in confirmation of Satan's warning to man, *"And Satan indeed found his calculation true concerning them, for they follow them, all except a group of true believers."* Likewise, we read in chapter XIV:22, *"And Satan said when the matter had been decided: Indeed! Allah promised you a promise of truth; and I promised you and failed you. And I had no power over you except that I called so you and you obeyed me. So do not blame me but blame yourselves."*

Blame is a matter which can only be associated with those who possess the power of reason and freewill. We quote these verses to show that Satan, like the rest of the angels, is a thinking independent being rather than a force in nature.

Just as verses occur in the Qur'ān concerning the angels and the devils, there also are verses, which clearly and vividly describe the jinn (elemental spirits or invisible beings, either harmful or helpful). In chapter XLVI:18 reference is made to those who invited to believe in Islam spurn it as just another ancient fable or superstition:

Such are those in whom the word concerning nations of the jinn and mankind that have passed away before them has effect. Indeed, they are the losers.

We may understand from this verse that the jinn, the invisible entities, like mankind, live in different nations, pass a period of time in their different societies and finally die.

In the same chapter, verses 29-32 we read,

And when we inclined toward you (Muḥammad) certain of the jinn who wished to hear the Qur'ān and when they were in its presence said, Listen! And when it was finished turned back to their people warning. They said, O our people! Truly we have heard a book which has been revealed after Moses, confirming that which was before it, guiding to the truth and a right road. O my people! Respond to God's Summoner and believe in Him. He will forgive you some of your wrong actions and guard you from a painful doom. And whoever does not respond to God's Summoner he can in no way escape in the earth, and you (can find) no protecting friends instead of Him. Such are in clear error.

These verses clearly confirm that the jinn, like men, live in groups are thinking individuals possessing freewill and charged with duties. Moreover, there are other verses dealing with the day of rising which affirms these same qualities in the jinn.

The Call of Conscience

According to the explanation of certain modern writers, Prophethood is the rising up of a man from amongst his people in order to undertake social reform in accordance with the call of his conscience. The Qur'ān, however, gives a different meaning to the Prophethood. In XCI:7-8 we read, *"And a soul and Him who perfected it, and inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it."*

In this verse, God demonstrates that each individual perceives from his own conscience and God-given nature the difference between good and bad action; and that the potential for reform and the bettering of one's self is contained within each person; some listen to their conscience and act correctly while others pay no heed and so act wrongly.

Thus in the following verses of the same chapter God says: *"He is indeed successful who causes it to grow and he is indeed a failure who stunts it."* If Prophethood manifests itself as a result of the conscience, which everyone possesses, then everyone in theory may become a prophet. God, however, has reserved this duty for certain men only.

Thus He says in chapter VI:124, *"And when a sign comes to them, they say: we do not believe until we are given that which God's messengers are given. God knows best with whom to place His message."*

The Reality of the Prophet's Mission

We should repeat at this point that we do not intend to prove or disprove here the truth of Islam or the validity of the Prophet's invitation of the people to Islam. Rather, we simply want to state that the second of the modern non-Islamic explanations is also not in accordance with the explanation given in the Qur'ān.

According to it, the prophet succeeded in convincing people to believe in a set of superstitions framed in a politico-religious framework; he was aided in this, so they say, by the fact that his own people were tribesmen, having no advanced culture of their own. In the name of public good and the wellbeing of society harsh punishments were promised to those who did not obey the religious laws; the Prophet instilled a fear of the Day of Reckoning and promised rewards for those who obeyed.

Thus, fervor for the promised paradise and fear of the Day of Reckoning created a society based on a religious foundation.

The history of the lives of other prophets has, for the most part, been lost in time, but the life of the Prophet Muḥammad is well documented. Anyone who researches into it will not be left in the least doubt that he had total faith and inner certainty in his mission. If religious beliefs were mere superstitions or a means to unify and subdue a society, then all the proofs expounded in the Qur'ān concerning the hereafter, the existence of a Creator of the World, Divine Unity, His attributes, belief in a prophecy and the reckoning of a man's actions after death would have absolutely no meaning.

What the Qur'ān says about the Meaning of Revelation and Prophecy

The Qur'ān clearly states that it is a book revealed to the Prophet and that revelation is a kind of divine utterance beyond the understanding or communication of the material world; revelation is unperceived by sense or intellect but apprehended by other faculties which, by God's will, are present in certain individuals. Through revelation instructions from the unseen are received and their acceptance and implementation is called Prophethood. To clarify this matter we may make the following points.

Man's Innate Nature

In the beginning of this book we explained that each created entity, whether mineral, plant or animal, is endowed with an inherent force which enables it to develop in accordance with its own innate design and nature.

Thus we read in chapter XX:50, *"Our Lord is He who gave everything its nature, then guided it correctly,"* and again in chapter LXXXVII:2-3 *"Who creates, then disposes, who measures then guides."* We also know that man is not excluded from this general law, that is, he has a direction and an aim towards which he develops, having been endowed with faculties which allow him to fulfill this aim. All his happiness lies in achieving this aim; his sorrow, grief and misfortune are the result of his failure to achieve this aim. He is guided to this special purpose by his Creator.

As God says in chapter LXXVI:3, *"Indeed, we have shown him the way whether he be grateful or disbelieving."* Likewise we read in chapter LXXX:19-20, *"From a drop of seed, He creates him and Proportions him; then makes the way easy for him."*

Man's Path, in Traversing the Road of Life

The difference between the animal and plant kingdoms and man is that the former react according to their inherent knowledge or instinct, while man, also possessing an inherent knowledge, is equipped with an intellect and the capacity to use or recognize wisdom. Even if man is capable of undertaking a

certain action, he weighs the good or the bad, the benefit or harm, contained in that action and implements it only if he estimates that the benefit outweighs the harm.

Thus he follows the instruction of his intellect in every action; the intellect dictates the necessity of an action. The intellect causes one to abandon an act if it is likely to bring with it ' an unacceptable degree of trouble and hardship; it not only instructs one on the feasibility of an action, but it also takes into account the dictates of sentiment and feeling.

Indeed the perception of sentiment with regard to the relative good or bad in matter is so closely connected with the decision of the intellect as to be considered one and the same thing.

Man as a Social Being

No one would deny that men are social beings who cooperate with each other to better meet their daily needs. We may wonder, however, whether men desire this cooperation from their natural feelings; are they naturally inclined to undertake an action with others and share an interest in something as a social project?

On one level, man's needs feelings and desires cause him to act for his own benefit and, without regard for the needs and wishes of others. Man uses every means to fulfill his own needs: he uses every kind of transport to reach his destination; he uses the leaves, stems and fruit of plants and trees; he lives upon the meat of animals and their products, and takes advantage of a multitude of other things to complement his own deficiencies in certain respects. Can man, whose state is such that he uses everything he finds to his own ends, be expected to respect another human being? Can he extend his hand to another in cooperation and turn a blind eye to his own desire for the sake of mutual benefit?

The answer in the first instance must be no. It is as a result of man's countless needs, which can never be fulfilled by himself alone, that he recognizes the possibility of fulfilling them through the help and cooperation of others. Similarly, he understands that his own strengths, desires and wishes are also shared by others, and just as he defends his own interests so others defend theirs.

Thus, out of necessity, he cooperates with the social nexus and gives a certain measure of his own efforts to fulfill the needs of others; in return, he benefits from the efforts of others in order to fulfill his own needs. In truth he has entered into a marketplace of social wealth, always open to traders and offering all the benefits obtained by the collective work of the society. All these factors are placed together in this marketplace of pooled human resources and each person, according to the importance society attaches to his work, has a share in these benefits.

Thus, man's first nature incites him to pursue the fulfillment of his own needs using others in the process and taking advantage of their work for his own ends. It is only in cases of necessity and helplessness that he lends a hand to cooperate with society.

This matter is clear when we observe the nature of children: anything a child wants he demands in an extreme way; he emphasizes his demand by crying. As he grows older, however, and becomes a part of the social fabric, he gradually puts an end to his excessive demands. More evidence for the truth of this may be seen when a person accumulates power, which exceeds that of others and he rejects the spirit of cooperation and its restrictions of society; such an individual uses people and the fruits of their labors for himself without giving anything back in return.

God refers to the necessary spirit of natural cooperation in society in chapter XLIII:32, "*We have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of the world, and raised some of them above others in rank that some of them take labor from others...*" This verse refers to the reality of the social situation in which each individual has a different capacity and different talents: those who are superior in one domain engage the cooperation or employ of others for their eventual mutual benefit.

Thus, all members of society are linked together in the ways and wants of the fabric of one single social unit. Those who do not see the obvious necessity of mutual cooperation are

condemned by God in chapter XIV:34, "Truly man is surely a wrongdoer, (a tyrant)" and, in chapter XXXIII:72, "Indeed he has proved a tyrant and a fool."

These verses refer to man's natural instinct which, unless checked, drives him to take advantage of his fellowmen and in doing so to overstep the rights of others.

The Manifestation of Social Differences and the Necessity of Law

Man in his dealings with his fellow men is obliged to accept a social life based on cooperation; in doing so he effectively forgoes some of the freedom enjoyed within his own sphere of work. Merely taking part in a society based on injustice and gaining social differences is not enough to satisfy the basic needs of the average man. In such a society, taking advantage of the efforts of others leads to corruption and a loss of the original purpose of removing glaring differences between men and bettering their lives.

It is clear that a framework of laws, understood and respected by all, must govern the different members of society. If there are no clear laws governing even the most basic of transactions (like buying and selling), transactions will cease to function correctly. Laws are necessary to preserve the rights of individuals. The power and wisdom of the Creator Who has guided man towards his wellbeing and happiness, has also guaranteed the success and happiness of society.

Guidance in the form of social law is mentioned by God in LXXX:19-20, "From a drop of seed He creates him and proportions him; then makes the way easy for him." This making of life easy for him is an indication of the social guidance which he has given to man in the form of laws and instructions.

The Intellect is not Sufficient in Guiding Man towards Respect of the Law

The guidance we are considering here is that which emanates from the wisdom of the Creator; this wisdom has created man

and allotted him his goal of wellbeing just as it has assigned a path and goal to all creation. This goal of happiness and wellbeing is the path of self-fulfillment based on correct behavior in a social setting. It is clear that, of necessity, there can be no inconsistencies or shortcomings in the work of the Creator.

If, at times, one cannot discern His aim or it seems hidden from normal perception, it is not through lack of reason or cause on the part of God, but rather that the cause is linked to other causes which obscure the one in question. If there were no hindrances to a clear perception of the causal chain of events, two given actions would never appear inconsistent or contradictory to the harmony of creation nor would the work of the Creator appear (as it sometimes does to those whose perception is hindered by the intricacy of the causal chain of events), inconsistent and imperfect.

Guidance towards the law, whose function is to remove differences and conflict between individuals in society, is not a matter for the intellect since it is this very intellect which causes man to dispute with others. It is the same intellect which incites man to profit at the expense of others and to preserve, first and foremost, his own interest, accepting justice only when there is no alternative.

The two opposing forces, one causing difficulties and one doing away with them, are qualities of man's character; they do not obviously exist in the Creator: 'the countless daily transgressions and violations of the law, in effect, all result from those who use their intellect incorrectly; they themselves are the very source of their own difficulties.

If the intellect was truly a means of removing wrong action from society and was itself a trustworthy guide to man's wellbeing, it would recognize the validity of the law and prevent man from violating it. The intellect's refusal to willingly accept what is obviously given for the wellbeing of man is confirmed when we realize that its acceptance of a society based on just laws is only out of necessity. Without this compulsion, it would never accept to know the law.

Those who transgress the law do so for many reasons: some oppose it without fear, because their power exceeds that of the law; others, because they live outside the reach of the law, through deceit or negligence on the part of the authorities; others are able to invent reasons which make their wrong actions appear lawful and acceptable; some make use of the helplessness of the person they have wronged. All, however, find no legal obstacle in their wrong aims; even if an obstacle appears, their intellect, rather than guiding them to an acceptance of the law, renders the obstacle right and ineffective.

From these examples we are left in no doubt that the intellect, far from controlling, restricting or guiding man, merely uses its influence to its own purpose. We must include, therefore, that it is incapable of guiding man towards a social law which guarantees the rights, freedom and wellbeing of all the members of society.

God says in chapter XCVI:6-7 "*Indeed, man truly rebels when he thinks himself independent.*" The independence referred to here includes the independence of those who imagine that they can claim their rights through other than the path of legality.

The Only Way to Guidance is that of Revelation

Man, like the rest of creation, naturally seeks his own wellbeing and happiness as he lives out his life. Since, by his very makeup, he has a variety of natural needs, he has no alternative but to live in society in order to fulfill these needs; his own wellbeing and search for the fulfillment of his natural character takes place in the wider framework of society's wellbeing.

Thus the only acceptable pattern of existence, regulated by a comprehensive law common to all people, is the one which guarantees both the wellbeing of society and of the individual in a balanced and just fashion. It is also clear that man, like the rest of creation, must endeavor to achieve his wellbeing and undertake whatever preparation is necessary for achieving this by allowing himself to be guided by his Creator.

It is but a logical next step in our analysis to say that any guidance from the Creator must be towards this comprehensive law, common to all and, at the same time, in accord with the individual's wellbeing. Intellect is not enough to guide man to the law since it does not always decide in favor of cooperation with others nor in favor of the common good.

The path -the way- which fits perfectly the requirements of man is the way taught by the Prophets and messengers of God. It is the way brought to them by God through revelation and established as undeniably true and valid, by the example of their own lives and their intimate knowledge and contact with God.

In chapter II:213, God says, "*Mankind was one community and God sent (to them) prophets as bearers of good news and as warners and revealed to them the book with the truth that it may judge between mankind concerning that in which they differed.*" Here we understand "one community" to mean a society at peace, its members living without dispute or difference. After a period of time, men differed with one another and, as a result, God sent the prophets.

Again, He says in IV:163-165, "*Indeed we have inspired you as we have inspired Noah... Messengers of good news and a warning in order that mankind might have no argument against God after the Messenger.*" Intellect alone does not make man accountable to God and this is why he must be awakened to the reality of his inner condition by other means.

The first of the above-mentioned verses recognizes the way of revelation and prophecy as the only way of removing differences between men. The second shows revelation and prophecy to be the complete and absolute proof to mankind of the truth of God's message.

Some Questions Answered

Question: By using the premise that the intellect cannot prevent violation of the law and the wrong action of man in general, you are declaring the necessity of imposing a law or, as you say, "guidance" towards his own wellbeing; that is, you are

demanding that we place our trust in revelation and in Prophethood rather than in the intellect.

The truth is, however, that the laws and instructions of revelation are also ineffective in that they cannot prevent violation of the law of the Shari'ic law or divine code; in fact, man's acceptance of this code is even less than his acceptance of the civil code. What can you reply to this?

Answer: To point out the way is one thing and to follow it is another. The Creator has taken upon himself to guide mankind to a law under which he can achieve his wellbeing; He has not taken upon himself to stop mankind from infringing upon the law nor of compelling men to follow the law. We have investigated above the problem of man's infringement of the law, not to prove that the intellect is deficient or incapable of preventing wrong action but, rather, to show that it usually does not decide in favor of the law or of cooperation with society.

As we have pointed out, the intellect only follows the law out of necessity; if it perceives that obeying the law and restricting one's personal freedom brings less benefit than disobedience, then it will not follow the law nor stop others from transgressing.

The acceptance of the way of the revelation, however, always brings with it obedience to the law. By accepting the code of behavior revealed by the prophets, one entrusts one's judgment to God who, with his boundless power and knowledge, constantly watches over man; only He can reward good deeds or punish bad ones in an absolutely just and unbiased way. God says in chapter XII:40, "*The decision rests with God only,*" and in chapter XCIX:7-8, "*And whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it then and whoever does an atom's weight of bad will see it then.*"

Likewise, He says in XXII:17, "*Indeed God will decide between them on the day of Rising, Indeed! God is witness over all things,*" and in II:77, "*Are they unaware that God knows that which they keep hidden and that which they proclaim.*" In XXXIII:52, we read: "*And God is watcher over all things.*"

From these verses, it is clear that the divine *dīn* of Islam, which has been given to man through revelation, is not capable of preventing transgression of the law any more than the civil law drawn up by men. The machinery of the civil law appoints officials and employees to control and inspect the action of man and also imposes a system of punishment for his offences; this method only works when the law is strong and the crime is discovered.

The divine *dīn* is superior to manmade laws or social orders in that control over man is carried out in a very special way, namely, through the vigil of the angels. Moreover, the divine *dīn* obliges in every man and woman to enjoin the right and forbid the wrong. All men, without exception, are instructed to watch over the action of their fellow men and to be guardians of the law.

It is only belief in a divine order which contains and defines action outside the limits of good and bad and within the reality of the Day of Reckoning to come. Most importantly, the Lord of the world and of the entire unseen world is aware of man's every action and is present with him everywhere at every moment.

Like the civil codes drawn up by man, there is also in the divine code a corresponding system of punishment for every sin both in this world and on the day of reckoning after death. Unlike the civil code, however, the divine law guarantees that no man will escape from judgment and punishment, if punishment is warranted. As proof, the reader is urged to follow what is written in chapter IV:59, "*Obey God and obey the messenger and those of you in authority*" and in XI:71, "*And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one to another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong.*"

Likewise, we may study LXXXII:10-12 when God says, "*Indeed there are guardians above you, generous and recording, who know all that you do.*" and also in XXXIV:21, "*And your Lord (O Muḥammad) takes note of all things.*"

A Second Question: It has been argued that the intellect does not always decide in favor of respect for the law. Is this not inconsistent with what is contained in the saying of the Imams, which states that God has given two proofs to his servants, the outward and obvious one being that of His Prophet, and the inner and hidden one being that of the intellect of man? How are we to understand this statement in the light of how the intellect has been described?

Answer: Without exception, man's intellect is concentrated on securing benefit and avoiding harm. Whenever it accepts to cooperate and share in society's activity, it is, as we have seen above, seeking its own benefit. This need is often felt by those who wish to profit from others or seek to control others by using their wealth. For such men there is nothing prohibiting them from pursuing their illegal action; their intellect will not decide in favor of the law nor forbid transgression of the same law.

If, however, the source of compulsion (as is understood in the light of divine revelation) is from God, then the effect on man is totally different. Gods watching over man's action, His punishment or reward of bad or good action, admits of no negligence, ignorance or incapacity. The intellect, which recognizes the existence of God, cannot refuse the law. It will always decide in favor of that which revelation demands of man.

Thus, the intellect of a believing man will recognize the importance of the revelation over any personal matter. God says in XIII:33 *"Is He who is aware of the deserts of every soul as he who is aware of nothing?"* and in LXXXV:14, *"No soul but has a guardian over it"* and LXXIV:38, *"Every soul is a pledge for its own deeds."*

The Path of Revelation is Protected Against Mistakes

The path of revelation is part of the Creator's program. He never makes mistakes, neither in His Creation nor in the system of belief and the laws of the sharī'ah, which are delineated for man through revelation.

God says in LXXII:26-28,

(He is) the knower of the Unseen and he reveals His secret to no one except to every messenger He has chosen and He makes a guard go before him and a guard behind him, that He may know that they have indeed conveyed the message of their Lord. He surrounds all their doings and He keeps Count of all things.

From this we understand that the prophets and messengers of God must be infallible both in receiving the revelation and in preserving it against alteration and attack. They are as instruments at the disposal of the Creator's wisdom. Were they to make an error in receiving or teaching the message of the revelation or be led astray by the whispering of evil persons, were they themselves to commit wrong or deliberately change the message they had to deliver, then the wisdom of God would be unable to perfect its program of guidance.

God confirms in chapter XVI:9 that He is in total control of man's guidance by means of his messenger, "And God's is the direction of the way, and some (words) do not go straight."

The Hidden Reality of Revelation

The reality of revelation is hidden from us. What is clear is that the aim of the program of life, outlined for man by the Creator, cannot possibly have been put together by the intellect; there must be another way of understanding, of perceiving, (other than through reflection and thought), by which man learns of the duties incumbent on him and his fellowmen. This understanding may only be encompassed by the path of revelation.

There are, however, only a limited number of men who possess this kind of understanding since receiving revelation requires an understanding based on purity, sincerity and freedom from all corruption and bad thoughts. It requires men whose spiritual qualities do not change; men who are psychologically balanced in their judgments and who possess. It must be admitted that these real depth of understanding qualities are rarely to be found amongst men.

The Prophets and messengers mentioned in the Qur'ān are men of precisely these qualities. The Qur'ān does not mention their number; it only names a few (namely Adam, Nūḥ (Noah), Hūd, Şālih (Methusaleh), Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Lūṭ (Lot), Ismā'īl (Ismael, Ishmael), Alyasa` (Elisha), Dhu'l-Kifl (Ezekiel), Ilyās (Elias), Yūnus (Jonah), Idrīs (Enoch), Ishāq (Isaac), Ya`qūb (Jacob), Yūsuf (Joseph), Shu`ayb, Mūsā (Moses), Hārūn (Aaron), Dāwūd (David), Sulaymān (Solomon), Ayyūb (Job), Zakariyyā (Zachariah), Yaḥyā (John), Ismā'īl Şādiq al-Wa`d, `Isā (Jesus) and Muḥammad; others are indicated but not named).

We, as ordinary men, do not share at all their qualities and so we cannot taste the reality of their perception. Prophecy, as an experience, remains unknown for us. Moreover, few of the past revelations have reached us and we have only a limited view of the reality which is revelation and prophecy. It may be that what has reached us in the form of revealed books is exactly as the revelation we are familiar with, that is the Qur'ān.

Nevertheless, it is possible that other revelations (completely unknown to us) may have contained information and instructions of which we have no knowledge.

How the Qur'ān was Revealed

Qur'ānic revelation, according to the Qur'ān itself, is an utterance on behalf of God to His Prophet; the Prophet received the speech of God with all his being, not just by way of learning. In XLII:51-52 God says,

And it was not to be for any man that God should speak to him unless (it be) by revelation or from behind a veil or (that) we send a messenger to reveal what He will by His leave. Truly, He is exalted, wise. And thus We have inspired in you (Muḥammad) a spirit of Our Command. You did not know what the Book, nor what the Faith was. But We have made it a light whereby We guide whom We will of our slaves. And truly you surely guide to a right path.

On comparison of these two verses, we discover three different ways of divine utterance. Firstly, God speaks without there

being any veil between Him and man. Secondly, God speaks from behind a veil: like the tree on the *Ṭūr* mountain from behind which Moses heard God speaking. Thirdly, God's speech is brought to man by an angel who had previously heard the revelation from Him.

The second of the two verses above show that the Qur'ān has reached us by means of the third of three possible ways. Again, God says in XXVI:192-195, "*(A revelation) which the Faithful Spirit (Gabriel) has brought down upon your heart, that you may be (one) of the warners, in plain Arabic Speech,*" and in chapter II:97, "*Who is an enemy to Gabriel! For it is he who has revealed (this book) to your heart.*"

From these verses we understand that the Qur'ān was transmitted by way of an angel named Gabriel, or the "Faithful Spirit", and that the Prophet received the revelation from him with all his being, all his perception and not merely by listening. The verse says "*on your heart,*" which in Qur'ānic terms means perception or awareness. In LIII:10-11, we read, "*And He revealed to His slave that which He revealed. The heart did not lie in seeing what it saw;*" and in XCVIII:2, reception of the revelation is indicated as a reading of "pure pages" by God's messenger.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE QUR'ĀN TO THE SCIENCE

Praise of Knowledge and the Stimulation of the Desire to Study

No other revealed book praises and encourages science and knowledge as does the Qur'ān and it is for this reason that the Qur'ān names the age of the desert Arabs, together with their pagan cultures, before Islam as the "age of ignorance." In over a hundred verses reference is made to science and knowledge in a variety of ways; and many of these verses praise the value of scientific knowledge. In XCVI:5, God indicates the favor He has done man by bringing him out of his state of ignorance. "He teaches man what he did not know."

Likewise, we read in LVIII:11, "God will exalt those who believe among you and those who have knowledge to high ranks," and in XXXIX:9, God says, "Are those who know equal to those who do not?" Besides, the many verses in the Qur'ān concerning knowledge, there are also countless traditions of the Prophet and the Imams on this subject which rank second only in importance to the Qur'ān.

The Sciences which the Qur'ān Invites Men to Study

In verses too numerous to mention, the Qur'ān invites one to reflect upon the signs of creation; the heavens, the shining stars and their astonishing celestial movements, and the cosmic order which rules over the m all. Similarly, the Qur'ān

urges one to reflect upon the creation of the earth, the seas, the mountains, the desert, and the wonders contained below the surface of the earth, the difference between night and day and the changing cycle of seasons. It urges mankind to meditate on the extraordinary creation of the plants and the order and symmetry governing their growth, as well as the multiplicity of the animal kingdom.

The Qur'ān invites to witness the interdependence of beings and how all live in harmony with nature. It calls upon man also, to ponder on his own make-up, on the secrets of creation which are hidden within him, on his soul, on the depth of his perception, and on his relationship with the world of the spirit.

The Qur'ān commands man to travel in the world in order to witness other cultures and to investigate the social orders, history and philosophies of past people. Thus it calls man to a study of the natural sciences, mathematics, philosophy, the arts and all sciences available to man, - and to study them for the benefit of man and the wellbeing of society.

The Qur'ān recommends the study of these sciences on the condition that it leads to truth and reality, that it produces a correct view of the world based on an understanding of God. Knowledge, which merely keeps a man occupied, and prevents him from knowing the reality of his own existence, is equated with ignorance. God says in XXX:7, *"They know only some appearance of the life of one world and are heedless of the Hereafter,"* and in chapter XLV:23, *"Have you seen him who makes his desire his goal and God sends him astray purposely and seals up his heart and sets a covering on his heart. Then who will lead him after God (has condemned him)."*

The Qur'ān not only stimulates the desire for study but is itself a complete system of education of divine knowledge; it provides, too, a model for human behavior and thought. This complete way of life is, called Islam, the way of submission.

The Sciences Particular to the Study of the Qur'ān

There are many sciences devoted to the study of the Qur'ān itself. The development of such sciences dates from the first day of Qur'ānic revelation; over a period of time, they were unified and perfected. Today countless books are available on these sciences, fruit of the labor of different researchers over the centuries.

Some of these sciences investigate the language and vocabulary of the Qur'ān, and some the meanings. Those concerned with language are the sciences of correct Qur'ānic pronunciation and reading (*tajwīd and qirā'ah*). They explain the simple changes, which certain letters undergo when occurring in conjunction with others, the substitution of letters and the places prescribed for breath-pausing, and other similar matters. They also study the different ways the Qur'ān has been written down and the several generally accepted ways of recitation, together with the three lesser known ways and the rarer modes of recitation.

Other works enumerate the number of chapters and their verses, while others relate these numbers to the whole Qur'ān. They discuss the tradition of Qur'ānic calligraphy and how it differs from the normal Arabic script. They research, too, into the meanings of the Qur'ān and the general division of subject matter, such as the place and circumstances of revelation, the meanings, the *muhkam* (clear) or the *mutashābih* (ambiguous), and the abrogating and the abrogated verses.

Others study the verses containing the laws (which, in fact, are part of what is known as Islamic *fiqh* or jurisprudence). Others specialize in the commentary of the meanings (already seen in a previous section of the book). Specialists in each of the different sciences have published numerous works on each subject.

The Sciences which Developed because of the Qur'ān

The sciences of the *din* of Islam came into being at the beginning of the Prophet's mission and the revelation of the Qur'ān, including laws governing the behavior and transactions

of Muslims. Study of these sciences developed in the first century after the *Hijrah* although initially, not in any formal way. Since the Caliphs had prohibited the writing down of the tradition, they were handed down by word of mouth by the companions and their followers.

A small number of Scholars wrote on jurisprudence and on the science of the traditions at the beginning of the second century when the prohibition was lifted,¹ allowing Scholars to record the traditions.

It was at this point that a number of disciplines came into being including the Science of Traditions and the Science of establishing the authority and sincerity of those men who transmitted it; the Science of analysis of the text of the traditions; the Science of the foundations of jurisprudence and jurisprudence itself the Science of belief in the judgment after death and the afterlife. Even philosophy, which entered the Islamic arena via the Greek, and remained there for some time in its original Greek, took on the color and beliefs of the people after a time.

Changes in the subject matter and the structure of disciplines took place such that today, amongst Muslims, all subject matter concerning divine gnosis is supported by proofs and reasons taken from the Qur'ān and the traditions.

All these subjects were also studied as an integral part of the Arabic language; mastery of the science of verb declension, Arabic grammar, meanings of words, commentary and explanation, the art of metaphors and good style, and the philosophy and science of derived meanings allowed greater precision and clarity in the study of the Islamic Sciences as a whole.

Indeed, what stimulated scholars to record and arrange coherently the laws of the Arabic language was the sense that they were serving God; love of Him drew them to a clarity and

¹ This restriction was imposed by the Umayyad caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, 99-101 AH.

sweetness of style, which in turn generated the Science of correct speech and composition.

It is thus related that Ibn `Abbās who was one of the commentator amongst the companions, explained the meanings of verses by taking examples of the vocabulary in question from Arabic poetry. He advised people to collect and learn Arabic poetry saying,

Poetry is the court of the Arabs (meaning the place where the finest language may be heard.)

The famous Shī`ite scholar Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farahīdī wrote the book *al-`Ayn* on the subject of language and also described the science of poetic rhyme.

Many others also wrote on the same subjects. The subject of history was initially derived in Islam from stories of the lives of Prophets, in particular that of the Prophet Muḥammad and the description of the course of past nations. To this basic material was added an account of the events during the period immediately following the appearance of Islam. All this was developed into a history of the world in the writings of such men as al-Ṭabariy, al-Mas`ūdiy, al-Ya`qūbiy and al-Wāqidiy.

The original reason the Muslims translated and transmitted the natural Sciences and mathematics from other languages and cultures into Arabic was the cultural stimulation given to them by the Qur'ān. Many different Sciences were translated from Greek, Syriac, and Sanskrit into Arabic.

Access to these sciences was at first available only to the Caliph (who was at that time leader of only Arab Muslims). Gradually, they were made available to all Muslims and improved upon as research methods, structuring, classification and ordering of the subjects developed.

One of the main reasons the civilization of Islam, which formed after the death of the Prophet, came to include a large part of the inhabited world (and which today numbers over six hundred million inhabitants), was the Qur'ān. We as Shī`ah, however, deny that the caliphs and the kings who followed them had legitimate claim to the guardianship and execution of

the law even though they expanded Islamic civilization, and do not fully agree with the way they explained the realities of Islam.

Indeed the light of wisdom which illuminated the world was from the light of the miracle of the Qur'ān. The appearance and diffusion of the revelation caused a change in the direction of history and generated a chain of important events resulting in the progress and development of the culture of man.

THE ORDER OF THE QUR'ĀN'S REVELATION AND THE GROWTH OF THE QUR'ĀNIC SCIENCES

The Order in which the Verses of the Qur'ān were Revealed

That the chapters and verses were not revealed in one place but rather in stages over a period of twenty-three years during the Prophet's mission is authenticated not only by historical evidence but also from evidence from the various verses. In XVII:106 we read, "And it is a Qur'ān that we have divided that you may recite it to mankind at intervals and we have revealed it by (successive) revelations." As further proof there are abrogating and abrogated verses which are directly related to events from different periods and circumstances and which obviously were not revealed at one time.

At this point we should note that the chapters and verses were not revealed in the order in which they are set out; that is the first chapter "*al-Fātiḥah*" (The Opening) was revealed after "The Cow", "The Family of `Imrān," "Women," and "The Table Spread." This is true also for the order of the verses, which do not necessarily follow chronologically. The content of a Qur'ānic text may for example show that the content of some chapters and verses concord with the first period of the Prophet's mission like the chapters "The Clot," and "Nūn," but are recorded at the end of the Qur'ān.

Many chapters and verses which correspond to the time after the migration like "The Cow," "The Family of 'Imrān," "Women," "The Spoils" and "Repentance" have been placed at the beginning of the Qur'ān.

The contents of the chapters and verses are thus directly related to the events, circumstances and different needs of the period of the Prophet's mission: the chapter and verses which only deal with the calling of the polytheists to belief in God's oneness and the struggle against the idol-worshippers correspond to a time before the migration when the Prophet was inviting the people to Islam in Mecca.

The verses dealing with battles and those dealing with social laws were revealed after the events and circumstances associated with the establishment and progress of the Islamic society in Medina.

Conclusions to be Drawn

We may divide the chapters and Qur'ānic verses according to the place, time and circumstance of their revelation:

Some of the chapters and verses are Meccan and some Medinan; usually those revealed before the Prophet's migration are counted as Meccan. The majority of the chapters, and especially the shorter ones, are of this type. Those revealed after the migration are counted as Medinan even though they may have been revealed outside Medina or even in Mecca.

Some chapters and verses were revealed while the Prophet was traveling and some while he was resident in a place. The verses are also divided according to whether they were revealed by day or by night, in peace or in war, or when the Prophet was on earth or in the heavens, or whether he was alone or with others. In the light of these different classifications we may study the reasons for the revelations.

Some chapters were revealed more than once such as the chapter "*al-Fātiḥah*," which was revealed once in Mecca and once in Medina. Some verses were revealed several times like, "*Which is it of the favors of your Lord do you deny?*" in the

chapter "The Beneficent" which is repeated thirty times, and the verse, "*And indeed your Lord He is truly the Mighty, the Merciful,*" which is repeated eight times.

Sometimes one verse occurs in more than one chapter such as "*they say: when is the fulfillment of promise, if you are truthful.*" We find, too, that a sentence appears as a complete verse in one chapter and as part of another verse elsewhere; for example, the sentence, "*Allah! there is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal,*" is a complete verse in the beginning of "The Family of `Imrān," Yet, in "The Cow" it is part of the *al-Kursiy* verse. Most chapters and verses, however, were revealed in one place at one time and do not recur in the Book.

Similar verses appear in different places in the Qur'ān because of certain subjects, which demand repetition. One of the significant features of the Qur'ān is the difference in the length of the chapters. We may compare "Abundance" (the shortest chapter) and "The Cow" (the longest chapter).

Likewise, we may compare the length of verses, with the shortest being the single Arabic word "*mud'hāmmatān*" (dark green with foliage) and the longest, composed of thirty sentences being the 282nd verse of "The Cow" (whose subject concerns debt).

All these differences are in accordance with the demands of the revelations. Sometimes, it happens that two verses are closely connected in meaning but differ greatly in length; for example, the thirtieth and thirty-first verses of "The Cloaked One", the first being a single sentence and the second more than eleven sentences.

We should not forget that most of the shorter verses like "The Dawn" and "The Night" are Meccan, and those whose subject matter is treated in greater length and detail are Medinan. The first verse to be revealed to the Prophet was during the revelation of the first five verses of "The Clot: and the last to be revealed was verse 281 of "The Cow"; "*And guard yourselves against a day in which you will be brought back to Allah. Then every soul will be paid in full that which it has earned and they will not be wronged.*"

The Reasons for the Revelations

Many of the verses are connected with events and circumstances which took place as the Prophet called the people to Islam, for example "The Cow".¹

Other chapters, like "The Tribe" refer to the exile of the Banū al-Naḍīr and the chapter "The Coursers" was revealed for the Bedouin Arabs of the Dry Valley and other tribes. Some chapters or verses were revealed because of the need to explain the laws and directions of Islam; for example, the chapter "Women" which defined marriage and the inheritance of women, "The Spirits" which explains how to deal with the prisoner-of-war captured as booty and, the chapter "Divorce" which was revealed, as its name suggests, to explain divorce.²

The circumstances leading to the revelation of these chapters are called "reasons for revelation" and there are countless traditions on this subject.

Amongst the Sunnis, there are many traditions which deal with the reasons for revelation; several thousand narrations may be enumerated (although in the Shi'ah School only a few hundred may be counted). Many of these are without a chain of narration and are not accepted as fully trustworthy; moreover, a considerable number are classified as weak. The dubious nature of the majority of these may be ascribed to the following reasons. Firstly, it is obvious from the form of many of these sayings that the narrator had not learnt them through oral transmission but rather based on his own judgment, that the revelation of a certain verse was connected with certain events. Thus, the narrator links a certain even to a verse of suitable meaning mentioned in the tradition.

This is a subjective view, carried out through *ijtihād* or personal reflection upon the matter, and not the actual reason

¹ The second chapter (*al-Baqarah*) descended in 1 A.H. in Medina. Some of its verses reproach the Jews who prevented the progress of Islam and others are about the rituals like the *kiblah*, the month of fasting, hajj, etc.

² See Sūrah 4, 8 and 65 respectively.

for revelation learned orally through transmission from the Prophet. As proof of this argument, we may cite many inconsistencies amongst these traditions. There are verses, for example, recorded as having several conflicting "reasons for revelation" which are totally unconnected with each other.

Ibn `Abbās, for example, who is not alone in this practice, relates several "reasons for the revelation" of one single verse. The existence of such conflicting reasons is because many have been arrived at through subjective deliberation rather than transmitted directly from the Prophet. This results in one narrator attributing a certain verse to a particular event while another narrator attributes it to another event.

On other occasions, a narrator relates two different reasons from the revelation of one verse and thus implicates himself in two conflicting views; then he rejects the first view in favor of the second. We are led to conclude, moreover, that most of these narrations are fabrications or deceitfully transmitted under the pretence of trustworthy narrators. Such doubt concerning the validity of many of these traditions greatly endangers their credibility.

Secondly, it has been related with certainty that the early Caliphs strictly prohibited the recording and writing down of the narrations and, whenever a sheet of paper or tablet was found on which a saying had been written, it was burned. This prohibition lasted until nearly the end of the first century after *Hijrah*, that is, for a period of about ninety years. The effect of this prohibition was that the narrators and scholars of sayings were free to make small additions or changes during oral transmission of the saying. These additions gradually accumulated until the original meaning of the saying was lost.

This becomes very clear on investigation of an event or subject which has been related by two different narrators; one may come across a saying which describes an event and see the same event described in a different way by another narrator. False sayings were not only introduced by attributing them to respected narrators but also by the hypocrites. Their sayings soon became part of the main body of sayings and this further undermined the credibility of this particular section of the Science of tradition.

The Method Used in Describing "The Reasons for the Revelations"

Past scholars of Islam, and in particular the Sunni scholars, attached great importance to the order of revelation of the chapters. Among the narration on the subject is that of Ibn ʿAbbās who has said that "the beginning of each chapter which was revealed in Mecca was recorded as having been revealed in that very place, then God added what He wanted to it."¹ The following is the order of revelation of the Qur'ān (beginning with the Meccan verses):

- (1) Read in the name of your Lord. (XCVI:1)
- (2) Nūn. (LXVIII:1)
- (3) O you wrapped up in your raiment. (LXXIII:1)
- (4) O you wrapped up in your cloak. (LXXIV:1)
- (5) The power of Abū-Lahab will perish. (CXI: 1)
- (6) When the sun is overthrown. (LXXXI:1)
- (7) Praise the name of your Lord, the Most High. (LXXXVII:1)
- (8) By the night enshrouding. (XCII:1)
- (9) By the Dawn. (LXXXIX:1)
- (10) By the morning hours. (XCIII:1)
- (11) Have we not caused your breast to expand? (XCIV:1)
- (12) By the declining day. (CIII:1)
- (13) The Courses. (C:1)
- (14) Indeed, We have given you abundance. (CVIII:1)
- (15) Rivalry in worldly increase distracts you. (CII:1)
- (16) Have you observed him who denies the *dīn*? (CVII:1)
- (17) Say: O disbelievers! (CIX:1)

¹ Al-Suyūṭīy, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 10 (quoting *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān* of Ibn Darīṣ).

