

Rationality of **ISLAM**



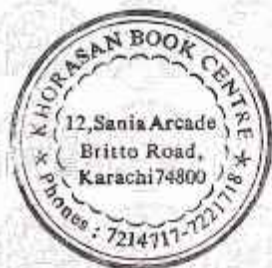
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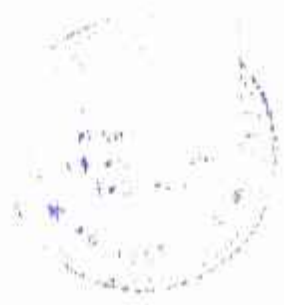
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Rationality of Islam

By A Group of Scholars

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RATIONALITY OF ISLAM

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ABOUT OURSELVES

An alert mind today notices a change in the intellectual life of man. Science and technology with their wondrous achievements seem to have reached their zenith. Material needs together with the passion for authority and supremacy have led man towards an apparent bankruptcy of the moral values. In this desperate situation one is forced to pause and reassess the potential dangers threatening mankind as a whole. Man, has once again set his eyes on Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful as he has now realized that the solution to his problems and his ultimate salvation lies in following the Divine commandments.

This shift from the material to the spiritual thinking is fully in keeping with the aims and objects of the Islamic Seminary. Religious precepts, abreast with the developments of our time, provide the much-needed sanctuary for the troubled and anxious mind. It is a result of increasing awareness, that it is being realized that the secret of living a virtuous life in this world leads to the eternal bliss of life in the Hereafter. This is the universal message of ISLAM.

The Islamic Seminary seeks to hold aloft the torch of spiritual guidance and to help in all earnest to promote mankind's spiritual heritage. It presents Qur'anic way of life in its pristine glory. It presents only that which is authoritative and authentic. Its publications are designed to meet the spiritual need of our times. It will serve as a perennial spring to those who are thirsty of knowledge.

The Islamic Seminary is a world organization endeavouring for Islamic fraternity. It enjoys the contributions of the best brains, in addition to having an international support for the fulfilment of its great objective. It has centres in Asia, Africa, Europe, America, Canada and Far East.

A list of addresses appears in the closing pages of this book. Readers can write to any of these centres for our publications.

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ISLAMIC SEMINARY PUBLICATIONS



Dear Reader,

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ

This book is an Islamic Seminary publication. Its publications are designed to cater for the spiritual needs of the age with a particular emphasis on grooming Muslim mind and thinking. Utmost efforts have been made by the Seminary to put forth in its publications what is really authoritative and authentic in Islam.

You are requested to kindly go through this book in the spirit in which it is intended. You are also requested to communicate to us your free comments on our publication, which will be highly appreciated.

Propagating the message of Islam is a task which calls for the co-operation of all. The Seminary invites you to join it in this task complying cordially with the verse of the holy Qur'an: "*Say: I give you but one admonition, that you stand for Allah's sake jointly and singly*". (34:46)

May Allah bless you!

Yours in Islam,
Publication Secretary.

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The followers of the Progeny of the Holy Prophet

Our Love and Attachment to Other Sects of the Ummah.

Foreword

In this short preface, we intend to draw the attention of the readers to a few important points:

(1) We are Muslims, but is it enough for us to be Muslims and should we feel pride in it without knowing that Islam, more than anything else, stresses upon knowledge and action?

Islam means knowledge of a specific conception of the cosmos for the intellectual and moral reform of mankind, of a superbly calculated programme put forth as a dynamic school of thought. It is knowledge of articles of belief and articles of action.

Unfortunately many people consider themselves to be Muslims simply because they were born in a Muslim family or in a Muslim country, or because it was Islam which came to their minds first and they accepted it.

However, it is obvious that a true Muslim cannot be content with such things, because Islam is not a thing to be received in inheritance, nor is it a product of environments.

It is, therefore, necessary for a Muslim to have a true understanding of Islam, both of its articles of belief and articles of action so as to be able to give a convincing answer, howsoever brief and simple, to the following two questions:

(i) What is Islam and how is it a blessing to humanity?

(ii) Why have you accepted Islam?

After learning the precepts and principles of Islam, it is equally necessary to apply them in one's individual and social life.

(2) The book "*Rationality of Islam*" aims at a comprehensive presentation of the basic teachings of Islam in a concise form. Subjects dealt with in lengthy chapters in voluminous books, have sometimes been crammed into a few lines. Anyhow, an effort has been made to present facts in a simple diction and yet to preserve the rational spirit of the book.

(3) It has also been our consistent effort that, in discussing doctrines and tenets of Islam, the relevant authority should always be quoted and nothing should be mentioned without a proof. As for articles of action, reference has been made, as far as possible, to their instructional and social philosophy, so that the reader may be encouraged to act according to them.

(4) Though Qur'anic verses, sayings of the Holy Prophet and Holy Imams have been extensively quoted, yet their Arabic texts have been omitted for the sake of brevity and simplicity. Quotations from Western scholars have been cited in only the first few chapters.

It is hoped that this book will enlighten the minds of our conscientious young men and women, and will serve as an introduction to a wider study of Islam. It will induce them to recognize Islam as a great and creative school of thought, help them in shaping out their lives and preparing them for great sacrifices. It will most certainly inspire the young people to form a much better, healthier and happier society.

Sh. Yusufali Nafsi Najafi

Role of Religion in Human Life

DEFINITION OF RELIGION

To understand what religion is and what is its role in the life of men, we should first of all know its definition.

Religion may briefly be defined as under:

Religion (*din*) is an all-round movement in the light of faith in Allah and a sense of responsibility for the reformation of thought and belief, for the promotion of high principles of morality, for the establishment of good relations among members of the society and the elimination of every sort of undue discrimination.

Keeping in view this definition, our need for religion and religious teachings is absolutely necessary. To be a little more elaborate, it may be said that we require religion for the following reasons:

1. SANCTION FOR THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALITY

Religion provides a sanction for the principles of morality like justice, honesty, righteousness, brotherhood, equality, virtuousness, tolerance, sacrifice, help to the needy and other kindred virtues. These are the virtues without which, not only our life will lose its order and normalcy, but it is very likely to be turned into a chaos. Of course, it is possible to acquire these moral and social qualities without the aid of religion. But, certainly in the absence of a firm religious belief, these values appear to lose their meaning and become a series of mere unbinding

recommendations, because in such a case they do not amount to more than a piece of advice from a close friend which we are at full liberty to accept or reject.

These qualities are rather based on an internal feeling and faith, and are naturally beyond the scope of an ordinary law.

It is only faith in the existence of an Eternal Being, who knows man equally from within and without and who has full control over him, that cultivates these virtues within man and impels him to observe righteousness and adherence to duty, and if need be, to make sacrifices for the sake of others.

Will Durant, the well-known philosophercum-historian, says in his book, 'Pleasures of Philosophy' that without the backing of religion, morality is nothing more than arithmancy, as without it, the sense of obligation disappears.

2. POWER TO ENDURE ADVERSITIES OF LIFE

Religion provides power for facing adversities and serves as a bulwark against undesirable reactions of despair and hopelessness.

A religious man, with a firm belief in Allah, and of His munificence, does not find himself in utter desperation even in the worst moments of his life, because he knows well that he is under the protection of a Being who is Almighty. With faith in the fact that every problem can be solved and every deadlock can be resolved with His help, a religious man can overcome every disappointment and hopelessness.

For this very reason, it seldom happens that a truly religious man suffers from the acute reaction of desperation like suicide, nervous-breakdown or psychic ailments which are products of frustration and defeatism.

The Holy Qur'an says: *Surely those who are close to Allah, have no fear nor shall they grieve.* (Surah Yunus, 10:62)

Imam Ja'far Sadiq says: "A true believer can never commit suicide".

Thus, religious faith is, on the one hand, a motivating force, and on the other, it is a factor which enables man to face hardships with courage and saves him from the ill effects of failure and disappointment.

Following the downfall of the Nazis, says Bertrand Russell, there existed a danger of an intellectual and ideological revolt in Germany, but no doubt, religion has been one of the biggest factors in that country's return to stability.

3. ENCOUNTER WITH IDEOLOGICAL VACUUM

Man cannot live in an ideological vacuum for long and as such his tendency towards a wrong ideology and false values becomes definite. His intellectual life is not filled with sound beliefs and healthy teachings. A superstitious and even a destructive idea may find way into his spiritual firmament and may for ever pollute his brain. Instances of man's tendency towards idolatry, manworship, diverse superstitions and credulity regarding the influence of irrational things over destiny can be witnessed even in the lives of world intellectuals. All this originates from a spiritual vacuum. It is religion which can fill the ideological vacuum with sound teachings and can save one from a tendency towards absurdities and irrationalities.

Hence, true understanding of religion can play an important role in combating superstitions, though it is true that even religion itself, if not understood correctly, may promote superstitions.

4. AN AID TO THE PROGRESS OF SCIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

Religion with its firm and sound teachings can be an effective factor in scientific progress, because its foundation has been laid on the solid bed-rock of 'freedom of will' and on the fact that everybody is accountable for his own deeds.

The Holy Qur'an says: *Everyone is entangled in the outcome of his deeds.* (Surah al-Muddath-thir, 74:38)

Faith in religion teaches that limitless knowledge is the source of this cosmos which is like a grand book penned by an erudite scholar. Every page of it, nay every line and every word of it, contains a glaring truth which stimulates us to further study and contemplation.

This attitude towards the cosmos undoubtedly stimulates persistent thinking over the mechanism of creation and, consequently, helps in the advancement of science and knowledge.

In contrast, if we hold that this universe is the product of sheer mechanical factors having no intellect, there remains no plausible reason why we should make strenuous efforts to discover its secrets. In principle, a universe which is the outcome of the working of an unconscious machinery, can neither be harmonious nor mysterious.

Apart from giving a deadly blow to the advancement of science and knowledge, such conception of cosmos negates the very fact that man's instinct is basically rooted in religion. Albert Einstein was very true when he pointed out why great thinkers and discoverers were interested in religion. He said that it was hard to find anyone among the great thinking brains of the world who might not have a sort of religious feeling peculiar to him. That feeling was

different from the religion of the man in the street.

It has the form of a delightful wonder at the marvellously accurate system of the universe, which from time to time, unveils secrets in comparison with which all organized human thinking and research are rather weak and stale. This feeling illuminates the path of the life and efforts of a scientist and, as he gains success and honour, it keeps him free from the deadweight of selfishness and pride.

What a belief in the system of the universe and what a fascinating desire it was, he adds, that enabled Kepler and Newton to suffer for years in isolation and in complete silence in order to simplify and explain the laws of gravitation and planetary motion! No doubt, it is this very religious feeling that enabled the self-sacrificing and self-effacing men through long centuries, in spite of their apparent defeats and failures, to rise on their feet again and make fresh efforts. (The world as I see)

The contemporary scientist, Abernethy, says that science for its own perfection should regard faith in God as one of its accepted principles.

Thus a religious man, following the true teachings of religion, can more than anybody else, carry out research and discover the secrets of nature.

5. FIGHT AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

Religion strongly opposes every discrimination based on colour, race or class, because it regards all human beings as God's creatures and every country as God's country. According to it, all enjoy God's love and kindness equally and as such, all are equal.

According to the teachings of Islam no man can be superior to other on the basis of his colour, race, descent, language or class.

Islam recognizes only piety and knowledge as the touch-stones of superiority. Allah says: *Man, We have created you from a male and a female, and have divided you into nations and tribes so that you may get to know one another. Surely the most honourable of you in the sight of Allah is he who is most pious.* (Surah al-Hujurat, 49:13)

Thus, the role of religion in a world that has not yet been able to solve even the problem of colour, the question of class distinction, is quite clear.

Anyhow, it cannot be denied that every kind of religious thought or belief cannot produce the desired results.

Like every other intellectual pursuit, religion requires correct guidance. Otherwise, it assumes the form of superstition, monasticism, escape from positive life and pseudo-gnostic negative tendencies, the examples of which can even now be seen in the West, where people have got fed up with mechanical life. It is only in such an atmosphere that, for want of correct knowledge, religion is regarded as an obstructive factor.

ROOTS OF RELIGIOUS SENSE

Man has been familiar with religion for such a long time that it covers the entire recorded history of human life and goes back into the depths of pre-historic times.

The Holy Qur'an has described religion as man's innate nature and Allah's established order. It says: *Islam is in harmony with nature which Allah has designed for man.* (Surah al-Rum, 30:30)

Research carried out by sociologists and historians shows that places of worship, either in their simple or elaborate and complex form, have always had an influence

on human life, and religion in its various shapes has been interwoven with its history.

Will Durant, after a comparatively detailed discussion of atheism of certain people, writes that, despite all that he has mentioned, these are exceptional cases; and the old notion that "religion" is a phenomenon that generally extends to all human beings, is true. The question of religion, in the view of a philosopher, is one of the basic questions of history and psychology.

He adds that, from time immemorial, religion has always gone hand in hand with human history. The idea of piety can never be removed from the human heart. (History of Civilization, vol. I, pp. 88 - 89)

From a psychological point of view, this time-honoured relationship between man and religion proves that "religious feeling" is one of the basic human instincts and natural elements of the human soul.