- (18) Have you not seen your Lord dealt with the owners of the elephant? (CV:1)
- (19) Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak. (CXIII:1)
- (20) Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the mankind. (CVIV:1)
- (21) Say: He is God, the One. (CXII:1)
- (22) By the Star. (LIII:1)
- (23) He frowned. (LXXX:1)
- (24) Indeed, We have revealed it on the Night of Power. (XCVII:1)
- (25) By the sun and its brightness. (XCI:1)
- (26) By the heaven, holding mountains of the stars. (LXXXV:1)
- (27) By the fig. (XCV:1)
- (28) For the taming of the Quraish. (CVI:1)
- (29) The calamity. (CI:1)
- (30) No, I swear by the Day of Resurrection. (LXXXV:1)
- (31) Woe to every slandering traducer. (CIV:1)
- (32) By the emissary winds. (LXXVII:1)
- (33) Qāf. (L:1)
- (34) No, I swear by this city. (XC:1)
- (35) By the heaven and the morning star. (LXXXVI:1)
- (36) The hour drew near. (LIV:1)
- (37) Šād. (XXXVIII:1)
- (38) The heights. (VII:1)
- (39) Say: it is revealed... (LXXII:1)
- (40) Yā Sīn. (XXXVIII:1)
- (41) The Criterion. (XXV:1)
- (42) The Angels. (XXXV:1)

- (43) Kāf Hā Yā `Ayn Şād. (XIX:1)
- (44) Ṭā Hā. (XX:1)
- (45) The Reality. (LVI:1)
- (46) Ṭā Sīn Mīm. (The Poets) (XXVI:1)
- (47) Ṭā Sīn. (XXVII:1)
- (48) The Story. (XXVIII:1)
- (49) The Children of Israel (*al-Isrā`*) (XVII:1)
- (50) Jonah. (X:1)
- (51) Hūd. (XI:1)
- (52) Joseph. (XII:1)
- (53) The Exile. (XV:1)
- (54) The Cattle. (VI:1)
- (55) Those who set the ranks. (XXXVI:1)
- (56) Luqmān. (XXXI:1)
- (57) Saba'. (XXXIV:1)
- (58) The Troops. (XXXIX:1)
- (59) Ḥā Mīm (The Believer *or* Ghāfir) (XL:1)
- (60) Ḥā Mīm (The Prostration *or* Fuṣṣilat) (XLI:1)
- (61) Ḥā Mīm `Ayn Sīn Qāf. (XLII:1)
- (62) Ḥā Mīm (Ornaments of Gold) (XLIII:1)
- (63) Smoke. (XLIV:1)
- (64) Crouching. (XLVI:1)
- (65) The Wind Curved Sand-hills. (XLVI:1)
- (66) The Winnowing Winds. (LI:1)
- (67) The Overwhelming. (LXXXVIII:1)
- (68) The Cave. (XVIII:1)
- (69) The Bee. (XVI:1)

- (70) Indeed, We sent Noah. (LXXI:1)
- (71) Abraham. (XIV:1)
- (72) The Prophets. (XXI:1)
- (73) The Believers. (XXIII:1)
- (74) Alif Lām Mīm The Prostration. (XXXII:1)
- (75) Mount Sinai. (LII:1)
- (76) The Sovereignty. (LXVII:1)
- (77) The Reality. (LXIX:1)
- (78) A Questioner Questioned... (LXX:1)
- (79) About what do they question one another? (LXXVIII:1)
- (80) Those who drag forth. (LXXIX:1)
- (81) When the heaven is cleft apart. (LXXXII:1)
- (82) When the heaven is split asunder. (LXXXIV:1)
- (83) The Romans. (XXX:1)
- (84) The Spider. (XXXIX:1)
- (85) Woe to the defrauders. (LXXXIII:1)
- (86) The Cow. (II:1)
- (87) The Spoils of war. (VIII:1)
- (88) The Family of `Imrān. (III:1)
- (89) The Clans. (XXXIII:1)
- (90) She That is to be examined. (LX:1)
- (91) Women. (IV:1)
- (92) When the earth is shaken. (XCIX:1)
- (93) Iron. (LVII:1)
- (94) Muḥammad. (XLVIL1)
- (95) The Thunder. (XIII:1)
- (96) The Beneficent. (LV:1)

- (97) Man. (LXXVI:1)
 (98) Divorce. (LXV:1)
 (99) The Clear Proof. (XCVIII:1)
 (100) Exile. (LIX:1)
 (101) When God's help arrives. (CX:1)
 (102) Light. (XXIV:1)
 (103) The Pilgrimage. (XXII:1)
 (104) The Hypocrites. (LXIII:1)
 (105) She that Disputes. (LVIII:1)
 (106) The Private Apartments. (XLIX:1)
 (107) Banning. (LXVI:1)
 (108) The Congregation. (LXII:1)
 (109) Mutual Disillusion. (LXIV:1)
 (110) The Ranks. (LXI:1)
 (111) Victory. (XLVIII:1)
 (112) The Table Spread. (V:1)
 (113) The Immunity (Repentance). (IX:1)

Further Traditions Concerning the Order and Place of Revelation of the Chapters

The tradition of Ibn 'Abbās mentions one hundred and thirteen chapters, the chapter "*al-Fātiḥah*" not being counted among them. There is another saying, related by al-Bayhaqiy from 'Ikrimah,¹ which enumerates one hundred and eleven chapters, the three chapters "*al-Fātiḥah*" "The Heights," and "Counsel (Alif-Lām-Mīm-'Ayn-Sīn-Qāf)" not being mentioned. When al-Bayhaqiy relates this same tradition from Ibn 'Abbās, it includes all one hundred and fourteen chapters. The tradition of al-Bayhaqiy reckons "The Defrauders" as one of the

¹ Al-Suyūṭiy, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 10.

Medinan chapters in opposition to the other traditions, which count it as Meccan. The order mentioned in these two traditions for both the Meccan and Medinan chapters is different from that of other traditions.

Another tradition, related from 'Alī ibn Abī-Ṭalḥah¹ says: The chapter "The Cow" was revealed in Medina and "The Family of Imrān," "Women," "The Table Spread," "Spoils of War," "Repentance," "The Pilgrimage," "Light" "The Clans," "Those Who Deny," "Victory," "Iron," "She That Disputes" "Exile" "She That Is To Be Examined," "The Helpers of Allah (The Ranks)," "Mutual Disillusion," "O Prophet, if you divorce women," "O Prophet, why do you ban," "The Dawn," "The Night," "We have revealed it in the night of power" "The Clear Proof," "When the earth shakes," "When the help of Allah comes," and the rest of the chapters were revealed in Mecca.

The intention of the tradition seems only to establish the difference between the Medinan and Meccan chapters and to define the order of revelation of the chapters mentioned. The chapters, "Table Spread" and "Repentance" are, without doubt, later in revelation than that indicated in this tradition. Moreover, chapters "The Dawn," "The Night," and "The Night of Power," are counted as Medinan chapters, whereas the above tradition counts them as Meccan. Likewise, "The Thunder" "The Beneficent," "Man," "The Congregation" "The Private Apartments" are considered as Meccan, whereas in the above tradition they are counted as Medinan.

In another tradition related by Qatādah,² "The Cow," "The Family of Imrān," "Women," "The Table Spread," "Immunity," "The Thunder," "The Bee," "The Pilgrimage," "The Light," "The Clans" "Muḥammad," "Victory," "The Private Apartments," "Iron," "The Beneficent," "She that disputes," "Exile," "She that is to be Examined," "The Ranks," "The Congregation," "The Hypocrites," "Mutual Disillusion," "Divorce," the first thirteen verses of "O You Prophet! Why do you ban," "When the earth

¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 10.

² Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 10.

Shakes" and "When the help of Allah comes," were revealed in Medina and the rest in Mecca. This tradition is contrary to the previous traditions and, in particular, with regard to the mention of "The Defrauders," "Man" and "The Clear Proof."

This tradition is, however, unacceptable according to the Science of traditions, being disconnected from direct transmission from the Prophet. It is also unclear whether Ibn `Abbās learned of the order of revelation from the Prophet himself or from some other unidentified person, or arrived at it by subjective decision.

If the latter is the case, it has no value or authenticity but for himself. It has also no value historically, as Ibn `Abbās did not have close contact with the Prophet. It is obvious that he could not have been present nor a witness to the revelation of all these chapters. Even if we suppose the tradition to be true, it is still not totally acceptable in matters outside the law of the *shari`ah*.

The only way to discover the true order of the chapters, and whether they are Meccan or Medinan, is to examine the content the chapters and to compare them with the circumstances and social reality before and after the migration. Such a method is effective in certain cases; the content of chapters "Man", "The Coursers", and "The Defrauders" testify to their being Medinan, although some of these traditions only establish them as Meccan.

The Gathering of the Qur'ān into One Volume (Before the Death of the Prophet)

The influence of the Qur'ān, which was revealed in separate chapters and verses, increased day by day. Its eloquence and miraculous clarity transfixed the Arabs who attached great importance to fine language; they came from far and wide to hear and learn a few verses from the Prophet. However, the notables of Mecca and the leaders of Quraish who were idolaters and bitter enemies of the Prophet and Islam tried to prevent the people from getting close to the Prophet; they tried to frighten off the Arabs by telling them that the Qur'ān was magic.

Despite this, people came, unknown to friends, family and servants, in the dark of night to a place near the Prophet's house and listened to the Prophet reading the Qur'ān.

The efforts of the early Muslims in listening to, memorizing and recording the Qur'ān were stimulated by another motive' they valued the Qur'ān as a sacred document, being the word of God; they were also obliged to read the chapter "al-Fātiḥah" and a portion of another part of the Qur'ān through which the Prophet had been commanded to instruct people in the laws of Islam.

This study and devotion to the Qur'ān became more ordered and comprehensive after the Prophet emigrated to Medina and formed an independent Muslim community. He ordered a considerable number of the companions to recite the Qur'ān and to learn and teach the laws which were being revealed daily. So important was this activity that, according to special permission granted by God in chapter "Repentance" verse 122, these scholars were relieved of their obligation to fight jihād (so called Holy War).

Since most of the Prophet's companions, (in particular those who had emigrated from Mecca to Medina), were unable to read or write, the Prophet ordered them to learn from the Jewish prisoners-of-war the simple writing of the time. Thus a group of the companions gradually became literate.

Those of this group who engaged in the recitation of the Qur'ān, learning by heart the chapters and verses were called *qurrā*, it was from amongst this group that forty (some report seventy) died as martyrs in an accident called *Bi'r Ma'ūnah*. The Qur'ān was recorded, as it was revealed, on tablets, bones and the wide flat end of the date palm fronds. There is no doubt that most chapters were in use amongst early Muslims since they are mentioned in numerous sayings by both Sunni and Shī'ah sources, relating the Prophet's use of the Qur'ān as a call to Islam, the making of prayer and the manner of recitation.

Similarly, one comes across names of chapters in traditions, which describe the time when the Prophet was still alive, namely the very long chapters and "al-Fātiḥah".

After the Death of the Prophet

After the death of the Prophet, Imam `Alī who (according to a tradition of absolute authority) was more knowledgeable of the Qur'ān than any other man, retired to his house and compiled the Qur'ān in one volume in the order corresponding to its revelation. Before six months had elapsed after the death of the Prophet, the volume was completed and carried by camel to show to other people.

Just about a year after the death of the Prophet, the war of Yamāmah took place in which seventy of the reciters were killed and the Caliphs conceived the idea of collecting the different chapters and verses into one volume. They feared that should a future battle take place and the rest of the qurrā' be killed, the whole Qur'ān would disappear with them.

Thus, on the orders of the Caliph, a group of the qurrā' from amongst the companions including Zayd ibn Thābit, collected the chapters and verses (written on tablets, bones and date palm fronds and kept in the Prophet's house or the houses of reciters), and produced several handwritten copies of the complete Book. They then sent copies of this compilation to all areas of the Muslim domain.

After a time, during the rule of the third Caliph, it came to the attention of the Caliph himself that differences and inconsistencies were appearing in the copying down of the Qur'ān; some calligraphers lacked precision in their writing and some reciters were not accurate in their recitation.

Since the word of God seemed threatened with alteration, the Caliph ordered that five of the *qurrā'* from amongst the companions, (one of them being Zayd ibn Thābit who had compiled the first volume), produce other copies from the first volume which had been prepared on the orders of the first Caliph and which had been kept with Ḥafṣah, the wife of the Prophet and daughter of the second Caliph.

The other copies, already in the hands of Muslims in other areas, were collected and sent to Medina where, on orders of the Caliph, they were burnt (or, according to some historians, were destroyed by boiling). Thus, several copies were made, one being kept in Medina, one in Mecca, and one each sent to Shām (a territory now divided into Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan), Kufa and Basra.

It is said that beside these five, one copy was also sent to Yemen and one to Bahrain. These copies were called the Imam copies and served as original for all future copies. The only difference of order between these copies and the first volume was that the chapters "Spirits of War" and "Immunity" were written in one place between "The Heights" and "Jonah."

The Importance Muslims Attached to the Qur'ān

As we have pointed out above, the verses and chapters of the Qur'ān were in oral use amongst Muslims at the time of its first and second compilation into one volume. They were extremely careful in preserving what they had learnt by heart.

Moreover, a large group of companions and their followers were engaged only in recitation and learning the Qur'ān by heart. The collecting together of the Qur'ān into one volume took place under their scrutiny. They all accepted, without objection, the volume when it was given to them and then made copies of it.

It happened that when some men tried to record verse 34 in "Repentance" "And those who hoard up gold and silver" without the "and" in the ʿUthmānic (second compilation) volume, they were prevented from doing so. The companion Ubayy ibn Kaʿb swore that if anyone left out the "and", he would fight him with the sword..

As a result, the word "and" was recorded. One day, the second Caliph, during the time of his own caliphate, read the verse,

And the first to lead the way of the Muhājirūn and Anṣār and those who follow them in goodness... [IX:100]

Without the word "and", he was opposed and forced in the end to read it with the "and".

The Qur'ān that had been compiled by `Alī was rejected by several people when he showed it to them. Despite this, `Alī made no objection or resistance and accepted the Qur'ān in circulation for as long as he lived, even during the time of his own Caliphate.

Likewise, the Imams of the Prophet's Family, the successors and sons of the Prophet, did not mention their objection to the Qur'ān to the intimates amongst their Shī`ah followers. They always referred to the Qur'ān in common use and in their commentaries and ordered the followers to recite it as the people did.

`Alī's silence in the matter of the difference of order between the two volumes was in keeping with the preference of the Shī`ah Imams for commentary of the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān; for them the order of the Medinan and Meccan chapters has no influence on the meanings of the Qur'ān; commentary of each verse is made by comparing it to another group of verses. Moreover, the Qur'ān is eternal and valid for all times and places; such local and temporary particularities as this time, place and circumstances of revelation can have no effect on the higher scale of meanings contained in the Qur'ān.

It is true that there are benefits to be gained by knowing certain details of revelation; they help one to discern the development of divine wisdom, social laws or stories of the past prophets and nations; also an understanding of the reasons for revelation show how the call to Islam progressed during the twenty-three years of the Prophet's mission.

We would like to make clear, however, that it was in order to preserve the unity of the Muslims that caused the Shiites to be silent in this matter.

The Qur'ān is Protected from any Alteration

The transmission of the Qur'ān, from the day of its revelation up to the present day, is flawless. The chapters and verses have

been in constant use amongst Muslims and have been passed on perfectly intact from one generation to the other. The Qur'ān we know today is the same Qur'ān which was revealed to the Prophet some fourteen centuries ago.

The Qur'ān does not stand in need of historical proof for its identity or authenticity, (although history too confirms its validity). Since a book which claims to be the actual unalterable word of God and attests to this in its own text does not need to resort to others to prove its authenticity.

The clearest proof that the Qur'ān we have with us today is the same that was revealed to the Prophet and that no alteration has taken place in its text is that very superiority which the Qur'ān claimed for itself at the time of its revelation and which still exists. The Qur'ān says that it is a book of light and guidance, a book which shows man the truth and reality of existence; it says that it explains all things, that is, everything necessary for man to live in accordance with his own natural character; it says that it is the word of God and challenges man and jinn to produce similar words; it invites them to find someone like the Prophet, who could neither read nor write and grew up in an age of ignorance as an orphan without instruction; the Qur'ān challenges them to find any inconsistency in its method, Sciences, or laws, such as one might find in any ordinary book. They obviously cannot for the superiority of the Qur'ān remains after its revelation.

Likewise, the guidance for man contained in the Qur'ān is still valid; it still expounds a complete world view which is in accord with the purest of intellectual proofs and is the source of man's wellbeing in this world and in the next. By the benevolence and care shown by the Creator for His creation in the Book, it still invites man to belief.

The Qur'ān cares for the needs of man by giving him a vision of reality based on Divine Unity. All knowledge and belief spring from this view of reality. At no point does the Qur'ān fail to explain in the most comprehensive fashion the reality of this oneness.

It devotes much attention to explaining the behavior and transactions expected of the individual in society and shows how correct action is that which accords with the natural character and capability (*fiṭrah*) of man. The Qur'ān leaves the detailed description of man's behavior to the Prophet whose daily life was an example of how man was to apply what was contained the Qur'ān.

Together the Book of God and the example (*sunnah*) of the Prophet delineated an astoundingly comprehensive life-pattern for man, namely, the way of living in tune with the reality which is Islam. The Qur'ān deals precisely with all aspects of individual and social life and, despite having been revealed in another age, does not contain the slightest inconsistency of incompatibility even today. It describes a *dīn*, a comprehensive way of life, whose program of living is beyond the imagination of the world's most capable lawyers and sociologists.

The miracle of the Qur'ān has in it clarity and eloquence, rooted, as it is, in the language of a nation famed for the purity and power of its language. The Qur'ān is a miraculous sun whose light shines far brighter than the finest poetry of the time, indeed of any age. During the Islamic conquests of the first century after Hijrah, the resulting admixing of non-Arabic words with the Arabic lessened the purity of Arabic language used in the Qur'ān causing it to disappear from the everyday speech of the people.

The Qur'ān does not merely challenge man by the use of its language, but also by the depth of its meaning. Those familiar with the Arabic language (both prose and verse writings) are reduced to silence and astonishment when they attempt to describe it.

The Qur'ān is neither poetry nor prose but rather seems to draw qualities from both; it is more attractive and dazzling than poetry and clearer and more flowing than prose. A single verse or phrase from the Qur'ān is more illuminating, more penetrating, and more profound than the complete speech of most eloquent speakers.

The profundity of meaning in the Qur'ān remains as miraculous as ever; its complex structure of beliefs, morals and laws stands as proof that the Qur'ān is the word of God. Man, and in particular someone who was born and raised in circumstances similar to those of the Prophet, could never have created such a system; the Qur'ān is a harmonious whole despite having been revealed during twenty-three years in greatly varying circumstances.

God Himself confirms that the Qur'ān has been preserved from change; in chapter XV:9 He says, "*Indeed We, even We, reveal the Reminder and indeed We are truly its guardian,*" and in chapter XLI:41-42, He says, "*For indeed it is an unassailable Book. Falsehood cannot come at it from before or behind it. (It is) a revelation from the Wise, the deserver of Praise.*" Only a divine Book could remain preserved for fourteen centuries in a world where the enemies of truth and of Islam are numerous.

The Recitation, Memorization and Transmission of the Qur'ān

There were a number of reciters engaged in learning and teaching the Qur'ān in Medina. Anyone learning from one of them would transmit that individual's particular style of recitation when he transmitted it to others as a tradition. Various ways of recitation occur. One may attribute this, firstly, to the fact that the script used at the time was the kufic style and had no diacritical points; each word could be read in various ways.

Secondly, most people were illiterate and when learning the Qur'ān had no alternative but to commit it to memory and transmit it orally. This method continued to be used for many generations.

The Different Groups of Reciters

The first group of reciters were those companions who were engaged in learning and teaching the Qur'ān during the time of the Prophet. Among them was a group which mastered the whole Qur'ān; one of this group was a woman by the name of Umm-Waraqah bint 'Abdullāh ibn Hārith.

Study was also undertaken by four of the Anṣār (or helpers, that is Medinan who became Muslim and welcomed the Muslims from Mecca). They learned the whole Qur'ān by heart but were not concerned with the ordering of the verses and chapters; other scholars were responsible for memorization of the order.

Some traditions say that the position of each verse and chapter was defined at the orders of the Prophet himself but this is generally refuted by the rest of the traditions.

According to some later scholars, (namely al-Suyūṭī in his book *al-Itqān*, in the chapter dealing with the qualities of the men responsible for transmission), several of the *qurrā'* became famous, among them `Uthmān, `Alī, Ubayy ibn Ka`b, Zayd ibn Thābit, `Abdullāh ibn Mas`ūd and Abū-Mūsā al-Ash`ariy.

The second group of reciters were the students of the first group. They were generally *tābi`ūn* (followers of the companions of the Prophet) and the more famous amongst them had centers of recitation and teaching in Mecca, Medina, Kufa, Basra and Shām. The `Uthmānic volume was used in these five places.

In Mecca were `Ubayd ibn `Āmir and `Aṭā' ibn Abī-Rabāh, Ṭāwūs, Mujāhid, `Ikrimah ibn Abī-Mulaykah and others. In Medina were Ibn al-Musayyib, `Urwah, Sālim, `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Azīz, Sulaymān ibn Yasār, `Aṭā' ibn Yasār, Mu`ādh al-Qārī, `Abdullāh ibn al-A`raj, Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhriy, Muslim ibn Jundub and Zayd ibn Aslam.

In Kufa were `Alqamah, al-Aswad, Masrūq, `Ubaydah, `Amr ibn Shuraḥbīl, Hārith ibn al-Qays, `Amr ibn Maymūn, Abū-`Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamiy, Zarr ibn Ḥubaysh, `Ubayd ibn Naflah, Sa`īd ibn Jubayr, al-Nakha`iy, al-Sha`biy, Abu'l-`Āliyah, Abū'l-Rajā', Naṣr ibn al-`Āsim, Yaḥyā ibn Ya`mur, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣriy, Ibn Sīrīn, Qatādah, Muḥirah ibn Abī-Shihāb, `Uthmān, Khalīfah ibn Sa`d, Abu'l-Dardā'.

The third group lived during the first half of the second century after Hijrah; it included a number of Imams famous for their Qur'ānic recitation who received this knowledge from the second group. In Mecca were `Abdullāh ibn Kathīr (one of the seven *qurrā'*), Ḥumayd ibn Qays al-A`raj and Muḥammad ibn Abī-Muḥaysin. In Medina were, Abu Ja`far Yazīd ibn al-Qa`qā`, Shaybah ibn Naṣṣāḥ and Nāfi` ibn Nu`aym (one of the seven *qurrā'*).

In Kufa were Yaḥyā ibn Waththāb, `Āṣim ibn Abī'l-Nujūd (one of the seven *qurrā'*), Sulaymān al-A`mash, Ḥamzah (one of the seven *qurrā'*) and al-Kisā'iy (also one of the seven *qurrā'*). In Basra were `Abdullāh ibn Abī-Ishāq, `Īsā ibn `Umar, Abū-`Amr ibn al-`Alā' (one of the seven *qurrā'*), `Āṣim al-Jahdariy and Ya`qūb al-Ḥaḍramiy. In Sham `Abdullāh ibn `Āmir (one of the seven *qurrā'*), `Aṭīyah ibn Qays al-Kallā'iy, Ismā`il ibn `Abdullāh ibn Muhājir, Yaḥyā Ḥārith and Shurayḥ ibn Yazīd al-Ḥaḍramiy.

The fourth group consisted of the students of the third group, like Ibn `Ayyāsh, Ḥafṣ and Khalaf and many of the most famous may be classed in the next section.

The fifth group comprised those concerned with academic research and writing including Abū-`Ubayd Qāsim ibn Salām, Aḥmad ibn Jubayr al-Kūfiy and Ismā`il ibn Ishāq al-Mālikiy from the companions of Qālūn al-Rāwī. Included also are Abū-Ja`far ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabariy and Mujāhid. The field of research was widened after them by men like al-Dānī¹ and al-Shāṭibiy² who wrote a great number of books on poetry.

¹ Abū-`Amr `Uthmān ibn Sa`id al-Dānī al-Andalusiy, the author of many works including *Kitāb al-Taysīr*, died in 444 A.H.

² Al-Qāsim ibn Firruḥ al-Shāṭibiy a famous reciter and author of the celebrated *al-Qaṣidah al-Shāṭibiyyah* (comprising 11200 poetic verses), died 590 A.H. (*Kashf al-Zunīn*).

The Seven Reciters

Seven members of the third group achieved considerable celebrity; they became a focus of learning for others. Each of the reciters appointed two narrators who each propagated a particular style of recitation. The following is a list of these seven:

First Ibn al-Kathīr¹ whose narrators were Qanbal and al-Baziy, with only one intermediate relater in the chain from Ibn `Abbās from the leader of the Faithful (*amīr al-mu'minin*) `Alī. The second was Nāfi`² and his narrators Qālūn and Warsh. The third was `Āṣim³ and his narrators were Abū-Bakr Shu`bah ibn al-`Ayyāsh and Ḥafṣ; the Qur'ān recitation which is in common use among Muslims today is according to the reading of `Āṣim by a narration of Ḥafṣ. The fourth was Ḥamzah⁴ and his narrators were Khalaf and Khallād. The fifth was al-Kisā'iy⁵ and his narrators were al-Dawriy and Abū-`Alī al-Ḥārith. The sixth was Abū-`Amr ibn al-`Alā';⁶ and his narrators were al-Dawriy and al-Sūsiy with one intermediate narrator. The seventh was

¹ `Abdullāh ibn Kathīr al-Makkiy (d. 120 A.H.), received his instruction in the recitation of the Qur'ān from `Abdullāh ibn al-Ṣā'ib and Mujāhid.

² Nāfi' ibn `Abd al-Rahmān ibn Nu'aym al-Iṣfahāniy al-Madaniy (d. 159 or 169 A.H.) received his instruction from Yazīd ibn al-Qa`qā' and Abū-Maymūnah Mawlā (the freed slave of) Ummu-Salamah.

³ `Āṣim Abī al-Nujūd al-Kūfiy (d. 127 or 129 A.H.) a pupil, in the art of Qur'ānic recitation, of Sa'd ibn Ayyāsh al-Shaybāniy and Zarr ibn Ḥubaysh.

⁴ Ḥamzah ibn Ḥabīb al-Zayyāt al-Tamīmiy al-Kūfiy (d. 156 A.H.) was a pupil of `Āṣim, A'mash, al-Sabi'iy and Maṣū' ibn al-Mu'tamir. He also studied under the Sixth Imam al-Ṣādiq and was the first to write about the *mutashābihāt* of the Qur'ān.

⁵ `Alī ibn Ḥamzah ibn `Abdullāh ibn Fayrūz al-Fārisiy (d. between 179-193 A.H.), a grammarian and reciter of the Qur'ān, was a teacher of the Caliphs al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn. He studied grammar under Yūnus al-Naḥawiy (the grammarian), and al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhidīy and Qur'ānic recitation under Ḥamzah and Shu`bah ibn `Ayyāsh.

⁶ Abū-`Amr Zabbān ibn al-`Alā' al-Baṣriy (d. between 154 and 159 A.H.)

Ibn `Āmir¹ and his narrators were Hushām² and Ibn Dhakwān with one intermediary narrator.

Following the seven famous recitations are the three recitations of Abū-Ja`far,³ Ya`qūb,⁴ and Khalaf.⁵

The majority of Scholars recognize the seven types of recitation as *mutawātir*, that is, as having been related in unbroken chains of transmissions. One group of narrators has equated the tradition that the Qur'ān was revealed in seven *ḥarf* (literally, "word" in Arabic), with the seven different recitations; this tradition is well-known amongst Muslim scholars in general but is not recognized as being trustworthy.⁶

Al-Zarkashiy⁷ says in his book *al-Burhān*, "It is true that these seven recitations from the seven reciters have come to us via unbroken chain of transmission but their chain of transmission from the Prophet are open to inspection, since the chains of transmission of the seven reciters are all of the type of single transmission, that is, related by one single man to another single man."

¹ `Abdullāh ibn `Āmir al-Shāfi'iy al-Dimashqiy (d. 118 A.H.) studied under Abū'l-Dardā' and the companions of `Uthmān.

² There are differences of opinion as to the names of *ruwāh* (transmitters) of Ibn `Āmir. Those mentioned above are given according to al-Suyūṭiy's *al-Itqān*.

³ Abū-Ja`far Yazīd ibn al-Qa`qā' al-Madaniy (d. between 128-133 A.H.), a freed slave of Ummu-Salamah, received his instruction in Qur'ānic recitation from `Abdullāh ibn `Ayyāsh, Ibn `Abbās, and Abū-Hurayrah.

⁴ Ya`qūb ibn Ishāq al-Baṣriy al-Ḥaḍramiy (d. 205 A.H.) was a scholar and reciter on the authority of Salām ibn Sulaymān, `Aṣim al-Sulamiy and `Ali ibn Abi-Tālib.

⁵ Khalaf ibn Hushām al-Bazzāz (d. 229 A.H.) was a *rāwī* of Ḥamzah. He studied under Mālik ibn Anas and Ḥammād ibn Zayd and his pupil was Abū-`Awānah.

⁶ See al-Majlisiy, *Bihār al-Anwar*, (section of Qur'ān); al-Fayḍ al-Kāshāniy, *Tafsīr al-Şāfi* (introductory matter); al-Suyūṭiy, *al-Itqān*, vol. 1, p. 47.

⁷ Al-Suyūṭiy, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 82.

Al-Makkiy says in his book, "Anyone who imagines that the recitation of such men as Nāfi' and `Āṣim are the same seven *ḥarf* mentioned in the saying of the Prophet is committing a grave mistake." Moreover, the implication of this saying is that recitations, other than these seven, are not correct; this also is a grave mistake since early Islamic Scholars like Abū `Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Salām, and Abū-Ḥātam al-Sajistāniy, Abū-Ja`far al-Ṭabariy and Ismā`il al-Qāḍī have recorded several other recitations besides these seven.

At the beginning of the second century A.H., the people of Basra used the recitation of Abū-`Amr and Ya`qūb and in Kufa the recitations of Ḥamzah and `Āṣim. In Sham, they used that of Ibn `Āmir and in Mecca that of Ibn Kathīr. In Medina that of Nāfi' was used. This situation remained unchanged until the beginning of the third century A.H. when Ibn Mujāhid removed the name of Ya`qūb, and put the name of al-Kisā'iy in his place.

The reason why scholars paid so much attention to the seven reciters, despite there being many others of equal or better standing, was that the number of recitations had multiplied so quickly that they lost interest in learning and recording all the traditions about recitation. Thus they decided to choose several of the recitations which complied with the orthography of the Qur'ān and which were easier to learn and record.

Thus for the five copies of the Qur'ān which `Uthmān had sent to the towns of Mecca, Medina, Kufa, Basra and Sham, five reciters were chosen from the five areas and their recitations were then used. Ibn Jubayr writes about these five recitations from the five forms. Ibn Mujāhid records a tradition which asserts that `Uthmān sent two other copies to Yemen and Bahrain, that the number of `Uthmān copies thus numbered seven and that they chose seven narrators.

Since precise information about this tradition (which states that copies were sent to Yemen and Bahrain) was not available, they added two of the reciters of Kufa, to make up the number they had previously chosen, to seven. This number, which corresponds with the abovementioned saying and affirmed that the Qur'ān was revealed in seven recitations, was then used by

others who had no knowledge of the matter. They mistakenly supposed that what was meant by the seven *ḥarf* which the Prophet spoke of, was the seven recitations. The only trustworthy recitations are those whose text is sound and whose meaning corresponds to what is written in the Qur'ān.

Al-Qurāb says in his *al-Shāfi*, "We should look for the seven recitations amongst the *qurrā'* not from among others." This view is neither tradition nor sunnah but rather it originated from some of the later scholars who collected the seven recitations. These seven recitations became so well-known that people imagined that other recitations should not be used. This, however, has never been claimed.

The Number of Verses in the Qur'ān

The enumeration and delineation of the verses date from the time of the Prophet. In a saying the Prophet mentions ten verses from the "Family of 'Imrān," seven, in the chapter "al-Fātiḥah" and thirty in the chapter "The Sovereignty."

There are six views concerning the total number of verses in the Qur'ān, as related by al-Dānī. Some have said that the total is 6,000, some 6,204 and some 6,219. From these six estimations, two are from the reciters of Medina and four from the other areas to which the 'Uthmānic copies were sent, namely, Mecca, Kufa, Basra and Sham.

All these scholars support their claims by traditions reaching back to the companions and thus not directly linked, in a chain of transmissions, to the Prophet. Such traditions are called *mawqūf* in the science of the traditions.

From Medina, those who specialized in enumeration and delineation of the verses, were Abū-Ja'far Yazīd ibn al-Qa'qā', Shaybah ibn Naṣṣāḥ, Ismā'il ibn Ja'far ibn Abī-Kathīr al-Anṣāriy, Ibn Kathīr, Mujaḥid, Ibn 'Abbās, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Ḥanzah, al-Kisā'iy, Khalaf, Ibn Abī-Laylā, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamīy, 'Alī, 'Āṣim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Jaḥdariy, Ibn Dhakwān, Hushām ibn 'Ammār.

The reason for the different opinions concerning the total number of verses is related to the method of delineation and separation of the verses and letters.

The Names of the Chapters

The division of the Qur'ān into chapters, like its division into verses, is mentioned in the Qur'ān itself. In several places, God uses the actual words *sūrah* and *āyah*. In (XXIV:1), He says "(Here is) a *sūrah* which we have revealed," in "Repentance", verse 86, "And when a *sūrah* is revealed," in "The Cow" verse 23, "Then produce a *sūrah* like it..." and other similar verses.

The name of the chapter is sometimes derived from a name or form occurring in the chapter or from a subject treated by the chapter; for example "The Cow", "The Family of `Imrān", "The Night journey" and "The Unity". We may note here that in the old Qur'āns it is usual to observe the following at the beginning of each chapter: "*The sūrah in which the Cow is mentioned*" or "*the sūrah in which the family of `Imrān is mentioned.*" Sometimes, the chapter becomes known by its first phrase; take for example, the chapter "*Read in the name of your Lord*" (or "the Clot") or the chapter, "*Truly we revealed it*" (The Night of Power) or the chapter "*Those who disbelieve*" (also called "The Clear Proof").

Sometimes the chapter becomes known by a certain position or quality it possesses; thus the chapter "The Opening of the Book" or "The Mother of the Book" or "The Seven Oft-repeated verses" (all describing the, first chapter, or the "*al-Fātiḥah*"). The chapter "The Unity" is also called by the name "*al-Ikhlāṣ*" (meaning that it describes the absolute unity of God) or by the name "*Nisbat al-Rabb*" (meaning the chapter which describes the divine nature of the Lord in relation to the slave). This method of naming the chapters was also used in the early days of Islam and is attested to by the traditions.

There are traditions, whose chains of authority reach back to the Prophet, which assert that the name of such chapters as "The Cow", "The Family of `Imrān", "Hūd" and "The Event" were used by the Prophet himself. We may conclude from this that many of these names came into being at the time of Prophet as a result of being in common use.

Calligraphy, Orthography and Diacritical Marks Used in the Qur'ān

The first and second copies of the Qur'ān were written in Kufic script at the time of the Prophet. The very basic nature of the script, without diacritical marks, was suitable for the reciters, relaters and scholars who had learned the Qur'ān by heart, since only they knew the precise pronunciation of the words. Others found great difficulty if they opened the Book and tried to read correctly.

It was for this reason that at the end of the first century after *Hijrah* Abū al-Aswad al-Du'aliy,¹ one of the companions of Imam 'Alī, with the guidance of the latter, wrote out the rules of the Arabic language and on the orders of the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik produced a Qur'ānic text with diacritical marks. This, to a certain extent, removed the difficulty of reading the Kufic script.

Several difficulties remained, however; the diacritical marks for vowels, for example, were for a time only points. Instead of a *fathah* a point was placed at the beginning of the letter and, instead of *kasrah*, a point below and, for a *dammah*, a point above at the end of a letter. This led to ambiguity. It was not until al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdiy set about explaining the *maddah*, i.e. the lengthening of certain words, the doubling of letters, the diacritical marks of vowelling and the pause, that the difficulty of reading the script was finally removed.

¹ Al-Suyūṭiy, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 171.

A SHĪ'ITE ANTHOLOGY

SELECTED AND WITH A FOREWORD BY:
'ALLĀMAH SAYYID MUḤAMMAD ḤUSAYN ṬABĀṬABĀ'Ī

TRANSLATED WITH EXPLANATORY NOTES BY:
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UNDER THE DIRECTION OF AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY:
SAYYID ḤUSAYN NAṢR

بِسْمِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH,
THE BENEFICENT, THE MERCIFUL

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the vast amount of scholarship carried out by Western Orientalists since the nineteenth century the analyses and translations made of various Islamic sources, very little attention has been paid thus far to the collection of religious sayings, sermons, prayers, proverbs and didactic expositions which comprises the corpus of Ḥadīth as understood by Twelve-Imam Shī'ite Ḥadīth collection resembles the Sunni collection,¹ and to the extent that the latter has been studied the former has also been dealt with in an indirect manner. But inasmuch as Shī'ite Ḥadīth possess a form, style and "perfume" of their own, no indirect treatment of their substance content can replace the direct translation and analysis of collection itself.

It is in fact rather amazing that despite the extreme importance of Shī'ite law and theology as well as many fields of the "intellectual sciences" (*al-'Ulūm al-'aqliyah*), not to speak of its role in piety and the spiritual life, the sayings of the Imams

¹ There are six canonical collections in Sunni Islam which have been accepted by the whole community since they were first compiled in the second and third Islamic centuries. These collections, referred to as *al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-Sittah*, the *Six Correct Collections*, are associated with the names of great scholars of Ḥadīth, such as *al-Bukhāriy*, Muslim, etc. of these, the most famous is that of *al-Bukhāriy*, which has fortunately been translated into English (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāriy; Arabic-English*), by Muḥammad Muḥsin Khān, Islamic University, Medina; second revised edition, Ankara, 1976). The vast concordance of *Ḥadīth* by Wensick, Mensing et al. (Leiden, 1936-69) is based on these six collections.

of Shī'ism have not been rendered into English until now. Nor have they been studied as a whole and as a distinct body of religious writings of an inspired nature within the general context of Islam itself. The present volume represents, therefore a pioneering effort to present a sample of this extensive body of writings to the English-speaking world.

The Shī'ite Ḥadīth literature includes all the sayings of the Prophet of Islam accepted by Shī'ites as well as the traditions of the twelve Imams from `Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib to al-Mahdī. This collection is thus considered to be, after the Holy Qur`ān, the most important body of religious texts for Shī'ites. As in Sunni Islam, so in this case: the Ḥadīth forms along with the Revealed Book the basis of all the religious sciences, including of course the Sharī`ah as well as religious life in both its intellectual and devotional aspects. No aspect of the life and history of the Shī'ite community would be comprehensible without a consideration of this body of inspired writings.

What is particular to this collection, however, is that although it is a part of the foundation of Islam as seen by Shī'ism, its "composition" stretches over a period of more than two centuries. In Sunni Islam, ḥadīth is limited to the sayings of the Blessed Prophet. In fact, to use the term "Ḥadīth" in Sunnism is to refer to *his sayings* and not to anyone else's. in the case of Shī'ism, however, although a clear distinction is made between prophetic Ḥadīth (*al-Ḥadīth al-nabawiy*) and the sayings of the Imams (*al-Ḥadīth al-mawlawiy*), the two are included in a single collection. This means that from a certain point of view the apostolic age of Islam is seen by Shī'ism to stretch way beyond the relatively short period usually associated with apostles in various religions.

The reason for this perspective lies of course in the Shī'ite conception of the Imam.¹ The term *imām* as used in a technical sense in Shī'ism differs from the general usage of the term in

¹ See `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shī'ah in Islam*, London-Albany, 1975, pp.173 ff.

Arabic, where it means "leader", or in Sunni political theory where it means the caliph himself. As used technically in Shi'ism, the term refers to the person who contains within himself the "Muhammadan Light" (*al-nūr al-muḥammadiy*) which was handed down through Fāṭimah, the daughter of the Blessed Prophet, and `Alī, the first Imam, to the others, terminating which the Hidden Imam who is to appear again one day as al-Mahdi.¹ As a result of the presence of this light, the Imam is considered to be "sinless" (*ma`ṣūm*) and to possess perfect knowledge of the esoteric as well as the exoteric order.

The Imams are like a chain of light issuing forth from the "Sun of Prophecy" which is their origin, and yet they are never separated from that Sun. whatever is said by them emanates from the same inviolable treasury of inspired wisdom. Since they are an extension of the inner reality of the Blessed Prophet, their words really go back to him. That is why their sayings are seen in the Shi'ite perspective as an extension of the prophetic *Ḥadīth*, just as the light of their begin is seen as a continuation of the prophetic light. In Shi'ite eyes, the temporal separation of the Imams from the Blessed Prophet does not at all affect their essential and inner bond with him or the continuity of the "prophetic light" which is the source of his as well as their inspired knowledge.

This metaphysical conception is the reason that Shi'ites incorporate traditions stretching over two centuries into a single whole with those of the Blessed Prophet himself. It also distinguishes the Shi'ite conception of *Ḥadīth* from that held in Sunnism. Otherwise, the actual content of *Ḥadīth* in Sunni and Shi'ite collections is very close. After all, both kinds concern the same spiritual reality. Of course, the chain of transmission accepted by the two schools is not the same. But despite this difference in the authorities who have handed down the prophetic sayings, the actual *Ḥadīths* recorded by Sunni and

¹ As far as the continuity of the chain is concerned, the Ismā'īlī conception is of course different, since for the Ismā'īlīs the chain of Imams continues uninterrupted to this day.

Shī'ite sources have overwhelming ties. The major difference is the Shī'ites consideration of the extension of an aspect of the being of the Blessed Prophet in the Imams and therefore their addition of the sayings of the Imams to the strictly "prophetic" *Ḥadīth*.

The sayings of the Imams are in many ways not only a continuation but also a kind of commentary and elucidation of the prophetic *Ḥadīth*, often with the aim of bringing out the esoteric teachings of Islam. Many of these *Ḥadīths* deal, like those of the Blessed Prophet, with the practical aspects of life and the *Shari'ah*. Others deal with pure metaphysics, as do certain prophetic *Ḥadīths*, especially the "sacred *Ḥadīth*" (*Ḥadīth qudsī*). Still other sayings of the Imams deal with the devotional aspects of life and contain some of the most famous prayers, which have been recited over the ages by both Sunni and Shī'ites. Finally, some of the sayings deal with the various esoteric sciences. They thus cover a vast spectrum ranging from the "mundane" problems of daily life to the question of the meaning of truth itself. Because of the innate nature and also the fact that like Sufism they issue from the esoteric dimension of Islam, they have intermingled over the ages with certain types of Sufi writings.¹ They have also been considered as sources of Islamic esotericism by the Sufis, because the Imam of Shī'ism are seen in the Sufi perspective as the spiritual poles of their age. They appear in the spiritual chain (*silsilah*) of various Sufi orders, even those which have spread almost exclusively among Sunnis.²

¹ On the relation between Shī'ism and Sufism, see S. H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, London, 1972, pp. 104-20.

² A most interesting example of such interpenetration is to be seen in part of the famous prayer of the third Shī'ite Imam Ḥusayn, also found in Shādhili prayer manuals. See W. Chittick, "A Shādhili Presence in Shī'ite Islam", *sophia perennis*, vol. I, no. 1, 1975, pp. 97-100.

Because of the nature of their contents, these sayings have influenced nearly every branch of Shī'ite learning as well as the daily life of the community. Shī'ite jurisprudence (*fiqh*) bases itself directly upon this corpus in addition to the Holy Qur'ān. Shī'ite theology (*kalām*) would be incomprehensible without a knowledge of these sayings. Shī'ite Qur'ānic commentaries draw heavily upon them. Even sciences of nature such as natural history or alchemy were developed with reference to them. And finally, these sayings have surfaced as sources for meditation of the most sublime metaphysical themes over the centuries, and some of the most elaborate metaphysical and philosophical schools of Islam have issued to a large extent from them. Later, Islamic philosophy as associated with the name of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzi would in fact be inconceivable without recourse to the Shī'ite Ḥadīth collection.¹ One of Ṣadr al-Dīn's greatest metaphysical works is his unfinished commentary upon a portion of the most important of the four basic Shī'ite collections of Ḥadīth, the *al-Kāfi* of al-Kulayniy.²

Within the collection of Shī'ite Ḥadīths are certain works which need to be mentioned separately. There is first of all the celebrated *Nahj al-Balāghah* (The Path of Eloquence) of Imam 'Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib assembled and systematized by the fourth/tenth century Shī'ite scholar Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Raḍiy. Considering the enormous importance of this work in Shī'ite Islam as well as for all lovers of the Arabic language, it is remarkable how little attention has been paid to it in European languages.³ After all, many of the leading writers of Arabic such

¹ On this corpus as a source for the doctrines of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzi, see S. H. Naṣr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzi and His Transcendent Theosophy*, London-Boulder, 1978, chapter 4.

² This monumental work was translated into French by H. Corbin, who taught it for many years in Paris, but it has never been published. See Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, Paris, 1971.

³ This work has been translated several times in part or wholly in the Indo-Pakistani sub-continent and in Iran, but none of these translations is completely adequate. A new translation has been prepared by S. H. Jafri which is supposed to be published soon and

as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Kurd `Alī claim in their autobiographies to have perfected their style of writing Arabic through the study of the *Nahj al-Balāghah*, while generation after generation of Shī'ite thinkers have meditated and commented upon its meaning. Moreover, the shorter prayers and proverbs of work have spread very widely among the populace and have entered both the classical and folk literature of not only Arabic but also Persian and through the influence of Persian, several other languages of the Islamic peoples, such as Urdu.

The *Nahj al-Balāghah* contains, besides spiritual advice, moral maxims and political directives, several remarkable discourses on metaphysics, especially concerning the question of Unity (*al-Tawḥīd*). It possesses both its own method of exposition and a very distinct technical vocabulary, which distinguish it from the various Islamic schools which have dealt with metaphysics.

Western scholars refused for a long time to accept the authenticity of the authorship of work and attributed it to Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Raḍiy, although the style of al-Raḍiy's own works is very different from that of the *Nahj al-Balāghah*. In any case as far as the traditional Shī'ite perspective is concerned, the position of the *Nahj al-Balāghah* and its authorship can best be explained by repeating a conversation which took place some eighteen or nineteen years ago between `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the celebrated contemporary Shī'ite scholar who is responsible for the selection of the present anthology, and Henry Corbin, the foremost Western student of Shī'ism. Corbin, who himself was as far removed from "historicist" as possible, once said to `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī during the regular discussions they had together in Tehran (in which the present writer usually acted as translator), "Western scholars claim that `Alī is not the author of the *Nahj al-Balāghah*. What is your view and whom do you consider to be the author of this work?" `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī raised his head

which, we hope, will fulfill the very difficult condition of doing justice to both the meaning and the literary beauty of the text.

and answered in his usual gentle and calm manner, "For us, whoever wrote the *Nahj al-Balāghah* is `Alī, even if he lived a century ago."

The second notable work in the Shī`ite collection of Ḥadīth is the *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah* (The Scroll of al-Sajjād) of the fourth Imam Zayn al-`Ābidīn, also called al-Sajjād. A witness to the tragedy of Karbalā' — which must have left an indelible impression upon his soul — the fourth Imam poured forth his inner life in a symphony of beautiful prayers which have caused the *Ṣaḥīfah* to be called "the Psalms of the Family of the Holy Prophet." These prayers form a part of the daily religious life of not only Shiites but also Sunnis who find them in many of the prayer manuals most popular in the Sunni world.¹

Also notable in the Shī`ite collection of Ḥadīth are the sayings of the fifth, sixth, and seventh Imams from whom the largest number of traditions have been recorded. These Imams lived at the end of the Umayyad and the beginning of the `Abbāsīd dynasties when, as a result of the changes in the caliphate, central authority had weakened and the Imams were able to speak more openly and also train more students. The number of students, both Shī`ite and Sunni, trained by the sixth Imam Ja`far al-Ṣādiq has been estimated at four thousand. He left behind a vast body of sayings, which range from the field of law to the esoteric sciences.

The sayings of the Holy Prophet and the Imams have been of course a constant source of meditation and discussion by Shī`ite men of learning throughout the ages. But it is especially in the later period of Shī`ite history beginning with Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī, leading to the great masters of the Safavīd period such as Mīr Dāmād and Mullā Ṣadrā and continuing to the present day that these sayings have served as a distinct source for metaphysics and philosophy as well as the juridical and Qur'ānic sciences. The commentaries of Mullā Ṣadrā, Qāḍī

¹ Some of these prayers have been translated by C. Padiwick in her *Muslim Devotions*, London, 1961.

Sa'īd al-Qummī and many others on these collections of Shī'ite Ḥadīth are among the great masterpieces of Islamic thought.¹ Later Islamic philosophy and theosophy in fact could not be understood without them.²

The present volume represents the second in a series of three, which was planned many years ago with the help and support of Professor Kenneth Morgan, then of Colgate University, with the aim of presenting Shī'ism to the Western world from the point of view of Shī'ism itself. The first volume in the series appeared in English as *Shī'ite Islam* by 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, edited and translated by the author of these lines.³ The second volume, called *The Qur'ān in Islam (Qur'ān dar islām)*, was also written by 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī and its Persian version printed in Tehran. Most of it was also translated by us into English, but the translation was not completed. The events of the last year in Iran have made the manuscript of what we have already translated inaccessible to us so that there is no possibility at the present moment to produce the English translation as planned.

¹ See H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*.

² Not only Mullā Ṣadrā, but also his students were deeply influenced by this collection. One of Mullā Ṣadrā's most famous students, Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī, who was at once theologian, gnostic and philosopher, was also an outstanding authority on Shī'ite Ḥadīth. His *al-Wāfi* is one of the most often studied works on the Ḥadīths of the Shī'ite Imams and their lines of transmission.

³ In our introduction that work, we have dealt with the conditions under which these works were conceived as well as a biography of 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī. *Shī'ite Islam* was published by both Allen & Unwin in London and the State University of New York Press in Albany. The work has also just appeared in paperback in America. It is of interest to note that the original Persian version of this work, written specifically for the project and with a Persian introduction by S. H. Naṣr, has become one of the most widely read works on Shī'ism in Iran itself and has been reprinted many times.

The present volume is the third and final one in the series. After a long period of study and deliberation, `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī made the present selection from the vast collection of Ḥadīth, a task which would have been bewildering for anyone not possessing his knowledge of this inspired literature. Once this selection was made, Dr. William Chittick, who was then residing in Tehran and working with us on various scholarly projects, undertook the arduous task of translating the very compact and difficult Arabic texts into English. Because of the lack of precedence for rendering these writings into European languages and the nature of the texts themselves, Dr. Chittick was faced with a formidable task. It was only his intimate knowledge of Arabic, Persian and the subject matter combined with great patience and meticulous scholarship that made it possible for him to succeed in such a laborious and exacting undertaking. He should be congratulated in every way for having successfully concluded this colossal task.

It remained for the Muḥammadi Trust to bring the project to fruition and to make its publication possible. The credit for this volume and its effect in making Shī'ism better known must be given to a large extent to the Trust. As one who was responsible for this volume from its inception, I want to thank the Trust especially Wg. Cdr. (ret'd.) Q. Ḥusayn, its very able secretary who with great love and devotion to the true cause of Islam, enabled us to complete this project. Dr. Chittick, also, has earned the gratitude of all students of Islam for his fine scholarship and devotion to the completion of a very difficult project.

This volume is particularly pertinent at the present moment, when volcanic eruptions and powerful waves of a political nature associated with the name of Islam in general and Shī'ism in particular have made an authentic knowledge of things Islamic imperative, lest ignorance destroy the very foundations of human society and the relations which make discourse between various nations and religious communities possible.

At the dawn of this fifteenth century of the terrestrial existence of Islam, may this volume be an aid in bringing about an understanding of one of the fundamental sources of inspiration and knowledge for not only Shi'ism, but Islam as such.

Seyed Hossein Naşr
Cambridge, Massachusetts
Muḥarram 1400
November 1979

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

In works on Islam the word "Ḥadīth" usually refers to the sayings or "traditions" which have been transmitted from the Prophet. Muslims hold these to be the most important source of Islamic teachings after the Qur'ān. Numerous works have been written in Western languages on the role of the Ḥadīth literature in Islam¹ and a number of important translations have been made.² But almost all Western studies have been limited to the point of view of Sunni Islam and based on Sunni sources and collections. Practically no one has paid any serious attention to the different nature of the Ḥadīth literature in Shī'ism and the different sources from which the Ḥadīth are derived.

The fundamental distinction to be made between Shiite and Sunni Ḥadīths is that in Shī'ism the traditions are not limited to those of the Prophet, but include those of the Imams as well. As important and basic as this point is, it has not been understood even in such standard reference works as the new *Encyclopedia of Islam*. There the author of the article "Ḥadīth"

¹ On the subject of prophetic Ḥadīth in general see the article "Ḥadīth" in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (New Edition), where a good bibliography is also provided. (vol. III, pp. 23-8).

² Perhaps the most important Ḥadīth collection yet to be completely translated into worthy English is the *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ*, translated by J. Robson, Lahore, 4 vols. 1963-5. See also the translation of Bukhāriy mentioned in note 1 of this introduction, and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, translated by A. K. Ṣiddīqī, Lahore, 1972 onward.

is aware that there is some difference between Shī'ism and Sunnism on the question of which Ḥadīths are included, but he thinks that it lies in the fact that the Shī'ite collections accept "only traditions traced through 'Alī's family." But this is incorrect, since numerous traditions are also transmitted through other sources. What the author fails to mention is that the Ḥadīth literature as understood by Shī'ites is not limited to the sayings of the Prophet, but includes those of the Imams as well.¹

In short, collections of Ḥadīths in Sunni Islam, such as those of al-Bukhāriy and Muslim, contain only sayings transmitted from and about the Prophet. But the Shī'ite collections, such as that of al-Kulayniy, also contain sayings transmitted from and about the twelve Imams. Naturally, the Shī'ites make a distinction among the Ḥadīth, so that those transmitted from the Prophet are of greater authority, but nevertheless all traditions are listed together according to subject matter, not according to author.

The most famous and authoritative collections of Shī'ite Ḥadīths are four works which, in terms of their importance for Shī'ism, correspond to the Six Correct Collections in Sunni Islam. These are *al-Kāfi fī 'ilm al-dīn* (The Sufficient in the Knowledge of Religion) by Thiqat al-Islam Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulayniy (d. 329/940), *Man-lā-yahduruhu'l-faḥih* (For him not in the Presence of a jurisprudent) of Shaykh al-Ṣadūq Muḥammad ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 381/991), *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* (Rectification of the Statutes) by Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifah Muḥammad al-Ṭūsiy (d. 460/1068) and *al-Istibṣār fī ma ukhtulifa fihī min al-akhbār* (Reflection upon the Disputed Traditions) also by al-Ṭūsiy.

¹ *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. III, p.24.

The Present Collection

The sermons, sayings, prayers and writings translated here present a cross section of Shī'ite religious thought with an emphasis upon that which is most basic for the religion itself and most universal and hence understandable in the eyes of non-Muslims. As 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'i points out in his foreword, in making these selections his aim was to emphasize the three basic dimensions of the Shī'ite tradition:

1. The profession of Unity (*al-Tawhīd*), or the metaphysical and theological principles of the faith.
2. The political, social and moral teachings.
3. The inward, spiritual and devotional life of the community.

Hence, the selections stress the principles and fundamentals (*uṣūl*) of Islam, while they tend to ignore the branches and secondary aspects (*furū'*). In other words, little is said about the concrete ramifications of the principles in terms of the details of the application of the Divine Law (*al-Sharī'ah*) to everyday life. Nevertheless, the secondary aspects are clearly reflected in 'Alī's "Instructions to Mālik al-Ashtar" and to a lesser degree in the prayers.

Although it is well known that the first "pillar of Islam" is the profession of faith, which begins with a statement of the Divine Unity, Western scholars have tended to explain the Islamic belief in God's Oneness as a relatively simple-minded affirmation of the existence of only one God. Perhaps one reason the *Nahj al-Balāghah* and the Shī'ite Ḥadīth literature in general have been neglected or simply branded as spurious is that their very existence flatly contradicts the commonly accepted idea of a simple bedouin faith with few philosophical or metaphysical overtones. In these writings, we see that already in the first centuries of Islam the Divine Unity was affirmed in terms reminiscent of the subtlety of later "theosophical" Sufism, but still completely steeped in the peculiar spiritual aroma of the revelation itself.

The Sources

In making the selections Ḥallāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī utilized four works: the *Nahj al-balāghah*, *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, *Biḥār al-Anwār* and *Mafātiḥ al-Jinān*. The first two works are discussed in Dr. Naṣr's introduction. *Biḥār al-Anwār* (Oceans of Lights) is a monumental encyclopedia of Ḥadīths which attempts to collect all Shī'ite traditions in a single work and which classifies them by subject matter. It was compiled in the Safavid period by the famous theologian Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisiy (d. 1110/1698-9 or 1111/1699-1700). The importance the work has possessed since its compilation as the standard reference work for all Shī'ite studies can hardly be overemphasized. One indication of its popularity is that, despite its enormous size, it was published twice in lithographed form in the nineteenth century. The modern edition of the work fills 110 volumes of approximately 400 pages each.

Majlisiy collected his traditions from numerous earlier sources. As examples, we can mention a few of the works from which he derived the Ḥadīths in the present collection, works which have been independently published in modern times. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, the author of one of the four basic works on Shī'ite Ḥadīths referred to above, compiled dozens of authoritative Ḥadīth collections, each of which usually follows a particular theme. His *al-Tawḥīd* collects traditions which illustrate the profession of God's Unity. His *ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā* gathers together everything that has been related about Imam ʿAlī al-Riḍā, the eighth Imam, whose tomb in Mashhad is the holiest site of pilgrimage in Iran. The work contains such things as descriptions of the Imam's mother, explanations of the reason his name was chosen, all the sayings which have been recorded from him, and traditions concerning his death and the miracles which have occurred at his tomb. Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's *al-Khiṣāl* demonstrates the importance of numbers in the traditions. In twelve long chapters he records all the Ḥadīths which mention the numbers one to twelve. The author of *al-iḥtijāj*, Abū-Manṣūr Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Ṭabarsī (d. 599/1202-3), rejects the

views of certain of his contemporaries who had claimed that the Prophet and the Imams never engaged in argumentation. He collects together traditions in which their discussions with opponents have been recorded.

The fourth work from which `Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī made his selections is *Mafātiḥ al-Jinān* (Keys to the Gardens of Paradise), a standard collection of Shī'ite prayers compiled from *Bihār al-anwār* and other sources by `Abbās Qummī (d. 1359/1940-1). It includes prayers to be recited daily, prayers for special occasions such as religious holidays and days of mourning, litanies and invocations for different moments in one's life, instructions for making a pilgrimage to the tomb of the Prophet or any one of the Imams, and prayers for every other conceivable occasion as well.

The Translations

A note needs to be added about the method of translation. Because of the sacred nature of the texts and their fundamental importance as sources for the Shī'ite branch of Islam, I have attempted to translate them in a strictly literal manner so that the least amount of personal interpretation will have been made. There are definite disadvantages to this method, but the necessity for an accurate translation would seem to outweigh them all. After all, the Qur'ān has been translated dozens of times. Others who may feel that the present translation does not do justice to the literary qualities of the text may try their own hand at rendering it into English.

The necessity for a literal translation is all the greater because a good deal of the material translated here - in particular those parts which derive from the *Nahj al-balāghah* - has also been translated elsewhere and on the whole has been misrepresented. Before such interpretive translations are made and held to reflect the thought of the Imams, literal translations are of paramount importance. In order to maintain a faithful translation, I have added notes wherever I deviate from a strictly literal translation or wherever there are questionable readings in the original.

Because no standard translations exist for many technical terms, I have felt it necessary to add the Arabic original in brackets for the benefit of scholars and Arabic speakers. This is especially true in the most difficult and metaphysical section of the book, Part I "On the Unity of God." Although the Arabic terms will prove a distraction to most readers, they represent the only practical way of tying the present texts into the reader's knowledge of the Arabic language.

Finally I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Seyed Hossein Naṣr, who asked me to undertake this work many years ago and has guided me in every stage of it, although of course I remain completely responsible for any inaccuracies which may remain in the translations and notes. Peter Lamborn Wilson and William Shpall also read the manuscript and made valuable suggestions and without the kindness and encouragement of Wg. Cdr. (rtd.) Ḥusayn and the Muḥammadi Trust, the work may never have been completed and published.

FOREWORD

If one studies the literature of Islam carefully, one will, immediately encounter a vast and varied field of material. First there is the network of laws and regulations which makes up Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and which takes into consideration and regulates man's every individual and social "movement and rest", activity and situation, at every moment of time, in every place and under all conditions, as well as every particular and general occurrence related to human life. Second, there is a vast range of moral and ethical expositions which weighs every sort of moral activity, whether praiseworthy or blamable, and presents as a model for human society that which befits the perfection of man. Finally on the level of Islam's overall view of Reality there is the general "philosophy" of Islam, that is, its sciences relating to cosmology, spiritual anthropology and finally the knowledge of God, presented in the clearest possible expression and most direct manner.

On a more profound level of study and penetration it will become obvious that the various elements of this tradition, with all their astonishing complexity and variety, are governed by a particular kind of interrelationship; that all of these elements are reducible in the final analysis to one truth, the "Profession of God's Unity" (*Tawhīd*), which is the ultimate principle of all the Islamic sciences. "A good word is as a good tree - its roots are in heaven, it gives its produce every season by the leave of its Lord" (Qur'ān XIV, 24).

The noble sayings and writings presented in the present work were selected and translated from the traditions left by the foremost exponents of Islam. They include expositions elucidating the principle of Tawḥīd and making clear the fundamental basis of all Islamic sciences and pursuits. At the same time they contain excellent and subtle allusions to the manner in which the important remaining sciences are ordered and organized around tawḥīd, how the moral virtues are based upon it, and how finally the practical aspects of Islam are founded upon and derived from these virtues. Finally, 'Alī's "Instructions to Mālik al-Ashtar" clarify the general situation of Islamic society in relation to the practical application of Islamic government.

All the traditions translated in the present work are summarized in the following two sentences: "Islam is the religion of seeing things as they are" and "Islam means to submit to the Truth (*al-ḥaqq*) and to follow it in one's beliefs and actions."

'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī

ON THE UNITY OF GOD

A follower of the Islamic religion must first accept the testimony of faith: "There is no god but Allah" (*lā ilāha illa-llāh*). This profession of God's Unity is Islam's first pillar (*rukṅ*). All else depends upon it and derives from it.

But what does it mean to say that there is no god but God ? For Islam, the manner in which the believer answers this question displays the depth to which he understands his religion. And, paraphrasing a *Hadīth* of the Prophet often quoted in Sufi texts, one might say that there are as many ways of understanding the meaning of this profession as there are believers.¹

Islamic intellectual history can be understood as a gradual unfolding of the manner in which successive generations of men have understood the meaning and implications of professing God's Unity. Theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, Sufism, even to some degree the natural sciences., all seek to explain at some level the principle of Tawḥīd, "To profess that God is One." Some of the most productive of the intellectual schools which have attempted to explain the meaning of Tawḥīd have flourished among Shī`ites.

Many historians have looked outside of Islam to find the inspiration for Islam's philosophical and metaphysical expositions of the nature of God's Unity. Such scholars tend to relegate anything more than what could derive - that is, in their

¹ The Prophet said, "The number of paths to God is equal to the number of human souls."

view from a "simple bedouin faith" to outside influence. Invariably they ignore the rich treasures of wisdom contained in the vast corpus of Shī'ite *Ḥadīth* literature pertaining to Islam's first centuries, i.e., the sayings of the Imams who were the acknowledged authorities in the religious sciences not only by the Shī'ites but also by the Sunnis. Even certain sayings of the Prophet which provide inspiration for the Imams have been ignored. In particular, the great watershed of Islamic metaphysical teachings, 'Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law and the Shī'ites' first imam, has been largely overlooked.

In the following selections from *Bihār al-anwār*, fifteen out of hundreds that can be found in Shiite sources, the reader will see the seeds for much of later Islamic metaphysical speculation. It will be noticed that the style of the *Ḥadīths* varies little from the Prophet himself to the eighth Imam, the last from whom large numbers of such sayings have been handed down. The most important sources for such *Ḥadīths*, i.e., the Prophet, the first, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth Imams, are all represented.

The basic themes of the selections remain largely constant. The Prophet and the Imams all emphasize God's transcendence, or His "incomparability" (*tanzīh*) with the creatures. We may speak of God - although only on the authority of His own words, i.e., the Qur'ān - but the expressions we employ are not to be understood as they are when we use the same words to describe the creatures. At the same time, the very fact that words can properly be employed to refer to God show that in some respect He is indeed "comparable" or "similar" (*tashbih*) to His creation, if only in the sense that His creation is somehow "similar" to Him because created by Him. Otherwise, the words employed to speak about Him would all be meaningless, or each one would be equivalent to every other. But this second dimension of God's Reality - one more emphasized in Sufism - is relatively ignored in favor of His incomparability. Another theme of the selections is man's inability to grasp God through such things as the powers of his reason and his senses. The

constant emphasis upon this point underlines God's incomparability and illustrates the particular errors to which the polytheistic and anthropomorphic thinking and imagination of the "Age of Ignorance" (*al-jāhiliyyah*) before Islam was prone.

In order to clarify the meaning of the selections, I have tried to supply a sufficient number of annotations. To comment upon the sayings in detail has been the task of much of Shi'ite speculation throughout the centuries. Every word and every sentence have provided numerous scholars with ample opportunity to display their erudition. But for a Western audience, one can only hope to point-out the most important references to the Qur'ān and the prophetic *Hadīth* literature - references which are largely obvious for the Arabic speaking Muslim. Then I have tried to illustrate the manner in which later commentators have elaborated upon the *Hadīths* by quoting a number of explanatory passages, in Part I mostly from Majlisiy, the compiler of the *Biḥār al-anwār*. Some of these commentaries are necessary to understand the bearing of the text, but others may seem to obscure an apparently obvious sentence. In the latter case, this is largely because the commentators usually try to explain the text by referring to theological and philosophical concepts familiar to their readers, but not so to the average Westerner. However, that may be, such notes illustrate the manner in which later speculation has expanded and developed an aphoristic mode of expression into a complex metaphysical system.

A. The Prophet

i. Profession of Faith

Abū-'Abdullāh (the sixth Imam) has related from his fathers that the Prophet of God—God bless him and his household—¹ said in one of his sermons, "Praise belongs to God, who in His firstness (*awwaliyah*) was solitary and in His beginninglessness (*azaliyah*) was tremendously exalted through divinity and supremely great through His magnificence and power.² He originated that which He produced and, brought into being that which He created without a model (*mithāl*) preceding anything that He created. Our Lord, the eternal (*al-qadīm*), unstitched (the heavens and the earth)³ through the subtlety (*lutf*) of His lordship and the knowledge within His omniscience, created all that He created through the laws of His power (*qudrah*), and split (the sky) through the light of dawn.⁴ So none changes His creation, none alters His handiwork, 'none repels His law' (XIII, 45)⁵ none rejects His command. There is no place of rest

¹ 2 Throughout these texts, as in all traditional Muslim writings, whenever the name of the Prophet or a pronoun referring to him is mentioned, phrases like "Upon whom be blessings and peace" are added. In the same way for the Imams "Upon whom be peace" is added. For the most part these phrases have been dropped in translation.

² According to Majlisiy, the meaning is that God's exaltation, magnificence and divinity are not dependent upon creation, but existed before it (p. 288). I.e., although these terms logically imply duality (exalted in relation to the debased, divine in relation to creatures, etc.), they express qualities which God possessed in His eternal nature "before" any creature existed. The same can be said about His solitariness.

³ Cf. Qur'ān XXI, 30: "The heavens and the earth were a mass all sewn up, and then we unstitched them."

⁴ Reference to Qur'ān VI, 97: "He splits the sky into dawn".

⁵ Chapter and verse of Qur'ānic quotations will be indicated in the text in this manner. I have relied largely on the Arberry and Pickthall translations.

away from His call (*da`wah*),¹ no cessation to His dominion and no interruption of His term. He is the truly existent (*al-kaynūn*) from the first and the truly enduring (*al-daymūm*) forever. He is veiled from His creatures by His light in the high horizon, in the towering might, and in the lofty dominion. He is above all things and below all things. So He manifested Himself (*tajallī*) to His creation without being seen, and He transcends being gazed upon. He wanted to be distinguished by the profession of Unity (*Tawḥīd*) when He withdrew behind the veil of His light, rose high in His exaltation and concealed Himself from His creation.²

"He sent to them messengers so they might be His conclusive argument against His creatures³ and so His messengers to them might be witnesses against them.⁴ He sent among them prophets bearing good tidings and warning, 'that whosoever perished might perish by a clear sign, and by a clear sign he might see who lived' (VIII., 42) and that the servants might understand of their Lord that of which they had been ignorant, recognize Him in His Lordship after they had denied (it) and profess His Unity in His divinity after they had stubbornly resisted."

¹ Cf. for example Qur`ān XIV, 44: "And warn mankind of the day when the chastisement comes on them, and those who did evil shall say, 'Our Lord, defer us to a near term, and we will answer Thy call, and follow the Messengers'."

² Majlisiy offers several explanations for this passage, and he comments as follows on the interpretation followed here: "He wished that creatures profess His Unity alone, without associating any others with Him. For if He were apparent to minds and the senses, He would be associated with possible beings in unreal unity (*al-wiḥdah al-i`tibiriyah*). Then the unity which pertained to Him would not belong to Him alone" (p. 289).

³ Cf. Qur`ān IV, 165: "Messengers bearing good tidings, and warning, so that mankind might have no argument against God, after the Messengers," and VI, 150: "To God belongs the argument conclusive."

⁴ Cf. for example, Qur`ān XXII, 78: "That the Messenger might be a witness against you..."

2. God's Attributes

Ibn `Abbās related that a Jew, called Na`thal, stood up before the Prophet of God—upon whom be blessings and peace—and said, "O Muḥammad, verily I will ask thee about certain things which have been repeating themselves in my breast for some time. If thou answerest them for me I will embrace Islam at thy hand."

The Prophet said, "Ask, O Abā `Imārah"

Then he said, "O Muḥammad, describe for me thy Lord."

He answered, "Surely the Creator cannot be described except by that with which He has described Himself - and how should one describe that Creator whom the senses cannot perceive, imaginations cannot attain, thoughts (*khaṭarāt*) cannot delimit and sight cannot encompass? Greater is He than what the depictees describe I He is distant in His nearness and near in His distance. He fashions (*kayaf*) 'howness' (*kayfiyah*), so it is not said of Him, 'How?' (*kayf*); He determines (*ayan*) the 'where' (*ayn*), so it is not said of Him, 'Where?' (*ayn*). He sunders 'howness' (*kayfūfiyah*) and 'whereness' (*aynūniyah*), so He is "One... the Everlasting Refuge" (CXII, 1-2), as He has described Himself. But depictees do not attain to His description. 'He has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one' (CXII, 3-4).

Na`thal said, "Thou hast spoken the truth. O Muḥammad, tell me about thy saying, 'Surely He is One, there is none like (*shabih*) Him.' Is not God one and man one? And thus His oneness (*waḥdāniyah*) resembles the oneness of man."

He answered, "God is one, but single in meaning (*aḥadiy alma`nā*), while man is one but dual in meaning (*thānawiy alma`nā*) corporeal substance (*jism*) and accidents (*`araḍ*), body (*badan*) and spirit (*rūḥ*). Similarity (*tashbih*)¹ pertains only to

¹ "Similarity" or "comparison" (*tashbih*) becomes an important

tile meanings.”

Na`thal said, “Thou hast spoken the truth, o Muḥammad.”

B. `Alī, the First Imam

i. The Transcendent Lord

It was related by `Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā (the eighth Imam) from the earlier Imams in succession that al-Ḥusayn ibn `Alī (the third Imam) spoke as follows: The Commander of the Faithful—upon whom be peace—addressed the people in the mosque at Kufa and said:

“Praise belongs to God, who did not originate from anything, nor did He bring what exists into being from anything.¹ His beginninglessness is attested to by the temporality (*ḥudūth*) of things, His power by the impotence with which He has branded them, and His everlastingness (*dawām*) by the annihilation (*fanā`*) which He has forced upon them. No place is empty of Him that He might be perceived through localization (*ayniyah*).

technical term in Islamic theology and Sufism. It indicates the belief that God’s attributes can be likened to those of man and the creatures. Hence, scholars have often translated the term as “anthropomorphism”. It is contrasted with “incomparability” (*tanzih*), the belief that God’s attributes are in no way similar to those of the creatures. As pointed out in the introduction, the Imams emphasize the latter position throughout these texts, without failing to make use of the former to explain their points. In later theology and Sufism, attempts are often made to strike a balance between the two positions by maintaining that God is neither completely similar to His creatures nor totally incomparable, or that He is both similar and incomparable at the same time. For example, Ibn al-`Arabi attempts to strike this balance in the third chapter of his celebrated *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikmah*. See W. Chittick, “Ibn `Arabi’s own Summary of the *Fuṣūṣ*: ‘The Imprint of the Bezels of Wisdom’,” *Sophia Perennis*, vol. 1, no. 2, Autumn 1975, pp. 108-110

¹ As pointed out by Majlisi (pp. 223-4), this is “a rejection of the views of those who say that every temporal being (*Ḥadīth*) must come from a (preexisting) matter (*māddah*).”

no object (*shabah*) is like Him that He might be described by quality (*kayfiyah*), nor is He absent from anything that He might be known through situation (*haythiyah*).¹

"He is distinct (*mubā'in*) in attributes from all that He has originated, inaccessible to perception because of the changing essences He has created (in things),² and outside of all domination (*taṣarruf*) by changing states (*ḥālāt*) because of grandeur and tremendousness. Forbidden is His delimitation (*taḥdīd*) to the penetrating acumen of sagacities, His

¹ The words *ayniyyah*, *kayfiyyah* and *haythiyah* could be translated more literally as "whereness", "howness" and "whercasness" (cf. above, p.26, and below, p. 49). Majlisiy explains the meaning as follows: "In other words, He is not localized in any one place that He should be in that place without being in another, as is the case with things qualified by localization (*mutamakkināt*). So He cannot be perceived like something possessing location and place. The relation of a disengaged reality (*mujarrad*) to all places is equal. No place is empty of Him in respect of the fact He encompasses them in knowledge, in terms of causality, and because He preserves and sustains them..."

"There is no object like Him existing either externally (*fi'l-khārij*) or mentally (*fi'l-adh'hān*), that He might be described as possessing any of the various qualities relating to corporeality and possibility. It is also possible that by 'quality' is meant 'cognitive form' (*al-ṣūrah al-'ilmiyyah*).

"And He is not absent from anything, that is,... in respect of knowledge, that one might thus conclude that He possesses aspect (*hayth*) and place (*makān*). As for things qualified by place, it is in their nature to be absent from (other) things and not to encompass them in knowledge. This sentence is as if to emphasize the former statement. It is also possible that 'aspect' here refers to time. ..." (p. 224).

² "The changing essences of things make Him inaccessible to minds... either because, if the mind could perceive Him, He would be - like possible beings - a locus for changing attributes, and thus He would be in need of a maker; or because reason tells us that the Maker must be different in attribute from the made, so He cannot be perceived as are created things..." (Majlisiy, p. 225).

description (*takyīf*) to the piercing profundities of thought and His representation (*taṣwīr*) to the searching probes of insight.

"Because of His tremendousness places encompass Him not, because of His majesty measures gauge Him not, and because of His grandeur standards judge Him not. Impossible is it for imaginations (*awhām*) to fathom Him, understandings (*afhām*) to comprehend Him or minds (*adh'hān*) to imagine Him. Powers of reason (*'uqūl*) with lofty aspiration despair of contriving to comprehend Him, oceans of knowledge run dry without alluding to Him in depth,¹ and the subtleties of disputants fall from loftiness to pettiness in describing His power.

"He is One (*wāhid*), not in terms of number (*'adad*); Everlasting (*dā'im*), without duration (*amad*); Standing (*qā'im*), without supports (*'umud*). He is not of a kind (*jins*) that (other) kinds should be on a par with Him, nor an object that objects should be similar to Him, nor like things that attributes should apply to Him. Powers of reason go astray in the waves of the current of perceiving Him, imaginations are bewildered at encompassing the mention of His beginninglessness, understandings are held back from becoming conscious of the description of His power, and minds are drowned in the depths of the heavens of His kingdom (*malakūt*).²

"He is Master over (giving) bounties, Inaccessible through Grandeur, and Sovereign over all things. Time (*al-dahr*) makes Him not old, nor does description encompass Him. Humbled

¹ Cf. Qur'ān XVIII, 110: "Say, 'If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be spent before the Words of my Lord are spent, though We brought replenishment the like of it.'"

² It will not have passed unnoticed that the transcendence of the divine Essence is emphasized here by the fact that man is dumbfounded even by the lower reaches of God's theophanies. The powers of man's reason are stopped by the waves, they do not reach the current itself. The mere mention of God's eternity bewilders the imagination, etc.

before Him are the firmest of obdurances in the limits of their constancy, and submitted to Him are the most unshakeable of the cords in the extremity of their towering regions.¹

"Witness to His Lordship (*rubūbiyah*) is the totality of kinds (*al-ajnās*, i.e., kinds of creatures), to His Power their incapacity, to His eternity (*qidmah*) their createdness (*fuṭūr*), and to His permanence (*baqā'*) their passing into extinction (*zawāl*). So they possess no place of refuge from His grasp (*idrāk*) of them, no exit from His encompassing (*iḥāṭah*) them, no way of veiling themselves from His enumeration (*iḥṣā'*) of them and no way of avoiding His power over them. Sufficient is the perfection of His making them² as a sign (*āyah*), His compounding of their (natural) constitutions as a proof, the temporal origin (*ḥudūth*) of their natures as (a reason for His) eternity, and the creation's laws governing them as a lesson.³ No limit is attributed to Him, no similitude struck for Him and nothing veiled from Him. High indeed is He exalted above the striking of similitudes and above created attributes!

"And I testify that there is no god but He, having faith in His lordship and opposing whoso denies Him; and I testify that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger, residing in the best lodging-place, having passed from the noblest of loins and immaculate wombs, extracted in lineage from the noblest of

¹ According to Majlisiy, the reference is to the "cords" (*asbāb*) or degrees of "Pharaoh said, 'Hāmān, build for me a tower, that haply so I may reach the cords, the cords of the heavens, and look upon Moses' God' " (XI, 36-7).