It is obvious that, at a time, when the level of human thinking was low and the sciences had not made any remarkable progress, this internal feeling was in an incredible way mixed with superstition; but gradually, with the progress of sciences on the one hand, and persistent efforts and teachings of the Prophets on the other, it was purified of adulterations and thus regained its purity and originality.

ANTI-RELIGIOUS WAVES

DURING THE PAST CENTURIES

In these circumstances, it looks a little surprising that during the past centuries, especially from the 16th century onward, a violent anti-religious wave engulfed the Western countries, and many of the liberal-minded Europeans dissociated themselves from the Church. Those who

wanted to remain loyal to religion turned to some Eastern religions or to a sort of gnosticism minus religion, while a large number of people were attracted by materialism and the like.

But an inquiry into the roots of this subject indicates that in the special circumstances prevailing in Europe, this phenomenon was not unexpected.

To make it clear, factors leading to anti-religious movements and the tendency to materialism in Europe should be viewed in the perspective of the polity which the Church pursued with regard to the Renaissance and progress of natural science in various fields.

In the Middle Ages (especially during 13th to 15th centuries) the Church started a campaign against science and attempted to crush scientific movements through inquisition. It issued a papal decree to condemn science, dragged people like Galileo to persecution and forced them to deny the motion of the earth. This campaign was made to continue till the late 17th century. It is obvious what the reaction of the scientists towards the Church should have been. The scientists, with all their determination worked for the advancement of science.

Mistake in an analogy and incorrect comparison of other religions with the special position of the Church in the Middle Ages induced certain scientists to start a campaign against all religions and to reject them formally. They went to the extent of innovating a doctrine known as 'discord between religion and science'.

But the study of scientific movement in Islam, which started from the very first century and bore fruit in the second and third centuries of the Hegira era, shows that in Muslim society the case was quite different. This movement soon gave birth to the scientists like Hasan ibn Haytham,

the well-known Muslim physicist, Jabir ibn Hayyān whom the Europeans call the Father of Chemistry, and scores of other men like them. Their writings exercised considerable influence over scientists like Roger Bacon, Johannes Kepler and Leonardo da Vinci. It is interesting to note that all the scientific progress in the Muslim society took place during the period which is called by the Westerners as the Middle Ages. It coincided with the Church's violent opposition to the Renaissance and the pioneers of the new scientific movement.

Eminent historians of the East and the West, who have studied Islamic culture, are unanimously of the view that works of Muslim scientists gave rise to a wide-spread scientific movement whose influence over the Renaissance and the scientific movement of Europe was remarkable.

Thus, the factors which forced the intellectuals in the West to shun religion did not exist in the Muslim society. On the contrary, Islam nurtured a better and more conducive atmosphere for the advancement of learning and promotion of science.

In short, Islam stimulated scientific movements in the world and for this very reason was the fountain-head of the vast development of science and knowledge.

However, it cannot be denied that disputes and dissensions in a section of the Muslim society grew in intensity from the fifth century Hegira onward, and their short-sightedness, disregard for true teachings of Islam, apathy to progress and indifference to the spirit of the time, resulted in the backwardness of many Muslim countries.

Another factor, which complicated the problem, was that Islam was not properly introduced to the succeeding generations. Thus, the constructive role of Islam in various

fields gradually declined. The position at present is that many young men think that Islam has always been in this abject state.

However, Islam holds a brilliant future. With the revival of the ideals of Islam and its projection into proper form, especially to the impressionistic minds of the younger generation, it is earnestly hoped that Islam shall soon regain its original character and universal appeal.

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

No religion approves of materialism, whether it be in its simple shape or in the form of dialectic materialism, which is the very basis of Marxism and communism, because materialism maintains that this universe is merely a set of undesigned and aimless happenings.

Religion, in censuring materialism relies on a number of principles which are absolutely logical, because:

1. The interpretation of the order of the universe advanced by the materialistic school is unscientific, for science in the course of its research, talks of well-calculated and precise systems, which cannot be interpreted by accidental and chance happenings.

Science acknowledges that the Maker of this universe is the greatest physicist and chemist, the most expert physician and the best anthropologist and cosmologist, because while performing his job, he made use of all scientific laws. Naturally, he could not do so without having complete knowledge of them. It goes without saying that natural factors and natural developments can have no such knowledge at all.

2. Materialism has accepted the doctrine of compulsion as one of its basic principles. It holds that every human

action and every movement is the result of a sequence of compulsory causes. On this basis, according to the materialistic point of view, all the efforts of man are like the movements of the wheels of a machine. It is obvious that the acceptance of this view goes against the idea of every social, moral or human responsibility.

In contrast, religion accepts the principle of obligation and responsibility and, thus, lays the foundation of its teachings on the freedom of human will.

It cannot be contradicted that the acceptance of the principle of compulsion gives a hard blow to dynamism and the sense of duty as well as responsibility. It also directly contributes to crimes and aggressions, because the offenders can plead that they are not responsible for the crimes and that, for committing it, they were forced by a host of factors such as training, environment and situation etc. But there is no possibility of such evil effects, if the principle of free will is accepted.

3. With the idea of matter gaining ground, the materialists have practically ousted all good and moral values. The effect of this way of thinking is highly baneful, for without such virtues as philanthropy, tolerance, sacrifice, sincerity and love, man will be anything except a human being, and no problem can be solved at world level because belief in the exclusive domination of matter is obviously not compatible with principles of virtues.

RELIGION AND INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

Some people think that religion restricts individual freedom and disallows the fulfilment of some desires, whereas, in fact, the aim of religious teachings is not to curb the logical freedom at all. Its aim is to direct human efforts to more constructive and fruitful ways so as to

achieve inner peace and satisfaction in life in this world and a reward in the Hereafter.

For example, if religion forbids the use of intoxicants, gambling and unlawful indulgence in sex, it does so for the good of the body and soul of the individual as well as for the maintenance of a harmonious social order.

This moral taboo is in keeping with the real spirit of freedom, for freedom means that man should be able to take full advantage of the assets of his existence which is one of the manifold blessings of the Providence. In return of it, he should render valuable services which may order a better and stabler world.

Religion supports every such freedom as helps a man leap forward in the sanctioned ways of life and this alone is freedom in the true sense of the word. All else is libertinism because it is not conducive to the individuals as well as the society.

That is why religion allows man to use all good things in life, to wear any reasonable dress, to relish any pure food and to take part in any healthy pastime. In short, it has allowed the use of all comforts and conveniences of life, and asks none to give up any such thing.

The Holy Qur'an says: *Say: Who has forbidden the beautiful things of Allah and the pure foods which He has created for His servants.* (Surah al-A'raf, 7:32)

Moreover, our religion calls upon us to make the most of the needs and exigencies of time. Islam most eloquently advocates for the acquisition of knowledge and for keeping our knowledge refereshed in all the fields.

One of the leaders of Islam, Imam Sadiq has said: "He who knows his time and its requirements, shall not be taken unawares by the misfortunes of life". (Kulayni's Usul al-Kafi vol. I chapter "Aql-o-Jahl" Hadith 29)

Our religion tells us that out of the new ideas, customs and usages we should choose what is useful and worthy and should discard what is improper and wrong. We must not follow others blindly and must not adopt anything that is not compatible with human dignity and the spirit of rational thinking. The Holy Qur'an says: *Give glad tidings to my servants who listen to what is said and follow the best thereof. They are those whom Allah has guided and those who have good sense.* (Surah al-Zumar, 17 - 18)

* * * * *

Belief in Allah

It is worth emphasizing that among the thinkers there exists no difference of opinion on the point that this universe has a Self-Sustaining First Cause. Ever since the recorded history of mankind controversies regarding the existence of Supreme Being have been raging and, despite clear signs of His presence, many a man has deviated. The nihilist and the atheist have denied the very existence of the First Cause. Schopenhauer and men belonging to his school of thought, though basically, denying God, have accepted that there does exist a force.

Similarly, the materialists call it matter, while the religious philosophers call it Allah. It is essential to acknowledge the existence of the First Cause, for a sequence of causes and effects cannot go on indefinitely and we must reach a point where we should come to a cause which is not the effect of any other cause, i.e. the ultimate cause or the Prime Mover, which is self-existing and which has always been and shall always be.

It is this Self-Sustaining First Cause which not only makes our intellectual life possible but also quite meaningful. Suppose for a moment that there is no such first cause. Where does this lead us to? Surely this cause and effect pursuit leads us in what is known in philosophy as '*continuum ad infinitum*'. This brings our investigation to a blind alley. It marks the beginning of intellectual wilder-

ness, a wild goose chase. You go on piling cause upon cause and effect upon effect only to find that there is yet another cause and effect staring you in the face. Of what earthly use it is to put zero after zero when the result is zero or to place nil after nil when the result is nil? Such is the deception of a certain mental activity and such is its misguidance!

It will thus be seen that the only way to get out of this riddle is to acknowledge the Self-Sustaining First Cause.

Belief in the existence of an Eternal and First Cause is the common ground between the believers in God and the materialists. The only controversial point of difference is whether the First Cause has knowledge and intellect or not. That is the real point of difference.

The materialists deny that the First Cause has any intellect. They hold that the First Cause is matter, which lacks intellect or knowledge, whereas the believers in God maintain that the First Source of the universe has limitless knowledge, wisdom and rationalism.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE GOD

(a) The Universe

Now let us have a glance on the various phenomena of the universe to ascertain whether the things existing in the universe indicate that the First Cause has intellect.

It will be better to begin with our own body. Does not the construction of the human eye and the way the lenses, retina and various layers of it have been fixed, testify that its Maker is fully conversant with the physical laws concerning the reflection of light and the working of lenses and mirrors?

Does not the composition of human blood with

plasma and various types of corpuscles with such a fixed proportion that the slightest change in it disturbs the whole biological system, clearly show that the Maker of the blood knew the chemical composition and properties of all the ingredients of blood fully well?

Does not the construction of a living human being, animal and plant with all the perfect and yet complex system, manifest that the job has been performed by a Being who had full knowledge of all the laws connected with the human, animal and plant physiology?

Does not the special design of the Solar System and the particular proportion between the size, distance and speed of each planet of this system, prove that the Designer is fully aware of all the details of the law of gravitation and the effects of the rotatory motion in producing centrifugal forces?

Therefore, all that exists in the universe from the smallest particles to the biggest galaxies, bear witness to the fact that the First Source has full knowledge of all the connected laws and systems.

In principle, all human sciences are nothing more than a partial knowledge of a minute part of the secrets and laws of the universe.

How can it ever be that we, with such a limited knowledge, should become scholars and scientists but the First Source who brought the whole universe into existence, should have no knowledge and intellect?

Transplantation of the human heart by Dr Bernard required millions of scientists for thousands of years to continue their efforts for the development of medicine and surgery. Is it conceivable that the very Maker of the heart should have no knowledge?

In short, the interpretation of the creation of all the

well-calculated and well-conceived system as chance events, and products of unplanned and aimless causes, is as illogical as to say that the transplantation of heart by Dr Bernard and his team was not the result of any knowledge and study, and it was just by chance that the grafting took place.

Such an interpretation is totally unacceptable. But to say, that the entire universe has come into existence just by chance, is far more illogical. Hence the materialistic interpretation of the genesis of the universe and all that exists in it, is totally unscientific.

Thus, every book of our natural sciences like physics, chemistry, biology, physiology, anatomy, medicine, surgery, zoology and botany etc. may be used as a book of natural theology; for all these books discuss the secrets and laws of the marvellous systems of creation, whose logical and correct interpretation is not possible without acknowledging the existence of Allah.

This very line of argument has been largely followed by the Holy Qur'an in its arguments for the Unity of Allah.

As Kepler, the founder of modern astronomy, has said, "The more we know about the creation and the grandeur of the heavenly bodies, the deeper should be our faith (in God)".

George Gemov says that there exists a close relationship between the progress of sciences and the firmness of faith in Allah. The more the scientific knowledge expands, the firmer will be the faith in God.

Albert Winchester, a biologist who has been the Head of the Academy of Science, Florida, says that every new discovery in the world of science increases the firmness of our faith hundreds of times; dispels the hidden doubts

which more or less lurk inside our hearts, and replaces them with the nobler ideas of the acknowledgement of God and His Unity.

(b) Motion, Evolution and Life

Physics tells us that in case the lifeless matter is static, it tends to remain static unless it is moved by some external force; and if it is in motion, it continues to move unless it is stopped by some external factor.

Yet another scientific law tells us that the matter, forming the universe, tends to disintegrate and assume a simpler form with the passage of time. Mechanized matter changes into simpler matter; atoms, if they remain as they are, automatically disintegrate; and bright stars tend to lose their brightness.

Thus, within the lifeless matter, there exists no factor which may push it forward to evolution. On the contrary, it tends to disintegrate automatically.

In such circumstances, it must be admitted that evolution and life have come from outside, for, within the matter there exists no such tendency.

A philosopher says that you cannot think of that attraction to life which pervades from simple amoeba to grown up human beings (like Einstein, Edison and Anatole France) without seeing the world in a Divine garb. (Pleasures of Philosophy, Will Durant).

In other words, it is not possible to interpret attraction to life and inclination to evolution except through belief in Allah, the Almighty.