² The same words, *itqān al-ṣun'*, are used together once in the Qur'ān: "God's handiwork, who has made everything perfectly" (XXVII, 88).

³ The fact that the creation displays the signs and portents of God is of course emphasized throughout the Qur'ān and all of Islam and is the basis of all Islamic cosmology. For the Muslim, moreover, it is the very order and regularity of the universe and nature's laws which prove God. See S. H. Naṣr, *Science and Civilization in Islam*, Cambridge (Aims.), 1968.

mines and in origin from the most excellent of plantations, and (derived) from the most inaccessible of summits and the most glorious roots, from the tree from which God fashioned His prophets and chose His trusted ones:¹ (a tree) of excellent wood, harmonious stature, lofty branches, flourishing limbs, ripened fruit, (and) noble interior, implanted in generosity and cultivated in a sacred precinct. There it put forth branches and fruit, became strong and unassailable, and then made him (the prophet Muḥammad) tall and eminent, until God, the Mighty and Majestic, honored him with the Faithful Spirit,² the Illuminating Light,³ and the Manifest Book.⁴ He subjected to him Burāq⁵ and the angels greeted him.⁶ By means of him, He terrified the devils, overthrew the idols and the gods (who were) worshipped apart from Him. His prophet's Wont (*sunnah*) is integrity (*rushd*), his conduct (*sirah*) is justice and his decision is truth. He proclaimed that which was commanded by his Lord,⁷ and he delivered that with which he was charged⁸ until he made plain his mission through the profession of Unity and made manifest among the creatures that there is no god but God alone and that He has no associate; until His Oneness

¹ According to Majlisiy, by "tree" is meant first the Abrahamic line of prophecy, then the tribe and family of the Prophet the Quraysh and Banu-Hāshim (p. 227). The descriptions following all refer to the tree of prophecy and the prophets who grew from it.

² I.e., Gabriel, the angel of revelation. Cf. Qur'ān XXVI, 192-3: "Truly it is the revelation of the Lord of all beings, brought down by the Faithful Spirit..."

³ I.e., revelation.

⁴ The Qur'ān.

⁵ The "steed" which carried the Prophet to Heaven on his night journey (*mi'rāj*).

⁶ I.e., during the Prophet's *mi'rāj*.

⁷ Cf. Qur'ān XV, 94: "So proclaim that which thou art commanded, and withdraw from the idolaters."

⁸ Cf. Qur'ān V, 67: "O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to thee from thy Lord..."

became pure and His lordship unmixed. God made manifest his argument through the profession of His Unity and He raised his degree with submission (*al-Islām*). And God, the Mighty and Majestic, chose for His prophet what was with Him of repose, degree and means - upon him and upon his pure household be God's peace."

2. *Via negativa*

'Alī said, "Praise belongs to God, whose laudation is not rendered by speakers,¹ whose bounties are not counted by reckoners,² and whose rightfully due (*ḥaqq*) is not discharged by those who strive. Grand aspirations perceive Him not and deep-diving perspicacities reach Him not. His attributes (*ṣifah*) possess no determined limits (*ḥadd maḥdūd*), no existing description (*na't mawjūd*), no fixed time (*waqt ma'dūd*) and no extended term (*ajal mamdūd*). He originates the creatures by His power,³ looses the winds by His mercy,⁴ and fastens the shaking of His earth with boulders.⁵

"The first step in religion is knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of Him. The perfection of knowledge of Him is to confirm Him (*taṣdīq*). The perfection of confirming Him is to profess His unity (*tawḥīd*). The perfection of professing His Unity is sincerity (*ikhhlās*) towards Him.⁶ And the perfection of sincerity towards Him is to

¹ According to a *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet, "I cannot enumerate an of Thy praises: Thou art as Thou hast praised Thyself".

² Cf. Qur'ān XIV, 34 and XVI, 18.

³ Cf. Qur'ān XVII, 51: "Then they will say, 'Who will bring us back?' Say: 'He who originated you the first time'."

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān XXX) 46: "And of His signs is that He looses the winds, bearing good tidings and that He may let you taste of His mercy", and other similar verses.

⁵ Cf. Qur'ān XVI, 15: "And He cast on the earth firm mountains, lest it shake with you"; also XXI, 32 and XXXI, 10.

⁶ The editor comments as follows in a footnote: "The perfection of professing His Unity is to *maintain* that He is not forced to act as He does and is devoid of all faults, to declare Him to be above the

negate attributes (*nafy al-ṣifāt*) from Him, because of the testimony of every attribute that it is not that which possesses the attribute (*al-mawsūf*) and the testimony of everything that possesses attributes that it is not the attribute.

"So whoso describes God -glory be to Him- has given Him a comrade (i.e. the description). Whoso gives Him a comrade has declared Him to be two (*tathniyah*). Whoso declares Him to be two has divided Him. Whoso divides Him is ignorant of Him. (Whoso is ignorant of Him points to Him).¹ Whoso points to Him has delimited Him. Whoso delimits Him has numbered Him. Whoso says, 'In what is He?' has enclosed Him. Whoso says, 'On what is He?' has excluded Him (from certain things).

"He is a being (*kā'in*) not as the result of temporal origin (*ḥadath*), an existent (*mawjūd*) not (having come) from nonexistence (*'adam*). He is with everything, not through association (*muqāranah*); and He is other than everything, not through separation (*muzāyalah*). He is active (*fā'il*), not in the sense of possessing movement and instruments. He was seeing when there was none of His creatures to be observed by Him. He was 'alone' (*mutawahhid*) when there was none with whom to be intimate and at whose loss to feel lonely.

"He originated creation and gave to it its beginning without employing deliberation, profiting from experience, occasioning movement (*ḥarakah*, i.e. in Himself), or being disrupted by the cares of the soul (*hammāmah nafs*). He delays things to their

blemishes of incapacity and imperfection, and to profess that He is pure of what pertains to and impinges upon possible beings, such as corporeality, composition, and other negative (*salbiy*) attributes" Sincerity is to profess the Unity of God in a perfect manner, so that eventually at the end of the path of spiritual realization and perfection (*al-trarīqah*), all stains of contingency are removed both from the knowledge and the being of the believer.

¹ This sentence does not occur in the *Bihār al-anwār*, but it does occur in the same passage in the *Nahj al-balāghah* and seems necessary from the context.

times,¹ mends their discrepancies, implants (in them) their natural dispositions, and makes these (dispositions) adhere to their objects. He has knowledge of them before their beginning, encompasses their limits (*ḥudūd*) and their end (*intihā'*) and knows their relationships (*qarā'in*) and aspects (*aḥnā*)."

3. Firm Rooting in Knowledge

It was related from Abū-'Abdullāh that when the Commander of the Faithful was speaking from the pulpit at Kufa, a man stood up and said, "O Commander of the Faithful! Describe for us thy Lord -blessed and transcendent is He- that our love (*ḥubb*) for Him and knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of Him may increase."

The Commander of the Faithful became angry and cried out, "Assemble for prayer!" The people gathered together until the mosque was choked with them. Then he stood, his color changing, and he said, "Praise belongs to God, who does not gain in plenty, by withholding nor become poor through giving, while every other giver than He diminishes. (He is) full of the benefits of blessings and the advantages of superabundance. Through His generosity, He ensures the provision of creatures. So He smoothes the path of aspiration (*ṭalab*) for those who make Him their Quest. Nor is He more generous with what is asked of Him than with what is not asked. Time in its march varies not for Him that (His) state should change accordingly. If He should give to some of His servants (all of) the silver metal, ingots of pure gold and sacks of pearls that the mountains' mines breathe² and the seas' shells smile, His generosity would in nowise be affected, nor would the expanse of that which is with Him dwindle. With Him are treasuries of bounteous

¹ I.e., to their "appointed terms" to use Qur'ānic language (111, 145, etc.). The text of the *Nahj al-balāghah* reads "*aḥāl*" for "*ajjal*", which would change the translation to the following: "He transforms things at their (proper) times."

² "The relation (of this image) to the saying that minerals are generated from the vapors of the earth is obvious" (Majlisiy, p. 278).

bestowal which are not exhausted by objects of request and which come not to His attention in spite of their abundance, for He is the Generous who is not diminished by gifts nor made niggardly by the importunity of the importune. And 'His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it "Be", and it is' (XXXVI, 8 1).

"The angels, despite their proximity to the throne of His liberality, the great extent of their burning love (*walah*) for Him, (their) glorification of the majesty of His might, and their proximity to the unseen of His kingdom (*ghayb malakūtih*), are capable of knowing only what He has taught them of His affair, although they are of the Sacred Kingdom in terms of rank. It is because they possess knowledge of Him only as He created them that they say, 'Glory be to Thee! We know not save what Thou hast taught us' (11, 32).¹

"So what is thy opinion, O questioner, of Him, who is thus? Glory be to Him, and praise belongs to Him I He has not come into being that change or removal should be possible in Him. He is not affected in His Essence by recurrence of states, and aeons of nights and days differ not for Him. (It is He) 'who originated creation with no model (*mithāl*) to copy or measure (*miqdār*) to imitate from a deity (*ma'būd*) who should have existed before Him. Attributes encompass Him not, lest He be defined by limits (*hudūd*) (resulting) from their having attained Him. He - 'like Him there is naught' (XLII, 11) - never ceases to transcend the attributes of creatures.

"Eyes are prevented from reaching Him, lest He be described through being plainly seen (*bil-'iyān*) and lest He be known among His creatures in the Essence that none knows but He. Through His exaltation (*'uluww*) over things He eludes that

¹ On the Islamic teaching that the angels, though of luminous substance, are "peripheral" beings since they know only some of God's Names, while man is "central" since he knows all of His Names, see F. Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, London, 1953, pp. 70-72.

upon which falls the conjectures of imaginers (*mutawahhimūn*). The inmost center (*kunh*) of His tremendousness transcends the embrace of the impotent deliberation of those who meditate. He has no similitude that what is created should resemble Him. For those who have knowledge of Him He is forever above likenesses and opposites.

"Those who ascribe rivals to God (*al-`ādilūn billāh*) cry lies when they make Him similar to the like of their categories, adorn Him in their imaginations with the adornment of creatures, divide Him with a measure resulting from the notions of their concerns, and measure Him by the talents of their reason's powers¹ in terms of the creatures with their

¹ "Reason's powers" is a translation of *'uqūl*, plural of *'aql*. A more awkward but perhaps more exact translation would be "reasons". Many scholars translate the word *'aql* as "intellect" or "intelligence". Certainly all of these translations are possible, since the various meanings are all contained in the one Arabic word - if indeed the reader will concede that there is more than one basic meaning, for in modern thought the distinction between the reason (*ratio*) and the intellect (*intellectus*) has largely been ignored.

However that may be, the Arabic word *'aql* may be said to possess at least two significations according to various contexts. It may signify the Universal Intellect, which is equivalent to the Greatest Spirit and the Muhammadan Light. It is God's first creation and possesses true and detailed knowledge of all things, including God Himself. It may also signify the "reason", which is the reflection of the Universal Intellect upon the human plane. But in ordinary men the reason is cut off from the Intellect. Only the prophets and saints may be said to have actualized their "intellects" to various degrees. In other words, they have realized an inward identity with the Universal Intellect.

But in these texts, the Imams usually speak of *'aql* as cut off from its luminous and spiritual source. It limits and constricts the infinite Truth in keeping with its root meaning (*'aqala*; to tie, to bind). Hence, I translate the word as "reason" or "power of reason". When the Imams speak of the actualization of the intellect within man, they refer to the "heart" (*qalb*). The reason cannot understand God, but, as we shall see below, the heart may see Him. Most Sufis follow this terminology, such as the members of Ibn al-'Arabi's school (see my forthcoming study of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī). But all are aware of

multiple faculties. For how should the deliberations of imaginations assess Him whose measure cannot be determined, when surely the notions of understanding have erred in conceiving of His inmost center? For He is greater than that the minds of men should delimit Him through thought (*tafkīr*) or angels should encompass Him through estimation, despite their proximity to the kingdom of His might.

'High be He exalted above having an equal (*kufw*) with which to be compared, for He is the Subtle: when imaginations desire to encroach upon Mm. in the depths of the unseen regions of His dominion, (when) thoughts (*fīkar*) free from insinuating

the 'aql's dual nature. Thus Rūmī: "The particular intellect ('aql-i juzwi - reason) has disgraced the Intellect" (*Mathnawī*, V. 463).

Nevertheless, the Imams do not ignore the positive role that 'aql - and here perhaps "intelligence" would be the best translation - can and does play in religion, in keeping with Islam's fundamental emphasis upon knowledge (see F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, Leiden, 1970). The first book of the section on *uṣūl* from al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi* is entitled the "Book of 'Aql." It contains such *Hadīths* as the following: "The intelligence is that through which man worships the All-Merciful and gains Paradise" (Imam Ja'far). "The sincere friend of every man is his intelligence, while his enemy is his ignorance" (Imam 'Alī al-Riḍā). "He who possesses intelligence possesses religion, and he who possesses religion enters the Garden" (Imam Ja'far). "In the reckoning on the Day of Resurrection God will only scrutinize His servants to the extent He has given them intelligence in the world" (Imam Mūsā). The first selection from Imam al-Riḍā below (pp. 44-48) refers in several places to the positive function of the 'aql.

The two roles of the 'aql to which the Imams allude, positive and negative, derive from the principle enunciated by the Prophet in the *Hadīth*: "Meditate upon God's bounties, but not upon His Essence." The 'aql must be able to see that the world by its very nature manifests a Reality beyond it. A healthy intelligence, one which on the human plane reflects the First Intellect directly, will naturally see the signs of God in all things. But as soon as the 'aql tries to understand the very Essence of God, it oversteps its boundaries and goes astray.

intrusions seek to grasp knowledge of His Essence, (when) hearts are thrown into mad confusion over Him in trying to embrace Him through conforming to His attributes, (when) the ways of approach of reason's powers become obscured since no attributes attain to Him by which they might gain the knowledge of His divinity, (then) they (imagination, thoughts, hearts and ways of approach) are checked in disgrace while traversing the chasms of the dark reaches of the unseen worlds, rid (of all things) for Him - glory be to Him 1 They return having been thrown back, admitting that the inmost center of His knowledge is not reached through the deviation of straying (from the path)¹ and that no notion of the measure of His might's majesty occurs to the mind of mediators, by reason of His distance from being (encompassed) within the faculties of limited beings. For He is counter to (*khilāf*) His creation, and there is nothing like Him among creatures. Now a thing is only compared with its like (*ʿadīl*). As for what has no like, how should it be compared with what is other than its like (*mithāl*)? And He is the Beginning (*al-badī*) before whom was naught, and the Last (*al-ākhir*) after whom will be naught.

"Eyes reach Him not in the splendor of His Power (*jabarūt*). When He obscures them with veils, eyes do not penetrate the density of the veils' thickness, nor do they pierce the firmness pertaining to His coverings to (reach) the Possessor of the Throne,² in whose will affairs originate and before the majesty of whose tremendousness the grandeur of the arrogant cringes. Necks are bowed before Him and faces humbled in fear of Him. In the marvels (*badā'ī*) which He creates appear the traces (*āthār*) of His wisdom (*ḥikmah*), and all that is created becomes an argument (*ḥujjah*) for Him and attributed to Him. Were it a silent creation His argument would be speaking through it in

¹ Majlisiy interprets the "deviation of straying" to mean the "reason, whose nature is deviation and straying" (p. 281).

² This divine Name occurs several times in the Qur'ān, such as XL, 15.

His directing (of its affairs, *tadbir*).¹

"He determines what He creates and makes firm His determining (*taqdir*), places everything in its place through the subtlety of His directing, and turns it in a direction.² Then nothing of it reaches the environs of His station.³ It falls not short before carrying out His will and refrains not when ordered to execute His desire. He suffers not from weariness that might touch Him,⁴ nor is He deceived by one who would transgress His command.⁵

"So His creation is complete and it yields to Him in obedience. It complies with the (appointed) time at which He brings it forth, a response resisted by neither the dawdler's hesitation nor the lingerer's tardiness. He straightened the crookedness of things, delineated the way-marks of their limits, reconciled their contradictions through His power, joined the means of their conjunctions (*ashbāb qarā'inihā*), caused their various sorts to be disparate in size, and divided them into different kinds, natural dispositions, and appearances - marvels of creation, whose fashioning He made firm. He made them

¹ As the Qur'ān often affirms, both explicitly and implicitly, "He directs the affair" (XIII, 2, etc.).

² Cf. Qur'ān II:148: "Every man has his direction to which he turns." Majlisiy cites the *Hadith*, "All are eased to what has been created for them", which in turn recalls Qur'ān LXXX, 19-21: "He created him (man), and determined him, then the way eased for him..."

³ Both the editor in a footnote, pointing to the printed edition of *al-Tawhīd*, and Majlisiy in his commentary, basing himself on a similar passage in the *Nahj al-balāghah*, suggest that the correct reading is *hudūd* for *maḥdūd*. The translation has been made accordingly.

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān, L, 38: "We created the heavens and the earth, and what between them is, in six days, and no weariness touched us."

⁵ The commentator points out that *mukābadah* occurs in place of *mukāyadah* in some manuscripts, which would change the translation of the last clause to the following: "or from hardship from one who would transgress His command" (p. 280).

according to His desire and¹ brought them into existence. His knowledge put in order the kinds of their creation and His directing achieved their fairest determination.

"O questioner! I Know that whoso compares our majestic Lord to the mutual dissimilarity of the parts of His creation and to the interconnection of their joints, hidden by the directing of His wisdom, surely he has not fixed his inmost consciousness (*ghayb damīrih*) upon knowledge of Him, and his heart has not witnessed (*mushāhadah*) the certainty that He has no compeer. It is as if he had not heard of the followers disclaiming the followed, saying, 'By God, we were certainly in manifest error when we made you equal to the Lord of all beings' (XXVI, 97-8).²

"Whoso sets our Lord equal to something has ascribed rivals to Him, and he who ascribes rivals to Him is a disbeliever in what His clear verses³ have revealed and in what the witnesses of His clear signs' arguments have spoken. For He is God, who does not become defined within the powers of reason that He should be qualified within the range of their thought or be limited and turned about within the craws of the reflection of aspiring souls.⁴ He is the Producer of the kinds of things without having

¹ According to a footnote to the text another manuscript reads "when He" for "and".

² These are the words of the people who were led astray by the followers of Iblis disputing with them in hell. The verse continues: "It was naught but the sinners that led us astray; so we have no intercessors, no loyal friend. O that we might return again, and be among the believers!"

³ Passages of the Qur'an known as "clear" (*muhkam*) are those about whose meaning there can be no question. They are contrasted with other passages known as "ambiguous" (*mutashābih*), which are open to various interpretations, even in the outward and literal meaning of the text.

⁴ The commentator remarks: "The subtlety of the comparison of reflection, or the mind, where reflection takes place, to a bird's craw will not be lost on the reader?" (p. 284).

been in need of reflection, or of acting according to an innate disposition, or of experience gained through the passing of Time's events, or of an associate to help Him in bringing into existence the wonders of affairs. When those who ascribe rivals to Him compare Him to creation, whose attributes are divided and limited and whose levels possess various zones and regions - and He, the Mighty and Majestic, is the existent through Himself, not through His instruments (*adāh*) - they can not have measured Him with His true measure. Thus, He said, declaring Himself incomparable with the association of compeers and rising above the estimate of those of His disbelieving servants who measure Him within limits, 'They measure not God with His true measure. The earth altogether shall be His handful on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens shall be rolled up in His right hand. Glory be to Him! High be He exalted above that they associate' (XXXIX, 67)

"So as for that to which the Qur'ān directs thee concerning His attributes, follow it, so that a link may be established between thee and knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of Him. Take it as an example, and seek illumination by the light of its guidance; surely it is a blessing and a wisdom given to thee, so take what has been given thee and be among the thankful.¹ But as for that to which Satan directs thee, that which is not made incumbent upon thee in the Qur'ān and no trace (*athar*) concerning which exists in the Wont of the Prophet and the Imams of guidance, leave its knowledge to God, the Mighty and Majestic. Surely, that is the limit of God's claim (*ḥaqq*) against thee.

"Know that those firmly rood in knowledge² are they whom God has freed from the need to assault the closed doors beyond

¹ Cf. Qur'ān 11, 231: "And remember God's blessing upon you, and the Book and the Wisdom He has sent down on you..."; and 11, 269: "Whoso is given the Wisdom, has been given much good?"

² A term appearing twice in the Qur'ān (111, 7 and IV, 162). In Sufism and Shi'ism, it is usually taken to refer to those who, due to their elevated spiritual station, are qualified to speak of the divine mysteries.

which are the unseen things (*al-ghuyūb*), so they cling to the acknowledgement (*iqrār*) of all of the veiled unseen of which they know not the interpretation, and they say, 'We have faith in it; all is from our Lord.' (111, 7). So God praised their avowal of incapacity to grasp what they comprehend not in knowledge, and He called their abandonment of the desire to penetrate into that whose examination is not required of them 'firm-rootedness'. So limit thyself to that (same attitude) and measure not the Mightiness of God - Glory be to Him - according to the measure of thy reason's power, thus becoming of those who perish."

4. The Fairest of Creators

It has been related that 'Alī - upon whom be peace - delivered the following sermon at Kufa. He was standing on a stone that had been set up for him by Ja'dah ibn Hubayrah al-Makhzūmī¹ He wore an outer garment of wool. His sword belt and his shoes were made of fiber. His forehead was like the knee of a camel.² He said, "Praise belongs to God, unto whom are the homecomings of creation and the issues of the affair.³ We praise Him for His mighty goodness, His radiant proof (*burhān*) and the profusion of His bounty and gracious giving; a praise which might render Him His rightfully due, accomplish His thanks, bring (us) near to His reward and cause the fairest of His increase.⁴ We pray to Him for succor,⁵ the prayer of one hoping

¹ The son of 'Alī's sister, Umm-Hānī bint Abī-Ṭālib. For the scant bibliographical references, see *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 4, P. 3 13 and the *Lughat-nāmah* of Dihkhudā (Tehran, 1325/1946 onward).

² A reference to much prostration in prayer. Cf. Qur'ān XLVIII, 29: "Their mark is on their face, the trace of prostration."

³ The Qur'ān emphasizes "To God is the homecoming" (XXXV, 18; cf. also 11, 285; III, 28, etc). Likewise, "Unto God belongs the issue of all affairs" is a Qur'ānic expression (XXII, 41; XXXI, 22).

⁴ CL Qur'ān XLII, 26: "And He answers those who believe and do righteous deeds, and gives them increase of His bounty."

⁵ Reference to Qur'ān II, 4: "To Thee alone we pray for succor."

for His bounty, anticipating His benefit, having confidence in Him to avert (evil), acknowledging His blessings and submitting to Him in deed and word. We believe in Him with the faith (*īmān*) of one who hopes for Him with certainty, turns to Him as a believer, humbles himself before Him in submission, sincerely professes His Unity (*akhlāṣ muwahhīdan*), magnifies Him in glorification and seeks refuge in Him, desiring and striving (*rāghiban mujtahidan*).

'He has not been begotten' (CXII, 3) - glory be to Him that He should share in Might, and 'He has not begotten' (CXII, 3) that He should bequeath and perish. Time (*waqt*) precedes Him not, nor duration, and increase and decrease seize Him not by turns.

"Nay, He appears to the powers of reason by the marks He has shown us of (His) perfect directing and certain decree. So of the witnesses of His creation is the creation of the heavens without pillars,¹ standing without supports. He called them and they answered, obeying, submissive, without hesitation or delay.² Had it not been for their acknowledging (*iqrār*) Him in lordship and their willing submission (to Him), He would not have appointed them the locus of His Throne, nor the dwelling place for His angels, nor the place of ascent of good words and the righteous deed of His creation.³ He appointed their stars waymarks by which the bewildered traveler is guided in the divergent paths of the lands. The thickness of the dark night's curtain prevents not the shining of their light, and the garments of the black night's blackness cannot push back the brilliance of the light of the moon that spreads in the heavens.

¹ "God is He who raised up the heavens without pillars you can see.. (Qur'ān XIII, 2; cf. XXXI, 10).

² A reference to their creation: "The only words We say to a thing, when We desire it, is that We say to it 'Be', and it W' (Qur'ān XVI, 40).

³ A reference to Qur'ān XXXV, 10: "To Him good words go up, and the righteous deed - He uplifts it."

"So glory be to Him, from whom is not hidden the blackness of a gloomy dusk or still night in the hollows of lands low, nor in the peaks of neighboring mountains;¹ (nor) that with which the thunder reverberates in the horizon of heaven; (nor) that from which the lightning of the clouds vanishes;² (nor) the leaf which falls, removed from its place of falling by the gales caused by the stars (*al-anwā'*)³ and the pouring down of the rain. He knows the place where the raindrop falls and where it takes its rest, the route by which the tiny ant draws and drags (on the ground), what is sufficient food for a gnat⁴ and what the female bears within her womb.⁵

"Praise belongs to God, the Existent (*al-kā'in*) before there was a Pedestal (*kursī*), or Throne (*'arsh*), or heaven, or earth, or jinn, or man. He is not perceived by imagination (*wahm*) or measured by understanding (*fahm*). Petitioners busy Him not⁶ and giving diminishes Him not. He is not observed by eyes, nor delimited by location ("where", *ayn*), nor described by pairs.⁷

¹ Literally, "the neighboring dark-reds", i.e., as explained by Muḥammad 'Abduh in his commentary on the *Nahj al-balāghah* (Vol. II, P. 126), a reference to the mountains in terms of their color from afar.

² Majlisiy remarks, "If you say, 'He - glory be to Him - knows what the lightning illumines and what it does not illumine, so why should the Imam specify what the lightning vanishes from?' I would answer, 'Because His knowledge of what is not illumined is stranger and more wonderful since, as for what is illumined by the lightning, it is possible that anyone of correct vision would also know it'" (P. 316).

³ A reference to ancient Arabian beliefs concerning the influence of the moon in its various mansions on the weather. See the article "Anwā'" in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (new edition), vol. I, pp. 523-4.

⁴ Cf. Qur'an 11, 26: "God is not ashamed to strike a similitude even of a gnat".

⁵ "God knows what every female bears" (Qur'an XIII, g).

⁶ Since He already knows their needs, or since He is the "All-Hearing" in His Essence.

⁷ Majlisiy comments: He is not described by pairs, "i.e. by likes, or by opposites; or by the attributes of pairs; or there is no composition

He creates not through application¹ is perceived not by the senses and is compared not with man.

"He it is who spoke to Moses directly² and showed him one of His mighty signs³ without members (*jawāriḥ*), instruments (*adawāt*), speech or throat.⁴ Nay, if thou speakest truly, o thou who affectest to describe thy Lord, then describe Gabriel, Michael and the hosts of the angels brought nigh, bowing in the sacred chambers (*ḥujarāt al-quds*), their intellects in adoring perplexity to delimit the 'Fairest of Creators'.⁵ Surely only those are perceived through attributes who possess forms and instruments and who end in annihilation when they reach the limit of their term. There is no god but He. He illumines with His Light every darkness and He darkens with His Darkness every light."

S. Oneness

It has been related that on the day of the Battle of the Camel⁶ a Bedouin came before the Commander of the Faithful and said, "o Commander of the Faithful! Sayest thou that God is one?"

The people attacked him and said, "o Bedouin! Doest thou not see how the Commander of the Faithful's heart is divided (with cares)?"

in Him as the result of the marriage of any two things. . ." (P. 316).

¹ Ilāj. If He did, it would suggest that there is something upon which He works or to which He applies Himself. Rather, "He but says to it 'Be', and it W' (Qur'ān 11, 117; 111, 47, etc.).

² See Qur'ān IV, 164.

³ Cf. Qur'ān XX, 23.

⁴ Literally, "uvulae", *lahawāt*.

⁵ A divine Name occurring in Qur'ān XXIII, 14 and XXXVII, 125.

⁶ The famous Battle of the Camel occurred in the year 36/656 between the followers of 'Alī and those of Ṭalḥah and Zubayr. See the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (new edition), "Djamaal", vol. II, pp. 414-16.

The Commander of the Faithful said, "Leave him, for surely what the bedouin wishes (i.e., knowledge of God) is what we wish for the people." Then he said, "O bedouin! To say that God is one (*wāḥid*) has four (possible) meanings, two of which are not permissible concerning God, the Mighty and Majestic, and two of which are established concerning Him.

"As for the two which are not permissible concerning Him, (the first is) the saying of him who says 'one' and has in mind the category of numbers. Now this is not permissible, for that which has no second does not enter into the category of numbers. Hast thou not seen that he who says that He is 'the third of three' is of the unbelievers? And (the second is like) the saying of him who says (concerning a man), 'He is one of mankind', meaning that he is one kind within the species.² This is not permissible because it is a comparison, and our Lord is greater than that and high above it.

"As for the two meanings which are established concerning Him, (the first is) the saying of him who says, 'He is one, there is no likeness (*shabah*) unto Him among things.' Such is our Lord. And (the second is) the saying of him who says, 'Surely, He, the Mighty and Majestic, is single in meaning (*aḥadi alma'nā*), intending by that that He is not divided by existence,

¹ This is a reference to the Qur'ānic verse, "They are unbelievers who say, 'God is the Third of Three- (V, 73). Concerning the providential Qur'ānic "misunderstanding" of the Christian Trinity, see F. Schtion, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, pp. 40.

² The first kind of "unity" that is rejected is numerical unity, or the idea that when we say "He is one God" we mean something similar to what we mean when we say, "This is one walnut, i.e., that there may also be two Gods, three Gods, etc. The second "unity" refers to similarity in kind or species, as when we say, "This is one cat", meaning that there are also other kinds of cats. In the words of Majlisiy, "When it is said in this sense of a Byzantine that he is one of mankind, it is meant that his kind is one of the kinds of men or is a kind among other kinds" (p. 207). This is *tashbih* because we are comparing God to whatever we say He is one of. Since He is one of that kind, He has to be similar to others of that kind.

the power of reason, or imagination.¹ Such is our Lord, the Mighty and Majestic."²

6. Discernment

In another sermon 'Alī -upon whom be peace- said, "What points to Him (*dalīlūh*) is His signs (*āyāt*);³ to perceive Him (*wujūdūh*) is to affirm Him (*ithbātūh*);⁴ to know Him is to profess His unity; and professing His Unity is to distinguish Him (*tamyīz*) from His creation. The standard (*ḥukm*) for distinguishing is separation (*baynūnah*) in attribute, not separation in terms of distance (*'uzlah*). Surely He is a creating Lord (*rabb khāliq*), neither possessing a Lord nor created. Whatever can be conceived of is different from Him."

Then after that he said, "Whoso is known in himself (*bi-nafsihī*) is not a god: this is the guide to that which points to Him (*al-dalīl 'alayh*) and this it is which leads to knowledge of Him."

¹ As Majlisiy points out, the first of the acceptable meanings of divine Unity is that He is one in the sense that He has no second, associate or partner. Only He truly is. And the second is that He has no parts in any sense whatsoever (p. 207).

² The discrepancies between the present translation of this passage and that found in *Shī'ite Islam*, p. 127, are due to the fact that in *Shī'ite Islam* the passage has been translated from 'Allāmah Tabāṭabā'i's Persian translation, which includes his commentary.

³ God's signs are displayed through the whole of creation, as indicated in many passages of the Qur'ān, as for example, in the verse "In the alternation of night and day, and what God has created in the heavens and the earth - surely there are signs for a god-fearing people" (X, 6).

⁴ The translation of this sentence follows the first interpretation offered by the commentator. According to the second, which seems less likely in the context, *wujūd* would mean "existence" as it usually does in current usage, and the meaning would be: "This existence (being manifestly evident) necessitates affirming Him (i.e. attesting to Him)".

7. *The Vision of the Heart*

Abū-'Abdullāh related as follows: the Commander of the Faithful was speaking from the pulpit at Kufa when a man called Dhi'lib stood up before him. He was sharp-tongued, eloquent and courageous. He said, "O Commander of the Faithful! Hast thou seen thy Lord?"

He said, "Woe unto thee, O Dhi'lib! I would not be worshipping a lord whom I have not seen."

He said, "O Commander of the Faithful! How didst thou see Him?"

He answered, "O Dhi'lib! Eyes see Him not through sight's observation, but hearts see Him through the verities of faith (*ḥaqā'iq al-īmān*). Woe to thee, O Dhi'lib! Verily, my Lord is subtle in subtlety (*laṭīf al-laṭāfah*), but He is not described by subtleness (*luṭf*); tremendous in tremendousness (*'aẓīm al-'aẓamah*), but not described by tremendousness (*'iẓam*); grand in grandeur (*kabīr al-kibriyā'*), but not described by grandness (*kibr*); and majestic in majesty (*jalīl al-jalālah*), but not described by greatness (*ghilaz*). Before all things He was; it is not said that anything was before Him. After all things He will be; it is not said that He possesses an 'after.'¹ He willed (all) things, not through resolution (*himmah*). He is all-perceiving (*darrāk*), not through any artifice (*khadi'ah*). He is in all things, but not mixed (*mutamāzīj*) with them, nor separate (*bā'in*) from them. He is Outward (*ẓāhir*), not according to the explanation of being immediate (to the senses: *mubāsharah*); Manifest (*mutajallin*), not through the appearance of a vision (of Him: *istihlāl ruyah*); Separate, not through distance (*masāfah*); Near (*qarīb*), not through approach (*mudānāh*); Subtle, not through corporealization (*tajassum*); Existent (*mawjūd*), not after nonexistence (*'adam*); Active (*fā'il*), not through coercion (*ijtirār*); Determining (*muqaddir*), not through movement (*ḥarakah*); Desiring (*murīd*), not through

¹ The editor notes that in the printed edition of *al-Tawḥīd* the text reads, "So it is not said that anything is after Him."

resolution (*hamāmah*); Hearing (*samī'*), not through means (*ālah*); and Seeing (*baṣīr*), not through organs (*adāh*).¹

"Spaces (*amākin*) encompass Him not, times (*awqāt*) accompany Him not, attributes (*ṣifāt*) delimit Him not and slumbers (*sināt*) seize Him not."²

"By His giving sense (*tash'ir*) to sense organs (*mashā'ir*) it is known that He has no sense organs."³ By His giving substance

¹ As in many similar sayings of the Imams, the purpose of this passage is to affirm both God's "similarity" to creatures and His "incomparability" with them by stating that His attributes must not be understood in the usual sense of the words. Normally if we say "outward", we mean that which is immediately perceptible to the senses, but God's "outwardness" is of a different kind. Majlisiy comments in detail upon this passage. Here we can quote his remarks on some of the less obvious clauses: "Inward, i.e. not in terms of spatial distance, in the sense that He would move from one place to another in order to become hidden, or that He would enter into creatures' inner parts in order to know them. Rather, in His inmost center He is hidden from the powers of man's reason, and He knows his inner parts and his secrets... His nearness is not the spatial nearness acquired by approaching things, but derives from knowledge, His causal relationship to the creatures, His originating growth and development within them, and His mercy (which encompasses them). He is Subtle not by being a body with a delicate constitution, small volume, strange and wondrous structure, or in that He is colorless, but by creating subtle things and knowing them; or by His incorporeality and 'disengagement' (*tajarrud*). 'Not through coercion', that is, He is free and not forced in His activity... 'Not through the activity of thought': in other words, when He determines things He does not need the flow or activity of thought" (pp. 236-7).

² Reference to Qur'ān; II, 255.

³ Majlisiy comments: "When He creates sense organs and bestows them upon the creatures, it is known that He has no sense organs. This is either because of what has already been said about the fact that He does not possess the attributes of creatures; or because, when we see that He has bestowed sense organs, we become aware that we need them in order to perceive. Then we conclude that He transcends them, since it is impossible for Him to be in need of anything. It may

(*tajhīr*) to substances (*jawāhir*) it is known that He has no substance.¹ By His causing opposition (*muḍāddah*) among things it is known that He has no opposite (*ḍidd*).² By His causing affiliation (*muqāranah*) among affairs it is known that He has no affiliate (*qarīn*). He opposed darkness to light, obscurity to clarity, moisture to solidity,³ and heat to cold. He joins together those things which are hostile to one another, and separates those which are near. They prove (the existence of) their Separator (*mufarriq*) by their separation and their Joiner (*mu'allif*) by their junction. This is (the meaning of) His words - He is the Mighty and Majestic 'And of everything created We two kinds; haply you will remember' (LI., 49). "So

also be because the reason judges that He differs from His creatures in attributes" (pp. 237-8). Majlisiy also quotes (pp. 238-9) a long philosophical and metaphysical discussion of this sentence by Ibn Maytham, one of the commentators of the *Nahj al-balāghah*.

¹ "In other words, since their realities have become actualized and their quiddities have been brought into existence, it is known that they are possible beings. Now every possible being needs an origin. The Origin of origins will not be one of these realities (which have become externally actualized)" (Majlisiy, p. 239).

² "When we see that He created opposites and that they need a particular situation or position to manifest themselves, we realize that He is not opposite to anything, for to need something contradicts the Necessity (*wujūb*) of Being. Or the meaning is that when we see that each one of two opposite things prevents, repels and negates the existence of the other, we realize that He transcends that. Or we see that opposition occurs through delimitation by certain limits which are unable to embrace other limits, as for example (in the case of) different colors or qualities, while He transcends all limits. In the same way, how should the Creator oppose His creatures, or He who causes to issue forth (*al-fā'id*) oppose that which is issued forth (*al-mafīd*)? Or if we understand opposite to mean that which is equal in strength, this would necessitate another Necessary Being, the impossibility of which has already been proven" (Majlisiy, p. 239).

³ In a footnote, the editor mentions that some copies of *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā*, one of the sources of this passage, read *al-jaff* (dryness) for *al-jasū* (solidity).

through them He separated 'before' and 'after' that it might be known that He has no before and after. They testify with their temperaments (*gharā'iz*) that He who gave them temperaments has no temperament. They announce through their subjection to time (*tawqīt*) that He who has subjected them to time is not subject to it Himself.

"He veiled some of them from others so that it might be known that there is no veil between Him and His creation other than His creation. He was a Lord when there was none over whom He was Lord (*marbūb*); a God when there was none for whom to be a God (*ma'lūh*); a Knower (*'ālim*) when there was nothing to be known (*ma'lūm*); and a Hearer when there was nothing to be heard (*masmū'*)." ¹

Then 'Alī composed the following verses extemporaneously:

"My Lord is ever known by praise, my Lord is ever described by generosity.

"He was, when there was no light by which to seek illumination, and no darkness bent over the horizons.

"So our Lord is counter to creatures, all of them, and to all that is described in imaginations.

"Whoso desires Him portrayed through comparison returns beleaguered, shackled by his incapacity,

"And in the Ascending Stairways the wave of His power casts a wave which blinds the eye of the spirit."¹

"So abandon the quarreler in religion lost in the depths, for in him doubt has corrupted his view.

"And become the companion of that reliable one who is the

¹ The Ascending Stairways (*al-ma'ārij*) are mentioned in the Qur'ān, LXX, 3. The meaning would seem to be that at death, if the spirit of one who has compared things to his Lord tries to ascend towards Him, it is blinded by His power. Compare Rūmī: "Make it thy habit to behold the Light without the glass, in order that when the glass is shattered there may not be blindness (in thee)" (*Mathnawī*, V, 991).

beloved of his Master and surrounded by the favors of his Protector:

"Smiling, he became in the earth the waymark of guidance (*dalil al-hudā*) and in Heaven the adorned and acknowledged."

After this Dhi'lib fell to the ground in a faint. When he recovered he said, "I have never heard such words. I will not return to any of that (which I believed before)."

C. al-Bāqir, the Fifth Imam

The Incomparable Lord

Abū-Baṣīr has related that a man came to Abū-Ja'far (the fifth Imam) and said to him, "o Abū-Ja'far! Tell me about thy Lord! When was He?"

He said, "Woe unto thee I Surely it is said of a thing that was not, and then was, 'When was it?' But my Lord - blessed is He and high exalted - was ever-living without 'how' and had no 'was'. Its Being (*kawn*) had no 'how', nor had it any 'where'. He was not in anything, nor was He on anything. He did not bring into existence a place (*makān*) for His Being (*kān*). He increased not in strength *after* bringing things into being, nor was He weak *before* bringing things into being. And He was not lonely (*mustawhish*) before creating things. He resembles nothing brought into being. He was not devoid of power over the dominion before its production that He should be devoid of the dominion¹ after its passing. He remains Living without (created) life, a powerful King before He produces anything (over which to rule) and an all-compelling King (*malik-jabbār*)

¹ The text reads "it" for "dominion", but in order to avoid ambiguity the noun has been repeated. In Arabic the masculine pronoun cannot refer to the feminine "power", although if one were to follow the similar sentence in the *Hadith* related from the Seventh Imam below, "power" would be the logical choice as antecedent. The meaning is that before the production of the world God had power over it, and after its end He will still possess it. Whether or not it exists in external form is irrelevant.

after He produces the universe (*al-kawn*). His Being has no 'how', nor has it any 'where', nor has it any limit. He is not known through anything resembling Him. He ages not through the duration of His subsistence. He is thunderstruck by nothing. Nothing causes Him to fear. And all things are thunderstruck by fear of Him.¹

"He is Living without temporal life, without a being (*kawn*) described by attributes, without a state which can be defined (*kayf maḥdūd*), without a trace which can be followed, and without a place adjacent to anything. Nay, He is a Living One who knows, a King who ever is. His are the power and the dominion. He produces what He wills through His will (*mashi'ah*). He is neither limited nor divided into parts, and He perishes not. He was the First, without 'how', and He will be the Last, without 'where'. And 'All things perish, except His Face' (XXVIII, 88). 'His are the creation and the command. Blessed be God, the Lord of all being.' (VII, 54).

"Woe upon thee, O questioner! As for my Lord, truly imaginations envelop Him not, uncertainties touch Him not, He is oppressed by none, none is adjacent to Him, phenomena touch Him not, He is questioned not as to anything He does,² He comes not upon anything,³ 'Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep' (II, 255). 'To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and all that is underneath the soil' (XX, 6)."

¹ Cf. Qur'ān III, 45: "Then leave them, till they encounter their day wherein they shall be thunderstruck..."

² Cf. Qur'ān XXI, 23: "We shall not be questioned as to what He does, but they shall be questioned."

³ *Lā yaqa' alā shay'*. The meaning is not completely clear. The editor points out in a footnote (P. 300) that in the *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi* the text of this *Ḥadīth* reads *yandam* for *yaqal*, i.e., "He becomes remorseful at nothing."

D. *Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, the Sixth Imam*

Seeing God

Abū-Baṣīr has related that he said to Abū-'Abdullāh -upon whom be peace- "Tell me about God, the Mighty and Majestic. Will believers see Him on the Day of Resurrection?"

He answered, "Yes, and they have already seen Him before the Day of Resurrection."

Abū-Baṣīr asked, "When?"

The Imam answered, "When He said to them, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Yea, verily' (VII, 172)¹ Then he was quiet for a time. Then he said, "Truly the believers see him in this world before the Day of Resurrection. Doest thou not see Him now?"

Abū-Baṣīr then said to him, "That I might be made thy sacrifice I Shall I relate this (to others) from thee?"

He answered, "No, for if thou relatest it, a denier ignorant of the meaning of what thou sayest will deny it. Then he will suppose that it is comparison and unbelief (*kufr*). But seeing with the heart (*al-ru'yah b-il-qalb*) is not like seeing with the eyes (*al-ru'yah b-il-'ayn*). High be God exalted above what the comparers (*mushabbihūn*) and heretics (*mulhīdūn*) describe!"

2. The name that can be named...

It has been related that Abū-'Abdullāh, "The name of God is other than God, and everything that can be called by the name of a 'thing' (*shay*)² is created, except God. Therefore, all that

¹ This verse is in reference to the covenant made between God and man before the creation of the world. See S. H. Naṣr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, London, 1966, pp. 25-7.

² God is often referred to as a "thing" (*shay*') in the *Ḥadīth* literature, as well as in theology and philosophy, since the meaning of the word "thing" in Arabic is not limited to external, concrete existents. Rather, it signifies reality, entity or quiddity, at whatever level of existence, from the most sublime to the most concrete.

tongues express or is worked by hands¹ is created. God is the goal of him who sets Him as his goal, but the determined goal (almughayā, i.e., in the mind of man) is other than the (real) goal.² The goal possesses attributes (*mawṣūf*), and all that possesses attributes has been fashioned (*maṣnī*). But the Fashioner (*ṣāni*) of things does not possess the attributes of any stated limit (*ḥadd musammā*). He has not come into being that His Being (*kaynūnah*) should be known through fashioning (*ṣun*) (carried out) by other than He.³ He does not terminate at a limit unless it be other than He. Whoso understands this principle (*ḥukm*) will never fall into error. It is the unadulterated profession of Unity (*al-Tawḥīd al-khālīṣ*), so believe in it, confirm it, and understand it well, with God's permission - the Mighty and Majestic.

"Whoso maintains that he knows God by means of a veil (*ḥijāb*) or a form (*ṣūrah*) or a likeness (*mithāl*) is an associator (*mushrik*), for the veil, the likeness and the form are other than He. He is utterly and only One. So how should he who maintains that he knows Him by means of other than Him be

¹ Majlisiy interprets this to mean the "script written by hands" (p. 162). I.e., neither the spoken nor the written name is the Named.

² The meaning of this sentence is obscure in the Arabic and Majlisiy offers at least eight possible readings (pp. 162-3). Some of which are very close to one another, and the most likely of which has been followed here. The present interpretation is also that offered by the editor of *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 58.

³ Majlisiy comments that this sentence has been interpreted to mean that "God has not come into being. If He had, He would have been originated by another, and His Being as well as the attributes of His origination would be known by means of the fashioning of His maker, just as effects are known by their causes." But, he adds, "In my view perhaps the meaning is that He has not been fashioned and that therefore He cannot be known by comparing Him to something else which has been fashioned" (p. 163). According to this interpretation, the sentence should be translated as follows: "He has not come into being that His Being should be known through something else which has been fashioned."

professing Unity? Surely He alone knows God who knows Him by means of God (*billāh*). Therefore, whoso knows Him not by means of Him knows Him not. On the contrary, he only knows other than Him. There is nothing between the Creator and the created.¹ God is the Creator of things, but not from something. He is named by His names, so He is other than His names, and His names are other than He.² The described (*al-mawṣūf*) is other than the describer.)

¹ Majlisiy comments: "Between the Creator and His creatures there is no common matter (*māddah*) or reality (*ḥaqīqah*) which might allow them to attain to knowledge of Him; rather, He produced them from nothing that was" (p. 165). This passage may also be interpreted to mean, in accordance with the beginning of the paragraph, "There is nothing to act as a veil between the Creator and His creatures."

² This passage is related up to this point in the *Uṣūl min al-Kāfi*. The Tehran edition of 1388/1968-9, published with a Persian translation and notes by one of the well-known contemporary 'ulamā', Ayatallāh Muḥammad Bāqir Kamarā'i contains the following commentary (vol. I, pp. 207-8): "The Names of God are His theophanies (*jilwah-hā*) which cast a ray of light upon man's reason (*khirad*). Because they become connected to human reason, limit, end and definition (*ghāyah, nihāyah, ḥadd*) apply to them. The limit of each being lies where it is connected to another being. The theophanies of God's act (*fi'l*) and fashioning (*ṣan'ah*), which are His creation, become limited in the framework of possible beings (*mumkināt*). There the ray of light which brings about creation comes to its limit. Thus it is said, 'the existence of a man', or 'of a tree', 'of an angel', 'of the earth', 'of heaven', etc.

"The theophanies of God's attributes (*ṣifāt*), which are the principle (*mabādi'*) of the theophanies of (His) act, are given limits by the functioning of the reason, and thus it is said, God's 'knowledge', 'power', and 'life'. In this way the Names become distinct from the divine Essence, and even the all-inclusive (*jāmi'*) Name of God, which is 'Allah', is separated from the Essence. The reality of God is other than all of these."

"Then whoso maintains that he has faith in that which he does not know has gone astray from knowledge (*ma'rifah*).¹ A created thing (*makhlūq*) perceives nothing unless by means of God: the knowledge of God is perceived only by means of God. But God is empty of His creatures and His creatures are empty of Him."²

¹ *Ma'rifah* within the essentially gnostic perspective of Islam is the goal of religious endeavor. See F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, London, 1962, chapter I. As explained in the following footnote, the meaning of this sentence is that man has faith not in something which he himself does not know, but in that upon which all of his knowledge is based and which is in fact the object of all knowledge. To the extent he has knowledge, he has knowledge of God, albeit imperfectly, since there is no other knowledge.

² In an unpublished work entitled *Risālat al-walāyah* (Treatise on sanctity), 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'i comments on the section of this passage beginning with the words "Whoso maintains that he knows God by means of a veil: "Allusion is made here to the fact that it is logically impossible for the knowledge of something other than God to make necessary the knowledge of God Himself. Because of God's transcendence, it cannot be said that knowledge (of Him) is the very same as the thing known, as has already been explained (earlier in the treatise).

"It is impossible that knowledge of one thing should be knowledge of another thing different from it: otherwise the two different things would be the same, which contradicts the premise. So the fact that knowledge of one thing renders the knowledge of another thing necessary requires some sort of unification (*ittiḥād*) between the two things. But since they have been postulated as two things, there must be in addition to an aspect of unification, an aspect of disparity. Thus, each of them is compounded of two aspects. Whereas God - glory be to Him - is one and simple in essence: He is not compounded of anything in a manner which would allow Him to be known by other than Him. This point is indicated by the Imam's saying, 'There is nothing between the Creator and the created,' etc., as well as by his words, 'Then he who maintains that he has faith in that which he does not know has gone astray from knowledge', etc., which is derived from his previous saying, i.e., 'Surely he alone knows God who knows Him by means of God,' etc. His words, 'A created thing perceives nothing unless it be by means of God', serve as its proof, for everything is known by means of God, who is 'the

When He desires a thing, it is as He desires, by His command (*amr*) and without speech (*nuṭq*). His servants have no refuge from that which He decrees (*mā qaḍā*), and they have no argument against that which is His pleasure. They have no power to act or to deal with that which is brought about in their bodies, created (by God), except by means of their Lord. So whoso maintains that he is able to perform an act which God, the Mighty and Majestic, does not desire, has maintained that his will (*irādah*) prevails over the Will of God. 'Blessed be God' the Lord of all beings!' (VII, 54)

Light of the heavens and the earth (Qur'ān XXIV, 35); so how should things be known by means of other than Him? For He supports every individual being (*dhāt*), and He is without supports in His very Essence (*dhāt*). At the same time, knowledge of that which in its very essence is dependent ensues from knowledge of the Independent Being that supports it, for the fact that knowledge takes form necessarily requires independence in the case of that which is known. Thus knowledge of what is dependent is a consequence of (knowledge of) the Independent which accompanies it. Such is the reality.

"And since it might be imagined that this doctrine is incarnation (*ḥulūl*) or unification (*ittiḥād*) - high be God exalted above these - the Imam follows his words by saying, 'God is empty of His creatures and His creatures are empty of Him', etc. Saying that the created being's perception of something is by means of God does not negate the beginning of the passage ('Whoso asserts...'), which denies that the knowledge of God should require knowledge of other than Him, for the knowledge which is spoken of at the beginning is acquired (*ḥuṣūlī*, i.e., rational), and that at the end is 'presential' (*ḥuṣūlī*, i.e., direct and divinely dispensed knowledge or gnosis)." Folio 26 obverse-reverse (Photocopies of this work are in the possession of a number of 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'i's disciples and students, and it is hoped that some day it will be published).

E. Mūsā, the Seventh Imam

God's Might and Majesty

It has been related that the righteous servant, Mūsā ibn Ja'far, said, "Surely God - there is no god but He - was the Living without 'how' (*kayf*) or 'where' (*ayn*). He was not in anything, nor was He on anything. He did not create a place (*makān*) for His grandeur (*makān*).¹ He increased not in might after bringing things into being. Nothing brought into being resembles Him. He was not devoid of power over the dominion before its production, nor will He be devoid of power (over it) after its passing."²

"He - the Mighty and Majestic - is a Living God without temporal life, King before He produces anything, Master after its production (*inshā'*). God has no limits (*ḥadd*). He is not known through something resembling Him. He ages not through subsistence (*baqā'*). He is struck not by fear of anything, and by fright before Him all things are thunderstruck.³ So God is Living without temporal life, without a being described by attributes, without a state which can be defined, without a designated location or fixed place. Nay, He is Living in Himself, a Master whose power does not remove. He produced what He wills when He wills through His will and His power. He was First, without 'how', and will be Last, without

¹ In *al-Tawhīd*, the editor explains that here the second *makān* is equivalent to *makānah* or *iqāmah*. He comments, "He did not create a place for His station and grandeur because places encompass Him not" (p. 141). Majlisiy prefers the reading *kān* for *makān* as found in some manuscripts and also in the *Ḥadīth* from the fifth Imam translated above. The meaning would then be as translated there, i.e., "He did not bring into existence a place for His Being."

² "Master of the dominion" (*mālik al-mulk*) is a divine name, occurring in Qur'ān 111, 26. Cf. Qur'ān 111, 18q: "To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: and God is powerful over everything" and many similar verses.

³ Cf. Qur'ān, III, 45.

'where'. And 'All things perish, except His face' (XXVIII, 88). 'His are the creation and the command. Blessed be God, the Lord of all beings P (VII, 54)."

F. 'Alī al-Riḍā, the Eighth Imam

i. Profession of Unity

It has been related that when al-Ma'mūn¹ desired to install al-Riḍā (as his successor), he collected together Banū-Hāshim² and said to them, "Verily I desire to install al-Riḍā in this affair after me."

Banū-Hāshim envied al-Riḍā and said, "Thou appointest an ignorant man who possesses not the insight to direct the caliphate. Therefore send for him. He will come to us and thou wilt see how his ignorance decides thee against him." So he sent for him and he came. Banū-Hāshim said to him, "O Abū'Ḥasan! Ascend the pulpit and display for us a sign whereby we may worship God."

So, he ascended the pulpit and sat for a long time, his head bowed in silence. Then he trembled a great trembling and stood up straight, praised and lauded God, and asked His blessing for His prophet and his household. Then he said, "The first element in the worship of God is knowledge of Him, the root (*aṣl*) of knowledge of Him is to profess His Unity (*tawḥid*), and the correct way (*niẓām*) to profess the Unity of God is to negate attributes from Him. For the powers of reason testify that every attribute and everything possessing an attribute (*mawṣūf*) is

¹ The famous 'Abbāsīd caliph, son of Hārūn al-Rashīd. On his decision to appoint Imam al-Riḍā as his successor, see *Shī'ite Islam*.

² In general, Banū-Hāshim ("The sons of Hāshim") have been understood to be the descendents of Hāshim ibn 'Abd Manāf, the great grandfather of the Prophet and also the ancestor of 'Alī and al-'Abbās, half-brother of the Prophet's father, from whom is taken the name of the Abbasid caliphate. During the Abbasid period the term refers to the family of the Prophet, but more specifically, as here, to the Abbasid family itself. See B. Lewis, "Hāshimiyah", *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (new edition), vol. III, p. 265

created. Everything possessing an attribute testifies that it has a Creator which is neither attribute nor possesses an attribute. Every attribute and everything possessing an attribute testify to connection (*iqtirān*) between the attribute and that to which it is attributed). Connection testifies to temporality (*ḥadath*). And temporality testifies that it accepts not the Beginningless, which accepts not the temporal.

“So it is not God whose Essence is known through comparison. It is not *His* Unity that is professed by someone who attempts to fathom Him. It is not His reality (*ḥaqīqah*) that is attained by someone who strikes a similitude for Him. It is not *He* who is confirmed (*taṣḍīq*) by him who professes an end for Him. It is not *He* to whom repairs he who points to Him. It is not *He* who is meant by him who compares Him (to something). It is not to *Him* that he who divides Him into parts humbles himself. And it is not *He* who is desired by him who conceives of Him in his imagination.

“Everything that can be known in itself (*bi-nafsihi*) is fashioned (*maṣnū*).¹ All that stands apart from Him is an effect (*ma'lūl*). God is inferred from what He fashions (*ṣun*), the knowledge of Him is made fast by the powers of reason, and the argument (*ḥujjah*) for Him is established by (man's) primordial nature (*al-fitrah*).

“God's creating of the creatures is a veil between Him and them. His separation (*mubāyanah*) from them is that He is disengaged from their localization (*ayniyah*).² That He is their origin (*ibtidd'*) is proof for them that He has no origin, for none that has an origin can originate others. That He has created them

¹ Majlisiy offers four possible explanations for this sentence, the simplest of which is as follows: “Everything whose existence can be known immediately through the senses without inference from its effects is fashioned (since it is a part of the created world)” (p. 233).

² Men are not separated from God because they are in one place and He in another, but because He is free of place and localization, whereas they are entrapped within it (Majlisiy, p. 233).

possessing means (of accomplishing things) is proof that He has no means (*adāh*), for means are witness to the poverty of those who use them.

"So His names are an expression (*ta'bir*), His acts (*af'āl*) are (a way) to make (Him) understood (*tafhim*), and His Essence is Reality (*ḥaqīqah*).¹ His inmost center (*kunh*) separates (*tafriq*) Him from creation, and His otherness (*ghuyūr*) limits (*taḥdid*) what is other than He. Therefore ignorant of God is he who asks for Him to be described! Transgressing against Him is he who seeks to encompass Him! Mistaken is he who imagines to have fathomed Him!

"Whoso says 'how?' has compared Him (to something). Whoso says 'why?' has professed for Him a cause (*ta'li*). Whoso says 'when?' has determined Him in time (*tawqīt*). Whoso says 'in what?' has enclosed Him (*taḍmīn*). Whoso says 'to what?' has professed for Him a limit (*tanhiyah*). Whoso says 'until what?' has given Him an end (*taghiyah*). Whoso gives Him an end has associated an end with Him. Whoso associates an end with Him has divided Him. Whoso divides Him has described Him. Whoso describes Him has deviated from the straight path (*ilhād*) concerning Him.²

¹ Majlisiy comments: "His names are an expression, or they are not His very Essence and Attributes, rather they are means of expressing and speaking of them. 'And His acts are to make understood', so that men will come to know Him through them and they will infer His existence, knowledge, power, wisdom and mercy. 'And His Essence is Reality', or a hidden, transcendent reality not reached by the powers of the creatures' reasons.

² Majlisiy offers several interpretations for this passage. According to the one which is largely followed here, "To associate an end with Him ... means to come to the conclusion that He undergoes annihilation along with the creatures, so that it would be correct to say, 'His end is before, or after, the end of so and so.' This is the same as to say that He participates wholly in the nature of creatures and therefore has parts. Whoso says this has described Him as possessing possibility, incapacity and the other defects of possible beings. And whoso judges such has deviated concerning the divine

“God does not change with the changes undergone by creation, just as He does not become limited by delimiting (*taḥdīd*) that which is limited (*al-maḥdūd*). He is One (*aḥad*), not according to the explanation offered by number (*ta'wil 'adad*); Outward, not according to the explanation of being immediate (to the senses);¹ Manifest, not through the appearance of a vision (of Him); Inward (*bāṭin*), not through separation (*muzāyalah*); Apart (*mubā'in*), not through distance; Near, not through approach; Subtle, not through corporealization; Existent, not after nonexistence; Active, not through coercion; Determining, not through the activity of thought (*jawl fikrah*); Directing (*mudabbir*), not through movement; Desiring, not through resolution; Willing (*shā'*), not through directing attention (*himmah*);² Grasping (*mudrik*), not through touch (*majassah*);

Essence”

¹ From this sentence begins a long section which corresponds almost exactly with the *Hadīth* quoted from Imam 'Alī above. For this reason, the original Arabic terms have not been repeated. It might be tempting to take this correspondence as proof that the attribution of these words to 'Alī al-Riḍā or to 'Alī is incorrect. But one must remember that it is quite common for the Imams to quote their fathers and grandfathers, all the way back to the Prophet. We have seen examples of this already in the chain of authority of a number of *Hadīths* translated above. Moreover, in the middle of a discourse there is no particular reason for the Imam to stop and point out exactly whom he is quoting, just as is the case with quotations from the Qur'ān, especially since most of his followers would know perfectly well. The traditional explanation for the repetition is summed up by Shaykh al-Saḍuq (*al-Tawḥīd*, p. 309; see also Majlisīy, p. 306): “In the *Hadīth* of 'Alī, there are certain words which Imam Riḍā mentioned in his sermon. This is a confirmation of what we have always said concerning the Imams, upon whom be peace: the knowledge of each of them is derived from his father right back to the Prophet?”

² This and the previous phrase are essentially the same in meaning. Normally, when man wills or desires to do something, he has a particular idea or goal and then exerts himself to achieve it, employing resolution and diligence. But as for God, “His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it ‘Be’, and it is.” (Qur'ān

Hearing, not through means; and Seeing, not through organs.

"Times accompany Him not, places enclose Him not, slumber seizes Him not, attributes delimit Him not, and instruments (*adawāt*) are of no use to Him. His being (*kawn*) precedes times (*al-awqāt*), His existence (*wujūd*) nonexistence and His beginninglessness (*azal*) beginning (*al-ibtidā'*).

"By His giving sense to the sense organs it is known that He has no sense organs. By His giving substance to substances it is known that He has no substance. By His causing opposition among things it is known that He has no opposite. By His causing affiliation among affairs it is known that He has no affiliate. He opposed darkness to light, obscurity to clarity, moisture to solidity, and heat to cold. He joins together those things which are hostile to one another and separates those which are near. They prove (the existence of) their Separator by their separation and their Joiner by their junction. That is (the meaning of) His words - He is the Mighty and Majestic - 'And of everything created We two kinds; haply you will remember' (II, 49).

"So through them He separated 'before' and 'after' that it might be known that He has no before and after. They testify with their temperaments that He who gave them temperaments has no temperament. They prove by their disparity (*tafāwut*) that He who made them disparate has no disparity. They announce through their subjection to time that He who subjected them to time is not subject to it Himself.

"He veiled some of them from others so that it might be known that there is no veil between Him and them other than them. His is the meaning of lordship (*al-rubūbiyah*) when there was none over whom He was Lord, the reality of godhood (*al-ilāhiyah*) when there was nothing for whom He was God, the meaning of Knower when there was nothing to be known, the meaning of Creator (*khāliq*) when there was nothing created

(*makhlūq*) and the import of hearing when there was nothing to be heard. It is not because He created that He deserves the meaning (of the term) 'Creator' and not because He brought the creatures into being that the meaning of 'making' is derived.

"How (should it not be so)? For *mudh* (ever since') conceals Him not, *qad* (already)¹ brings Him not near, *la`alla* (perhaps') veils Him not, *matā* ('when?') limits Him not in time, *bin* (at the time of) contains Him not, and *ma`a* (with) brings Him not into association.² Instruments (*adawāt*) limit only themselves and means (*ālah*) allude only unto their own like.³ Their activities are found only in things.⁴ *Mudh* withholds things from being eternal (*qidmah*), *qad* shields them from beginninglessness, and *lawlā* (if only) wards off perfection (*al-takmilah*).⁵ Things

¹ *Qad* often cannot be translated by a separate word in English. It indicates the termination of action at the moment of speaking and therefore as Majlisiy notes, quoting the classical grammarians, serves "to approximate the past to the present."

² Majlisiy explains that none of these words can refer to God since each of them implies temporal or other limitation, while God transcends time and knows all things in eternity. Thus, "ever since" indicates a point of beginning in time, and if it applied to God it would indicate that what was before that point was concealed from Him. He can have no doubts concerning the future, so "perhaps" cannot apply to Him, etc. (PP. 241-2).

³ Majlisiy remarks that "instruments and means ... or physical organs and corporeal faculties... allude to the existence of corporeality like themselves... And it is not improbable that by 'instruments' are meant the words which are negated from Him in the previous section and that this passage is meant to be an explanation of that.

⁴ The activities and the results of these instruments *ālah* means are found in creatures, not in God" (Majlisiy, p. 242).

⁵ The fact that the words *mudh*, *qad*, and *lawlā* are attributed to instruments indicate that the latter are neither beginningless, nor eternal, nor perfect. Therefore, instruments could not delimit or allude to Him because, by reason of their temporality and imperfection, they are far from being commensurate with (God), the Perfect, Absolute and Eternal in His Essence... (This is) because *mudh* refers to beginning in time... *qad* approximates the past to the

become separate and prove (the existence of) their Separator. They become distinguished and prove their Distinguisher (*mubā'in*). Through them their Maker manifests Himself to the powers of reason. Through (these powers)¹ He becomes veiled to sight, to them imaginations appeal for a decision,² in them is substantiated (only) other than Him, from them is suspended the proof and through them He makes known to them the acknowledgement (*al-iqrār*).³

"Confirmation (*taṣḍīq*) of God is made fast by the powers of reason, and faith (*imān*) in Him reaches perfection through acknowledgment. There is no religiosity (*diyānah*) except after knowledge (*ma'rifah*), no knowledge except through sincerity (*ikhhlāṣ*) and no sincerity along with comparison.⁴ There is no

present... and *alwā* is employed to speak of what would have been good... (for example), 'How good it would have been *if only* it had been such and such'... and thus it points to imperfection in the situation and deters from absolute perfection" (Majlisi, p. 243). Majlisi also points out two alternative readings for this passage which need not concern us here.

¹ The text reads "through them", and in a long passage (pp. 242-3) Majlisiy demonstrates that the pronoun should refer to "powers of reason" rather than to "instruments", although in a similar passage in the *Nahj al-balāghah* it refers to the latter.

² "He becomes veiled to sight through the powers of reason because it is the powers of reason which judge that the vision of Him is impossible, and it is to the powers of reason that imaginations appeal when they differ among themselves" (Majlisiy, p. 244).

³ "From the powers of reason the proof of things is derived, and through these powers God makes known to the reason, or to its possessor, the acknowledgment of Him" (Majlisiy, p. 244)

⁴ 'Sincerity' is to make the knowledge of Him pure from all that is not appropriate to His sacred Essence, i.e., materiality, accidentality, extraneous attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-zā'idah*) and temporal phenomena. To say that he means 'sincerity in devotion' would be artificial and forced (*takalluf*)" (Majlisiy, p. 244). In the Qur'an the chapter called "Sincerity" (*al-ikhhlāṣ*) is also called "The Profession of Unity" (*al-Tawhīd*), and the meaning of sincerity in Islam is tied to the correct profession of divine Unity in terms of the negation of all

negation (*nafy*) of comparison if there is affirmation (*ithbāt*) of attributes.¹

"So nothing in creation is found in its Creator. All that is possible in it is impossible in its Maker. Movement (*ḥarakah*) and stillness (*sukūn*) do not affect Him. How should that which He effects (in others) have effect upon Him, or that which He has originated recur for Him? Then His Essence would be disparate, His inmost center divided, His signification (*ma'and*) prevented from eternity. How would the Creator have a meaning different from the created ?

"If something from behind limited Him, then something in front would limit Him. If perfection (*tamām*) were seeking Him, imperfection would be upon Him. How should that which does not transcend (*imtinā'*) temporality be worthy of (the Name) 'Beginningless'? How should that which does not transcend being produced (*inshā'*) produce the things (of the world)? There then would have arisen in Him a sign of having been made (*al-maṣnū'*) and He would become a proof (*dalil*) after having been the proven (*madlūl 'alayh*).²

"There is no argument in absurd opinions (such as the above), no answer when it (absurdity) is asked about, no glorification of Him in its meaning.³ Nor is there any ill in distinguishing Him

"Associationism" (*shirk*). The meaning of sincerity is discussed most profoundly perhaps in Sufi writings, where it means complete negation of self. See F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, pp. 140, 155-6.

¹ "I.e., whoso affirms that He possesses extraneous attributes does not negate an understanding of Him in terms of comparison" (Majlisiy, p. 244).

² That is, if these temporal events and changes referred to Him they would indicate that He had been created, and He would then be proof of another Creator, just as possible beings are proof of the Necessary Being (Majlisiy, P. 246).

³ There is no substance to the absurd arguments that would prove Him temporal and possessed of extraneous attributes, and no answer to such arguments precisely because of their self-evident absurdity.

from creation, unless it be that the Eternal accepts not to be made two, nor the Beginningless to have a beginning.¹

"There is no god but God, the All-high, the Tremendous. They have cried lies who ascribe equals to God! They have gone astray into far error and suffered a manifest loss!² And God bless Muḥammad and his household, the pure."

2. The Veil

It was related from Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh al-Khurāsānī, the servant of al-Riḍā - upon whom be peace - that a man from among the unbelievers (*zanādiqah*)³ entered the presence of the

By saying such things one does not glorify Him, rather one attributes to Him imperfection (Majlisiy, p. 246).

¹ According to Majlisiy this means that there is nothing wrong with distinguishing Him from creation, unless we consider a perfection - His lying above duality and beginning - to be a fault. He cites the following line of poetry as an example of this type of expression: "They have no fault except that their swords/ Are dented from slashing the enemy forces". I.e., their only "fault" is a perfection (p. 246).

Another possible interpretation of this passage, which however is made doubtful by the context and structure of this and other sayings of the Imams, is to say that there is always something provisional about distinguishing God from creation, for this implies some sort of fundamental duality, which precisely - as asserted by the *Shahādah*, *lā ilāha illallāh* - God transcends. The world cannot exist "independently" of God, otherwise it would be another deity. If God is one, then ultimately the world cannot be other than He. Certainly He is other than the world, however, as this and all the other *Ḥadīths* cited from the *Bihār al-anwār* emphasize so strongly. See F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, pp. 17-18 and 125-6.

² Cf. such Qur'ānic passages as the following: "Whoso associates with God anything, has gone astray into far error... Whoso takes Satan to him for a friend, instead of God, has surely suffered a manifest loss." (IV, 116-9).

³ The *zanādiqah* (sing.: *zindīq*) are identified specifically in Islamic history with the Manichaeans, but the word is also used more generally, as here, to mean unbeliever and heretic.

Imam, with whom was a group of people. Abu'l-Ḥasan (the Imam) said to him,

"Dost thou see that if the correct view is your view - and it is not your view - then are we not equal? All that we have prayed, fasted, given of the alms and declared of our convictions will not harm us."

The unbeliever remained silent. Then Abu'l-Ḥasan said, "If the correct view is our view - and it is our view - then have not you perished and we gained salvation?"

He said, "God's mercy be upon thee. Then let me know, how is He and where is He?"

Abu'l-Ḥasan answered, "Woe be upon thee, surely the opinion thou hast adopted is mistaken. He determined the 'where', and He was, when there was no where; and He fashioned the 'how', and He was, when there was no 'how. So He is not known through 'howness' or 'whereness' or through any form of sense perception, nor can He be gauged by anything."

The man said, "So then surely He is nothing (*Id shay'*) if He cannot be perceived by any of the senses."

Abu'l-Ḥasan said, "Woe upon thee! When thy senses fail to perceive Him, thou deniest His lordship. But when our senses fail to perceive Him, we know for certain that He is our Lord and that He is something different from other things (*shay' bi-khilāf al-ashyā'*)."¹

The man said, "Then tell me, when was He?"

Abu'l-Ḥasan said, "Tell when He was not, and then I will tell you when He was."²

¹ Concerning the use of the term "thing" to refer to God, see above, note, 92.

² Majlisiy comments on the unbeliever's question and the Imam's answer as follows (p. 38): "The apparent meaning is that he is asking about the beginning of God's being and existence. But it is also possible that the question concerns the principle of time for His

The man said, "Then what is the proof of Him?"

Abu'l-Ḥasan said, "Surely when I contemplate my body and it is impossible for me to increase or decrease its breadth and height, or to keep unpleasant things away from it or draw benefits to it, then I know that this structure has a maker and I acknowledge (*iqrār*) Him - even though that which I had seen of the rotation of the celestial sphere through His power; the producing of clouds;¹ the turning about of the winds;² the procession of the sun, the moon and the stars; and others of His wondrous and perfectly created signs (*āyāt*), had (already) made me know that (all) this has a Determiner (*muqaddir*) and Producer (*munshī'*)."

The man said, "Then why has He veiled Himself (from men)?" Abu'l-Ḥasan replied, "Surely the veil is upon creatures because of the abundance of their sins. As for Him, no secret is hidden from Him during the day or the night."³

The man said, "Then why does the sense of sight perceive Him not?"

Abu'l-Ḥasan answered, "Because of the difference between Him and His creatures, who are perceived by the vision of the eyes,

existence. According to the first (possibility), the gist of his answer is that beginning in time pertains to that which is temporal, to that which had been nonexistent and then became existent. But as for God, nonexistence is impossible (so He cannot have a beginning in time).

"According to the second (possibility), the meaning is that the existent in time would be so through transformation in essence and attributes, for time is the relationship of the changing (*al-mutaḡhayyir*) to the changing. So in one moment of time it has a state which it does not have in another. But God transcends change in essence and attributes."

¹ Cf. Qur'ān XIII, 12.

² Cf. Qur'ān II, 164.

³ I.e., He is not veiled, for He sees all things. It is men who have veiled themselves from Him.

whether their own or others. Then He is greater than that sight should perceive Him, imagination encompass Him, or the power of reason delineate Him."

The man said, "Then define His limits (*ḥadd*) for me."

He answered, "He has no limits."

The man asked, "Why?"

He answered, "Because every limited thing (*māddad*) ends at a limit. If limitation (*taḥdīd*) is possible, then increase is possible. If increase is possible, then decrease is possible. So He is unlimited. He neither increases nor decreases. Nor is He capable of being divided or imagined."

The man said, "Then tell me about your saying that He is Subtle, Hearing, Seeing, Knowing and Wise.¹ Can He be the Hearing without ears, the Seeing without eyes, the Subtle without working with die hands and the Wise without workmanship (*ṣan'ah*)?"²

Abu'l-Ḥasan said, "Surely a person among us is subtle in accordance with (his) skill in workmanship. Hast thou not seen the man who undertakes a task and is subtle in his handling of it, so that it is said, 'How subtle is so and so V Then how should

¹ These are all divine names which occur in the Qur'ān. It should be noted, however, that the name *laṭīf* (Subtle) is particularly difficult to render into English in a manner which would do justice to its various shades of meaning, as will be apparent from the passage. Nevertheless, it seemed better to maintain the one word in English than to try to change it according to context and lose the point which the Imam wishes to make. In another *Ḥadīth*, Imam Ridā explains the meaning of the divine name *allāh* as follows: God is *laṭīf*, not because of being scanty, slender or small, but because of penetrating into things and being impossible of comprehension.... God is too subtle to be grasped within a definition or limited by a description, whereas, 'subtlety' for us is in smallness of size and quantity" (*al-Tawḥīd*, p. 189).

² "Wisdom" (*al-ḥikmah*) is defined as "knowledge which puts everything in its place", and therefore implies application and "workmanship".

it not be said of the Majestic Creator that He is Subtle, when He creates a subtle and majestic¹ creation, places in its living creatures their souls, creates every kind different in form from its own kind, and none resembles another? Each possesses in the composition of its form a subtlety from the Subtle and Aware Creator.

"Then we looked upon the trees and their bearing of delicate things, whether edible or inedible, and we said at that, 'Surely our Creator is Subtle, (but) not like the subtlety of His creatures in their workmanship.' And we said, 'Surely He is Hearing, for not hidden from Him are the sounds of His creatures between the Throne and the earth, from a mote to what is larger than it, and in the land and the sea. And their words are not confused by Him.' At that we said, 'Surely He is Hearing, but not through ears.' "Then we said, 'Surely He is Seeing, but not through eyes, for He sees the trace of a black speck on a dark night on a black stone.² He sees the tracks of an ant on a pitch-black night. He sees what is harmful for it and what beneficial, and the result of its cohabitation, and its young and descendents.' And at that we said, 'Surely He is Seeing, but not like the sight of His creatures."

The man did not leave until he had embraced Islam. The Imam said other things as well.

¹ Here subtle and majestic. *latif* and *jalil*, are meant to be two contrasting attributes, referring to the very small and the very large, etc.

² Cf. Qur'an VI, 59: "With Him are the keys of the Unseen; none knows them but He. He knows what is in land and sea; not a leaf falls, but He knows it. Not a grain in the earth's shadows, not a thing, fresh or withered, but it is in a Book Manifest."

THE RULER AND SOCIETY

Professing God's Unity and accepting Muḥammad as His prophet bring in their wake innumerable consequences. If the Qur'ān is God's Word and Muḥammad His chosen messenger who "speaks out not of caprice" (LIII, 3), their instructions concerning all things must be obeyed. Faced with these facts of their faith, the Muslims soon developed a complicated science of the *Shari'ah* or Divine Law, a science which embraces every dimension of human conduct, including the political.

One of the earliest and best expositions of Islam's explicit and implicit instructions concerning government and its role in society is `Alī's instructions to Mālik ibn al-Ḥārith al-Nakha'iy, surnamed al-Ashtar ("the man with inverted eyelashes") because of a wound he received in battle. He was one of the foremost Muslim warriors in the first few years of Islam's spread and one of `Alī's staunchest supporters. He advised `Alī against making a truce with Mu'āwiyah at the battle of Ṣiffin and was poisoned on his way to assume his post as governor of Egypt in the year 37/658 or 38, /659, shortly after `Alī became caliph following the assassination of `Uthmān.¹

Since these instructions form part of `Alī's *Nahj al-balāghah*, they have been discussed by all the more than 100 commentators on the text. I have made extensive use of two of the most famous of the commentaries. The first is by Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd (d. 655/1257), a historian who was attached to the

¹ See the article "al-Ashtar" in the new *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

Abbasid court in Baghdad. His commentary is one of the earliest, and because of its thoroughness and exactitude forms the basis for many of the later commentaries. The second is by Ibn Maytham al-Baḥrānī, a well-known Shī'ite scholar and theologian who died in 679/1282-3. In addition, I have profited from the glosses of the nineteenth century reformer Muḥammad `Abduh (d. 1905) and one or two other modern commentaries which are mentioned in the notes.

`Alī's Instructions to Mālik al-Ashtar

`Alī wrote these instructions to al-Ashtar al-Nakha`iy when he appointed him governor of Egypt and its provinces at the time the rule of Muḥammad ibn Abī-Bakr was in turmoil. It is the longest set of instructions (in the *Nahj al-balāghah*). Among all his letters it embraces the largest number of good qualities.

Part One: Introduction

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate¹

This is that with which `Alī, the servant of God and Commander of the Faithful, charged Mālik ibn al-Ḥārith al-Ashtar in his instructions to him when he appointed him governor of Egypt: to collect its land tax,² to war against its enemies, to improve the condition of the people and to engender prosperity in its regions. He charged him to fear God, to prefer obedience to Him (over all else) and to follow what He has directed in His Book - both the acts He has made obligatory and those He recommends³ - for none attains felicity but he who follows His

¹ The division into parts and the headings of parts two, three and four are taken from the commentary of Ibn Maytham.

² The land tax (*kharāj*) collected on the basis of the land's produce. See the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (new edition), Vol. 3, pp. 30-56.