(c) Transience of the Universe

Science tells us that in accordance with the second law of thermo-dynamics, all energy available in the world

is proceeding towards uniformity and neutrality, and a day will come when, having become uniform it will be neutralized. Then a state of indifference is likely to prevail in the whole world. This is just like liquid poured in one of a few inter-connected vessels. We find that the liquid comes in motion, but this state does not continue for ever. Sooner or later all the levels become uniform and everything becomes motionless and quiet.

According to this law, the universe must have a history. It cannot be eternal. Had it always existed, it would have become uniform and neutral long ago.

On this ground, we have to admit that this material world has not always existed. It is not eternal and must have a history.

Now a pertinent question arises as to what is the origin of the universe and how it came into being? How did the first explosion or Big Bang occur? What was the source of the explosion of the uniform atoms of primary matter? How is it possible that in a state of complete tranquillity and stillness an explosion should occur automatically. Here it must be admitted that some external factor caused the explosion to occur. We call this external factor the Supreme Being or Allah.

The above mentioned three ways of proving the existence of Allah are the subject of detailed books compiled by philosophers of Divinity. We have briefly given its summary.

THE QUR'AN AND THE COGNITION OF ALLAH

It is interesting to note that in our Sacred Book, the Holy Qur'an, stress has invariably been put on scientific arguments. The Holy Qur'an in most of its verses concern-

ing the Unity of Allah, refers to the first method, i.e. the study of the system of the universe. It calls upon all of us to study this marvellous system. Sometimes it refers to the secrets of the creation of the heavens.

It says: *In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alteration of night and day there are many evidences (of the existence of Allah) for the people of good sense.* (Surah Ale Imran, 3:189)

Sometimes it refers to other methods. It cites the Champion of Unity, Prophet Abraham as saying; *My Lord is He who gives life and who causes things to die.* (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:258)

Here, reference has been made to life and death, which definitely indicate the existence of the Creator. This is the second way of proving the existence of Allah. In the Qur'an, there are hundreds of verses on the subject of Divine Unity and existence of Allah, which draw one's attention to the marvels of the creation and grandeur of the universe. A study of these verses can be the subject of an independent book, in which wonders of science and the secrets of the Holy Qur'an can be discussed side by side.

ATHEISM DOES NOT EXIST

In view of the scientific arguments mentioned above to prove the existence of Allah, it may be asked why most of the scientists and founders of physical sciences still adhere to atheism. The answer to this question is simple. There is hardly any scientist who does not explicitly or implicitly profess the existence of the First Cause or the Source of Knowledge and Power. It does not make any difference if he does not use the word God or Allah. The author of "Metaphysics" says that there exists no atheism. Everybody thinks of Him and acknowledges Him in his

own way. (The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe)

If someone, in the course of a discussion on human heart, states that nature has placed a septum between the right and left chambers of the heart so that the pure and the impure blood may not be mixed, does it not mean that he concedes that nature has a planning, a programme and an intellect? In this case, is it possible to say that by nature he means factors lacking consciousness? Obviously, the reply is in the negative and by the word 'Nature' he means the All-knowing, All-powerful God.

Such expressions, which are an evidence of faith in existence of the First Cause, are found in the discourses of many scientists. This shows that they all hold that nature has a will, a purpose, and a programme. Evidently by the word 'Nature' he does not mean factor having no consciousness or will. Hence obviously he uses this word in place of the name of Allah.

ATTRIBUTES OF ALLAH

So, the existence of Allah is easy to prove but it is very difficult to explain His real Being and His attributes. First of all, we must know that Allah is Ever-Existing and Limitless. He is limitless in knowledge, power, time and space; whereas our knowledge and power, howsoever vast, are limited and have an end. As such, how can a limited being completely grasp the very essence of an Unlimited Being? It is obviously not possible for a chick which has grown inside the shell of an egg to know what happens inside the limitless space of the far-off galaxies.

But that does not mean that we cannot understand the attributes of Allah to the extent of our powers of thinking, knowing and understanding.

From the study of the phenomena of the universe, we can find out that He is:

All-knowing and All-wise: This is evidenced by the extraordinarily marvellous diversity of life and all that exists on the earth and in the heavens; and this is the Sign of His authority over all things.

Ever-living: Life, in the real sense, is nothing but a combination of knowledge and power. Allah is All-knowing and All-powerful. Hence, He is Ever-living.

For the same reason, He has will and comprehension as well. He sees everything and hears every word and sound. He is All-pervading and All-aware. He is Eternal and Ever-existing.

These are some of His attributes, known as positive attributes, for they have positive aspects. There are negative attributes also, which have a negative aspect.

Being Limitless and Perfect in every sense, He is free from ignorance, inability, need and defect.

He has no associate and none can be like Him. It is not possible to imagine the existence of two beings, limitless in every respect, for duality will give birth to rivalries, conflicts and disputes.

It, therefore, becomes evident that Allah has no body, for all bodies have to perish sooner or later. An Ever-existing Being cannot have a body which is liable to disintegration, decomposition and change.

1. Divine Unity the basis of all religious teachings

Divine Unity is the very edifice of all religious teachings. The question of Divine Unity has supreme importance in Islam. In one way or the other, it forms a part of all Islamic tenets and teachings. Islam rejects every kind of

polytheism, dualism and trinity. According to it, Allah is One. He has no components and none is like Him.

2. Unity of Attributes

A number of qualities such as knowledge, power and eternity are attributed to Allah. They are the very essence of His Being and are inseparable from Him. He is a Limitless Being, and a limitless being is but the Ultimate Reality. All His personal attributes are a single unity, viz. Limitlessness.

3. Unity of Worship

Further, according to the teachings of Islam, Allah alone is adorable. Islam does not allow in any form the worship of any other thing. Neither the sun nor the star nor any human being is adorable, because all things are His creations and He has sovereign control over them. Hence, He alone is adorable.

4. Unity of Action

A careful study of the worldly affairs will show that Allah is the Creator and the real source of all power. When we undertake a job, it is with His blessing that the job is accomplished. It may, therefore, be said that all our actions are accomplished with His help. None has power independent of His power. Absolute and independent power pertains only to Him.

Anyhow, this should not be misconstrued to mean that we have no free will or responsibility. Allah Himself has bestowed freedom on us. He wants us to choose our way freely so as to adapt ourselves in this world and Hereafter.

He has done us a favour and put at our disposal all

the necessary means to reach this goal.

Our freedom is a gift from Him and, because we have free will, we are held responsible for our actions.

MAN AND FREEDOM OF WILL

Let us discuss the subject of free will at a greater length. We can clearly see that we are not predestined in our actions. We have liberty of action and freedom of will. A simple proof of human volition is that we blame the offenders for their offences. We lodge complaints with the courts against transgressors and ask for their trial and punishment. Even those who claim to believe in predestination, take such action in their practical life. If man has no free will and everything is appointed and preordained by Allah, or if man is but a helpless being in the hands of nature, then prosecution, court trials and punishment tend to be meaningless. Neither a good and dutiful worker deserves any appreciation nor an evil-doer is liable to prosecution and punishment, because both of them are helpless in their action. Prosecution of a person who has no choice of action is far from justice. The way human beings behave in their life, testifies that they are convinced at hearts that man possesses freedom of will. Hence, belief in predestination has no basis. (See: Murtaza Mutahhary, *Man and His Destiny* ISP, 1983).

Allah has granted us freedom, but it is our duty not to misuse it. On the contrary, we should direct all our energies to the achievement of our own happiness as well as that of the society.

We should not practice false ideas or notions, nor should we take any incorrect action in the name of freedom of thought or freedom of action, for that will amount to chaos and anarchy which are the very antitheses of freedom.

Towards Eternal Life

"Death" means separation of the soul from the body. Islam tells us that man does not perish altogether as a result of death. He is only transferred from one world to another, where he begins a new life. The Holy Prophet said: "You have not been created for destruction. You have been created for ever-lasting life. The only thing is that you are moved from one world to another". (Biharul Anwār vol. VI, p. 249)

According to Islam, the souls of all the individuals are not to be extricated from the bodies in a uniform manner: "The souls of the sinners are separated with discomfort, but the souls of the righteous are sundered with ease and comfort". (Biharul Anwār vol. VI, p. 145)

THE HEREAFTER

All the Prophets and the revealed Scriptures unanimously agree that, with death, human life does not come to an end. After this world, there exists another world where human beings shall be rewarded or punished according to their deeds. The virtuous shall lead happy and pleasant life, and the evil-doers shall be punished and tormented. Belief in Resurrection and the next world is one of the fundamentals of all religions, and a believer in the Prophets has to believe in Resurrection too.

The idea that death reduces man to nothingness is not

only appalling but it appears to be odd and illogical too; and, after the acceptance of the doctrine of Divine Unity and belief in the existence of Allah, it is totally incomprehensible.

It is unbelievable that the aim of all the complex laws of evolution is first to transform a simple and invaluable being into a highly developed intellectual being like Avicenna (Ibn Sina) or Einstein and then to wipe him out altogether. It does not stand to reason that total destruction should be the fate of the entire human race and its culture. Such a theory is incredible, unreasonable and incompatible with the knowledge, wisdom and skill of the Creator. This looks as if a vainglorious person builds a well-designed and magnificent workshop or factory and then blows it up into pieces.

Will it not be more logical if we admit that after death life continues in another form and the process of evolution does not come to an end? Here we can give an apt example. Our life in this world is like that of a foetus, which after passing through several evolutionary stages, is transferred to a wider and more perfect environment of which it could not even have imagined, even if it had any power of imagination.

Had human life been limited to a foetal period and every foetus died immediately after birth, would such a life not have been illogical and unreasonable? It would be more logical if human life in this world, after passing through intricate and difficult routes of physical, intellectual and moral evolution, is a prelude to the beginning of a higher and wider life for the next world. The life of that world should bear the same relation to the life of this world, as the life of this world does to the foetal life.

That is why, all those who believe in Allah, also

believe that death is not a destroyer but a transferer of man to another world whose full details and characteristics are beyond our comprehension, for we are confined to the four-walls of this world. Anyhow, we know only this much that death does not mean the end of life and that another world does exist.

A study of the laws of the universe, of the forces which push man forward along the path of evolution and of the systematic grandeur of this world convincingly testify to this truth.

The Holy Qur'an says: *Do you think that We have made you in vain and that you are not going to return to Us?* (Surah al-Mo'minun, 23:114)

It also says: *Surely you know about your first development then why do you not take heed?* (Surah al-Waqe'ah, 56:62)

In other words, the Sacred Book tells people that in the light of their observations of life on this world, they should conclude that another world exists, for the study of this world and the laws governing the evolution of human life here show that there is another world wherein the process of evolution will continue, and will not get disconnected.

RESURRECTION AND SCIENTIFIC LAWS

It is remarkable that science, with its modern discoveries, has taken a long step forward towards the reality of Resurrection and life Hereafter, and by the enunciation of the doctrine of the imperishability of matter and energy. Thus, Resurrection which previously appeared to be impossible, has now become logical and comprehensible.

The doctrine of the imperishability of matter which was first propounded by Lavoisier, has rendered the ques-

tion of absolute destruction totally unscientific. According to it, the particles of man, howsoever decomposed and scattered that they may be still existing in this very world, and it is possible that they may be rearranged some day. This is the first step forward towards the possibility of the Resurrection of man and his return to life after death.

This doctrine was further reinforced by the discovery of radio active bodies by Marie Curie. Her discovery confirmed that, like matter, energy is also ever-lasting, and that there is no duality between matter and energy, for they are convertible to each other.

On this basis, we should admit that our ideas and our actions which are all produced by the transformation of our various bodily energies, continue to exist in this world.

Our vocal waves are not obliterated and their traces always exist in the air and in the objects which surround us. Only their form is changed. The same is the case with all our works and deeds.

This is another step forward towards the possibility of Resurrection and even physically seeing the deeds themselves.

Anyhow, with the progress of science the question of Resurrection and of physically seeing the deeds is no longer as complicated as it was. Now it is comprehensible and from a scientific stand-point fully admissible.

FAITH IN RESURRECTION AND TRAINING OF MAN

Faith in Resurrection, besides logically interpreting and resolving the mystery of life and death, produces diverse effects on human life, the most important of them being the following two:

1. The gruesome picture of death which had always agonized and disturbed the peace of mind, has undergone

a complete change. With the acknowledgement of the Resurrection and 'life after death' in a world where all the gifts of life shall eternally exist on a higher and bigger scale the poignant picture of death is no longer as dreadful and appalling as it was, and the scenes of death and old age no longer disturb the peace of mind.

The unrest and anxiety caused by the very thought of death is not as painful to those who believe in future life, as to the materialists, and thus the believers may lead a more peaceful and satisfied life.

The believers in Hereafter welcome sacrifice and martyrdom for a sacred cause, for they regard sacrifice in the way of Allah as a prelude to a new future life.

2. The realization that human thought and action continue to exist, and one has to receive reward or punishment, certainly exerts a healthy effect on human conduct and behaviour. Thus, the belief in the next world creates a favourable atmosphere for the promotion of good deeds and abstaining from unwholesome or indecent actions.