³ *Farā'id wa sunan*. The first very often refer to those acts which are commanded by God - such as the five daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramādan, etc. - in which case they are contrasted with the *sunan*, meaning the commands of the Prophet, which are divided into the commands he gave orally (*qawl*), the acts he performed (*fi'l*) and the acts he allowed others to perform without criticizing or

directions, and none is overcome by wretchedness but he who denies them and lets them slip by. (He charged him) to help God - glory be to Him - with his heart, his hand and his tongue,¹ for He - majestic is His Name - has promised to help him who exalts Him.² And he charged him to break the passions of his soul and restrain it in its recalcitrance, for the soul incites to evil, except inasmuch as God has mercy.³

Part Two: Commands and Instructions Concerning Righteous Action in the Affairs of the State

Know—O Mālik—that I am sending you to a land where governments, just and unjust, have existed before you. People will look upon your affairs in the same way that you were wont to look upon the affairs of the rulers before you. They will speak about you as you were wont to speak about those rulers. And the righteous are only known by that which God causes to pass concerning them on the tongues of His servants. So let the dearest of your treasures be the treasury of righteous action. Control your desire and restrain your soul from what is not lawful to you, for restraint of the soul is for it to be equitable in what it likes and dislikes. Infuse your heart with mercy, love and kindness for your subjects. Be not in face of them a voracious animal, counting them as easy prey, for they are of two kinds: either they are your brothers in religion or your equals in creation. Error catches them unaware, deficiencies overcome them, (evil deeds) are committed by them

protesting (*iqrār*). Here, however, since both kinds of acts are said to be mentioned in the Qur'ān, the meaning is as translated.

¹ 'With his heart', or through firm belief; 'with his hand', or through holy war and exertion in His path; and 'with his tongue', or through speaking the truth, commanding the good and forbidding the evil" (Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, vol. 17, p. 31).

² Cf. Qur'ān XLVIII, 7 "O believers, if you help God, He will help you and confirm your feet", and other similar verses, such as XXII, 40.

³ Nearly a direct quotation from Qur'ān XII, 53: "Surely the soul incites to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy."

intentionally and by mistake. So grant them your pardon and your forgiveness to the same extent that you hope God will grant you His pardon and His forgiveness. For you are above them, and he who appointed you is above you, and God is above him who appointed you. God has sought from you the fulfillment of their requirements and He is trying you with them.

Set yourself not up to war against God,¹ for you have no power against His vengeance, nor are you able to dispense with His pardon and His mercy. Never be regretful of pardon or rejoice at punishment, and never hasten (to act) upon an impulse if you can find a better course. Never say, "I am invested with authority, I give orders and I am obeyed," for surely that is corruption in the heart, enfeeblement of the religion and an approach to changes (in fortune). If the authority you possess engender in you pride or arrogance, then reflect upon the tremendousness of the dominion of God above you and His power over you in that in which you yourself have no control. This will subdue your recalcitrance, restrain your violence and restore in you what has left you of the power of your reason. Beware of vying with God in His tremendousness and likening yourself to Him in His exclusive power, for God abases every tyrant and humiliates all who are proud.

See that justice is done towards God² and justice is done towards the people by yourself, your own family and those whom you favor among your subjects. For if you do not do so, you have worked wrong. And as for him who wrongs the servants of God, God is his adversary, not to speak of His Servants. God renders null and void the argument of whosoever contends with Him. Such a one will be God's enemy until he desists or repents. Nothing is more conducive to the removal of

¹ I.e., oppose Him not through acts of disobedience" (Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, vol. 17 pp. 33).

² "I.e., Perform for Him the worship which He has made incumbent upon you and the requirements of intelligence and tradition" (Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, vol. 172 p. 35).

God's blessing and the hastening of His vengeance than to continue in wrongdoing, for God harkens to the call of the oppressed and He is ever on the watch against the wrongdoers.¹

Let the dearest of your affairs be those which are middlemost in rightfulness,² most inclusive in justice and most comprehensive in (establishing) the content of the subjects. For the discontent of the common people invalidates the content of favorites, and the discontent of favorites is pardoned at (the achievement of) the content of the masses. Moreover, none of the subjects is more burdensome upon the ruler in ease and less of a help to him in trial than his favorites. (None are) more disgusted by equity, more importunate in demands, less grateful upon bestowal, slower to pardon (the ruler upon his) withholding (favor) and more deficient in patience at the misfortunes of time than the favorites. Whereas the support of religion, the solidarity of Muslims and preparedness in the face of the enemy lie only with the common people of the community, so let your inclination and affection be toward them.

Let the farthest of your subjects from you and the most hateful to you be he who most seeks out the faults of men. For men possess faults, which the ruler more than anyone else should conceal. So do not uncover those of them which are hidden from you, for it is only incumbent upon you to remedy what appears before you. God will judge what is hidden from you. So veil imperfection to the extent you are able; God will veil that of yourself which you would like to have veiled from your subjects. Loose from men the knot of every resentment, sever from yourself the cause of every animosity, and ignore all that which does not become your station. Never hasten to believe the slanderer, for the slanderer is a deceiver, even if he seems to be a sincere advisor.

¹ Cf. Qur'ān LIX, 14: "Surely the Lord is ever on the watch."

² *Awsatuhā fi'l-ḥaqq*, reference to the "golden mean". Here some of the commentators mention Aristotle and refer to such *Hadiths* of the Prophet as "The best of affairs is their middlemost." See for example T. al-Fakikī, *al-Rā'i war-ra'iyah*, Vol. 2, Najaf, 1940, pp. 108-111.

Bring not into your consultation a miser, who might turn you away from liberality and promise you poverty;¹ nor a coward, who might enfeeble you in your affairs; nor a greedy man, who might in his lust deck out oppression to you as something fair. Miserliness, cowardliness and greed are diverse temperaments, which have in common distrust in God.²

Truly, the worst of your viziers are those who were the viziers of the evil (rulers) before you and shared with them in their sins. Let them not be among your retinue, for they are aides of the sinners and brothers of the wrongdoers. You will find the best of substitutes for them from among those who possess the like of their ideas and effectiveness but are not encumbered by the like of their sins and crimes; who have not aided a wrongdoer in his wrongs nor a sinner in his sins. These will be a lighter burden upon you, a better aid, more inclined toward you in sympathy and less intimate with people other than you. So choose these men as your special companions in privacy and at assemblies. Then let the most influential among them be he who speaks most to you with the bitterness of the truth and supports you least in activities, which God dislikes in His friends,

¹ According to Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, this sentence is based upon the following Qur'ānic verse: "The devil promises you poverty and bids you unto indecency; but God promises you His pardon and His bounty" (II, 268). He explains that the commentators of the Qur'ān say that here indecency (*al-faḥshā*) means "miserliness" (*al-bukhl*), and that the meaning of "promises you poverty" is that he makes you believe you will become poor if you are generous with your wealth (vol. 173 p. 10).

² Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd comments that if man trusts God with certainty and sincerity, he will know that his life-span, his daily provision, his wealth and his poverty are foreordained and that nothing occurs but by God's decree (vol. 17. p. 41). Ibn Maytham points out that "distrust in God begins with lack of knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of Him." A person ignorant of His generosity and bounty will not know that He rewards what is expended in His path; hence, he will be miserly in order to avoid poverty. He makes similar remarks concerning the qualities of cowardliness and greed.

however this strikes your pleasure. Cling to men of piety and veracity. Then accustom them not to lavish praise upon you nor to (try to) gladden you by (attributing to you) a vanity you did not do,¹ for the lavishing of abundant praise causes arrogance and draws (one) close to pride.

Never let the good-doer and the evildoer possess an equal station before you, for that would cause the good-doer to abstain from his good-doing and habituate the evildoer to his evildoing. Impose upon each of them what he has imposed upon himself.²

Know that there is nothing more conducive to the ruler's trusting his subjects than that he be kind towards them, lighten their burdens and abandon coercing them in that in which they possess not the ability. So in this respect you should attain a situation in which you can confidently trust your subjects, for trusting (them) will sever from you lasting strain.³ And surely

¹ According to Ibn Maytham this sentence is part of the description of those favorites who should be most influential. It means that the ruler "should train and discipline them by forbidding them from praising him lavishly or trying to make him happy by a false statement in which they attribute to him an act which he did not do and by this attribution cause him to be blameworthy." He then quotes the following verse of the Qur'ān: "Reckon not that those who rejoice in what they have brought, and love to be praised for what they have not done - do not reckon them secure from chastisement" (III, 188).

² "The evildoer has imposed upon himself worthiness for punishment and the good-doer worthiness for reward" (Muḥammad 'Abduh, vol. 3, p. 98).

³ Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadid comments on this passage as follows: "Whoever does good toward you will trust you and whoever does evil will shy away from you. This is because when you do good to someone and repeat it, you will come to believe that he likes you, and this belief will in turn lead to your liking him, for man by his very nature likes anyone who likes him. Then when you like him, you will feel secure with him and trust him. The reverse is true when you do evil toward someone..." (vol. 173 p. 47).

he who most deserves your trust is he who has done well when you have tested him, and he who most deserves your mistrust is he who has done badly when you have tested him.

Abolish no proper custom (*sunnah*) which has been acted upon by the leaders of this community, through which harmony has been strengthened and because of which the subjects have prospered. Create no new custom which might in any way prejudice the customs of the past, lest their reward belong to him who originated them, and the burden be upon you to the extent that you have abolished them.

Study much with men of knowledge (*'ulamā'*) and converse much with sages (*ḥukamā'*) concerning the consolidation of that which causes the state of your land to prosper and the establishment of that by which the people before you remained strong.¹

Part Three: Concerning the Classes of Men

Know that subjects are of various classes, none of which can be set aright without the others and none of which is independent from the others. Among them are (1) the soldiers of God, (2) secretaries for the common people and the people of distinction,² executors of justice³ and administrators of equity and kindness.⁴ (3) payers of *jizyah*¹ and land tax, namely the

¹ "He commands him to multiply his study with the men of knowledge, i.e., he should increase his study of the injunctions of the *Shari'ah* and the laws of religion; and he should increase his discussions with sages, or those whose knowledge is from God Himself (*al-'arīfūn billāh*) and who know the secrets of His servants and His land" (Ibn Maytham).

² The secretaries (*kuttāb*) are "those who are in charge of the ruler's own affairs and who write letters for him to his administrators and commanders. They take care of making arrangements and running the government administration (*dāwān*)" (Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, vol. 173 p. 76).

³ *Qudāt al-'adl*, i.e. judges.

⁴ Administrators (*'ummāl*) are governmental officials concerned with the affairs of "the general public, alms, religious endowments, the

people of protective covenants² and the Muslims, (4) merchants and craftsmen and (5) the lowest class, the needy and wretched. For each of them God has designated a portion, and commensurate with each portion He has established obligatory acts (*faridah*) in His Book and the Sunnah of His Prophet - may God bless him and his household and give them peace - as a covenant from Him maintained by US.³

Now soldiers, by the leave of God, are the fortresses of the subjects, the adornment of rulers, the might of religion and the means to security. The subjects have no support but them, and the soldiers in their turn have no support but the land tax which God has extracted for them, (a tax) by which they are given the power to war against their enemy and upon which they depend for that which puts their situation in order and meets their needs. Then these two classes (soldiers and taxpayers) have no support but the third class, the judges, administrators and secretaries, for they draw up contracts,⁴ gather yields, and are

con-anon interest etc." (Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, vol. 17. p. 69). For the meaning of the term *ʿāmil* (singular of *ʿummāl*) throughout Islamic history see the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (new edition), vol. I) p. 435.

¹ *Jizyah* is the head tax upon "People of the Book" - followers of revealed religions other than Islam - who live under Muslim rule.

² *Ahl al-dhimmah*. In other words the "People of the Book" who live in Muslim lands and are accorded hospitality and protection by Islam on condition of acknowledging Islamic political domination and paying the *jizyah*.

³ The covenant between man and God (*ʿahd*) is frequently mentioned in the Qurʾān and plays a central role in Islamic thought. Some representative Qurʾānic verses are the following: "Only men possessed of minds remember, who fulfill God's covenant..." (XIII, 20); "And fulfill the covenant; surely the covenant shall be questioned of" (XVII, 34); "Made I not a covenant with you Children of Adam, that you should not serve Satan... and that you should serve Me?" (XXXVI, 59-60).

⁴ One commentator remarks as follows: "Land tax is only paid in accordance with an agreement between the owners of the land and the ruler, so it is necessary that the documents be drawn up.

entrusted with private and public affairs. And all of these have no support but the merchants and craftsmen, through the goods which they bring together and the markets which they set up. They provide for the needs (of the first three classes) by acquiring with their own hands those (goods) to which the resources of others do not attain. Then there is the lowest class, the needy and wretched, those who have the right to aid and assistance. With God there is plenty for each (of the classes). Each has a claim upon the ruler to the extent that will set it aright. But the ruler will not truly accomplish what God has enjoined upon him in this respect except by resolutely striving, by recourse to God's help, by reconciling himself to what the truth requires and by being patient in the face of it in what is easy for him or burdensome.

(i.) Appoint as commander from among your troops that person who is in your sight the most sincere in the way of God and His Prophet and of your Imam,¹ who is purest of heart and most outstanding in intelligence, who is slow to anger, relieved to pardon, gentle to the weak and harsh with the strong and who is not stirred to action by severity nor held back by incapacity. Then hold fast to men of noble descent and those of righteous families and good precedents, then to men of bravery, courage, generosity and magnanimity, for they are encompassed by nobility and Then inspect the affairs of the soldiers.² as Parents

Furthermore, officials have to collect the land tax from the land owners according to the terms of the contract. Here it is possible that disputes arise between the government officials and the landowners, so it will be necessary to refer to judges to solve these disputes." Mirzā Ḥabībullāh al-Hāshimiy, *Minhāj al-barā'ah fi sharḥ nahj al-balāghah*, Tehran, 1389/1969-70, vol. 203 p. 200.

¹ I. e., Imam 'Alī himself.

² "Of the soldiers" is a translation of the pronoun "their", and some question remains as to whether the pronoun does not in fact refer to the commanders. "If you say, 'But the soldiers of the army are not mentioned in the preceding section, only the commanders,' I will answer, 'On the contrary, they were mentioned where he says "The weak and the strong"' (Ibn Abī'l-Ḥadīd, vol. 17, p. 53.

inspect their own child. Never let anything through which you have strengthened them distress you, and disdain not a kindness you have undertaken for them, even if it be small, for it will invite them to counsel you sincerely and trust you. Do not leave aside the examination of their minor affairs while depending upon (the examination of) the great, for there is a place where they will profit from a trifling kindness, and an occasion in which they cannot do without the great.

Among the chiefs of your army favor most him who assists the soldiers with his aid and bestows upon them what is at his disposal to the extent that suffices both them and the members of their families left behind.¹ Then their concern in battle with the enemy will be a single concern, for your kind inclination toward them will incline their hearts to you.² Verily the foremost delight of the eye for rulers is the establishment of justice in the land and the appearance of love for them among the subjects.³ But surely the subjects' love will not appear without the wellbeing of their breasts, and their sincerity (toward rulers) will not become free from blemishes unless they watch over their rulers, find their governments of little burden and cease to hope that their period (of rule) will soon come to an end. Therefore let their hopes be expanded, and persist in praising them warmly and taking in to account the (good) accomplishments of everyone among them who has accomplished, for frequent mention of their good deeds will encourage the bold and rouse the indolent, God willing.

¹ *Khulāf* (plural of *khalf*) are the women, children and weak left behind when the men go on a journey.

² Kind inclination toward the army means choosing for them the best of commanders, which will in turn cause them to love the ruler (Ibn Maytham).

³ According to Ibn Abi'l-Īḥādīd, the context indicates that the word "subjects" refers in particular to the army. Al-Hāshimiy disagrees and states that *ʿAlī* does in fact mean all the subjects. He mentions them in the section on soldiers because the soldiers have to keep order in the land among the subjects (vol. 2o, p. 22o-2).

Then recognize in every man that which he has accomplished, attribute not one man's accomplishment to another and fall not short (of attributing) to him the full extent of his accomplishment. Let not a man's eminence invite you to consider as great an accomplishment which was small, nor a man's lowliness to consider as small an accomplishment which was great.

Refer to God and His Messenger any concerns which distress you and any matters which are obscure for you, for God - high be He exalted - has said to a people whom He desired to guide, "o believers, obey God, and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. If you should quarrel on anything, refer it to God and the Messenger" (IV, 59). To refer to God is to adhere to the clear text of His Book, while to refer to the Prophet is to adhere to his uniting (*al-jāmi`ah*) Sunnah not the dividing (*al-mufarriq*).¹

(2a.) Then choose to judge (*al-hukm*) among men him who in your sight is the most excellent of subjects, i.e., one who is not beleaguered by (complex) affairs, who is not rendered ill-tempered by the litigants,² who does not persist in error, who is not distressed by returning to the truth when he recognizes it, whose soul does not descend to any kind of greed, who is not satisfied with an inferior understanding (of a thing) short of the more thorough, who hesitates most in (acting in the face of) obscurities, who adheres most to arguments, who is the least to become annoyed at the petition of the litigants, who is the most patient (in waiting) for the facts to become clear and who is the

¹ The commentators explain this as meaning that people should follow that part of the Sunnah of the Prophet upon which all are agreed, not that concerning which there is a difference of opinion.

² *Tamhakuhu 'l-khuṣūm*. According to Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, the verb here means to "make cantankerous or obstinate" (vol. 171 p. 59). Ibn Maytham, however, interprets the passage to mean that the judge should be someone "who is not overcome in his attempt to ascertain the truth by the obstinacy of the litigants. It has been said that this is an allusion to the person with whom the litigants are satisfied."

firmer when the verdict has become manifest; a man who does not become conceited when praise is lavished upon him and who is not attracted by temptation. But such (men) are rare.

Thereupon investigate frequently his execution of the law (*qadā'*) and grant generously to him that which will eliminate his lacks and through which his need for men will decrease. Bestow upon him that station near to you to which none of your other favorites may aspire, that by it he may be secure from (character) assassination before you by men of importance.¹ (In sum) study that (i.e., the selection of judges) with thorough consideration, for this religion was prisoner in the hands of the wicked, who acted with it out of caprice and used it to seek (the pleasures of) the present world.²

(2b.) Then look into the affairs of your administrators. Employ them (only after) having tested (them) and appoint them not with favoritism or arbitrariness, for these two (attributes) embrace different kinds of oppression and treachery.³ Among

¹ Muḥammad 'Abduh explains that when the judge is given an elevated position, the ruler's favorites as well as the common people will be in awe of him and no one will dare slander him, out of fear of the ruler and respect for the person held in such high esteem by him (vol. 3, p. 105).

² Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd: "His words refer to the judges and rulers appointed by 'Uthmān, for during his reign they did not judge rightfully but in accordance with caprice and in order to seek this world. Some people say that this happened because 'Uthmān was weak and his relatives were able to gain mastery over him. They disrupted the affairs of state without his knowledge, so the sin is upon them and 'Uthmān is guiltless of what they were doing" (vol. 17, p. 60). See *Shi'ite Islam*, pp. 46-48.

³ Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd reads *hum* for *humā*, i.e.: "For they (the administrators) are embraced by different kinds of oppression and treachery and he interprets the sentence to refer to the administrators who served under the three caliphs before 'Alī. Al-Hāshimiy offers a number of arguments in support of this interpretation, *Minhāj al-barā'ah*, Vol. 20, pp. 246-9.

them look for people of experience and modesty¹ from righteous families foremost in Islam,² for they are nobler in moral qualities, more genuine in dignity and less concerned with ambitious designs, and they perceive more penetratingly the consequences of affairs. Then bestow provisions upon them liberally, for that will empower them to set themselves aright and to dispense with consuming what is under their authority; and it is an argument against them if they should disobey your command or sully your trust.

Then investigate their actions. Dispatch truthful and loyal observers (to watch) over them, for your investigation of their affairs in secret will incite them to carry out their trust faithfully and to act kindly toward the subjects. Be heedful of aides. If one of them should extend his hand in a treacherous act, concerning which the intelligence received against him from your observers concurs, and if you are satisfied with that as a witness, subject him to corporeal punishment and seize him for what befell from his action. Then install him in a position of degradation, brand him with treachery and gird him with the shame of accusation.

(3.) Investigate the situation of the land tax in a manner that will rectify the state of those who pay it, for in the correctness of the land tax and the welfare of the taxpayers is the welfare of others. The welfare of others will not be achieved except through them, for the people, all of them, are dependent upon the land tax and those who pay it. Let your care for the prosperity of the earth be deeper than your care for the

¹ "Experience (*tajribah*) alone is not sufficient if the administrator is not endowed with modesty (*hayā*'), for modesty is the basis of manliness (*murū'ah*). As the Prophet said, 'Modesty brings only good', and 'Whoso has not modesty has not religion and will not enter Paradise'..." (al-Fakikī, *al-Rā'i war-ra'iyah*, Vol. 2, p. 38).

² I.e., those families who were first to enter Islam. "This is because... righteousness of family determines the way men are raised, and being foremost in Islam indicates nobility of character..." (Ibid., p. 39).

collecting of land tax, for it will not be gathered except in prosperity. Whoever exacts land tax without prosperity has desolated the land and destroyed the servants (of God). His affairs will remain in order but briefly.

So if your subjects complain of burden,¹ of blight, of the cutting off of irrigation water, of lack of rain, or of the transformation of the earth through its being inundated by a flood or ruined by drought, lighten (their burden,) to the extent you wish their affairs to be rectified. And let not anything by which you have lightened their burden weigh heavily against you, for it is a store which they will return to you by bringing about prosperity in your land and embellishing your rule. You will gain their fairest praise and pride yourself at the spreading forth of justice among them. You will be able to depend upon the increase in their strength (resulting) from what you stored away with them when you gave them ease; and upon their trust, since you accustomed them to your justice toward them through your kindness to them. Then perhaps matters will arise which afterwards they win undertake gladly if in these you depend upon them, for prosperity will carry that with which you burden it. Truly the destruction of the earth only results from the destitution of its inhabitants, and its inhabitants become destitute only when rulers concern themselves with amassing (wealth), when they have misgivings about the endurance (of their own rule)² and when they profit little from warning examples.

¹ Whether as the result of the land tax itself or the oppression of the tax-collectors (Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadid, vol. 17, p. 72).

² Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadid offers two possible explanations of this clause. According to the first, the words "*sū' zannihim bi'lbaqā*" "would have to be translated "they think wrongly about endurance," which means that they think their own existence will endure and they forget death and dissolution. In the translation, however, I have followed the second interpretation, which he explains as meaning "They imagine they will be deposed and replaced, so they seize upon opportunities, appropriate wealth and show no concern for the prosperity of the land." (vol. 1173 p. 73).

(2c.) Then examine the state of your secretaries and, put the best of them in charge of your affairs.¹ Assign those of your letters in which you insert your stratagems and secrets to him among them most generously endowed with the aspects of righteous moral qualities, a person whom high estate does not make reckless; that because of it he might be so bold as to oppose you in the presence of an assembly. (He should be someone) whom negligence will not hinder from delivering to you the letters of your administrators, nor from issuing their answers properly for you in that which he takes for you and bestows in your stead; a person who will not weaken a contract which he binds for you, nor will he be incapable of dissolving what has been contracted to your loss; a man who is not ignorant of the extent of his own value in affairs, for he who is ignorant of his own value is even more ignorant of the value of others.

Let not your choosing of them be in accordance with your own discernment, confidence and good opinion, for men make themselves known to the discernment of rulers by dissimulating and serving them well, even though beyond this there may be nothing of sincere counsel and loyalty. Rather examine them in that with which they were entrusted by the righteous before you. Depend upon him who has left the fairest impression upon the common people and whose countenance is best known for trustworthiness. This will be proof of your sincerity toward God

¹ "Know that the secretary alluded to by the Commander of the Faithful is he who nowadays is commonly called the 'vizier', for he is entrusted with the management of the affairs of the ruler's person and in all of them is his deputy. The letters of the administrators come to him and their answers are issued by him. He puts the (affairs of the) administrators in order and is supervisor over them. In fact he is the 'secretary of the secretaries' and for this reason is known as the vizier in the absolute sense. It is said that the secretary has three prerogatives before the king: to remove the veil from him (i.e., he has access to his personal affairs, even in the harem), to accuse traitors before him and to make secrets known to him..." (Ibn Abi'l-Hadid, vol. 173 p. 79).

and toward him whose affair has been entrusted to you.

Appoint to the head of each of your concerns a chief from among these men, (a person) who is neither overpowered when these concerns are great nor disturbed when they are many. Whatever fault of your secretaries you overlook will come to be attached to you.

(4.) Then make merchants and craftsmen - those who are permanently fixed, those who move about with their wares and those who profit from (the labor of) their own body¹ - your own concern, and urge others to do so,² for they are the bases of benefits and the means of attaining conveniences. They bring (benefits and conveniences) from remote and inaccessible places in the land, sea, plains and mountains, and from places where men neither gather together nor dare to go. (The merchants and craftsmen) are a gentleness from which there is no fear of calamity and a pacificity from which there is no worry of disruption.³ Examine their affairs in your presence and in every corner of your land. But know, nevertheless, that in many of them is shameful miserliness, detestable avarice, hoarding of

¹ Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd explains that the first two of these groups are merchants - those who have shops and those who travel with their wares - and the third group are the craftsmen (vol. 17, p. 84).

² The translation of this sentence is rather free and follows Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd's first interpretation. He adds that it is also permissible to read the sentence as follows: "Accept counsel (from me) for the good of merchants and craftsmen and counsel (others) concerning them" (vol. 17, pp. 83-4).

³ This is a literal translation of a passage which Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd explains as follows: "Then the Imam says, 'Surely they are a gentleness', that is to say, merchants and craftsmen are so. He seeks Mālik al-Ashtar's sympathy and favor for them and he says they are not like tax-collectors and commanders of the army, for they have to be sustained, protected and taken care of, the more so since there is no fear of calamity from them, neither in property where they might be disloyal (as in the case of the tax-collectors) nor in the government where they might work corruption (as in the case of the commanders of the army)" (vol. 17, p. 84).

benefits and arbitrariness in sales. This is a source of loss to all and a stain upon rulers. So prohibit hoarding (*iḥtikār*), for the Messenger of God - may God bless him and his household and give them peace - prohibited it.¹ Let selling be an openhanded selling, with justly balanced scales and prices which do not prejudice either party, buyer or seller.² As for him who lets himself be tempted to hoard after you have forbidden him (to do so), make an example of him and punish him, but not excessively.

(5.) Then (fear) God, (fear) God regarding the lowest class, the wretched, needy, suffering and disabled who have no means at their disposal, for in this class there is he who begs and he who is needy (but does not beg). Be heedful for God's sake of those rights of theirs which He has entrusted to you. Set aside for them a share of your treasury (*bayt al-māl*) and in every town a share of the produce of the lands of Islam taken as booty (*ṣawāfi al-islām*),³ for to the farthest away of them belongs the equivalent of what belongs to the nearest.⁴ You are bound to

¹ "According to the Sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (founder of the Ja'fari, i.e. Twelve-Imam Shiite school of law), 'It is reprehensible (*makrūh*) to hoard and to leave men with nothing. And it is said that it is forbidden (*ḥarām*), and this latter view is more correct. As was said by the Prophet of God, "Mercy is upon him who imports, and curses upon him who hoards". Surely, hoarding is forbidden under two conditions: First, that food - i.e. wheat, barley, dates, raisins, clarified butter, or salt - be held back seeking an increase in price. Second, if there is no other distributor to be found... Quoted in al-Fakiki, *al-Rā'i war-ra'iyyah*, vol. 2, p. 165.

² Cf. Qur'ān LIII, 1-2: "Woe to the stinters who, when they measure against the people, take full measure, but, when they measure for them or weigh for them, they skimp."

³ Reference to the principle alluded to in the following verse of the Qur'ān (VIII, 4) "Know that, whatever booty you take, the fifth of it is God's and the Messenger's and the near kinsman's and the orphan's and for the needy and the traveler".

⁴ "In other words, all poor Muslims are equal in their shares, there is no 'farthest away' or 'nearest'. Prefer not him who is near to you or

observe the right of each of them, so be not distracted from them by arrogance, for you will not be excused if, to attend to the very important affair, you neglect the trifling. So avert not your solicitude from them and turn not your face away from them in contempt.

Investigate the affairs of those (of the lowest class) who are unable to gain access to you, those upon whom eyes disdain to gaze and whom men regard with scorn. Appoint to attend exclusively to them a person whom you trust from among the god-fearing and humble, and let him submit to you their affairs. Then act toward them in a manner that will absolve you before God on the day that you meet Him.¹ For among the subjects these are more in need of equity than others. In the case of each of them prepare your excuse with God by accomplishing for him his rightfully due (*al-ḥaqq*). Take upon yourself the upkeep of the orphans and aged from among those who have no means at their disposal and do not exert themselves in begging. (All of) this is a heavy burden upon rulers. The truth (*al-ḥaqq*), all of it, is a heavy burden. But God may lighten it for people who seek the final end, who admonish their souls to be patient and trust in the truth of God's promise to them.

Part Four: Commands and Prohibitions in Mālik al-Ashtar's Best Interest

Set aside for those who have requests (*ḥājāt*) from you a portion (of your time) in which you yourself are free to (attend) to them. Hold an open audience for them and therein be

to one of your favorites over him who is far from you and without any connection to you or reason for you to turn toward him. It is also possible that he means that the produce of the land taken as booty in a certain area should not be distributed only to the needy of that area, for the right to the produce of the land is the same whether a person is far from that land or resides in it." (Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, vol. 17, pp. 86-7).

¹ The "meeting with God" is mentioned in a number of Qur'ānic verses, such as the following: "They indeed are losers who deny their meeting with God." (VI, 31).

humble before God who created you. Keep the soldiers and aides who are your bodyguards and police away from them so that their spokesman may address you without stammering (in fear), for I heard the Messenger of God - may God bless him and his household and give them peace - say not (only) on one occasion, "No community shall be sanctified within which the rightfully due of the weak may not be taken from the strong without stammering (by the weak)". Furthermore, suffer them to be coarse and faltering of speech and become not annoyed and angry with them. For that God will outspread the wings of His mercy over you and make binding for you the reward of having obeyed Him. Bestow in that you bestow in a pleasant manner and refrain (from granting requests when you must) gracefully and while asking pardon.

Then there are certain of your affairs which you must take in hand personally. Among them is giving an ear to your administrators when your secretaries have been unable to find the correct solution, and among them is attending to the requests of men when presented to you because the breasts of your aides have been straitened by them.¹

Each day perform the work of that day, for to each belongs what is proper to it. Set aside for yourself in what is between you and God the most excellent of these hours and the fullest of these portions, even though all of them belong to God if in them your intention is correct and because of them the subjects remain secure. In making your religion sincerely God's perform especially His obligations (*farā'id*),² which pertain only to Him. So give to God of your body in your night and your day, and complete in a perfect manner, neither defectively nor deficiently, what brings you near to God, no matter what may

¹ "The breasts of aides are straitened" by expediting the removal of grievances. They love to postpone attending to them, either in order to seek personal gain or to demonstrate their own authority" (Muḥammad 'Abduh, vol. 3, p. 114).

² i.e. the obligatory acts such as the five daily prayers.

befall your body (as a result).¹

When you stand to lead men in the canonical prayers, neither drive (them) away (by praying too lengthily) nor mar (the prayer by performing it too quickly or faultily), for among men there are some who are ill and others who are needy. I asked the Messenger of God - may God bless him and his household and give them peace - when he sent me to the Yemen, "How shall I lead them in prayer?" He said, "Lead them in prayer as the weakest of them prays, and be merciful to the believers."

Furthermore, prolong not your seclusion (*i'tikāf*) from your subjects, for rulers' seclusion from subjects is a kind of constraint and (results in) a lack of knowledge of affairs. Seclusion from them cuts rulers off from the knowledge of that from which they have been secluded. Then the great appears to them as small and the small as great. The beautiful appears as ugly and the ugly as beautiful. And the truth becomes stained with falsehood. The ruler is only a man. He does not know the affairs which men hide from him. There are no marks upon the truth by which the various kinds of veracity might be distinguished from falsehood.

Again, you are one of only two men: either you give generously in the way of the truth - then why seclude yourself from carrying out a valid obligation or performing a noble deed? Or else you are afflicted by niggardliness - then how quickly will men refrain from petitioning you when they despair of your generosity! Moreover, most requests men present to you are those *which* impose no burden upon you, such as a complaint against a wrong or the seeking of equity in a transaction.

Then surely the ruler has favorites and intimates, among whom there is a certain arrogance, transgression and lack of equity in transactions. Remove the substance of these (qualities) by

¹ The references to the body are due especially to the particularly physical nature of the daily canonical prayers. Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd explains the last clause as meaning, "Even if that wearies you and impairs your body and your strength" (Vol. 173 p. 90).

cutting off the means of obtaining these situations. Bestow no fiefs upon any of your entourage or relatives, nor let them covet from you the acquisition of a landed estate¹ which would bring loss to the people bordering upon it in (terms of) a water supply or a common undertaking, the burden of which would be imposed upon them.² Its benefit would be for those (who acquired the fiefs) and not for you, and its fault would be upon you in this world and the next.

Impose the right (*al-ḥaqq*) upon whomsoever it is incumbent, whether he be related to you or not.³ Be patient in this and look to your (ultimate) account (*muhtasib*),⁴ however this may effect your relatives and favorites. Desire the ultimate end in that of it (imposing the right) which weighs heavily against you, for its outcome will be praiseworthy.

If any of your subjects should suspect you of an injustice, explain to them your justification. By your explanation, turn their suspicions away from yourself. Thereby you train your soul (*nafs*), act kindly to your subjects and justify (yourself) in a manner to attain your need, i.e., setting them in the way of the truth.

Never reject a peace to which your enemy calls you and in which

¹ The words "acquisition of a landed estate" (*i'tiqād `qdah*) might be translated literally as the "binding of a contract". The commentators, such as Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd (vol. 173 p. 97)³ Ibn Maytham and Muhammad `Abduh (vol. 31 p. 11), explain it as translated (*iqtinā' dy'ah* or *tamlīk day'ah*).

² "His words... explain the methods of cutting off the causes referred to: the bestowal of a fief upon one of the entourage or a relative, and his desire to acquire a landed estate which will harm those people bordering upon it in terms of the water supply or a common undertaking - such as a building, etc. - while he imposes the burden of the undertaking on men, are the causes of the abovementioned situations..." (Ibn Maytham).

³ Or "whether near (*qarīb*) to you or far away (*ba'īd*)." I.e., whoever he might be, bring the person who has committed a wrong to justice.

⁴ I.e., realize that you will be rewarded in the next world.

is God's pleasure, for in peace there is ease for your soldiers, relaxation from your cares and security for your land. But be cautious, very cautious, with your enemy after (having made) peace with him, for the enemy may have drawn near in order to take advantage of (your) negligence. Therefore, be prudent and have doubts about trusting your enemy in this (matter).

If you bind an agreement between yourself and your enemy or cloth him in a protective covenant (*dhimmah*), guard your agreement in good faith and tend to your covenant with fidelity. Make of yourself a shield before what you have granted,¹ for men do not unite more firmly in any of the obligations (imposed upon them) by God than in attaching importance to fidelity in agreements,² despite the division among their sects and the diversity of their opinions. The idolaters (*al-mushrikūn*) had already adhered to that (honoring agreements) among themselves before the Muslims, by reason of the evil consequences of treachery that they had seen. So never betray your protective covenant, never break your agreement and never deceive your enemy, for none is audacious before God but a wretched fool. God has made His agreement and His protective covenant a security which He has spread among the servants by His mercy, and a sanctuary in whose impregnability they may rest and in whose proximity they may spread forth.³ Within it, there is no corruption, treachery or deceit.

¹ "That is, even if you yourself should perish, act without treachery" (Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, vol. 17, p. 107).

² The importance of observing covenants and agreements is referred to frequently in the Qur'ān. See for example, XVI, 91: "Fulfill God's covenant, when you make covenant, and break not the oaths after they have been confirmed..." See also VI, 153; XIII, 20; XVII, 34 et al.

³ According to Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd (vol. 17, p. 109), "in whose proximity they may spread forth" means "while dwelling in its proximity they may disperse in search of their needs and desires". 'Abduh explains the verb translated here as "spread forth" (*yastafidūn*) to mean "swiftly take refuge" Vol. 3, p. 118), but the first interpretation seems more likely.

Make not an agreement in which you allow deficiencies and rely not upon ambiguity of language¹ after confirmation and finalization (of the agreement). Let not the straitness of an affair in which an agreement before God is binding upon you invite you to seek its abrogation unjustly. For your patience in the straitness of an affair, hoping for its solution and the blessing of its outcome is better than an act of treachery. You would fear the act's consequence and (you would fear) that a liability before God will encompass you, a liability from which you will not be exempted in this world or the next.

Beware of blood and spilling it unlawfully, for nothing is more deserving of vengeance (from God), greater in its consequence or more likely to (bring about) a cessation of blessing and the cutting-off of (one's appointed) term than shedding blood unjustly. God - glory be to Him - on the Day of Resurrection will begin judgment among His servants over the blood they have spilt.² So never strengthen your rule by shedding unlawful blood, for that is among the factors which weaken and enfeeble it, nay, which overthrow and transfer it. You have no excuse before God and before me for intentional killing, for in that there is bodily retaliation.³ If you are stricken by error, and

¹ *Lahn al-qawl*, "color of words". Ibn Maytham explains this expression as meaning "ambiguity, dissimulation or allusion." Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd's explanation is similar: "He forbids him when making an agreement between himself and his enemy to break it by relying upon a hidden interpretation or the tenor of the words, or by saying, 'Surely I meant such and such, I did not have the apparent sense of the words in mind'" (vol. 17, p. 109)

² Ibn Abil-Ḥadīd cites the following *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet: "On the Day of Resurrection the first thing which God will judge upon among the servants is blood which has been spilled" (vol. 17, p. 111).

³ "Then he advises him that intentional killing involves retaliation, and he says 'bodily retaliation'. In other words, intentional killing makes the destruction of the physical body necessary, just as you have destroyed the body of the person killed. The Imam's intention is to frighten him with these words, and they are more effective than

your whip, your sword or your hand should exceed their bounds in punishment for in striking with the fists and all that exceeds it there is killing - never let the arrogance of your authority prevent you from paying the relatives of the killed their rightfully due (*al-ḥaqq*).¹

Beware of being pleased with yourself,² of reliance upon that of yourself which pleases you and of the love of lavish praise, for these are among Satan's surest opportunities to efface what there might be of the good-doers' good-doing.

Beware of reproaching (*mann*) your subjects in your good-doing (for their insufficient acknowledgment of their debt to you), of overstating the deeds you have done and of making promises to them followed by non-observance. For reproach voids good-doing,³ overstatement takes away the light of the truth and nonobservance results in the hatred of God and men. God - may He be exalted - has said, "Very hateful is it to God, that you say what you do not" (LXI, 3).

Beware of hurrying to (accomplish) affairs before their (proper)

if he had merely said, 'surely in that there is retaliation.' (Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd, vol. 17, p. 111)

¹ Like retaliation in cases of intentional murder, compensation in cases of unintentional killing are determined by the *Shari'ah*. Cf. Qur'an IV, 92-3: "It belongs not to a believer to slay a believer, except it be by error. If any slays a believer by error, then let him free a believing slave, and blood wit is to be paid to his family unless they forego it as a freewill offering. If he belong to a people at enmity with you and is a believer, let the slayer set free a believing slave. If he belongs to a people joined with you by a compact, then blood wit is to be paid to his family and the slayer shall set free a believing slave... And whoso slays a believer willfully, his recompense is Gahanna..."

² Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadīd cites several sayings of the Prophet, including the following: "There are three mortal perils: yielding to niggardliness, following caprice and being pleased with oneself" (vol. 173 p. 114).

³ Cf. Qur'an II, 264: "O believers, void not your freewill offerings with reproach and injury."

time, of neglecting them when they are possible, of stubborn persistence in them when they are impracticable and of weakness in them when they have become clear. So put everything in its place and perform every action at its time.

Beware of arrogating for yourself that in which men are equal; and of negligence in that which is of concern after it has become manifest to the eyes (of men), for these things will be held against you for (the benefit of) others;¹ and (beware of negligence) of the fact that little remains until the coverings of affairs are lifted from you and justice is demanded from you for the wronged.²

Control the ardor of your pride, the violence of your strength, the force of your hand and the edge of your tongue. Be on thy guard against all these by restraining impulses and delaying force until your anger has subsided and you have mastered (your own) power of choice. But you will not gain control over that from your soul until you multiply your concern for remembering the return unto your Lord.

Incumbent upon you is to recall the just governments, the excellent customs, the Sunnah of our Prophet—may God bless him and his household and give them peace—and the obligations (promulgated) in the Book of God, which preceded you among those of earlier times. Take as the model for your

¹ Ibn Abi'l-Ḥadid comments: For example, if it is pointed out to the commander that one of his favorites is performing a reprehensible act in secret, and if he then ignores that act, this will be to the benefit of the person doing the act, but not to his own benefit (vol. 17, p. 116).

² Cf. Qur'ān L, 19-22: "And death's agony comes in truth; that is what thou wast shunning!... 'Thou wast heedless of this; therefore We have now removed from thee thy covering, and so thy sight today is piercing'." Ibn Maytham remarks that when the veils of affairs are lifted from man at death, he sees the reality of these affairs and what God has prepared for him of good and evil: "The day every soul shall find what it has done of good brought forward, and what it has done of evil..." (Qur'ān III, 30).

action what you have observed us to perform of them, and strive to your utmost to follow what I have instructed you in these my instructions. I trust in them to act as my argument against you so that you shall have no cause for your soul's hastening to its caprice.¹

I ask God by the amplitude of His mercy, and His tremendous power to grant every desire, to bestow upon me and you in that wherein is His pleasure success in presenting Him and His creatures with a clear justification (for our actions). (May He bestow) excellent praise from among His servants, fair influence in the land, completion of blessings and manifold increase in honor. And I ask that He seal (the lives of) me and you with felicity (*al-sa'ādah*) and martyrdom (*al-shahādah*). "Unto Him we are returning" (11, 156). Peace be upon the Messenger of God—may God bless him and his good and pure household and grant them abundant peace. *Wa'l-Salām*.

¹ Cf. Qur'ān LXXIX, 40-1: "But as for him who feared the Station of his Lord and forbade the soul its caprice, surely Paradise shall be the refuge."

THE SPIRITUAL LIFE: PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION

For the Muslim, the necessary personal concomitant of professing God's Unity is devotion to Him. The outward dimension of this devotion is shaped by the Shari'ite injunctions concerning worship: the canonical prayer, whether mandatory or recommended, fasting, pilgrimage, almsgiving, etc. But the inward dimension of Muslim devotions is much more difficult to grasp. Unlike the outward dimension, it cannot be defined in so many sentences. It can only be perceived through studying the lives and spiritual radiance of holy men and saints. Some of the most fortunate glimpses of the pious Muslim soul are to be found in supplications.¹

Prayer in Islam can be divided into four basic forms: canonical prayer (*ṣalāt*), supplication (*du'ā'*), litany (*wird*) and invocation (*dhikr*). One can say that the first - especially in its mandatory form - corresponds to what is implied in Christianity by mass or holy communion. The second is equivalent to "personal prayer", or simply to what the Christian often understands by the term "prayer" as such. The mandatory canonical prayer must be performed at specific times every day and according to strictly defined rules, while the recommended form also follows the same strict pattern (standing, bowing, prostrating, sitting, etc.). But one may "supplicate" God at any time and in any circumstance, without any set pattern or

¹ See C. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, London, 1961.

formulae. Supplications are strictly voluntary and "free". As for litanies and invocations - i.e., the recitation of Qur'ānic formulae or one or more of the Names of God - like supplication these are voluntary, although they are not so "free" since they follow set patterns, and like the canonical prayer, must be in Arabic. Litanies may be performed by any pious Muslim, whereas invocations are recited almost exclusively by the Sufis.

Although supplications left by the great saints of early Islam are of the type of "free prayer", invariably they have one element in common: since they were recited in Arabic (although they may be made in any language), they are largely inspired by Qur'ānic images and incorporate Qur'ānic verses and formulae. Also, they are usually rhythmic and very often - as in all four prayers translated here - employ rhymed prose (*saja`*). Hence, in this part I have divided the lines of the translation in keeping with the rhythm of the original in order to give a better idea of the style.

The author of the first supplication is Imam Ḥusayn, the third Imam, who was martyred at Karbalā' and is probably the most important Imam in popular Shī'ite devotion. Certainly the days of mourning for him (in particular *tāsū`ā* and *`āshūrā'*, the ninth and tenth of Muḥarram), are still the most solemn and carefully observed holidays in the Shī'ite calendar. Imam Ḥusayn made his supplication - one of the most famous in Shī'ite annals - one year during the pilgrimage to Mecca on the Day of `Arafah (the ninth of Dhu'l-Hijjah), and it has been recited by pious Shi'ites ever since. On that day pilgrims pass the time at Mount Arafat occupying themselves with canonical prayer, reciting the Qur'ān, litanies, invocations and supplications. The spirit of the day is well represented in the Imam's prayer.

The second and third prayers are taken from the Fourth Imam's *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, referred to in the introduction.

As for the fourth and final prayer, it was given by the Twelfth Imam to his second "deputy" (*nā'ib*), Abū-Ja`far Muḥammad

ibn `Uthmān ibn Sa`id, who acted as the Imam's spokesman for many years until his death in 304/916-7 or 305/917-8. Here it is important for those not familiar with Shī'ite doctrines to understand that after the Twelfth Imam went into "occultation" at a young age in the year 260/873-4 and thus disappeared from the eyes of men, he maintained contact with four persons in succession until the last of them died in the year 329/940-1. Then his "greater occultation" (*al-ghaybah al-kubrā*) began. He will not reveal himself again until the end of time.¹

A. al-Ḥusayn, the Third Imam

Prayer for the Day of `Arafah

Praise belongs to God

whose decree none may avert,
and whose gift none may prevent.

No fashioner's fashioning is like His fashioning,
and He is the Generous, the All-embracing.

He brought forth the varieties of unprecedented creatures and
perfected through His wisdom all He had fashioned.

Hidden not from Him are harbingers,
nor lost with Him are deposits.²

He repays every fashioner,
feathers the nest of all who are content
and has mercy upon all who humble themselves.

He sends down benefits and the all-encompassing Book in
radiant light.

He hears supplications,
averts afflictions,
raises up in degrees,
and knocks down tyrants.

For there is no god other than He,
nothing is equal to Him,

¹ See *Shī'ite Islam*, pp. 210-11.

² Cf. Qur`ān LXXIII, 20: "And lend to God a good loan. Whatever good you shall forward to your soul's account, you shall find it with God as better, and mightier a wage."

"Like Him there -is naught,
 and He is the Hearing, the Seeing" (XLII, 11),
 the subtle, the Aware,
 and "He is powerful over all things" (V, 120 etc.).
 O God, I make Thee my quest and bear witness to Thy Lordship,
 acknowledging that Thou art my Lord and to Thee is my return.¹
 Thou originated me by Thy blessing before I was a thing
 remembered.²
 Thou created me from dust,
 then gavest me a place in the loins (of my fathers),
 secure from the uncertainty of Fate and the vagaries of the ages
 and the years.
 I remained a traveler from loin to womb in a time immemorial
 of past days and bygone centuries.
 In Thy tenderness, bounty and goodness toward me Thou didst
 not send me out into the empire of the leaders of disbelief,
 those who broke Thy covenant and cried lies to Thy
 messengers.³
 Rather, Thou sentest me out to that guidance which had been
 foreordained for me,
 the way which Thou madest easy for me and in which Thou
 nurtured me.
 And before that Thou wert kind to me through Thy gracious
 fashioning and abundant blessings.

¹ Cf. Qur'ān XL, 43. In another place, using a different root form for the verb "return", the Qur'ān says in one of the verses most often heard in the Islamic world, "Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return" (11, 156).

² Cf. Qur'ān LXXVI, 1: "Has there come on man a while of time when he was a thing unremembered?"

³ The sin of breaking God's covenant is often described in the Qur'ān. For example, "Such as break the covenant of God after its solemn binding... they shall be the losers." (II, 27). And "Crying lies to the messengers" is often mentioned as a major sin of past nations, e.g., "And the people of Noah, when they cried lies to the Messengers..." (XXV, 37).

Thou originated my creation from a sperm-drop spilled¹
and madest me to dwell in a threefold gloom among flesh, blood
and skin.²

Thou gavest me not to witness my creation,³
nor didst Thou entrust me with anything of my own affair.
Then thou sentest me out into the world for the guidance that
had been foredained for me,
complete and unimpaired.

Thou watched over me in the cradle as an infant boy,
provided me with food, wholesome milk,
and turned the hearts of the nursemaids toward me.
Thou entrusted my upbringing to compassionate mothers,
guarded me from the calamities brought by the jinn and kept
me secure from excess and lack.

High art Thou, o Merciful! O Compassionate!
Then when I began to utter speech Thou completed for me Thy
abundant blessings.

Thou nurtured me more and more each year until,
when my nature was perfected and my strength balanced,
Thou madest Thy argument incumbent upon me by inspiring me
with knowledge of Thee,
awing me with the marvels of Thy wisdom,
awakening me to the wonders of Thy creation which Thou hadst
multiplied in Thy Heaven and Thy earth,⁴
and instructing me in Thy thanks and remembrance.
Thou madest incumbent upon me Thy obedience and worship,
madest me to understand what Thy messengers had brought

¹ Cf. Qur'ān LXXV; 36-37: "What, does man reckon he shall be left to roam at will? Was he not a sperm-drop spilled?"

² Reference to Qur'ān XXXIX, 6: "He created you in the wombs of your mothers, creation after creation, in a threefold gloom."

³ Cf. Qur'ān XVIII, 52: "I made them not to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation..."

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān XVI, 13: "And that which He has multiplied for you in the earth of diverse hues. Surely in that is a sign for a people who remember."

and madest easy for me the acceptance of Thy good pleasure.

Thou wast gracious to me in all of this,
through Thy succor and kindness.

Then, since Thou created me from the best soil,¹
Thou wert not satisfied, my God, that I should have one
blessing without another.

Thou provided me with varieties of sustenance
and kinds of garments
and Thy tremendous - most tremendous - graciousness to me
and Thy eternal goodness toward me.

And finally, when Thou hadst completed for me every blessing
and turned away from me all misfortunes,

Thou wert not prevented by my ignorance and audacity
from guiding me toward that which would bring me nigh to
Thee

or from giving me success in that which would bring me close to
Thee.

For if I prayed to Thee Thou answered,
if I asked of Thee Thou gavest,

if I obeyed Thee Thou showed Thy gratitude,
and if I thanked Thee Thou gavest me more.²

All of that was to perfect Thy blessings upon me and Thy
goodness toward me.

So glory be to Thee; Glory be to Thee,
who are Producer and Reproducer,³
Laudable, Glorious.

Holy are Thy Names and tremendous Thy bounties.
So which of Thy blessings, my God, can I enumerate by
counting and mentioning?

For which of Thy gifts am I able to give thanks?

¹ Reference to the Imam's descent from the Prophet. Cf. the first selection from 'Ali above.

² Cf. Qur'ān XIV, 7: "And when your Lord proclaimed: If you give thanks, I will give you more..."

³ Cf. Qur'ān XXX, 11: "God produces creation, then He reproduces it, then unto Him you will be returned." Also XXIX, 19; XXX, 27.

Since they, O Lord, are more than reckoners can count¹
or those who entrust to memory can attain by knowledge.

But the affliction and hardship, O God,
that Thou turned and averted from me
is more than the health and happiness that came to me.

And I witness, my God, by the truth of my faith,
the knotted resolutions of my certainty,
my pure and unadulterated profession of Unity,
the hidden inwardness of my consciousness;

the places to which the streams of light of my eyes are attached,

the lines on my forehead's surface,
the openings for my breath's channels,
the parts of my nose's soft point,
the paths of my ears' canals,

what my lips close upon and compress,
the movements of my tongue in speaking,
the joint at the back of my mouth and jaw,
the sockets of my molar teeth,

the place where I swallow my food and drink,
that which bears my brain,

the hollow passages of my neck's fibers,
that which is contained in my breast's cavity,
the carriers of my aorta,

the places where my heart's curtain² is attached,
the small pieces of flesh around my liver that which the ribs of
my sides encompass,

the sockets of my joints,

the contraction of my members,

the tips of my fingers, my flesh, my blood,
my hair, my skin, my nerves,

My windpipe,³ my bones, my brain, my veins,

¹ Cf. Qur'an XIV, 34 and XVI, 19: "And if you count God's blessing you will never number it."

² The "curtain of the heart" (*hijāb al-qalb*) is the pericardium.

³ The windpipe is not mentioned in some editions of *Mafātiḥ al-jinān*.

and all of my members,
 what was knitted upon them in the days when I was a suckling
 baby, what the earth has taken away from me, my sleep, my
 waking, my being still, and the movements of my bowing and
 prostrating,
 that had I taken pains and had I striven for the duration of the
 epochs and ages - were my life to be extended through them to
 deliver thanks for one of Thy blessings,
 I would not have been able to do so, except by Thy grace, which
 alone makes incumbent upon me,
 rendering and ever renewed gratitude to Thee,
 and fresh and ever present praise.
 Indeed, and were I and the reckoners among Thy creatures ever
 so eager to calculate the extent of Thy bestowal of blessings,
 whether past or approaching, we would fail to encompass it
 through numbers or to calculate its boundaries.
 Never I How could it ever be done!
 For Thou announcest in Thy eloquent Book and truthful tiding,
 "And if you count God's blessing, you will never number it"
 (XIV, 34).

Thy Book, O God, Thy Message, has spoken the truth!
 And Thy prophets and messengers delivered Thy revelation that
 Thou hadst sent down upon them and the religion that Thou
 hadst promulgated for them and through them.
 And I witness, my God, by my effort, my diligence, and the
 extent of my obedience and my capacity,
 and I say as a believer possessing certainty,
 "Praise belongs to God, who has not taken to Him a son"
 that He might have an heir,
 "and who has not any associate in His dominion"
 who might oppose Him in what He creates,
 "nor any protector out of humbleness" (XVII, 111)
 who would aid Him in what He fashions.
 So glory be to Him, glory be to Him!
 "Why, were there gods in earth and heaven other than God, they

would surely go to ruin" (XXI, 22) and be rent.¹

Glory be to God, the Unique, the One,

"the Everlasting Refuge" who "has not begotten, nor has He been begotten, and equal to Him there is none" (CXII, 2-4).

Praise belongs to God, praise equal to the praise of the angels stationed near to Him and the prophets sent by Him.

And God bless His elect, Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets, and his virtuous, pure and sincere household and give them peace.

Then he began to supplicate. He occupied himself with prayer as tears ran from his blessed eyes. Then he said:

O God, cause me to fear Thee as if I were seeing Thee,²

give me felicity through piety toward Thee,

make me not wretched by disobedience toward Thee,

choose the best for me by Thy decree (*qaḍā*) and bless me by Thy determination (*qadar*),

that I may love not the hastening of what Thou hast delayed, nor the delaying of what Thou hast hastened.

O God, appoint for me sufficiency in my soul,

certainty in my heart,

sincerity in my action,

light in my eyes,

and insight in my religion.

Give me enjoyment of my bodily members,

make my hearing and my seeing my two inheritors,

help me against him who wrongs me,

show me in him my revenge and my desires,

and console thereby my eyes.

¹ Cf. Qur'ān XIX, 88-91: "And they say, 'The All-merciful has taken unto Himself a son.' You have indeed advanced something hideous! The heavens are wellnigh rent of it and the earth split asunder, and the mountains wellnigh fall down crashing for that they have attributed to the All-merciful a son..."

² In the famous *Hadith* concerning *ihsān* or "spiritual virtue" it is said that "Spiritual virtue is that you should worship God as if you were seeing him, and if you see Him not, He nonetheless sees thee."

O God, remove my affliction,
 veil my defects,
 forgive my offence,
 drive away my Satan,¹
 dissolve my debt,
 and give me, my God, the highest degree in the world to come
 and in this world.

O God, to Thee belongs the praise,
 just as Thou created me and made me to hear and to see;
 and to Thee belongs the praise,
 just as Thou created me and made me a creature unimpaired as
 a mercy to me,

while Thou hadst no need of my creation.

My Lord, since Thou created me and then made straight my
 nature;
 my Lord, since Thou caused me to grow and made good my
 shape;²
 my Lord, since Thou didst good to me and gavest me wellbeing
 in my soul;
 my Lord, since Thou preserved me and gavest me success;
 my Lord, since Thou blessed me and then guided me;
 my Lord, since Thou chocest me and gavest me of every good;
 my Lord, since Thou gavest me to eat and drink;³
 my Lord, since Thou enriched me and contented me;⁴
 my Lord, since Thou aided me and exalted me; my Lord,
 since Thou clothed me with Thy pure covering
 and smoothed the way for me by Thy sufficient fashioning:
 Bless Muḥammad and the household of Muḥammad,
 aid me against the misfortunes of time and the calamities of

¹ Cf. Qur'ān XLIII, 36: "Whoso blinds himself to the Remembrance of the All-merciful, to him We assign a Satan for comrade."

² Cf. Qur'ān LXIV, 3: "He shaped you and made good your shapes" See also XL, 64.

³ Cf. Qur'ān XXVI, 79: "...who created me, and Himself guides me, and Himself gives me to eat and drink..."

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān LIII, 48: "And that He it is Who enriches and contents."

nights and days,
 deliver me from the terrors of this world and the torments of
 the world to come and spare me from the evil of that which the
 evildoers do in the earth.

O God, as for what I fear, spare me from it,
 and as for what I seek to avoid,
 guard me against it.

In my soul and my religion watch over me,
 in my traveling protect me,
 in my family and my property appoint for me a successor,
 in what Thou hast provided for me bless me,
 in my soul humble me, in the eyes of men magnify me,
 from the evil of jinn and men preserve me,
 for my sins disgrace me not,
 for my inward secrets shame me not,
 for my action try me not,
 of Thy blessings deprive me not and to other than Thee entrust
 me not.

My God, to whom wouldst Thou entrust me?

To a relative? He would cut me off.

Or to a stranger? He would look at me with displeasure.

Or to those who act toward me with arrogance?

But Thou art my Lord and the sovereign over my affair.

I would complain to Thee of my exile and the remoteness of my
 abode,

and that he whom Thou hast made sovereign over me despises
 me.

My God, so cause not Thy wrath to alight upon me.

If Thou becomest not wrathful with me I will have no care-¹
 glory be to Thee I But Thy protection is more embracing.

So I ask Thee, O Lord, by the Light of Thy Face by which the
 earth and the heavens are illuminated,
 shadows are removed,

and the affairs of the ancients and the later folk are set aright,

¹ Some editions add here the phrase "other than Thee".

not to cause me to die when Thy wrath is upon me,¹
nor to send down upon me Thy anger.

The pleasure is Thine!

The pleasure is Thine, to be satisfied with me before that.

There is no god but Thou,

Lord of the Holy Land,²

the Sacred Monument,³

and the Ancient House,⁴

upon which Thou caused blessing to descend

and which Thou madest a sanctuary for mankind.⁵

O He who pardons the greatest sins by His clemency!

O He who lavishes blessings by His bounty!

O He who gives abundance by His generosity!

O Sustenance to me in my adversity!

O Companion to me in my solitude!

O Aid to me in my affliction!

O Benefactor to me in my blessing!

O my God and God of my fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and
Jacob!⁶

O Lord of Gabriel, Michael and Israfil!⁷

¹ Cf. Qur'ān IX, 55: "So let not their possessions or their children please thee; God only desires thereby to chastise them in this present life, and that their souls should depart while they are unbelievers."

² I. e., Mecca and the land surrounding it.

³ The "Sacred Monument", known as *Muzdalifah*, is the place where the pilgrims spend the night after the day at Arafat. Cf. Qur'ān 11, 19g: "When you press on from Arafat, remember God by the Sacred Monument."

⁴ I. e., the Ka'bah, called the "Ancient House" in reference to the tradition that it was constructed by Abraham. See Qur'ān XXII, 29 and 33; also XIV, 35-7.

⁵ Cf. Qur'ān 11, 125: "And when We made the House a resort for mankind and a sanctuary..."

⁶ A further reference to the Prophet's blood descent from the Abrahamic line of prophets.

⁷ *Isrāfil* is the angel who according to Islamic tradition blows the trumpet at the time of the Resurrection.

Lord of Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets, and his
household, the chosen ones!

Revealer of the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms and the
Criterion,¹

And Sender down of Kāf Hā' Yā' `Ayn Ṣād, Ṭā' Hā', Yā Sin, and
the Wise Qur'ān!²

Thou art my cave (of refuge) when the roads for all their
amplitude constrict me

and the land for all its breadth is strait for me. If not for Thy
mercy, I would have been among the perishing,
and Thou annullest my slip.

If not for Thy covering me,³

I would have been among the disgraced,

and Thou confirmest me with help against my enemies.⁴

And if not for Thy helping me, I would have been among those
overcome.⁵

O He who appropriated loftiness and exaltation to Himself, so
His friends (*awliyā'*) are mighty through His might!

O He before whom kings place the yoke of abasement around
their necks, for they fear His overwhelming power!

"He knows the treachery of the eyes and what the breasts
conceal" (XL, 19)

and the unseen brought by time and fate.

O He about whom none knows how He is but He!

O He about whom none knows what He is but He!

¹ The Criterion (*al-furqān*), is one of the names of the Qur'ān, mentioned several times in its text, such as III, 4 and XXV, 1.

² *Kāf Hā' Yā' `Ayn Ṣād* are Arabic letters which appear at the beginning of the chapter of Maryam, Qur'ān XIX. *Ṭā' Hā'* and *Yā' Sin* are also letters appearing at the beginning of Qur'ānic chapters, XX and XXXVI respectively, from which the chapters take their names. "The Wise Qur'ān" is a tide which appears in Qur'ān XXXVI, 2.

³ *Al-Sattār*, "He who covers (faults and sins)", is one of the names of God.

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān 111, 13: "God confirms with His help whom He will."

⁵ Cf. Qur'ān 111, 16o: "If God helps you, none can overcome you."

O He whom none knows but He!

O He who squeezed the earth onto the water and held back the
air with the sky!

O He to whom belong the noblest Names!¹

O He who possesses kindness which will never be cut off!

O He who assigned the cavalcade to Joseph in the barren land,
brought him out of the well and made him a king after slavery!

O He who returned him to Jacob after "his eyes were whitened
with sorrow that he was suppressing" (XII, 84)!²

O He who removed affliction and tribulation from Job³ and
restrained Abraham's hands from the sacrifice of his son after
he had reached old age and his life had passed by!⁴

O He who answered the prayer of Zachariah and bestowed upon
him John, not leaving him childless and alone!⁵

O He who brought Jonah out from the stomach of the fish!⁶

O He who parted the sea for the Children of Israel, then saved
them and drowned Pharaoh and his hosts!⁷

O He who sends winds heralding His mercy!⁸

O He who does not hurry (to act) against those of His creatures
who disobey Him!⁹

¹ *Akram al-asmā'*. God's "fairest names" (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*) are referred to several times in the Qur'ān, such as VII, 180 and XX, 8.

² For the story of Joseph in the Qur'ān see chapter XII.

³ Cf. Qur'ān XXI, 83-84 and XXXVIII, 42-45.

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān XXXVII, 102-105 and XIV, 39.

⁵ See Qur'ān XXI, 89-90.

⁶ The story of Jonah and the "fish" is referred to in Qur'ān LXVIII, 48-50.

⁷ Cf. Qur'ān XXVI, 63-66 etc.

⁸ Cf. Qur'ān XII, 48: "And He it is Who sends the winds, glad tidings heralding His mercy, and We send down purifying water from the sky." See also VII, 57 and XXX, 46.

⁹ Cf. Qur'ān XVIII, 59: "Thy Lord is the Forgiver, Full of Mercy. If He took them to task (now) for what they earn, He would hasten on the doom for them; but theirs is an appointed term from which they will find no escape."

O He who rescued the sorcerers after (their) long denial!

They had early benefited from His blessing, eating His provision and worshipping other than Him; they had opposed, denied and cried lies to His messengers.¹

O God!

O God!

O Beginner, O Creator with no compeer!

O Everlasting who has no end!

O Living when nothing was alive!

O Quickener of the dead!²

O "He Who is aware of the deserts of every soul" (XIII, 33)!

O He toward whom my gratitude was little,
yet He deprived me not!

My transgression was great,
yet He disgraced me not!

He saw me committing acts of disobedience,
yet he made me not notorious!

O He who watched over me in childhood!

O He who provided for me in my adulthood!

O He whose favors toward me cannot be reckoned and whose blessings cannot be repaid!

O He who has confronted me with the good and the fair,
and I have confronted Him with evil and disobedience in
return!

O He who led me to faith before I had come to know gratitude
for His gracious bestowal!

O He upon whom I called when I was sick and He healed me,
when naked and He clothed me, when hungry and He satisfied
me, when thirsty and He gave me to drink, when abased and He
exalted me,³

¹ Reference to the story of Moses and the sorcerers, related several times in the Qur'ān, especially VII, 111-126; XX, 62-73 and XXVI, 36-51.

² A divine Name used in Qur'ān XXX, 50 and XLI, 39.

³ *fc.* Qur'ān III, 26: "Thou exaltest whom Thou wilt, and Thou abasest whom Thou wilt."

when ignorant and He gave me knowledge,
 when alone and He increased my number,
 when away and He returned me,
 when empty-handed and He enriched me,
 when in need of help and He helped me,
 and when rich and He took not from me.

I refrained from (calling upon Thee in) all of that and Thou
 caused me to begin (to call).

Thine are the praise and the gratitude!

O He who overlooked my slip,
 relieved my distress,
 heard my prayer,
 covered my defects,
 forgave my sins,

caused me to reach my desire,
 and helped me against my enemy!

If I were to count Thy blessings, favors and generous acts of
 kindness,

I would not be able to reckon them.¹

o my Protector!

Thou art He who was gracious,

Thou art He who blessed,

Thou art He who worked good,

Thou art He who was kind.,

Thou art He who was bounteous,

Thou art He who perfected,

Thou art He who provided,

Thou art He who gave success,

Thou art He who bestowed,

Thou art He who enriched,

Thou art He who contented,²

Thou art He who sheltered,³

¹ Again reference to Qur'ān XIV, 34 and XVI, 18.

² Cf. Qur'ān III, 48: "He it is who enriches and contents."

³ Cf. Qur'ān XCIII, 6: "Did He not find thee an orphan and shelter Thee?"

Thou art He who sufficed,
 Thou art He who guided,
 Thou art He who preserved (from sin),
 Thou art He who covered (my sins),
 Thou art He who forgave,
 Thou art He who overlooked,
 Thou art He who established (in the earth),¹
 Thou art He who exalted,
 Thou art He who aided,
 Thou art He who supported,
 Thou art He who confirmed,
 Thou art He who helped,
 Thou art He who healed,
 Thou art He who gave wellbeing,
 Thou art He who honored
 Blessed art Thou and high exalted!
 So, Thine is the praise everlastingly,
 and Thine is gratitude enduringly and forever!
 Then I, my God, confess my sins, so forgive me for them.
 I am he who did evil,
 I am he who made mistakes,
 I am he who purposed (to sin),
 I am he who was ignorant,
 I am he who was heedless,
 I am he who was negligent,
 I am he who relied (upon other than Thee),
 I am he who premeditated,
 I am he who promised,
 I am he who went back on his word,
 I am he who confessed (any sins)
 and I am he who acknowledged Thy blessings upon me
 and with me and then returned to my sins.
 So forgive me for them,
 O He who is not harmed by the sins of His servants
 nor needs He their obedience.

¹ Cf. Qur'ān VII, 10: "We have established you in the earth..."

He gives success through His aid and His mercy
to whomsoever of them works righteousness.
So praise belongs to Thee, My God and My Lord!
O My God, Thou commanded me and I disobeyed
and Thou forbade me and I committed what Thou hadst
forbidden.

I became such that I neither possessed any mark of
guiltlessness that I might ask forgiveness nor any power that I
might be helped.

Then by what means shall I turn toward Thee, O my Protector?
What, by my ears?

Or my eyes?

Or my tongue?

Or my hand?

Or my leg?

Are not all of them Thy blessings given to me?
And with all of them I disobey Thee, O my Protector!

Thine is the argument and the means against me.¹

o He who veiled me (my sins) from fathers and mothers lest
they drive me away, from relatives and brothers lest they
rebuke me, and from kings lest they punish me!

If they had seen, O my Protector, what Thou hast seen from me,
they would not have given me respite, they would have
abandoned me and cut me off!

So here I am, O my God, before Thee!

O Lord, humbled, abased, constrained, despised, neither
possessing guiltlessness that I might ask forgiveness nor
possessing power that I might be helped.

There is no argument with which I might argue,
nor can I say I committed not (sins) and worked not evil.
And denial, were I to deny - my Protector! - could hardly profit
me.

How could it ever do that?

For all of my members are witness against me for what I have

¹ Cf. Qur'ān VI, 150: "To God belongs the argument conclusive."

done.¹

And I acted with certainty and without any doubt that
 Thou wilt ask me about great affairs,
 and that Thou art the equitable Judge who does no wrong.
 Thy justice is deadly for me and I flee from Thy every just act.
 If thou chastisest me, O my God, it is for my sins after Thy
 argument against me;
 and if Thou pardonest me, it is by Thy clemency, generosity and
 kindness.

“There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly I am one of the wrongdoers” (XXI, 87)

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly I am one of those who pray forgiveness.

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly I am one of those who profess Thy Unity.

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly I am one of the fearful.

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly I am one of those who are afraid.

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly I am one of the hopeful.

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly I am one of those who yearn.

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly, I am one of those who say “There is no god but Thou”.

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly I am one of the petitioners.

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly I am one of the glorifiers.

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee!

Truly I am one of those who magnify.

There is no god but Thou, glory be to Thee, my Lord, and the
 Lord of my fathers, the ancients!

¹ Cf. Qur'ān XLI, 19-20: “Upon the day when God's enemies are mustered to the Fire duly disposed, till when they are come to it, their hearing, their eyes and their skins bear witness against them concerning what they have been doing.”

My God, this is my praise of Thee exalting Thy majesty, my sincerity in remembering Thee by professing Thy unity, and my acknowledgment of Thy bounties by enumeration, even though I acknowledge that I cannot reckon them for their multitude, their abundance, their manifestness and their existence from ancient times until a present in which Thou hast never ceased to care for me through them from when Thou created me and brought me into existence in the beginning of
(my) life,

by enriching from poverty, relieving affliction, bringing ease, removing hardship, dispelling distress, and (giving me) wellbeing in body and soundness in religion.

Were all the world's inhabitants,
both the ancients and the later folk,

to assist me in attempting to mention Thy blessing,
I would not be able, nor would they, to do so.

Holy art Thou and high exalted, a generous, mighty, merciful
Lord.

Thy bounties cannot be reckoned, nor Thy praise accomplished, nor Thy blessings repaid. Bless Muḥammad and the household of Muḥammad, complete Thy blessings upon us and aid us in
Thy obedience.

Glory be to Thee I There is no god but Thou.

O God, truly Thou hearest the destitute,

removest the evil,¹

succourest the afflicted,

healest the sick,

enrichest the poor,

mendest the broken,

hast mercy upon the young and helpst the old.

There is no Support other than Thee and none powerful over
Thee.

And Thou art the Sublime, the Great.

¹ Cf. Qur'ān XXVII, 62: "He who answers the constrained, when he cons unto Him, and removes the evil and appoints you to be successors in the earth."

O Freer of the prisoner in irons!

O Provider of the infant child!

O Protection of the frightened refugee!

O He who has no associate and no assistant!

Bless Muḥammad and the household of Muḥammad, and give me this evening the best of what Thou hast given to and bestowed upon any of Thy servants, whether a blessing Thou assignest, a bounty Thou renewest, a trial Thou avertest, an affliction Thou removest, a prayer Thou hearest, a good deed Thou acceptest or an evil deed Thou overlookest.

Truly Thou art gracious,

Aware of what Thou wilt,

and Powerful over all things!

O God, truly Thou art the nearest of those who are called,
the swiftest of those who answer,

the most generous of those who pardon,

the most openhanded of those who give and the most hearing of
those who are asked of.

O Merciful and Compassionate in this world and the next!

Like Thee none is asked of;

and other than Thee none is hoped for.

I prayed to Thee and Thou answered me,

I asked of Thee and Thou gavest to me,

I set Thee as my quest and Thou hadst mercy upon me,

I depended upon Thee and Thou delivered me,

I took refuge with Thee and Thou sufficed me,

O God, so bless Muḥammad, Thy servant, messenger and prophet, and his good and pure household, all of them.

And complete Thy blessings upon us, gladden us with Thy gift and inscribe us as those who thank Thee and remember Thy bounties.

Amen, amen, O Lord of all beings!

O God, o He who owned and then was all-powerful, was all-powerful and then subjected,

was disobeyed and then veiled (the sin of disobedience),
and was prayed forgiveness and then forgave.

O Goal of yearning seekers and utmost Wish of the hopeful!

O He who "encompasses everything in knowledge" (LXV, 12) and embraces those who seek pardon in tenderness, mercy and clemency!

O God, truly we turn towards Thee this evening,
which Thou honored and glorified through Muḥammad,
Thy prophet and messenger,
the elect of Thy creation,
the faithful guardian of Thy revelation
which bears good tidings and warning
and which is the light-giving lamp¹

which Thou gavest to those who surrender (*al-muslimin*) and appointed as a mercy to the world's inhabitants.²

O God, so bless Muḥammad and the household of Muḥammad, just as Muḥammad is worthy of that from Thee, O Sublime!

So, bless him and his elect, good and pure household,
all of them,

and encompass us in Thy pardon,
for to Thee cry voices in diverse languages.

So appoint for us a share this evening, o God, of every good which Thou dividest among Thy servants,
every light by which Thou guidest,³
every mercy which Thou spreadest,⁴
every blessing which Thou sendest down,
every wellbeing with which Thou clothest
and every provision which Thou outspreadest.⁵

¹ Cf. Qur'ān XLI, 4 and XXXIII, 46.

² Cf. Qur'ān XXI, 107.

³ The symbolism of light and darkness is employed often in the Qur'ān, not to mention its usage in Sufism and philosophy, such as the School of Illumination (*ishrāq*) of Suhrawardi. A good example of Qur'ānic usage is the following: God is the Protector of the believers; He brings them forth from the shadows into the light" (II, 257). There is also the famous "Light Verse" (XXIV, 35), which contains the sentence "God guides to His Light whom He will."

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān XLII, 28.

⁵ Cf. Qur'ān XVII, 30.

O Most merciful of the merciful!

O God, transform us now into men successful, triumphant,
pious, and prosperous.

Set us not among those who despair,
empty us not of Thy mercy,

deprive us nor of that bounty of Thine

for which we hope, and set us not among those deprived of Thy
mercy,

nor those who despair of the bounty of Thy gift for which we
hope.

Reject us not with the disappointed, nor those driven from Thy
door.

O Most Magnanimous of the most magnanimous!

O Most Generous of the most generous!

Toward Thee we have turned having sure faith,
repairing to and bound for Thy Sacred House.¹

So, help is with our holy rites,
perfect for us our pilgrimage,
pardon us,
and give us wellbeing,

for we have extended toward Thee our hands and they are
branded with the abasement of confession.

O God, so give us this evening what we have asked of Thee and
suffice us in that in which we have prayed Thee to suffice us, for
there is none to suffice us apart from Thee and we have no lord
other than Thee.

Put into effect concerning us is Thy decision, encompassing us
is Thy knowledge² and just for us is Thy decree.

Decree for us the good and place us among the people of the
good!

O God make incumbent upon us through Thy magnanimity the
mightiest wage,

the most generous treasure and the lastingness of ease.

¹ Again a reference to the rites performed on the Day of 'Arafah. The "Sacred House" is of course the Ka'bah.

² CL Qur'ān LXV, 12.

Forgive us our sins, all of them,
 destroy us not with those who perish,¹
 and turn not Thy tenderness and mercy away from us,
 O Most Merciful of the merciful!
 O God, place us in this hour among those who ask of Thee and
 to whom Thou givest,
 who thank Thee and whom Thou increasest,²
 who turn to Thee in repentance and whom Thou acceptest³ and
 who renounce all of their sins before Thee and whom Thou
 forgivest,
 O Lord of majesty and splendor!
 O God, purify us, show us the right way and accept our entreaty.
 O Best of those from whom is asked!
 And O Most Merciful of those whose mercy is sought!
 O He from whom is not hidden the eyelids' winking, the eyes'
 glancing, that which rests in the concealed, and that which is
 enfolded in hearts' hidden secrets!
 What, has not all of that been reckoned in Thy knowledge and
 embraced by Thy clemency?
 Glory be to Thee and high indeed art Thou exalted above what
 the evildoers say!
 The seven heavens and the earths and all that is therein praise
 Thee,
 and there is not a thing but hymns Thy praise.⁴

¹ The word "destroy" (*ahlak*, from whose root is derived the word "those who perish", *hālikūn*) is used repeatedly in the Qur'an in reference to God's punishment of the evildoers, especially those of generations and ages past, as a sign and a warning for those present. For example, "Have they not regarded how We destroyed before them many a generation. . ." (VI, 6). See also X, 14; XIX, 98; XXI, 9; etc.

² Cf. Qur'an II, 58: "We will forgive you your sins and will increase (reward) for the right-doers."

³ Cf. Qur'an IX, 104: "God is He who accepts repentance from His servants."

⁴ This sentence is almost a word for word quotation of Qur'an XVII, 44.

So, Thine is the praise, the glory and the exaltation of majesty,
 O Lord of majesty and splendor,
 of bounty and blessing
 and of great favor!
 And Thou art the Magnanimous,
 the Generous,
 the Tender,
 the Compassionate.

O God, give me amply of Thy lawful provision,
 bestow upon me wellbeing in my body and my religion,
 make me safe from fear¹
 and deliver me from the Fire.

O God, devise not against me,²
 lead me not on step by step,³

trick me not⁴ and avert from me the evil of the ungodly among
 jinn and men.

*Then he lifted his head and eyes toward Heaven. Tears were
 flowing from his blessed eyes as if they were two water-skins,
 and he said in a loud voice:*

O Most Hearing of those who hear!

O Most Seeing of those who behold!

O Swiftest of reckoners!⁵

O Most Merciful of the merciful!

Bless Muḥammad and the household of Muḥammad,
 the chiefs,
 the fortunate.

¹ Cf. Qur'ān VII, 4: "Let them serve the Lord of this House who has ... made them safe from fear."

² Cf. Qur'ān III, 54: "And they devised, and God devised, and God is the best of devisers." See also Qur'ān XIII, 42; XXVII, 50, etc.

³ Cf. Qur'ān VII, 182-183: "And those who cry lies to Our signs - step by step We lead them on from whence they know not." See also LXVIII, 44.