INDEPENDENT EXISTENCE AND IMMORTALITY OF SOUL

Though the materialists try to describe thought, feeling and perception as the physical and chemical properties of the brain and thus regard the nervous system as something material, yet the inadequacy of their interpretation clearly manifest the independent existence and non-material nature of the soul. But the fact is that like soul, which is non-material, other mental states such as meditation and imagination are also non-material.

1. To sum up we can say that we can embody in our minds huge planets, galaxies and solar system or mountains, deserts and large rivers, though in their external

existence they are so enormous. Obviously, in such cases, a huge picture, even as large as heaven and earth, is drawn in our minds, and we feel the existence of the mental picture within ourselves.

Now the question is as to where this picture is located. Certainly it cannot be located in our brain cells, because our mental pictures may be millions of times larger than our brain. Can one ever draw a map of Japan on a paper on the actual and physical scale of that country? Certainly not.

Hence, we must believe in the existence of metaphysical forces so as to interpret this phenomenon without being confronted with the dilemma of correspondence between a big and a small object.

2. One of the general properties of matter is constant change. This transformation and disintegration takes place with the passage of time, whereas, our mental pictures remain firm and stable and do not undergo a change.

For example, some years ago we saw a young friend of ours at a meeting. If we recollects that meeting even after fifty years, the same mental picture, which is still firm in our memory, will reappear without the slightest change. This shows that mental pictures remain stable and are not affected by general properties of matter, and hence they cannot be material.

Non-correspondence of a large object with a small one and unchangeability of mental pictures are two out of many arguments advanced by the philosophers to prove the independent existence of human soul or spirit. There are other arguments too, which can better be seen in a book of philosophy.

From the above, it may be concluded that the soul and spiritual phenomena do not have general properties

of matter. Therefore with physical death soul does not perish and continues to exist even after it is separated from the body. This manifestly lends support to the conviction that there exists another life after death.

PURGATORY

Life in the Hereafter and Resurrection are proved by reason, but reason cannot guide us about the nature and character of the next life. For that we have to refer to the sayings of the Prophets and religious leaders (Imams). The Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet tell us that there exists a world named *Barzakh* (Purgatory) where the dead will be kept till the Day of Judgement. It is an intermediate stage between this world and the next. When a man dies, he is transported to this world called *Barzakh* where he passes a special kind of spiritual life. At the start of this life which begins from the grave, a brief interrogation is carried out, and the beliefs and acts of the individual are taken into account.

If the beliefs of the deceased are found in order and his acts and deeds good, an opening of Paradise is made for him and he stays on the way leading to Paradise, where he enjoys Heavenly blessings. In the *Barzakh* he, then, waits for the Day of Judgement and final attainment of eternal favours.

On the contrary, if he is found wicked and his beliefs are found to be false, he is placed on the way leading to Hell. There he leads a bitter and unpleasant life. He is tormented and remains in constant fear of the Day of Judgement and severe punishment.

The Holy Qur'an says: *Do not consider those who are slain for the cause of Allah as dead. They are alive, but you are unaware of them.* (Surah al-Baqarah 2:154)

It further says: *Do not consider those who are slain for the cause of Allah as dead. They are alive with their Lord and receive sustenance from Him.* (Surah Ale Imran 3:169)

The Holy Prophet said: "The grave is the first stage of the next life. If one is saved from its rigours, the next stages are easy. If one is not saved here, then what follows is not easier".

Imam Ali Zaynul Abidin said: "The grave is either a garden out of the gardens of Paradise or a pit out of the pits of Hell".

GENERAL RESURRECTION

The Holy Qur'an, the tradition of the Holy Prophet and the sayings of the Imams give a graphic description of the Resurrection as under:

On the Day of Resurrection, the sun and the moon shall be shrouded in darkness, the mountains cleaved and torn asunder; the planetary system will be upset; the seas shall be parched and the face of heaven and earth shall be deformed. Then the dead shall be resurrected to give an account of their deeds. None shall be spared and justice shall be done to them for a deed or a misdeed. On the Day of Judgement, the veil shall be lifted from the eyes of the people and they shall be able to see their deeds with their own eyes. Then the process of accountability shall begin.

Everything shall be judged most minutely. The infidels and the unpardonable sinners shall be condemned to Hell. The sinners eligible for pardon, having already undergone a part of punishment during their stay in Purgatory, shall be pardoned as a result of an intercession by the Prophets and the Imams. They shall eventually be rewarded with Paradise.

The accountability of the good and virtuous shall come to a brisk end, but the infidels and the transgressors shall have a rough time. Even the minutest details of their conduct shall be scrutinized and they shall be asked to explain all their acts. This will take a long time full of rigour and chastisement.

PARADISE

Paradise is a permanent abode for the good and righteous. There exist all means of comfort, ease and happiness and all that one may enjoy. Everything which one wishes shall be available there.

The Holy Qur'an says: *All that the souls may desire and that may delight their eyes will be available therein.* (Surah al-Zukhruf, 43:71)

The blessings of Paradise are much sublimer and loftier than those of this world. Judging by worldly standards, these blessings are, in fact, beyond our comprehension. There will not be the least feeling of discomfort there. He who enters Paradise shall have eternal life and his stay there shall be for ever. Paradise, as we are told, has various divisions and each of the happy lots shall be placed according to the degree of his good deeds and virtues.

HELL

Hell, a place of perpetual anguish, is the storehouse for the infidels and wrong-doers who shall continue to be punished, tormented and subjected to most severe pain. The punishment in Hell shall be indescribably harsh and severe. The fire in Hell shall not only burn the body, but it shall also burn the spirit and soul. The fire shall erupt within and inflame the very existence of the individual.

The Holy Qur'an says: *It is a fierce fire lighted by*

Allah to penetrate into the hearts. (Surah al-Humazah, 104:6)

Those consigned to Hell shall be divided into two groups:

The first group shall consist of unbelievers who do not acknowledge Allah. They shall be tormented in Hell for ever and shall have no escape.

The second group shall comprise those who had faith in God, but, their faith being weak, they committed sins and thus became liable to punishment. They shall be kept in Hell temporarily. After they have been purged of the blemish of sin, they, through the infinite mercy of Allah or the intercession of the Prophets, shall be forgiven and sent to Paradise.

Hell, too, like Heaven, has various divisions where an infidel or a transgressor shall be punished according to the varying degree of his sins.

INTERCESSION

According to a tradition of the Holy Prophet, there are three classes of people who shall be allowed to intercede with Allah on the Day of Judgement. They are the Prophets, the martyrs and the scholars called ulema. (See: Murtaza Mutahhary, *Martyr and Martyrdom*, ISP 1979).

In the above tradition, the Imams have not been mentioned expressly but, as the report comes down from our Imams, it is obvious that the term 'ulema' stands for the true divines, who par excellence include the Imams of the Ahl Bayt themselves.

The principle of intercession has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Holy Prophet and the Holy Imams. Hence, in principle, intercession is

undeniable. On the whole, the traditions show that the Holy Prophet and the Imams are sure to intercede on behalf of some sinners. They will say: "O Allah! Though this person is a sinner and deserves punishment, yet for the sake of a certain quality which he possesses and because You are All-forgiving and for the sake of the consideration You have for us, we beseech You to ignore his misdeeds and show mercy to him". Their request shall be acceded to and Allah shall forgive the sinner, bestowing His favour on him.

Although in view of the Qur'anic passages and the traditions, the principle of intercession is undeniable, a few points must be borne in mind.

1. No interceder shall intercede without prior permission of Allah.
2. Intercession shall take place only on the Day of Judgement and, after the process of accountability is completed. Interceders will request for mercy alone. There shall be no intercession so long as a person is in Purgatory, where sinners must undergo punishment according to their sins. Although it is possible that, even in Purgatory, punishment may be reduced or commuted on the recommendation of the Holy Prophet or an Imam, that is not what is meant by intercession.
3. The interceders (Imams) themselves have said: "Be careful to come on the Day of Judgement in the form of a man so that we may intercede on your behalf". This shows that if sins and beastly acts of a person are so heinous that he comes on the Day of Judgement in the shape of a beast, he is not eligible for intercession. In any case, eligibility is the essential condition.
4. The interceders have also said that their intercession shall not cover certain sinners like abandoner of ritual prayers (Salât).

5. In view of the above, one must not commit sins in the hope of intercession. That will only amount to taking poison and relying on the aid of physicians and medicines. Such a person is certainly liable to perish.

PENITENCE

The verses of the Holy Qur'an and the sayings of the infallible Imams tell us that if a sinner repents before his death and feels penitence for his misdeeds, his sins are forgiven, and he will not be liable to questioning. (Al-Wafi Vol. 1, part III, p. 183). Hence, nothing impedes contrition and no specific time is fixed for it. Therefore, one need not despair, for true penitence wipes out all sins. But it is not enough to repeat any formula of penitence or just to shed a tear. True contrition has certain conditions to which Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib has referred. He says: "Penitence has six conditions. One must:

- (1) Really and sincerely repent one's past misdeeds.
- (2) Be determined not to commit any sin in future.
- (3) Discharge all the duties which one owes to others.
- (4) Fulfil all neglected obligations.
- (5) Melt through self-mortification all the flesh that has grown on one's body through the use of unlawful foods.
- (6) Bear the bitterness of acts of worship in the same way as one has tasted the pleasures of sin".

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Guides of Humanity

We know that the Creator created man not because He needed him. He is free from needs in every respect. He created man for man's own elevation and perfection. He wants him to advance along the path of uplift and be worthy of a higher life, both from the moral and the material view-points.

It is obvious that treading the path of life requires guides, who, with their extraordinary knowledge and piety, may lead man to the right direction.

Human knowledge and intelligence being limited, it is quite likely that we may make a mistake in determining what is in our interest and which path leads us to eternal happiness. Hence, there must be some souls, who, because of their communion with the Divine Being, are in a real position to find the straight path and also lead others.

That is why we believe that the All-wise Allah would never leave men without guidance. Divine justice and benevolence demand that He, through His chosen Messengers, may guide men of all ages to the right path.

Prophets, being the chosen creatures of Allah, receive direct instructions from Him. This instruction or communication is called revelation. It is a special kind of Divine message. A Prophet, with his inner eyes, sees the mysteries of the universe; and, with the ears of his heart, listens to

the Divine calls which he conveys to the people.

PROPHETS ARE INFALLIBLE

Prophets can, under no circumstances, commit any sins, errors or mistakes, otherwise they cannot be fully relied upon in the performance of their mission. Allah has rendered them immune from sin and error, so as to be an embodiment of all excellence and perfection. If a Prophet commits a sin or an error, he cannot be a model and an example for others, nor can his sayings, ideas and acts become a code of conduct for his followers.

This immunity from sins and errors is called '*Ismat* (infallibility), and those who possess it, are called *Ma'soom* (infallible).

NUMBER OF PROPHETS

Abuzar Ghifari narrates from the Holy Prophet that for the guidance of the people Allah sent about 1,24,000 Prophets, the first of them being Adam and the last, Muhammad son of Abdullah. (Peace be on them)

Prophets are divided into two groups. Some received revelations but were not assigned to the mission of propagation. Others had such a mission. Some of the latter group did not have a distinct code of law of their own, but preached the Gospel of the other Prophet. It also happened that at one and the same time there were several Prophets discharging their duties in different countries or different cities and towns.

The most outstanding Prophets, who had independent codes of law, were five. Their names, along with the names of the Books revealed to them, are given below:

1. Noah : Epistle
2. Abraham : Epistle

3. Moses : Torah
4. Jesus : Evangel
5. Muhammad : Qur'an

AIMS OF THE PROPHETS

The programme of the Prophets includes:

1. To lay the foundation of justice on a firm basis.
2. To teach and educate the masses.
3. To combat every form of superstition, corruption, undue discrimination and deviation from Divine Unity, truth and justice.

The Holy Qur'an says: *We sent Our Messengers with clear proofs (to support their truthfulness), and sent with them the Book and the Balance so that people would maintain justice.* (Surah al-Hadid, 57:25)

As regards to the Prophet of Islam it says: *It is He who has raised among an unlettered people a Messenger from among themselves, who recites to them His verses and purifies them and teaches them the Book and the wisdom, although before this they were in clear error.* (Surah al-Jumu'ah, 62:2)

This is the noble aim for which the Prophets have been appointed by Allah.

PROOFS OF PROPHETHOOD

Prophets must be a living and a clear evidence of their Prophethood. This evidence is generally in the form of a miracle which is beyond the power of an ordinary man, so that it is affirmed that they are the Messengers of Allah and take guidance as well as instructions from Him.

The stories of the conversion of the rod of Moses into a python, reviving the dead and the recovery of the born blind through Jesus are undeniable. The story of the

speech of Jesus in the cradle, has expressly been narrated in the Holy Qur'an.

Similarly the Prophet of Islam, though raised from amongst the ignoramuses, brought the Book which is the fountain-head of all knowledge, principles of guidance, laws of morality, ways of life, and secrets of creation. Admittedly, it is beyond human power to accomplish such a feat.

That is why we call the Holy Qur'an a miracle. The Holy Qur'an is miraculous from several angles. Its literary style is so wonderfully striking that its enemies called it a magical act and warned people not to go near Prophet Muhammad lest the penetrating words of the Qur'an should make the listeners spell-bound and attract them to Islam. This shows that even the enemies were convinced of Qur'an's extraordinary striking effect.

It is impossible for a man with his human limitations to describe the excellence of the Holy Qur'an in its entirety. Suffice it to say that, it is the word of Allah and a miracle of His last Prophet. It is the guide which directs humanity in all its affairs and at every stage of its development. It ensures the success of man in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

The Holy Qur'an says: *Qur'an guides towards the path which is the most upright.* (Surah Bani Israil, 17:9)

At another place it says: *The Book has been revealed to you (Mubammad) so that, you would be able to lead people from darkness into light.* (Surah Ibrahim, 14:1)

It further says: *This (Qur'an) is a reminder for the people and a guidance and an admonition to those who are pious.* (Surah Āle Imran, 3:138)

The Holy Prophet is reported to have said that the Holy Qur'an excels all speech as much as Allah excels all His creation.

It will be in the fitness of things if we leave the description of the merits of the Qur'an to the Holy Prophet and his appointed successors, the Twelve Imams, who know its value and importance more than anyone else, and who themselves are its real interpreters as well as custodians.

The Holy Prophet said, "I am leaving behind me two authorities with you, the Book of Allah and my progeny. They are not going to be separated from each other till the Day of Judgement".¹

Hence, in regard to the description of the merits of the Qur'an, we should be content with what the Imams have said. A good number of their sayings have been quoted by Allamah Majlisi in his book *Biharul Anwār*. We produce here only a few of them.

Hārith Hamadani says: Once I found people arguing in the masjid. I went to Imam Ali and said: "Don't you see that the people are arguing?" "Are they?" said he. "Yes", said I. "I have heard the Holy Prophet saying that soon there would be discord and civil strife among the Muslims. Is there any way of escaping the evil consequence of that", asked I. The Imam said: "Yes, the Book of Allah. It tells what happened in the past and what is going to happen in future. It adjudicates all disputes. It is the last word, not a joke. Any tyrant who abandons it, shall be crushed by Allah. He who seeks guidance from any other source, shall be misled. It is a strong Divine bond. It is a wise discourse. It is the straight path. It cannot be changed by the sallies of passions, nor can it be obscured by the twist of tongues. The learned are never tired of it. The

¹Sahih Muslim, vol. 2, p. 362, printed Isa al-Halabi; Sahih Tirmizi, vol. 5, p. 328, printed Darul Fikr, Beirut; Mustadrak al-Hākim, vol. 3, p. 148, printed Hyderabad.

wisdom which this book contains and the guidance which it impacts cannot be exhausted by constant use. Its wonders are endless. The jinn, when they heard it, were wonder-struck. They exclaimed, 'We have heard the marvellous Qur'an'. He who quoted it, spoke the truth. He who adjudicated according to it, acted justly. He who acted upon it, deserved a reward. He who exhorted others to act upon it, directed them to the right path. O Hārith! make it a point to follow it''.

It will not be out of place to refer to some of the finer points of this Hadith (report).

The Holy Prophet has said that the Holy Qur'an tells us about future events. This may mean either that the Holy Qur'an has hinted at some of the future happenings, or that the events exactly similar to those experienced by the past peoples will also be faced by the Muslims.

The Qur'an says: *You will certainly pass through one stage after another.* (Surah al-Inshiqaq, 84:19)

Imam Ali said that any tyrant who abandons the Qur'an shall be crushed by Allah. This means that in a Muslim society no oppressor will ever be able to violate the sanctity of religion and use it for his selfish ends. It also means that its text will ever remain unaltered. The Imam meant the same thing when he said that the vagaries of passions cannot change it. The Qur'an has been misinterpreted by the self-seekers, but its text has always been safe from alteration. It is exactly in the same form in which it was revealed to the Holy Prophet. (See: Muhammad Riza Muzaffar, *The Beliefs of the Shi'ite School*, ISP 1983)

The words of Imam Ali purport that if the Muslims had referred their doctrinal differences to the Holy Qur'an, they would have found in it the best judge and arbitrator, for it gives a clear verdict on all important matters. Unfor-

tunately, they have neglected the Holy Qur'an with the result that things have deteriorated to such extent that various sects of the Muslims have charged each other with unbelief. What a pitiable state of affairs!

Describing the Holy Qur'an, Imam Ali has said: "This book is a light which will never go out. It is a lamp which will never dim. It is a sea, the bottom of which will never be reached. It is a way never to be lost. It is a ray which will never fade. It is an evidence, the proof of which will never weaken. It is a cure, the adverse reaction of which is not feared. It is an honour, the supporters of which will never be routed. It is a right, the upholders of which will never be disappointed. It is the main source of faith. It is a fountain of knowledge. It is the corner-stone of Islam. It is an ocean, which cannot be drained out. It is a spring which will never get dry. It is a pool, the water of which does not recede. It is a stage, through which no one can be misled".

Imam Ja'far Sadiq has said, "The Holy Qur'an is an immortal Book. It shall remain operative so long as the sun and the moon exist". (Al-Bayan fi Tafsiril Qur'an, p. 31)

MERITS OF RECITATION OF THE HOLY QUR'AN

The Qur'an is a Divine code, which ensures success and happiness for man in the present life and in the Hereafter. Every verse of it is a source of guidance. He who is keen on attaining success, must associate himself permanently with it, and accustom himself to reflect on its verses. There are innumerable sayings of the Prophet and the Imams, exhorting the people to read the Qur'an regularly.

Imam Muhammad Baqir quotes the Holy Prophet as saying, "He who reads ten verses, will not be regarded as negligent of his duty. The name of one, who reads 100 verses, will be recorded with those who remember Allah;

the name of one, who reads 200 verses, will be included among those, who are submissive to Allah, and the name of one, who reads 500 verses will be inscribed with those, who do their utmost to please Allah. (Al-Kafi chapter Fazlul Qur'an).

Imam Ja'far Sadiq has said, "The Holy Qur'an is the covenant of Allah to His creation. It is the duty of a Muslim to look into this covenant and read its fifty verses every day".

The Imam also said, "What prevents a busy merchant from reading a chapter of the Holy Qur'an after he returns from the market and before he goes to bed? If he does that ten merits will be recorded in his favour and ten of his errors will be erased". (Wasailush Shi'ah vol. 1, p. 370)

He said to the people, "Be particular about reading the Holy Qur'an, for Paradise has as many grades as the number of its verses. On the Day of Judgement, the reader of the Holy Qur'an will be told, 'Read and go up'. As he will read a verse, he will go to a higher grade".

A number of reports indicate that it is preferable to read from a copy of the Qur'an to reciting from memory.

Ishāq ibn Ammar said to Imam Sadiq that he had learnt the Qur'an by heart and asked him whether he should read it from a copy of it or from memory. The Imam replied that it was better to read from a copy, because it is also a meritorious act to look at the Holy Qur'an.

The Hadith tells us of the merit of reading the Holy Qur'an in the house. When a man recites it in his house, his wife and children are also encouraged to follow his example.

The Imams have said that the recitation of the Holy Qur'an in a house invites the blessings of Allah for its inmates. The angels visit such a house and the devils quit it. A house in which the Holy Qur'an is not read, is visited

by the devils and deserted by the angels. (Usul al-Kafi)

There are many sayings of the Holy Prophet and the Imams exhorting the people to read the Holy Qur'an and earn its reward. There are also many sayings which mention the merits of some particular chapters and verses of the Holy Qur'an for specific purposes, and they are all from the Prophet of Islam.

PONDERING OVER THE HOLY QUR'AN

The Holy Qur'an requires the Muslims to ponder over its contents and meanings. Allah says: *Will they then not meditate on the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked?* (Surah Muhammad, 47:24)

The verse severely rebukes those who do not reflect upon the Holy Qur'an. Imam Zayn al-Abidin is reported to have said that the verses of the Holy Qur'an are like treasures. One should look into a treasure to ascertain what it contains. Abu Abdir Rahman Salami says that the companions of the Holy Prophet used to learn ten verses at a time. They did not learn the next ten until they had understood fully the first ten and acted upon them.

INIMITABILITY OF THE HOLY QUR'AN

It is a well-known fact that the Prophet presented Islam to the whole world and asked everyone to accept it. He put forward the Holy Qur'an as a proof of his Prophethood and declared it as inimitable. He challenged the whole world to produce a like of it if they could, even with their joint efforts. Then he went a step further and asked them to produce ten chapters like those of it, and finally, he challenged them to produce even one single chapter, which could match the Book of Allah.

The Arabs, past masters of eloquence as they were, would certainly have accepted his challenge, if they could, and simply by producing one single chapter, like that of the Qur'an, they could have refuted his claim to Prophet-hood. In that case, they would have escaped the trouble of fighting so many battles and undergoing so much suffering.

But the Arabs did not accept the challenge, for they knew well that the Qur'an was inimitable. Some of them embraced Islam. Others, because of their intransigence, preferred to decide the issue by fighting and not by an intellectual contest. Allah says: *Say, if all men and jinn were to come together to bring the like of this Qur'an, they could not do so, even if they all were to help each other.* (Surah Bani Israil, 17:88)

We see that the Christians and other enemies of Islam spend millions and millions of dollars every year, nay every month, in their attempt to disparage Islam and depreciate the Holy Qur'an. If they could produce a chapter like any of the chapters of the Holy Qur'an, that certainly would have been the easiest way of achieving their purpose.

The Holy Qur'an says: *They would like to extinguish the light of Allah (Islam) with their mouths, but Allah has decided to let His light shine forever; even though the unbelievers may dislike it.* (Surah Taubah, 9:32)

Normally any literary style can be adopted or imitated after a certain amount of practice. But this rule is not applicable to the Holy Qur'an, which has a style that cannot be learnt. Had the Holy Qur'an been the work of the Holy Prophet, at least some of his sermons, which are extant, would have had a similar style.

We find that an Arab poet or a writer excels in only one or two aspects of literature, such as panegyric, satire,

elegy and love. But, the Qur'an has dwelt on many and varied aspects and, in each case, its style is incomparable. Such an achievement is not humanly possible.

AN EVERLASTING MIRACLE

As we know, the acceptance of a Prophet depends on the proof of his Prophethood in the form of a miracle. As the messages of the past Prophets were of short range and of restricted nature, their proofs were also confined to their time. Their miracles were witnessed by some people, and to some others their reports were transmitted through universally accepted evidence. But, since Islam is an everlasting religion, its miracle, i.e. the Holy Qur'an, is also everlasting. This fact leads us to two conclusions:

1. Superiority of the Holy Qur'an to the miracles of the past Prophets, and
2. The termination of the past Prophethoods with the expiry of their proofs.

The Holy Qur'an has another distinctive feature which proves its superiority to all the miracles of the past Prophets. It vouches for the guidance of entire humanity and ensures advancement to the point of perfection. It guided the rough and rude Arabs who were steeped in the worst evils. They worshipped idols, refrained from acquiring knowledge and indulged in tribal feuds and vainglory. The Qur'an turned them into a nation, not to speak of bringing a radical change in the intellectual social and moral life of the Bedouin.

Anyone who looks at the history of Islam and goes into the life accounts of those companions of the Prophet who laid down their lives for Islam; can easily realize the profound impact of the Qur'an on them. It was the Qur'an which lifted them up from the depths of ignorance to the

heights of knowledge and perfection. The Holy Book taught them how to make sacrifices for the religion of Allah. It illumined the hearts of those who were engaged in idol-worship; it rallies under one banner all those who vied with each other in boasting of their ancestry. It was because of the Qur'an that within a period of eighty years, the Muslims could make such vast conquests as others could not do even in 800 years.

THE HOLY QUR'AN AND KNOWLEDGE

A number of the Qur'anic verses expressly say that Prophet Muhammad did not know how to read and write. Nobody ever disputed this truth. There is a definite proof of its correctness. Despite his illiteracy, he presented to the world a Book which is such a marvellous treasure of knowledge that it has dazzled the philosophers and thinkers of the East and the West alike. This is one of the most miraculous aspects of the Holy Qur'an. (Mir'ätul Anwār)

Let us suppose for the sake of argument that Muhammad was not illiterate. In that case, he must have acquired knowledge from the people among whom he was brought up. We know that these people were either heathens, who believed in myths and superstitions, or were the followers of deformed Christianity and Judaism, who claimed the Old and the New Testaments as the source of their knowledge. But the Holy Qur'an does not reflect on the absurdities and the superstitious ideas of either of them. Many verses of the Holy Qur'an set forth the attributes of Allah. They describe Him in a manner befitting His perfection, and declare Him to be free from all defects. Here are a few specimens.