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān IV, 142: "The hypocrites seek to trick God, but God is tricking them."

⁵ A divine Name appearing in Qur'ān VI, 62.

And, I ask of Thee, O God, my need.

If Thou grantest it to me,

what Thou holdest back from me will cause me no harm;

and if Thou holdest it back from me,

what Thou grantest me will not profit me.

I ask Thee to deliver me from the Fire.

There is no god but Thou alone,

Thou hast no associate.

Thine is the dominion,

and Thine is the praise,

and Thou art powerful over everything.

O my Lord!

O my Lord!

Then he said, "O my Lord" over and over. Those who had been gathered around him, who had listened to all of his prayer and who had limited themselves to saying "amen" raised their voices in weeping. They stayed in his company until the sun went down, and then all of them loaded their mounts and set out in the direction of the Sacred Monument.¹

B. 'Ali Zayn al-'Ābidīn, the Fourth Imam

i. In Praise of God

Praise belongs to God,

the First without a first before Him

and the Last without a last which might be after Him.

Beholders' eyes fall short of seeing Him and depictees'

imaginings fail to describe Him.

He originated the creatures by His power with an origination

¹ At this point, the compiler remarks that some sources add another section to Imam Ḥusayn's prayer, a section which he then relates himself. Other authorities, such as Majlisiy, express their doubts as to the authenticity of this last section. In fact, it is almost certainly by Ibn 'Abdullāh al-Iskandariy, and therefore I have not translated it here. Readers interested will find a translation in V. Danner, *Ibn Aṭā'illāh's Sufi Aphorisms*, Leiden, 1973, pp. 64-9. See W. Chittick, "A Shādhili Presence in Shi'ite Islam", *Sophia Perennis*, vol. I, no. 1, 1975, pp. 97-100.

and fashioned them according to His desire with a fashioning.
Then He made them walk the path of His will and incited them¹
in the way of His love.

They have no power to keep back from that to which He has put
them forward,

nor can they go forward to that from which He has kept them
back.

He appointed to every soul (*rūḥ*) from among them a known
and determined sustenance from His provision.

No diminisher can diminish (the portion of) whomsoever He
has increased,

and no increaser can increase whomsoever He has diminished.

¹ In *Talkhīṣ al-riyāḍ*, a commentary on the *Ṣaḥīfah* (Tehran, 1381/1961-2, p. 34) al-Sayyid 'Alikhān al-Shīrāzī (d. 1120/1708-9), mentions an objection that some people might be tempted to make here. i.e., that "the pronoun 'them' refers to all creatures, while certain of the creatures are God's enemies, so how should this statement be correct? The answer is that in its essential and primordial nature according to which it was originally created (cf. Qur'ān XXX, 30) every soul loves and seeks the good, and all good flows from God's goodness, just as all existence flows from His Being. Therefore in reality the creatures love only Him, even if their love be in accordance with His Name 'the Outward' and in terms of external beauty and goodness, or worldly station and property, or anything else." Then al-Shīrāzī quotes Ibn al-'Arabī in the *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyah*: "None loves any but his Creator, but He is hidden from him under the veil of Zaynab, Su'ād, Hind and Laylā (names of women), dirhams and dinārs, worldly position, and all that exists in the world, for one of the causes of love is beauty - which belongs only to Him - since beauty incites love through its very nature. Now, 'God is beautiful, and He loves beauty' (a saying of the Prophet), and thus He loves Himself. Another cause of love is virtue (*iḥsān*), and virtue is only perfect when it comes from God: None is virtuous but God (*lā muḥsin illallāh*). So if you love beauty, you love none other than God, for He is the Beautiful; and if you love virtue, you love none other than He, for He is the Virtuous. In every case, the object of love is none other than God." This is one of the themes of the *Lama'āt* of Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī, translated by W. C. Chittick and P. L. Wilson, New York, forthcoming.

Then He set for every soul a fixed term in life and appointed for him a determined end.

He walks towards it in the days of his life and overtakes through the years of his destiny until,

when he accomplishes his final act and closes his life's account,

He seizes him for that towards which He had called him, either His abundant reward or His terrible punishment,

"That He may reward those who do evil with that which they have done,

and reward those who do good with goodness" (LIII., 31), as justice from Him. Holy are His Names and manifest His bounties!

"He shall not be questioned as to what He does, but they will be questioned" (XXI, 23)

And praise belongs to God,

for, had He held back from His servants the knowledge to praise Him for the repeated favors with which He tries them¹ and the

abundant blessings which He lavishes upon them, they would have made free use of His favors without praising

Him

and taken ease in His provision without thanking Him.

And had it been so,

they would have left the conditions of humanity for those of beastliness.

They would have been as He described in the clear text of His Book:²

"They are but as the cattle nay, but they are farther astray!" (XXV, 44).

And praise belongs to God for what He has made known to us of Himself,

for the gratitude towards Him which He has inspired in us,

¹ Cf. Qur'an LIX, 15-166: "As for man, whenever his Lord tries him, and honors him, and blesses him, then he says, 'My Lord has honored me'."

² On the meaning of "clear text of His Book", see above, p. 56, note 48.

for the doors of the knowledge of His lordship which He has
 opened for us,
 for the sincerity towards Him in professing His Unity to which
 He has guided us,
 and for the heresy and doubt concerning Him¹ which He has
 averted from us;
 a praise whereby we may be given long life among those of His
 Creatures who praise Him and outstrip those who outstrip
 toward His good pleasure and pardon;
 a praise whereby the darkness of the Interval² may be lit for us,
 the Path of the Resurrection³ smoothed for us and our positions
 at the Stations of the Witnesses⁴ made eminent on the day when
 "every soul will be compensated for what it has earned; they
 shall not be wronged" (XLV, 22);
 "the day a master shall avail nothing a client, and they shall not
 be helped" (XLIV, 41);
 a praise which will ascend from us to the most exalted of the
 'Ilīyyīn,⁵ in "a book inscribed, witnessed by those brought nigh"

¹ Literally, "concerning His affair (*amr*)". Al-Shīrāziy explains "His affairs" as meaning "either the knowledge of His nature and attributes, or of His religion and *Sharī'ah*" (p. 56).

² Here the Interval or "isthmus" (*barzakh*) refers to the time between death and resurrection. It is referred to in Qur'ān XXIII, too: "And beyond them is an Interval until the day when they are raised." See *Shī'ite Islam*, pp. 164-5; also the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (new edition), vol. I, pp. 1071-2.

³ According to a *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet, "Verily the passage from the grave to the Plain of Gathering (*'arāḍat al-maḥshar*) on the Day of Resurrection will be burdensome for some people and smooth for others" (quoted by al-Shīrāziy, p. 62).

⁴ The Stations of the Witnesses (*mawāqif al-ashhād*) are the stations of angels, prophets, Imams and believers who at the Resurrection act as witnesses over the deeds performed by men during their earthly lives. These Witnesses are referred to in Qur'ān XI, 18 and XL, 51.

⁵ 'Ilīyyūn, mentioned in Qur'ān LXXXIII, 18 and 19, is variously interpreted. For example, it is said to be the highest level of heaven, or a place in the seventh heaven where the souls of believers are taken after their death, or the book in the seventh heaven in which

(LXXXIII, 20-21);

a praise whereby our eyes may be at rest when vision is confounded¹ and our faces whitened when skins are blackened;²

a praise whereby we may be delivered from God's painful Fire unto God's noble proximity;

a praise whereby we may rival the angels stationed nigh unto Him and join the prophets sent by Him in the Abode of Everlasting Life which does not remove, and in the place of His Honor which does not change.

And praise belongs to God, who chose for us the good qualities of creation and granted us the good things of provision.³

He assigned to us excellence through domination over all creation.

Each of His creatures submits to us through His power and becomes obedient to us through His might.⁴

And praise belongs to God,
who locked to us the door of need except toward Himself.
So how can we voice His praise?

are written the deeds of angels and of righteous men and jinn.

¹ Cf. Qur'ān LXXV, 7 ff.: "But when sight is confounded and the moon is eclipsed and sun and moon are united, on that day man will cry: Whither to flee?"

² Cf. Qur'ān III, 106: "The day when some faces are blackened, and some faces whitened. As for those whose faces are blackened - 'Did you disbelieve after you had believed? Then taste the chastisement for that you disbelieved.'"

³ Cf. Qur'ān XL, 64: "And He shaped you, and shaped you well, and provided you with the good thing."

⁴ Besides the many Qur'ānic verses which point to man's "central" position in the Universe because of his capacity as viceregent or caliph of God, the being who partakes of all of the divine Names and Attributes, there are many other verses indicating one of the major results of his special rank: his dominion over all of the Universe. For example: "And He subjected to you the night and day, and the sun and moon" (XVI, 12); "Have you not seen how God has subjected to you whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth?" (XXXI, 20). See also XIV, 32-33; XXII, 65, etc.

And when can we thank Him? Nay, when?¹
 And praise belongs to God,
 who set in us the organs of expansion,
 appointed for us the instruments of contraction,²
 gave us to enjoy the spirits of life,³
 set firm within us the limbs of action,
 nourished us with the good things of provision,
 enriched us with His bounty and contented us with his favors.¹

¹ The Arabic reads "*lā-matā*", which according to al-Shirāziy can be interpreted in two ways: either it means "Nay (it is impossible to thank Him), when (could it be possible?)", or "(It is) not (correct to say) when, (for that implies that it is possible to thank Him)" (p. 75).

² According to al-Shirāziy, the reference is to the expansion and contraction of the organs of the body, such as nerves, muscles, veins, arteries, flesh, etc. (p. 75).

³ Or "breaths of life". Al-Shirāziy comments: "*Arwāh*" may be the plural of *rūh*, meaning spirit, in which case the meaning is explained by the tradition transmitted from Imams 'Alī, al-Bāqir and al-Šādiq: 'There are five (spirits) possessed by Those Brought Nigh (cf. Qur'ān LVI, 11): the spirit of sanctity, through which they know all things; the spirit of faith, through which they worship God; the spirit of power, through which they wage holy war against enemies and attend to their livelihood; the spirit of passion, through which they partake in the joy of food and marriage; and the spirit of the body, through which they move and advance. There are four spirits possessed by the Companions of the Right (Qur'ān LVI, 8), since they lack the spirit of sanctity; and there are three possessed by the Companions of the Left (Qur'ān LVI, 8) and beasts, since they lack (the spirit of sanctity and) the spirit of faith.

"*Arwāh*" may also be the plural of *rawh*, which is a 'breath of wind'. The arteries of the body possess two movements, contractive and expansive. It is their function to draw 'smoky' vapors from the heart with their contractive movement and to attract with their expansive movement fresh and pure breaths of air, through which the heart is refreshed and its natural heat is drawn from it. By means of this 'breath of wind' the animal faculty and the natural heat are diffused throughout the body. Thus, this breath of wind by which the heart refreshes itself is the 'breath of life'. If it is cut off from the heart for a period of time, life also will be cut off from it" (p. 75).

Then He commanded us in order to test our obedience and
prohibited us in order to try our gratitude.²

So we deviated from the path of His command and journeyed in
the trackless wastes of His prohibitions.³

But He hastened us not to punishment⁴
and sped us not to His vengeance.

Nay, He was patient with us in His mercy,
through kindness, and He awaited our return in His tenderness,
through clemency.

And praise belongs to God,
who guided us to repentance,

which we never would have gained save through His bounty.

Were we to count as His bounty it alone,
our benefit⁵ from Him would have been fair,

His goodness with us great and His bounty toward us vast.

And such was not His wont with repentance in the case of those
who went before us.⁶

¹ Cf. Qur'ān LIII, 48: "And that He it is who enriches and contents."

² Al-Shīrāziy quotes here a tradition of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq: "Gratitude for blessings is to avoid what is forbidden" (p. 77).

³ Al-Shīrāziy explains that "path" is used in the singular and "trackless wastes" in the plural because the "straight path" is one, while the ways of going astray are many: "This is My straight path, so follow it. Follow not other ways, lest ye be parted from His way" (Qur'ān VI, 154).

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān X, 12: "If God should hasten unto men evil (i.e., punishment), as they would hasten good, their term would be already decided for them."

⁵ *Balā'*, translated here as "benefit", usually means "test", "trial", or "misfortune", but here it is used as in Qur'ān VIII, 17, which Arberry, following the commentators, translates that He might confer on the believers a fair benefit." See al-Shīrāziy, p. 81.

⁶ According to al-Shīrāziy (p. 81), this is a reference to the difference between God's "wont" (*sunnah*) concerning repentance with the Muslims and His wont with the Jews. From the former He only asks regret (*al-nadam*), but from the latter in addition to regret He also asks "killing of themselves" (*qatl anfusihim*) as indicated in Qur'ān II, 54: "And when Moses said unto his people: O my people!

Assuredly He lifted from us that which we have not the strength
to bear¹
and He charges us not save to our capacity.²
He imposes upon us only ease³
and has left none of us with an argument or excuse.⁴
So perished is he among us who perishes in spite of Him.⁵
and felicitous is he among us who lets Him be his quest.
And praise belongs to God to the extent of all that He is praised

Ye have wronged yourselves by your choosing of the calf (for worship) so turn in repentance to your Creator; and kill yourselves."

¹ Cf. Qur'ān II, 286: "Our Lord! Lay not on us such a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us! Our Lord! Impose not on us that which we have not the strength to bear!"

² Cf. Qur'ān II, 196. "God charges no soul save to its capacity." According to al-Shirāziy, this sentence is a reference to the obligations which - according to Muslim beliefs - God imposed upon the Jews, such as, "the performance of fifty canonical prayers per day, the payment of one-fourth of their property in alms. Also, it is a reference to the verse, "For the evil-doing of those of Jewry, We have forbidden them certain good things that were permitted to them" (Qur'ān IV, 160). See al-Shirāziy, pp. 82-83.

³ Cf. such Qur'ānic verses as, "He has chosen you and has not laid upon you in religion any hardship" (XXII, 78).

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān IV, 165: "Messengers of good cheer and warning, in order that mankind might have no argument against God after the messengers"; and LXVI, 7: "O ye who disbelieve! Make no excuses for yourselves this day. Ye are only being paid for what ye used to do."

⁵ "In spite of Him" (*'alayh*) is explained by al-Shirāziy as meaning, "In spite of God's disliking (that he should perish), for He is not pleased that any of His servants should perish. Thus it is that He spreads His mercy over them and hurries them not to punishment for their sins. Rather He is patient with them in His mercy and waits for their return in His kindness. He opens for them the door of repentance, lifts from them that which they have not the strength to bear and charges them only to their capacity. So it is as if whoever perishes because of his evil deeds after all of this does so in spite of the fact that God does not want him to do so" (p. 84)

by those of His angels nearest to Him,
 His creatures noblest in His sight
 and His praisers most pleasing to Him,
 a praise which surpasses other praises as our Lord surpasses all
 of His creation.

Then to Him belongs praise in place of His every blessing upon
 us and upon all of His servants,
 those gone and those remaining,
 to the number of all things His knowledge encompasses,
 and in place of every one of these blessings,
 whose number will be doubled and redoubled always and
 forever until the Day of Resurrection;
 a praise whose confines have no limit,
 whose number has no reckoning,
 whose extremity is never reached and whose term is never
 interrupted;¹

a praise which may prove a way to reach His obedience and
 pardon,
 a means to His good-pleasure,
 a cause of His forgiveness,
 a path to His Paradise,
 a guard against His vengeance,
 a sanctuary from His wrath,
 an aid to obeying Him,
 a barrier against disobeying Him
 and a help toward carrying out our duties and obligations
 toward Him;

a praise which may give us the good fortune to be among His
 felicitous Friends,²

¹ Al-Shirāziy points out that the Imam first gives the Day of Resurrection as the outer limit of His praise, then as a sort of admonition lest he be misunderstood extends it in conformity with Him who is praised. In the same way in another prayer he says, "A praise eternal (*khālid*) with Thy Eternity" (p. 88).

² The term "friend" (*walī*) of God, referred to for example in the verse, "He befriends the righteous" (VIII, 90), is interpreted in many ways. According to certain theologians the *walī* is a person whose

and by which we may enter the ranks of those martyred¹ by the
swords of His enemies.

Surely He is a protecting Friend, Praiseworthy.²

2. Prayer for the Morning and Evening

Praise belongs to God,
who created the night and the day by His strength,
differentiated them by His power
and appointed for each of them a determined limit and an
extended term.³

He makes each of them enter into its companion
and makes its companion enter into it,⁴
as an ordainment from Him for His servants in that which He
feeds them and with which He causes them to grow.
So He created for them the night that they might repose in it
from toilsome movements and fatiguing activities.⁵
He made it a garment that they might clothe themselves in His

belief is sound, who performs his religious duties and who as a result has attained proximity to God. In Sufism, the term takes on a technical meaning and is often translated as "saint". See al-Shirāziy, pp. 91-92.

¹ According to a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet related through the sixth Imam, "Beyond every one who possesses piety, there are other pious acts, until he is killed in the path of God: when he has been killed in the path of God, there is no further act of piety" (al-Shirāziy, p. 93). See also such Qur'ānic verses as III, 157; III, 169 and IV, 74.

² Al-Shirāziy remarks, "The appropriateness of terminating this prayer, which is dedicated to praise, with the name 'Praiseworthy' is obvious" (p. 93)

³ Cf. Qur'ān XXXVI, 39: "It is not for the sun to overtake the moon, nor does the night outstrip the day."

⁴ Cf. Qur'ān XXXV, 13: "He makes the night enter into the day and He makes the day enter into the night." The same or similar verses occur several times in the Qur'ān, including 111, 27; XXII, 61; XXXI, 29; and LVII, 6.

⁵ Reference to Qur'ān X, 68 and several identical or similar verses: "It is He who made for you the night to repose in it."

rest and His sleep,¹

that it might be for them refreshment and strength,
and that they might attain in it pleasure and passion.

And He created for them the day to see that they might seek something of His bounty within it² gain access to His provision and spread freely on His earth searching for that wherein lies the attainment of the immediate things of this world and the acquisition of the deferred things of the world to come.

With all of this He sets them aright,

tries their tidings,³

and observes how they are in the times (set apart) for obeying Him,

the stages of what He has obligated (upon them)

and the situations in which His laws apply,

“That He may reward those who do evil with that which they have done,

and reward those who do good with goodness” (LIII, 31).

O God, so to Thee belongs the praise for the sky which Thou splittest into dawn for us,⁴

the light of the day which Thou givest us to enjoy thereby,

the places for seeking sustenance Thou makest us to see

and the striking of maladies from which Thou protectest us therein.

We and all things, all together, enter upon the morning

belonging to Thee

the heaven and the earth,

what Thou hast scattered in each of them,⁵

¹ Cf. Qur’ān XXV, 47: “It is He who appointed the night for you to be a garment and sleep for a rest...” and another similar verses.

² Cf. Qur’ān XVII, 12: “We made the sign of the day to see, and that you may seek bounty from your Lord” and other similar verses.

³ Cf. Qur’ān XLVII, 31: “And We shall assuredly try you until We know those of you who struggle and are steadfast, and try your tidings.”

⁴ Cf. Qur’ān VI, 97: “He splits the sky into dawn...”

⁵ Cf. Qur’ān XLV, 3-4: “Surely in the heavens and the earth there are signs for the believers; and in your creation, and the crawling things

whether at rest or in motion, stationary or journeying,
 what ascends into the air and what is hidden beneath the
 ground.

We enter upon the morning in Thy grasp.
 Thy dominion and power encompass us
 and Thy will embraces us.

We conduct ourselves according to Thy command¹
 and we go about our business under Thy direction.
 Nothing belongs to us of the matter except as Thou hast
 decreed,

and nothing of the good except as Thou hast given.
 This is a fresh, new day, and it is a ready witness over us,
 If we do good, it will bid farewell to us in praise,
 and if we do evil, it will part from us in blame.²

O God, bless Muḥammad and his household,
 provide us with the fair companionship of this day
 and protect us from parting with it badly,
 whether by committing an offence or perpetrating a minor or
 major sin.³

He scatters abroad, there are signs for a people having sure faith."

¹ Al-Shirāziy points out that "command" (*amr*) here means the "ontological (*takwīnī*) command" (p. 217). Philosophers and theologians distinguish this, which refers to the laws of creation and which all must obey by the very nature of things, from the "legislative (*tashrī'ī*) command", which refers to the laws set down by God in revelation and which man can obey or disobey according to his own free will. The "ontological command" is referred to in such verses as: "His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it 'Be', and it is" (XXXVI, 81).

² Al-Shirāziy quotes a tradition from the sixth Imam: "No day comes upon the son of Adam without saying to him, 'O son of Adam, I am a new day and I am a witness against thee. So speak good in me and work good in me, and I shall witness for thee upon the Day of Resurrection, for after this thou shalt never see me again'" (p. 218).

³ The distinction between minor (*ṣaghīrah*) and major (*kabīrah*) sins is much discussed in Islamic theology. For a sample of Shī'ite views, see al-Shirāziy, pp. 219-223.

Within it grant us abundant good deeds
and empty us of evil deeds.

Between its two extremes cause us to be filled with praise,
thanksgiving, reward, provision (for the world to come), bounty
and good-doing.

O God, ease our burden on the Noble Writers,¹
fill our pages with our good deeds,²
and abase us not before them with our evil deeds.

O God, in each of the hours of the day
appoint for us a portion of Thy servants,³
a share of thankfulness toward Thee
and a faithful witness from Thy angels.

O God, bless Muḥammad and his household,

¹ The angels who write down the deeds of men are referred to in Qur'ān LXXXII, 10-11: "Yet there are over you watchers noble, writers who know whatever you do." In explaining what is meant by "Ease our burdens on them", al-Shirāziy quotes the celebrated Safavid theologian, Shaykh Bahā'ī: "This is an allusion to seeking protection with God from excessive talk and from excessive occupation with what entails neither worldly nor other-worldly gain: then the Noble Writers will have fewer of our words and deeds to record." The Prophet said, "I am astonished at the son of Adam: his two angels are on his shoulders, his speech is their pen and his saliva their ink. How can he speak of that which does not concern him?" (p. 224)

² Cf. Qur'ān LXXXI, especially 10-14: "And when the pages are laid open, and when the sky is torn away, and when hell is ignited, and when the garden is brought nigh, (then) every soul will know what it has made ready."

³ According to al-Shirāziy the meaning is, "Appoint for us some of Thy servants that we may seek illumination through their lights and follow in their tracks." He adds a long discussion of the elevated position of the "servant" (*abd*), noting that in his highest form he is even more exalted than the messenger. This is the reason for the word order of the formula which every Muslim repeats in his canonical prayers: "Muḥammad is His servant and His messenger". Al-Shirāziy also points out that some manuscripts read "servanthood" (*ibādah*) for "servants" (*ibād*) and that this is more in keeping with the context (pp. 227-8).

and safeguard us from before us and behind us and from our
right hands and our left hands and from all directions,¹
with a safeguarding that will protect against disobedience to
Thee,

guide unto Thy obedience and engender Thy love.

O God, bless Muḥammad and his household,
and give us success today and tonight and in all of our days to

work for good,

abandon evil,

give thanks for blessings,

follow traditions (*sunan*),

avoid innovation, .

enjoin the right,

forbid the wrong,²

defend Islam,

diminish falsehood and abase it,

aid the truth and exalt it,

guide those who are astray,

help the weak and extend a hand to the distressed.

O God, bless Muḥammad and his household,
and make this day the most blessed day we have known,
the most excellent companion we have accompanied
and the best time we have passed.

Place us among the most satisfied of all Thy creatures
whom night and day have passed by,
the most thankful for the blessings Thou has vouchsafed,
the firmest in the injunctions Thou hast promulgated
and the most scrupulous in what Thou hast warned against in
Thy prohibitions.

O God, surely I call Thee to witness

¹ This is a reference to the words of Satan in the Qur'ān: "Then I shall come on them from before them and from behind them and from their right hands and their left hands, Thou wilt not find most of them thankful" (VII, 17)

² *Al-amr bi'l-mā'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-munkar*, according to Shi'ites, is one of the pillars of Islam, and a command which is repeated many times in the Qur'ān, such as VII, 157, and IX, 71.

and Thou art sufficient witness¹
 and I call to witness Thy heaven and Thy earth
 and whomsoever Thou makest to dwell in them
 of Thy angels and Thy other creatures,
 on this day, at this hour, in this night and within this my abode
 that I testify that Thou art God,
 there is no god but Thou,
 upholding justice,²
 equitable in judgment,
 tender to servants,
 Master of the dominion,³
 merciful to creatures;
 and that Muḥammad is Thy servant and Thy messenger
 and he whom Thou hast chosen from among Thy creatures.
 Thou didst charge him with Thy message and he delivered it,⁴
 Thou didst command him to counsel his community
 and he counseled it.
 O God, so bless Muḥammad and his household
 the most Thou hast blessed any of Thy creatures.
 Bestow upon him on our behalf the most excellent of what Thou
 hast given any of Thy servants,
 and recompense him in our stead with the most excellent
 and generous recompense that Thou hast given any of Thy
 prophets on behalf of his community.
 Truly, Thou art All-gracious with immense blessings,
 the Forgiver of great sins,
 and Thou art more compassionate than every possessor of

¹ The verse "God is sufficient witness" occurs several times in the Qur'ān, such as IV, 79; X, 29, etc.

² These two lines are an almost word for word quotation from Qur'ān III, 18.

³ A divine Name occurring in Qur'ān III, 26.

⁴ Cf. such verses as the following: "Say: 'Obey God and obey the Messenger; then if you turn away, only upon him rests what is laid on him... It is only for the Messenger to deliver the Message'" (XXIV, 34)

compassion.

So bless Muḥammad and his household,
the virtuous, the pure, the most excellent and noble.

C. Muḥammad al-Mahdī, the Twelfth Imam

Prayer for the month of Rajab

Shaykh al-Ṭūsiy has related that this noble writing came out of the Sacred Precinct on the hand of that great Shaykh, Abū-Ja'far Muḥammad ibn 'Uthmān ibn Sa'id¹ - may God be pleased with him. Recite it on each day of the month of Rajab.

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate
O God, I ask Thee by the meaning of all that by which Thou art
called upon by those who govern with Thy authority:

those who are entrusted with Thy mystery,
welcome Thy command,
extol Thy power,
and proclaim Thy majesty.

I ask Thee by Thy will which speaks within them,
for Thou hast appointed them mines for Thy words,
and pillars of the profession of Thy Unity,
Thy signs and Thy stations,
which are never interrupted in any place.
Through them knows he who knows Thee.

There is no difference between Thee and them,
save that they are Thy servants and Thy creation,
their doing and undoing is in Thy hand,
their origin is from Thee and their return is to Thee.

They are aides, witnesses, testers, defenders, protectors and
searchers.

With them Thou filled Thy heaven and Thy earth until it became
manifest that there is no god but Thou.

So I ask Thee by (all of) that,
and by the positions of Thy mercy's might
and by Thy Stations and Marks

¹ The second of the Twelfth Imam's four deputies, referred to in the introduction to Part III, p. 92.

that Thou bless Muḥammad and His household
and increase me in faith and steadfastness.

O Inward in His outwardness
and Outward in His inwardness and hiddenness!

O Separator of light and darkness!

O described by other than (His) Essence
and well-known in other than (His) likeness!

Delimitator of every delimited thing!

Witness of all that is witnessed!

Bringer into existence of every existent!

Counter of everything counted!

Depriver of all that is deprived!

There is none worshipped but Thou,
Possessor of Grandeur and Generosity!

O He who is not conditioned by "how"
or determined by "where!"

O veiled from every eye!

O Everlasting!

O eternally Self-subsistent and Knower of all that is known!
Bless Muḥammad and his household and Thy elect servants,

Thy mankind in veils,¹

Thy angels brought nigh,

and the untold multitudes (of angels) set in ranks
and encircling (the Throne).²

And bless us in this our venerated and honored month
and the sacred months that follow it.

In it bestow blessings upon us copiously,

make large our portions,

and fulfill for us (our) oaths,

by Thy most tremendous,

most tremendous, greatest and noblest Name,

¹ I.e., "normal" men, who are veiled from and ignorant of God's true nature.

² *Al-Sāffin*, the angels "who set the ranks", are referred to in Qur'an XXXVII, 165; and *al-ḥāffin* are referred to in XXXIX, 75: "And thou shalt see the angels encircling about the Throne proclaiming the praise of their Lord."

which Thou placed upon the day, and it brightened,
and upon the night, and it darkened.
And forgive us that of ourselves which Thou knowest and we
know not,
preserve us from sins with the best of preservations,
suffice us with the sufficiencies of Thy determination,
favor us with Thy fair regard,
leave us not to other than Thee,
hold us not back from Thy goodness,
bless us in the lifespans Thou hast written for us,
set aright for us the inmost center of our hearts,
give us protection from Thee,¹
cause us to act with the fairest of faith,
and bring us to the month of fasting²
and the days and years that come after it,
O Lord of Majesty and Splendor!

¹ This recalls the Prophet's supplication: "I seek refuge in Thy forgiveness from Thy punishment, I seek refuge in Thy approval from Thy anger, I seek refuge in Thee from Thee!"

² In the Islamic calendar, Rajab is followed by Sha'bān and then the month of fasting, or Rayḍān, which is considered to be the holiest and most blessed month of the year.

THE TWELVE IMAMS

The word "*imam*" in Arabic means "leader". In Islamic terminology it generally refers to any person who leads others in prayer. According to the early Sunni theologians, *the Imam* is the leader of the Islamic community, and his function is to enforce the revealed Law or Shari`ah. As such the term is equivalent to "caliph". In Sunnism it may also be an honorific term, given to certain important religious leaders, such as Imam Shāfi`iy, founder of one of the four Sunni schools of law. In Twelve-Imam Shī`ism it has two important meanings. As in Sunnism, the leader of others in prayer is called an "imam", especially the person who performs this function on a regular basis in a mosque. But more specifically, an Imam is one of the twelve successors of the Prophet listed below.

The specific meaning given to the word "Imam" in Shī`ism can not be understood until one grasps the basic difference between the Sunni and Shī`ite branches of Islam. The roots of this difference are to be found in the differing views held by the companions of the Prophet concerning the nature of his successor or caliph. The Prophet himself performed three basic functions: He acted as the means whereby a celestial book, the Qur`ān, was revealed by God to mankind. Thus he was the founder of a world religion. He was also the ruler of the early Islamic community, which means that he enforced the Shari`ah which God had revealed through the Qur`ān. Finally, he was the possessor of spiritual illumination and vision, and as such he could interpret the inner meaning of the Revelation and guide men upon the ascending stages of the path of spiritual perfection.

According to the majority of Muslims, the Sunnis, the successor of the Prophet must fulfill only one of these functions, i.e., he should enforce the Shari`ah. Muḥammad had been the last

¹ For a detailed account, see *Shī`ite Islam*.

Prophet, so there could be no prophet after him. And there was no way the community could guarantee that his successors would possess spiritual vision and illumination, for like prophecy, these things are divinely bestowed (although unlike prophecy, they could still be possessed by men). But undoubtedly, the Prophet's successor could act as a ruler and enforce the Shari'ah. In fact, the earthly existence of Islam largely depended upon this function being fulfilled, particularly at its beginning. Finally, the Sunnis held that the Prophet had not appointed a successor during his lifetime, so it was up to them to choose one.

But the minority group, known as the "Shi'ites" (the "partisans" of 'Alī!), maintained that the Prophet's successor must not only enforce the Shari'ah, he must also possess divinely illuminated wisdom and be the spiritual guide of men. Since this latter function is bestowed by God and cannot be judged by the majority of men, the Prophet's successor must be divinely appointed, as expressed in the Prophet's wishes. And the Shi'ites hold that the Prophet had in fact appointed 'Alī as his caliph.¹

This difference in view between the Shi'ites and Sunnis was often expressed in political terms, resulting in a good deal of strife in the early centuries of Islam between certain Shi'ite groups and the Umayyad and 'Abbāsīd caliphs. For, as far as the Shi'ites were concerned, the Imams were the only completely legitimate successors to the Prophet. The first, 'Alī, was appointed by the Prophet himself, and each in turn was appointed by his predecessor according to divine decree.

¹ For a profound and illuminating explanation of the basic difference between perspective represented by Sunnism and Shi'ism, see F. Schuon, *Islam and the Perennial Philosophy*, London, 1976, ch. 5.

Fāṭimah

The beloved daughter of the Prophet from Khadījah, Fāṭimah was born in Mecca five years before the beginning of the Prophet's mission. She was so loved by the Prophet that he called her "a part of me." In 2/624 she married `Alī ibn Abī-Ṭālib from whom she bore three sons, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn and Muḥsin (who died stillborn), and two daughters, Zaynab and Umm-Kulthūm. She was at the Prophet's bedside at the moment of his death and fought for her husband's succession to the caliphate. She died six months after her father in the year 11/633 and is buried in the Baqī` cemetery in Medina. It is said that when she was born the whole sky became illuminated; therefore she is called al-Zahrā', the "Radiant." She is the mother of the Shī`ite Imams and is considered the most holy of Muslim women.

The Imams

I. The First Imam, `Alī (b. A.D. 600, d. A.H. 40/A.D. 661)

He was the son of the Prophet's paternal uncle, Abū-Ṭālib, who had raised the Prophet like his own son and protected him after he declared his mission. According to the Shī`ites, `Alī was the first to accept the new religion at the hands of the Prophet, at the age of ten. He was the greatest warrior of early Islam, and according to his partisans was appointed by the Prophet as his successor at a place known as "Ghadīr Khumm". He became the fourth Sunni caliph, the last of the "Rightly-Guided Caliphs", after the death of `Uthmān. He was finally assassinated by followers of the Khawārij (an early schismatic sect), after five years as caliph. He is buried in Najaf in Iraq.

II. The Second Imam, al-Ḥasan (3/62-50/670)

He was the elder son of `Alī by the Prophet's daughter Fāṭimah. He laid claim to the caliphate for some six months after the death of his father, but was finally forced to surrender it to Mu`āwiyah. For the rest of his life he lived in Medina in seclusion. He is buried in the Baqī` cemetery in Medina.

III. The Third Imam, al-Ḥusayn (4/62-61/680)

The younger son of `Alī by Fāṭimah, like his brother he lived most of his life quietly in Medina under the watchful eyes of the caliph's officials and spies. When Mu`āwiyah's son Yazīd became caliph, he demanded allegiance from al-Ḥusayn, who refused to give it. Finally, al-Ḥusayn felt it necessary to go into battle against Yazīd to protest against the injustices which were being carried out in the name of Islam. He and a small group of followers including most of his immediate family were cruelly massacred at Karbalā'. The day of his martyrdom (`Āshūrā') has become the most solemn day of the Shī'ite calendar, marked by processions and universal mourning. Its celebration symbolizes the whole ethos of Shī'ism. He is buried in Karbalā' in Iraq.

IV. The Fourth Imam, `Alī, known as Zayn al-`Ābidīn and al-Sajjād (38/658-95/712)

The son of Imam al-Ḥusayn by the daughter of Yazdigird, the last Sassanid king of Iran, he was not able to carry arms at Karbalā' because of illness, and thus he was saved the fate of his three brothers. For most of his life he lived in seclusion in Medina, having contact with only a few select followers. His piety - which is reflected in his collected prayers, *al-Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah* - is proverbial. He is buried in the Baqī' cemetery in Medina.

V. The Fifth Imam, Muḥammad, known as al-Bāqir (57/675-114/732)

The son of the fourth Imam, he was present at Karbalā' at a young age. Because of changing political and religious conditions, among them the general revulsion following the events at Karbalā', many people came to Medina to learn the religious and spiritual sciences from him. He trained numerous well-known men of religion, and mainly for this reason is the first Imam after `Alī from whom large numbers of traditions are recorded. He is buried in the Baqī' cemetery in Medina.

VI. The Sixth Imam, Ja`far, known as al-Şādiq (83/702-148/765)

The son of the fifth Imam, he lived in an increasingly favorable climate and was able to teach openly in Medina. Large numbers of scholars gathered around him to learn, including such famous Sunni figures as Abū-Ḥanīfah, the founder of one of the four Sunni schools of law. Towards the end of Imam Ja`far's life, severe restrictions were placed upon his activities, as a result of growing Shī`ite unrest. More traditions are recorded from him than from all the other Imams together. He is so important for Twelve-Imam Shī`ite law that it is named the "Ja`far School" after him. He is buried in the Baqī` cemetery in Medina.

VII. The Seventh Imam, Mūsā, entitled al-Kāzim. (128/744-183/799)

The son of the sixth Imam, he was contemporary with such Abbasid caliphs as al-Manşūr and Hārūn al-Rashīd. He lived most of his life in Medina with severe restrictions placed upon him and finally died in prison in Baghdad. After him, the Imams were often not able to live in their traditional home of Medina, but were forced to remain near the caliph in Baghdad or Sāmarrā`. He is buried in Kāzimayn in Iraq.

The Eighth Imam, `Alī, known as al-Riḍā. (148/765-203/817)

The son of the seventh Imam, he lived in a period when the Abbasids were faced with increasing difficulties because of Shī`ite revolts. Finally the caliph al-Ma`mūn thought he would solve the problem by naming the Imam as his own successor, hoping thus to ensnare him in worldly affairs and turn the devotion of his followers away from him. After finally being able to persuade al-Riḍā to accept, al-Ma`mūn realized his mistake, for Shī`ism began to spread even more rapidly. Finally, he is said to have had the Imam poisoned. Al-Riḍā is buried in Mashhad in Iran.

**IX. The Ninth Imam, Muḥammad, known as al-Taḳī
(195/809-220/835)**

The son of the eighth Imam, he was given the daughter of the caliph al-Ma'mūn in marriage and for a time was kept by the caliph in Baghdad. But he was able to return to Medina until the end of al-Ma'mūn's reign. The new caliph, al-Mu'taṣim, summoned him back to Baghdad where he died. He is buried in Kāzimayn in Iraq.

**X. The Tenth Imam, 'Alī, known as al-Naqī (212/827-
254/868)**

The son of the ninth Imam, he remained in Medina teaching the religious sciences until 243/857, when he was summoned to Sāmarrā' by the caliph al-Mutawakkil. There he was treated harshly by the caliph and his successors until he died. He is buried in Sāmarrā'.

**XI. The Eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan, called al-'Askarī
(232/845-260/872)**

The son of the tenth Imam, he lived in close confinement in Sāmarrā' under the watchful eye of the caliph, especially since it was known that the Shi'ites were awaiting his son, the twelfth Imam, who was to be the promised Mahdī or "guided one", destined to remove injustice from the world. The eleventh Imam married the daughter of the Byzantine emperor, Nargis Khātūn, who, following instructions given her in a dream, had sold herself into slavery to become his wife. He is buried in Sāmarrā'.

**XII. The Twelfth Imam, Muḥammad, known as al-Mahdī (b.
256/868)**

The twelfth Imam lived in hiding under the protection and tutelage of his father until the latter's death. Then he went into "occultation". In other words, he became hidden from the eyes of ordinary men and appeared only to his Deputies (see p. 92.) In the year 329/939 his "greater occultation" began. It will continue as long as God wills, but when he does appear once again, he will erase evil and injustice from the world.

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The present work hopes to redress partially the lack of accessible and reliable English language material pertaining to shīsm. This work is a series a series of books destined to bring to the English - speaking world accurate information of writings by authentic shī'ite representatives and of some of the traditional sources which, along with the quran, form the foundation of shī'ite Islam. The purpose of this series is to present shī'ism as living reality as it has been and as it is, in both its doctrinal and historical aspects. thereby we can reveal yet another dimension of the Islamic tradition and make better known the richness of Islam's revelation in its historical unfolding, which could have been willed only Providence.



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