They (followers of the Bible) have said Allah has adopted a son. He is too glorious to have a son. To Him

belongs, all that is in the heavens and the earth. All are subservient to Him. Allab is the Originator of the heavens and the earth. When He decrees a thing, He just commands it to, 'Be' and it comes into existence. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:116 - 117)

Your Lord is the only One Lord. There is no god but He, the Beneficent, the Merciful. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:163)

Allab exists. There is no god but He, the Everlasting and the Guardian of life. Slumber does not seize Him. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:255)

Nothing in the heavens or in the earth is bidden from Allab. It is Allab who fashions you in the wombs as He wills. (Surah Ale Imran, 3:5 - 6)

He is Allab Your Lord. There is no god but He. He is the Creator of all things, so worship Him. He is the Guardian of all. Sight perceives Him not, but He perceives men's sights. He is Subtile, All-aware. (Surah al-An'am, 6:103 - 104)

Say, it is Allab who produces and then reproduces it then how is it that you are misled. (Surah Yunus, 10:34)

Allab is He who raised up the heavens without visible supports. Then He established His control over the realm and made the sun and the moon subservient to Him. Each of them will remain in motion for an appointed time. He regulates all affairs and explains the evidence (of His existence) so that you may, perhaps, be certain of your meeting with your Lord. (Surah al-Ra'd, 13:2)

He is Allab; there is no god other than Him. All praise is due to Him in this world and in the Hereafter. Judgement is in His hands and to Him you will all return. (Surah al-Qasas, 28:70)

He is Allab, besides whom there is no god, the Sovereign, Lord, the Holy One, the All powerful and the

Majestic. Exalted be He above what they associate with Him. (Surah al-Hashr, 59:23)

He is Allah, besides whom there is no god. He has knowledge of everything whether perceptible or imperceptible. He is the Beneficent, the Merciful. (Surah al-Hashr, 59:22)

That is how the Holy Qur'an describes Allah, the Lord of the universe. Everything is reasonable and in conformity with scientific evidence. An illiterate person, born and brought up in a barbaric environment, cannot be expected to produce such lofty ideas.

The description of the Prophets by the Qur'an is also gloriously in keeping with the sanctity of the Prophets and majesty of their mission. Here are a few examples.

Those who follow the Messenger (Mubammad) the Prophet, who can neither read nor write and whom they find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel, which are with them (the People of Scriptures); know that he (Mubammad) exhorts them to do what is right and restrains them from evil. (Surah al-A'raf 7:157)

It is He who has raised among the unlettered people a Messenger among themselves, who recites to them His revelations, ensures their development, and imparts to them wisdom and knowledge of the Book, though before that they were in clear error. (Surah al-Jumu'ah, 62:2)

You will certainly receive a never-ending reward. (Surah al-Qalam, 68:3)

When Abraham said to his father and his people, 'I renounce what you worship except for the One who has created me and will guide me'. (Surah al-Zukhruf, 43:26)

We showed Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth to strengthen his faith. (Surah al-An'am, 6:75)

Ishmael, Elisba, Jonah and Lot; each one of them did

we exalt over the whole world. And from among their fore-fathers, children and brothers We chose some and guided them to a straight path. Such is the guidance of Allab by which He guides whomever He pleases out of His slaves. (Surah al-An'am, 6:85 – 87)

We bestowed knowledge on David and Solomon. They said: "All praise is due to Allab, who exalted us above many of His believing slaves". (Surah al-Naml, 27:15)

These were the Prophets from the offspring of Adam; from those who embarked with Noab and from the offspring of Abraham and Israel. Allab guided them and chose them for His favour. Whenever they would hear the revelation of the Beneficent Allab, they would bow down in prostration with tears. (Surah Maryam, 19:58)

The Qur'an describes the Prophets in this way. On the contrary, the Old and the New Testaments attribute many absurd and immoral stories to them and charge them with fornication, adultery and intoxication. Such stories are neither in keeping with correct logic nor with the high moral values. Hence it cannot reasonably be suspected that the noble teachings of Islam, contained in the Qur'an, were in any way inspired by Judaism or Christianity.

CONSISTENCY OF THE HOLY QUR'AN

Experience shows that deceit, fraud, and lying, are bound to result in self-contradiction and incoherence of statements. This particularly happens when a person has concerned himself for years with serious subjects like law, sociology, and religious faiths, etc. It is but natural that an impostor should get confused at one time or another and fall a prey to incongruity. Proverbially speaking, a liar lacks memory.

The Holy Qur'an has dwelt on many subjects. It has

dealt with law, politics, economics, social organizations and rules of morality. It has also dilated upon astronomy, history, and rules of peace and war as well as various sciences. It has thrown light upon angels, stars, winds, oceans, plants, animals, the Day of Resurrection and so on. But there is not one instance in it of any contradiction or incongruity. The story of Moses has been repeated so many times. Each time it has a new significance but there is no contradiction in substance.

The consistency of the Holy Qur'an becomes more significant if we keep in mind that its verses were revealed gradually over long number of years. Allah has referred to this characteristic of the Holy Qur'an: *Will they not ponder over the Qur'an? Had it come from other than Allah, they would have certainly found in it much inconsistency.* (Surah al-Nisa, 4:82)

This verse draws the attention of the people to a fact of which they are aware intuitively. They know that the statements of an impostor are apt to be contradictory and confused. But that is not the case with the Qur'an. Its contents are characterized by consistency and coherence.

All those, who have studied pre-Islamic history, know what a disgraceful state of affairs was prevailing at that time. Morals were at their lowest ebb. Raids and plunder were the order of the day. At the slightest provocation, the Bedouin were ready to wage wars. They were heathen in their beliefs and savage in their behaviour. There was no common religion. There was no organized government. The idol-worshippers formed the majority of the people. Various tribes worshipped different deities. Gambling was rampant. One of the shabby customs was marriage with the step-mother after the death of the father. The most callous custom was that of the daughters being buried alive.

These were some of the customs and conventions of the Arabs. But with the advent of Islam, every evil was uprooted. The same Arabs adopted excellent habits. Heathenism was replaced by belief in monotheism, ignorance by knowledge and feud by fellow-feeling. The Arabs became a compact nation and the standard-bearers of a dynamic culture in the world.

Dozy, the distinguished Dutch scholar, says: "After the appearance of Islam, which united the Arabian tribes and welded them into one nation, having one goal, the Muslims became masters of an empire extending from the Tagus in Spain to the Ganges in India, and raised the standard of culture over vast territories of the world. All this happened at the time when Europe was groping in the darkness of the Middle Ages".

This achievement was possible because of the teachings of the Holy Qur'an, which excelled all other Divine Books. The teachings of the Holy Qur'an are clear and logical. They are just, balanced and based on common sense. In the very first chapter of the Holy Qur'an, man has been taught to say to Allah: *Guide us to the straight path.* (Surah al-Fatiha, 1:5). This verse, short as it is, has great significance.

The Holy Qur'an has laid great emphasis on justice and equity. It says: *Allah commands you to deliver back the trusts to their owners; and when you judge between the people, that you judge justly.* (Surah al-Nisa, 4:58)

Let not your hatred for a people seduce you that you deal with them unjustly. Be just; that is nearer to piety. (observance of your duty). (Surah al-Mai'dah, 5:8)

Allah commands (people) to maintain justice, kindness, and proper relations with their relatives. He forbids them to commit indecency, sin and rebellion. He exhorts

you in order that you may take heed. (Surah al-Nahl, 16:90)

The Holy Qur'an has also warned against miserliness and extravagance: *Do not be stingy nor prodigal, lest you become empty handed blamed and left destitute!* (Surah Bani Israil, 17:29)

The Sacred Book enjoins patience: *Surely those who endure with fortitude shall be repaid without measure.* (Surah al-Zumar, 39:10)

Allah loves those who have patience. (Surah Āle Imran, 3:146)

At the same time it has not asked the oppressed to sit with folded hands. To ensure justice and prevent lawlessness, it has allowed them to take vengeance: *One who attacks you attack him as he attacked you; and know that Allah is with those who are pious.* (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:194)

By enjoining justice, integrity and moderation, the Book of Allah has introduced a system which ensures success both in this world and in the Hereafter. It says: *Those who obey Allah and His Messenger will be admitted by Him into the gardens underneath which rivers flow, where they shall abide for ever. That is the supreme success.* (Surah al-Nisa, 4:13)

Whoever has done an atom's weight of good, will see it and whoever has done an atom's weight of evil, will also see it. (Surah al-Zilzāl, 99:7 – 8)

Seek the abode of the life to come in that which Allah has given you; and neglect not your share of this world. (Surah al-Qasas, 28:77)

Many verses of the Holy Qur'an urge the people to acquire knowledge and observe piety, nevertheless the Holy Qur'an allows them to enjoy the good things of life: *Mubammad, ask them, who has made it unlawful to*

maintain beauty and to eat the pure foods which Allah has created for His slaves. (Surah al-A'raf, 7:32)

The Holy Qur'an does not ignore man's relation with his fellow beings: *Believers, stand by your contracts (and obligations).* (Surah al-Mai'dah, 5:1)

It insists that people should be kind to their wives, parents, relatives, fellow Muslims and the entire humanity:

Treat your wives kindly. (Surah al-Nisa, 4:19)

Women have rights similar to those of men. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:228)

Worship Allah and associate not with Him; and be good to the parents, the relations, the orphans, the needy and the neighbour who is kin to you and the neighbour who is not kin to you, the fellow traveller, the wayfarer and the slaves whom you possess. Allah loves not those who are boastful and arrogant. (Surah al-Nisa, 4:36)

These are some specimens of the teachings of the Holy Qur'an which enjoin every Muslim to exhort others to do good and to restrain from evil. This law paved the way for the spread of Islam and infused a spirit of nobleness and virtue among the people. Islam has entrusted on every person the duty of urging others to do good and refrain from doing the evil. All Muslims are required to preach the teachings of Islam and see to it that they are implemented.

One of the finest teachings of Islam is the unity and fraternity of all sections of society. Islam does not recognize any distinction among the people except the one based on knowledge and piety.

The Holy Qur'an says: *The most honoured among you in the sight of Allah is he who is the most pious of you.* (Surah al-Hujurât, 49:13)

Are those, who know, equal to those, who do not know? (Surah al-Zumar, 39:9)

The Prophet of Islam said: "Islam has ennobled those who were regarded low during the days of ignorance. It has done away with the pre-Islamic pride in ancestry. Now all men, irrespective of their race and colour, are equal. The most dear in the eyes of Allah on the Day of Judgement will be the most pious and obedient".

Because of his perfect faith, Islam gave preference to Salman al-Farsi over all other companions and declared him to be a member of the Holy Prophet's family. It denounced Abu Lahab, one of the Prophet's own uncles, because of his mischief and disbelief.

We find that the Messenger of Allah never took pride in his noble descent as was the custom of the day. Instead, he called his people to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and urged them to get united by adopting a common belief. He was able to bring round a people torn by feud and vendetta, rivalries and discords, and boast of ancestry. He wiped off their arrogance so much so that there was nothing surprising in a wealthy man of high birth giving his daughter in marriage to a poor Muslim of low birth.

The teachings of the Holy Qur'an promote the welfare of the individual as well as of the society. The Holy Qur'an has laid down laws which ensure success in this world as well as in the Hereafter. It should be borne in mind that the Prophet of Islam was born and brought up in a barbaric society of the worst order; so, the enactment of these beneficial laws under the Divine guidance is a clear manifestation of his Prophethood.

PERFECTION OF QUR'ANIC IDEAS

The Holy Qur'an has dealt with a large number of subjects of divergent nature and laws relating to all spheres of human life, such as theology, history, economics, ethics,

metaphysics, astronomy, family laws, social administration, and penal laws etc. Whatever has been written in this Holy Book on a subject is unassailable and beyond criticism. Such a feat is not humanly possible. We know that the views, expressed by an author, lose their freshness and truth after some time. In many cases, further research proves the incorrectness of the previous ideas. We see that the books of the ancient and even modern philosophers have been criticized by those who succeeded them. In so many instances what was once believed to be an indisputable fact was later found to be a mere pack of lies or fiction.

But, despite the passage of such a long time, none of the statements made and views expressed by the Holy Qur'an is outdated or lacking in truth.

PROPHECIES OF THE HOLY QUR'AN

A number of the Qur'anic verses predicted some important future events. There is no doubt that such predictions could not be made except through revelation.

Such events include the victory of the Muslims in the Battle of Badr, the treaty of Hudaibiyah, victory of the Byzantium (Constantinople), which has earlier suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of Persia and the death of Abu Lahab as an infidel.

SECRETS OF NATURE

The Holy Qur'an brought to light many laws of nature and scientific truths, which could not be known in the beginning of Islam except through the revelation. Though some of them were known to the ancient Greeks or others, they were totally unknown in the Arabian Peninsula. Many other things were discovered centuries later as a result of the advancement of knowledge. There

are many verses in the Qur'an which refer to the laws of nature, some of them explicitly and others implicitly. As certain, scientific truths were incomprehensible to the people, they were expressed in such terms as could be interpreted by the later generations. We give below a few instances:

We made everything in the earth to grow to its proper weight. (Surah al-Hijr, 15:19)

This verse shows that everything that grows has a specific weight. It has now been proved that everything in the vegetable kingdom is composed of certain chemicals in specific proportions. If that proportion is disturbed, it will become something else.

We send the winds impregnating. (Surah al-Hijr, 15:22)

This verse refers to the pollination of plants and trees by the wind. This truth was discovered scientifically many centuries after it had been revealed by the Holy Qur'an.

He has made all fruits (plants and flowers) in pairs. (Surah al-Ra'd, 13:3)

Glory be to Him who created the male and female in what the earth produces, mankind themselves and (other creatures) of which they do not know. (Surah al-Yasin, 36:36)

These verses show that not only animals but also plants and flowers have males and females, and that plants have such a structure as corresponds to sex in animals.

He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, the Lord of the Eastern regions! (Surah al-Saffat, 37:5)

I swear by the Lord of the East and the West that We are certainly powerful! (Surah al-Ma'arij, 70:40)

These verses refer to the time zones and by implica-

tion to the sphericity of the earth.

Reports from the Imams also point out that the earth is round. Imam Ja'far Sadiq is reported to have said: "A man came to me. He used to offer the maghrib prayer in the evening and the fajr prayer before dawn. I used to offer the maghrib prayer after sunset and the fajr prayer after the first appearance of light in the morning. He asked me why I did not do as he did, and added that the sun rose at some places before it rose in our country and set at some places while it was still above horizon in our country. I said, we must offer prayer in our region after the sunset and after the appearance of dawn. (al-Wasail)

That man argued by saying that the sun rose and set in different regions at different hours. The Imam agreed with him to that extent, but reminded him of his religious duty.

We have mentioned only a few aspects of the uniqueness of the Holy Qur'an. Anyway, they are enough to prove that the Holy Qur'an is Divinely revealed, and it is beyond human power to bring a like of it.

To prove that the Holy Qur'an is the word of Allah, it is sufficient to say that it is the academy from where Imam Ali graduated. Nahjul Balaghah, (Peak of Eloquence, ISP 1979) which contains his sermons, is with us. When he takes up a subject, it appears as if he has spent his whole life in the study of that very subject. There can be no doubt that he derived his knowledge from the Book of Allah. He who is conversant with the history of Arabia, especially Hijaz, cannot imagine that Imam Ali could have any other source of knowledge except Divine revelation.

CALL OF ISLAM

Like all revealed religions, Islam calls for the belief in the Unity of Allah, and combating the worship of any

other object or being. Islam lays the greatest emphasis on the Oneness of God. The very first sentence which a convert to Islam utters is, *La ilaha illa Allah* ('There is no god but Allah').

Anyone who professes faith in the Unity of Allah and the Prophethood of the Prophet of Islam, becomes a Muslim without any further formalities.

Islam lays great stress on unity among the Muslims. Apart from that it calls for obedience to Allah, justice, piety, cleanliness, banishing discrimination, work and effort, and acquisition of knowledge; it also calls for cautious thinking and urges us to refrain from disunity and dissensions. The Holy Qur'an says: *I exhort you with a single exhortation, that you rise for the cause of Allah in twos (collectively), or singly, and then think carefully.* (Surah Saba, 34:46)

Islam proposes that religion should be accepted out of free will, coupled with logic and reasoning and not through force or compulsion, for belief is not a thing to be imposed by force. The Holy Qur'an says: *There is no compulsion in religion. True guidance has now become distinct from error.* (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:256)

ISLAM, THE LAST REVEALED RELIGION

Just as an individual has to pass through various educational stages, ranging from primary to higher education and then reaching the final stage; similarly, from the point of view of religious teachings, humanity has passed through several evolutionary stages, till it has reached the final stage, which is Islam.

ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES ACCORD

WITH HUMAN NATURE

Human nature everywhere and at every time is more or less the same. Thus, humanity is the common factor among all the people, whether they are white or black, Arabs or non-Arabs, men or women, old or young, rich or poor, weak or strong, wise or ignorant. Whatever they are, their innate tendency is the same and it makes no difference at all whether they belong to the Stone Age or to the Space Age.

However, according to the history of political philosophy, habits and customs are the robes in which our unchanging body, which is like a solid reality, is clothed, and these robes are there in every country and every society in some or the other shape and colour, although human temperament basically is one and the same and it has some special characteristics. Its range is so wide that psychology (which deals with human nature), deals with nothing but this unchangeable nature of man. Thus, so long as man exists and retains his nomenclature, this nature remains and will not undergo any change.

MAN'S INDIVIDUAL AND NATURAL NEEDS

Human needs are of two kinds: the primary needs and the secondary needs. The needs which we are discussing here are the primary needs. They spring from man's physical structure and common spiritual tendencies; and man as a human being is essentially subordinate to them.

Sociology has also kept this reality in view. Books on this subject tell us that there are many things common amongst the cultures of various societies. In the same way, similarity in ideas and customs emanate from human nature. As such, it is possible to bring these common factors under a general rule.

Keeping in view the fact that all men are the same in their build and that they have the same characteristics and requirements, it can be said that they must have the same needs and must be bound by the same laws. For instance, at no time and for no human race has it ever been possible to resort to peace against an enemy who is determined to wipe the other out, particularly when there is no other way to get him out of its way except through bloodshed. Hence a nation which is faced with such horrors cannot be held guilty of bloodshed.

Similarly, no society can run away from the obligation of feeding its people and providing them protection. Nor can any society put a ban on the sex life of its members. Thus, there are other numerous examples which throw a flood of light on the unchangeability of human nature which is the same in all ages and at all places. These natural tendencies are latent in man since his birth. They emerge when man grows and develops or when the obstacles in his way are removed. They give birth to new needs and ultimately help the growth of man's culture. However, no factor in one culture can ever tolerate that the basic needs are suspended. For example, it can be said that as a result of our civilization we are used to richer food, finer clothes and easier and more comfortable life. But it cannot be said that our needs of eating, drinking, sleeping and living are a result of our civilization. Nor can it be said that before the civilization there was no eating drinking and living. Surely, our very existence depends upon these needs.

It is also the demand of human nature that when specific and definite habits have a routine of their own, there ought not to be anything so as to cause a change in these definite and specific habits. This is but the greatness of Islam that it formulated laws and code of ethics in sheer

conformity with human nature. Further, since Islam is for the whole of mankind, and not for any specific group or people, it is this nature of man which is considered so important in forming its moral code. Therefore, while enunciating Islamic principles, man's basic needs have been granted full allowances. Further, Islam has a code of unchangeable laws of life, a code that admits of no change at all, in spite of the fact that this code exists in many lands and for indefinite time.

The injunctions of Islam have been framed to suit the creation of man and to be in harmony with his aptitudes as well as urges.

The Holy Qur'an says: *Therefore, stand firm in your devotion to the upright religion, which is in harmony with the nature of man, designed by Allah.* (Surah al-Rum, 30:30)

Religion is the very core of Divine purpose for which man was created. Therefore, we can say that it is deeply implanted in the nature of man; and human nature never changes. So long as man is man, this nature will remain with him. Future, present or past do not affect it. It is an established truth that human nature remains the same.

The teachings of Islam are based on human nature. It is the same nature which Allah has created and since it accords with the Divine command, it can admit of no change. Thus religion means this very unchangeable nature of man; as the Holy Prophet of Islam has said: "Every child is born in the nature of Islam. It is the parents who make their child a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian". (Usul al-Kafi).

It is clear from what has been said above that a system of permanent and stable principles is quite necessary for human nature. That is why, in its message, Islam has prescribed nothing beyond it. Thus, according to

Islamic ideology, only such code of ethics, as is practicable for the people in their social and personal lives can be prescribed. According to these eternal principles, there can be no difference in the simple and plain life of the primitive man and the life of the present civilized man, with all his complicated ways of life, since their basic inherent tendencies are the same. Nor can the different modes of life have any effect on man's unchangeable nature, no matter whether he travels by a cart, or by a jet plane, whether he lives in caves and eats wild roots or his abode is a palatial building and his beautiful dining table is laden with nicest dainties and he sleeps in the bed of roses. In all these conditions his nature does not change.

These ways of life are but temporary and are of little value from the religious point of view. What is aimed at is man's training, which means the development of those basic tendencies with which man is endowed according to his capacity. This really means that Islam is another name of those innate urges which are latent in man. Thus, Islam can go along the highest standard of man's evolution. Therefore, as long as man exists on this globe the laws and commands of Islam shall last and shall not suffer any change.

REALISTIC NATURE OF ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES

One of the most important drawbacks of man-made law is that it generally fails to touch the inner most subtleties while the Divine laws of Islam suffer from no such imperfection.

We know that drinking, for example, is an undesirable act; and, in view of its evil consequences, it can be regarded as a serious menace to human existence. Yet, in consideration of the material gains that accrue from the sale of wine, a

government deems it justified. Same is the case with gambling, prostitution and other corrupt practices.

The Islamic laws are, however, quite different in their composition because they have come to us from the Creator of this universe. Allah has created this universe and He is the Knower of all the ins and outs of it. In His knowledge past and future are the same. Since He is the Creator of nature, He knows all about it. Islam views human nature in its real form, in which Allah has created it. Hence, Islam, while making laws, has due regard for human needs. It has also due consideration for man's desires and inclinations; and it can justly be said that Islamic laws and human nature go together.

In the same way, while formulating Islamic injunctions, human nature has been the primary consideration. This is an indication that there is harmony between human nature and Islamic teachings. Therefore, so long as human nature remains unaltered irrespective of time and space, Islamic teachings shall have their value and Islamic laws shall have their effectiveness.

For example, Islam regards a liar as an enemy of Allah and declares the evil committed by him as a breach of trust. Can this now be said that falsehood was a breach of trust for the people living fourteen hundred years ago and that for the people in this age of science and wisdom, falsehood is not a breach of trust? Obviously its reply is in the negative.

Similarly, wine drinking is absolutely unlawful in Islam. The Holy Qur'an treats it as an evil and describes it as an act of the devil. The Holy Prophet has called it the mother of vices and the source of all sins.

He has termed the drunkards as accursed. The punishment for a single sip of wine is eighty lashes. It cannot be

denied that it is only on account of the hazardous consequences of wine drinking that Islam has declared it unlawful. It is also an established fact that apart from being injurious to health, wine ruins its user morally, physically and spiritually.

Is, this, therefore, not stupid for someone to say that drinking was an evil fourteen hundred years ago but in this age of sputniks and missiles it is not an evil at all? Not a single year passes without there being hundreds of cases of murder, suicide, defalcation, burglary, adultery, degradation and obscenity as a direct result of this fatal poison. Can it be claimed that now this outmoded prohibition is not worth being renewed? The law that speaks the language of nature can never grow outdated and outmoded. This is so, because there is nothing new and old for truth and reality. Truth and reality are always fresh everywhere and everytime.

Islam has severely censured adultery, obscenity, sex-licence and lawlessness. To guard the honour of the people, it has ordered for the first time in history that the man and woman guilty of illicit sex relation should be flogged hundred times. As a punishment for this immoral act, it has also ensured by law that the public shall witness and be present at this whipping.

Can any sensible person still maintain that such laws have grown old and that they are meant for the backward people only or that such laws were well observed in the past but now in this age of liberty and sex freedom, they have become defunct and meaningless? If we look at the sad plight of the West in particular and see how it has lost its glamour, we shall realize that these laws have not only not grown old but will always remain fresh.

The sum and substance of all this is that whatever Islam has declared to be permitted is on the basis of its

being beneficial to man; and whatever is declared to be unlawful is directly or indirectly harmful for him, whether this harm is material or moral. Man may not be fully aware of the realities of these things. A time is sure to come when man, on the basis of his knowledge and experience, will know the truth about it.

How just are the words of a British thinker, Mr H.G. Wells! "A religion I know, and about which I have often said that it is fully aware of the secrets of creation and of the reality of things, and which is co-extensive with civilization, is the religion of Islam and Islam only".

REALITY IS EVER FRESH

A thing, based on reality, never loses its freshness. For instance, the theories of Plato and Aristotle are still fresh and shall always remain so despite the fact that 2,500 years have elapsed since they were introduced. Mere passage of time does not affect them. In the times of Plato and Aristotle two and two were four and they are four even today, and after two thousand years from now too, two and two will be four. The upheavals of the world and the march of time have no effect on them.

There is no doubt that every law of Islam is in harmony with the system of creation in every respect. Nowhere in this world do we find a law as natural and as close to reality as the law of Islam. In other words, it should be said that the teachings of Islam are based on reality. Had Islam not been a religion of 'Nature' it would have been exterminated or deshaped by the vicissitudes of time. But, on the contrary, it is very much alive to this day, though it had no material props for its survival in the past nor does it have them now. This is in spite of the fact that ever since the advent of Islam, repeated attempts were

made to wipe it out and such attempts are still being made. The secret of its success is that Islam is the last of the Divine religions. Islam is so akin to reality that even the great thinkers of the West are amazed at it. The reason is that Islam's constitution is natural and it is in harmony with realities of life and so it is sure to exist as long as the world exists.

Although fourteen hundred years have passed, the freshness of the truth as uttered by the Prophet of Islam is still vividly manifest even this very day. For man's existence and happiness, it is quite necessary to act upon the code which Nature has sanctioned.

Only by adherence to Islam can man come out safe and successful from the storm of life. It is only by acting upon the prescribed course that man can create harmony between his life and the vast creation of Allah.

Thus, the ideals of Islam and man's progress as well as prosperity can never be in conflict with each other since Islam gives guidance along the path of Allah, and at the same time instils in man a sense of responsibility for making sacrifices for a noble and sacred cause.

THE NATURE OF ISLAMIC LAWS

The injunctions of the revealed religions are of two sets. The first set consists of injunctions that are eternal and invariable. Those do not die out with the passage of time but constitute a higher form, despite vicissitudes.

The second set of injunctions is specific in respect of time, place and conditions. Such injunctions get worn and become outdated with the passage of time and are replaced by new ones. It is in respect of such laws that we say, "the old order changes yielding place to new".

The discarded injunctions are meant to operate only

for a time and at a place and as such they represent reality, though in part only. How is it, then, possible that one reality should displace another reality? On this ground, a new religion need not annul all the injunctions of the old religions. Rather, there are in the revealed religions, injunctions that are unchanging and towards which all the Prophets, right from Adam to Muhammad, (Peace be on them) have invited the people.

It is also possible that the annulment of a law is provided for in a religious constitution. There may be a law which is superseded by another law. In Islam too, there are examples of this termination of laws and therefore, such laws are regarded as temporary and variable.

In view of man's unchanging needs, Islam has formulated unchanging laws; and, considering his changing needs, has also foretold the change in their *modus operandi*. Thus in an Islamic society the operative laws are of two sets.

1. Invariable Laws
2. Variable Laws

The first set includes those laws which were revealed to the Holy Prophet as Divine injunctions, and which were declared as binding on mankind under all circumstances. For example, there are qualities like justice, peace, liberty, cleanliness, the keeping of covenants, truthfulness, righteousness, honesty, doing good to all, sacrifice, fight for the right cause, love and sincerity, abstaining from cruelty and exploitation, combating undue discrimination, corruption and scores of other rules of morality. Similarly, Islam prohibits defamation, discord and dissension, licentiousness, falsehood and forgery. These are questions of eternal values, which admit of no change. Even after millions of years, tyranny will not become a virtue nor will justice become a vice. The important portion of the

teachings of Islam is concerned with these abiding principles which do not change in any age.

Thus an elucidation of this truth is to be found in the Hadith and what Prophet Muhammad has declared to be lawful is lawful till the Day of Judgment, and what he has declared unlawful shall remain unlawful for all time to come. Time has no effect on such laws. Like the exact formula of mathematics, they remain the same at all times. This is so because these laws are in conformity with the nature of man. It is an established fact that human nature will remain the same so long as man is man and there can be no change in it.

The second set consists of laws that are framed for a specific time and place. These laws are not based on a strong and stable foundation. So they keep on changing according to the demand of time and situation. Such laws depend on time and place for their existence, because they originate from human requirements which change with the passage of time. This set includes such aspects as relations and treaties of the Muslim countries with non-Muslims, political and economic relations, defence tactics, defence requirements and many other similar questions.

There is no denying the fact that such things do change and every age has its own peculiarities, but the teachings of Islam contain a large number of general rules which are applicable to every age and meet all requirements of the changing circumstances.

For example, in connection with defence preparations and equipment of military forces, the Holy Qur'an says: *Mobilize your (defensive) force as much as you can to frighten the enemies of Allah and your own enemies.* (Surah al-Anfāl, 8:60)

It is, therefore, evident that after the enunciation of

this general rule, utmost preparation should be made against the enemy and every possible war equipment should be acquired for that purpose. It has been expressly stated that the aim is not aggression or manslaughter, but to deter the enemy so that he is terrified and may not dare resort to war.

This is an example of the general rules of Islam in order to meet the requirement of every age. The same is the case with all those rules, which exist for a specific purpose and time, and which are to be adapted to particular requirements.

Thus, great Muslim scholars called Mujtahids are the competent authorities and are vested with powers to introduce changes according to the need of the time. Using these powers they (Mujtahids) can, when necessary, meet the requirements of any special circumstances. The well-known decree forbidding temporarily the use of tobacco and enjoining the economic blockade of an imperialistic trading company, which was issued in Iran by Ayatullah Mirza Muhammad Hasan Shirazi in 1309 A.H. to counter foreign influence, was of this very nature. In Islamic terminology, such a decree is called '*Hukmul Faqib*'—a jurist's order .

RIGHTEOUS RULERS AS THE VANGUARDS OF RELIGION

To meet the changing needs of the society, Islam has kept in view the mode of life of the same nature, as stated above and has thus rendered the changing conditions stable and steady. In this connection Islam has permitted the Mujtahids to issue judgement in accordance with the requirements of time and frame the rules and implement them accordingly.

Although these rules are to be issued in the same manner as the stable ones, yet they have a particular aspect of their own, i.e. they have to depend for their life and stability on those needs and requirements which have given birth to them and to which they are subordinate. Since the Islamic society is revolutionary and evolutionary in character, these codes also keep on changing, yielding place to new and better codes of rules.

This is the reason why the verse regarding *Uli'l amr minkum* (Vide Surah al-Nisa, 4:59), enjoins that the 'spiritual leaders' are to be obeyed in the same way as Allah and the Holy Prophet are obeyed. Of course, these powers were originally vested with the Holy Prophet and his government. After the Holy Prophet, the Imams (i.e. the spiritual leaders) were entrusted with these powers in succession; afterwards, through them, other lawful governments became the custodians of these powers.

Thus, after the Holy Prophet, the Holy Imams were the real spiritual guides, and after them only those persons who are their true representatives can perform these revered duties. (For details refer Imam Khumayni, *Wilayat-e-Faqih*)

If there are no set rules to cope with the new conditions and circumstances, the Islamic government can make new laws in accordance with the basic principles of Islam and the traditions of the Holy Prophet.

The Muslim rulers are, therefore, authorized to meet the changing needs and new situations in every age and country and fulfil the demands of the Muslim society in such a way that the fundamental provisions of Islam are neither infringed nor violated.

IJTEHĀD

'Ijتهād' means assiduous efforts in deducing a ruling

from the Holy Qur'an, the sayings and doings of the Holy Prophet and of the Holy Imams.

Ijtehād is thus a great and formidable task for the learned scholars (Mujtahids). It is in fact a serious and highly onerous duty. During the period of the Holy Prophet ijtehād played a sensitive and foundational role. Then it came to be regarded as a bridge that connects future with past. Ijtehād is the master key to all the problems and challenges of all times. Therefore, it has been rightly termed as 'the dynamic force of Islam'.

Thus unchanging and stable principles of Islam are limited. But occurrences and events bring along with them specific problems. Therefore, it is essential that in every age, there should be a galaxy of scholars, well-versed in Islamic code, well-acquainted with the world problems and with the demands of the time so that it could bear the responsibility of finding solution of these problems on the basis of ijtehād, that is to deduce a judgement for the problems from the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah.

Why not so? The world is advancing with terrific speed and this advancement is necessarily giving birth to such strange new problems as could never be conceived in the past. In meeting these new demands, there is a genuine need for such a living and enlightened jurisprudence, as will keep abreast of the times and reconcile man's new life with the real spirit of Islam so that along with the advancement of knowledge, the spirit of religion could be instilled into human mind and heart.

According to the needs of the time, the learned scholars have to present Islamic jurisprudence in such a manner that they may justify its needs, understand and solve the new problems in its light and guidance. This is essential lest the religion should stagnate and lose its real spirit.

A Hadith pertaining to ijtehad states that Ishaque bin Ya'qub submitted a letter to Imam Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, in which Ishaque stated the remedy he had discovered for the adversities which had befallen him. Muhammad bin Uthman 'Umari, the special representative of the Imam, put up the letter before him. The Imam replied to the letter in his own hand writing.

"In respect of adversities and events you should refer to our narrators and jurists, as they are for you our proof, just as we are Allah's proof".

In this tradition, actual adversities mean cropping up of the new problems. The writer had raised a question as to what they should do when confronted with a problem especially when they have no access to the Imam. The Imam replied that in a case like that they should refer the matter to the jurist and to the man in authority (Faqih).

Some contemporary jurists are of the opinion that occurrences do not mean problems and their religious solutions, since this is quite common among the Shi'ahs that in these matters they refer to the jurists. They think that problems mean those problems which keep cropping up in the life of the Muslims, and can arise in the cultural, intellectual, social, political and economic fields of life.

At any rate, whether the problems refer to events and occurrences or whether they refer to those new issues which crop up and subside in every age and time; in all such cases, you have to refer to the jurists and the narrators to know your duty in that respect. It is a rational approach of Shi'ah jurisprudence that every age poses new problems to which the old law offers no solution. Thus it is essential for the jurists to take cognizance of the problem, after judging its intricacies (from the Qur'an and Sunnah) as well as from existing precedents, and solve and

furnish a proper answer to it. (See: Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir Sadr, A short history of 'Ilmul Usul, ISP 1983)

A study of Islamic jurisprudence reveals that in different ages problems did crop up and the jurists did furnish solutions for them. Thus, slowly the range of our jurisprudence grew larger and larger. For example, when we study the books of jurisprudence prior to Shaykh Abu Ja'far Tusi (385 - 460 A.H.), we come to know how brief they are and how limited were the problems then. The Shaykh widened the scope of jurisprudence and brought about a revolution through the compilation of his renowned book 'Al-Mabsoot'.

In this way, from age to age, through the efforts of the jurists and the scholars, the volume of jurisprudence kept on growing, until a century ago it was possible for the author of 'Al-Jawahir' to complete one series of jurisprudence. It was the result of his lifelong labour.

So extensive has jurisprudence grown in our time, that it is not possible for a single person to make intensive study and research and write or teach the full course of jurisprudence.

This clearly shows how Islam, in different periods of history, has tackled the problems of change, revolution, and newness, and that their solution is due to these learned scholars and jurists.

The role of ijtehad in Islam is, therefore, of great importance, for it reconciles religion with the demands of the age. Islam encompasses all the decisions and injunctions that are to be issued and awarded till the Day of Judgement, and this world will need these decisions and injunctions for its own good and for the completion of its evolution. (See: Dr Behishti and Dr Bahonar, Philosophy of Islam, ISP, 1982).

In 'Al-Kafi' there is a chapter which emphasizes that "All needs of mankind are covered by the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith".

The Holy Qur'an explains everything. The Imam states on oath that all the needs arising in all ages for the Muslims are to be found in Islam and that there is no room for any doubt about it.

This is not merely a claim. On the contrary, it is a reality which has been acknowledged by the legal experts of the East and the West. They also accept Islam as a dynamic school of lasting legal system.

Santayana, the esteemed philosopher of the West, says, "The code of Islamic jurisprudence is so complete in its dealing with legal provisions, that it has to be admitted that for the organization of Muslim society it is a perfect legal system".

Professor Hockings, the renowned American scholar, commenting on Islamic jurisprudence states:

"The secret of progress of the Islamic countries does not lie in aping the values and the ways of the Western life and in installing them in their own life. Some people ask whether there is room for the creation of new thoughts in Islam and whether a stable and distinguished code could be framed as could agree with the new needs and demands of life. The answer to this query is that not only does Islam have the potential for every kind of progress but it also has greater capacity of evolution than other systems. The difficulty of the Muslim countries is not that their system of life has no room for progress. The difficulty, really, lies in the deplorable lack of will on their part to derive any benefit from the provisions of the Islamic laws which lead us toward progress"

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Teachings of Islam

Islamic teachings cover the entire range of human life. On the whole, they are divided into two parts.

1. Man's relation to Allah
2. Man's relation to man

MAN'S RELATION TO ALLAH

While performing an act of worship, man is absorbed in his praise for Allah and thus tries to make his soul transcend this material world. He tries to purge himself of the impurities of sins and to cultivate high human qualities in himself. He seeks the help of Allah, the Almighty and the Eternal, so as to overcome the causes of despair and despondency; he keeps remembering Him so as to shoulder his responsibility towards Him. The Holy Qur'an says: *Worship Me and be steadfast in prayer for My remembrance.* (Surah Tâhâ, 20:14)

Hence it is evident that it is the worshipper who shall benefit from worship.

SALUTARY EFFECT OF WORSHIP

Acts of worship are performed with particular attention and certain formalities. Allah does not need our worships. It is we, who through His worship and adoration, are showered with great moral and material benefits.

Alexis Carrel, a well-known scientist, says: "When it is not possible to find any logical words to infuse hope, it is worship and prayer which generate a feeling of trust and enable man to face the complex problems of life with confidence. This feeling can manifest itself in everybody".

Worship leaves a definite mark on the habits and manners, and for that purpose we must perform acts of worship regularly. The societies which have killed the spirit of worship, are not usually safe from corruption and decay. The effects of worship and adoration are so quick and wonderful that their manifestation can be felt physically.

According to the same scientist, the result of adoration can be established scientifically also. Acts of worship affect not only emotional, but also physical conditions and sometimes even heal bodily ailments in a few moments or a few days. Islamic acts of worship are very simple and easy to perform. There are ample facilities for the sick and the weak.

It is worth noting that Islamic acts of worship not only promote the desirable healthy effects in the emotional, psychological and moral aspects of an individual but they produce remarkable social effects too. (See: Ayatullah Baqir al-Sadr, *He, His Messenger and His Message*, ISP 1980).

SALAT

Salat, one of the most important Islamic acts of worship, is performed five times every day and night with great simplicity and devotion. It produces very healthy and sound effect on the moral and spiritual life of a person. It helps in strengthening the spirit of faith and purging the worshipper's heart of the impurities of sin. As one of its conditions is cleanliness, it enjoins upon every Muslim ever to keep his body and dress clean and tidy. (See:

Allama Āsifi, Al-Salāt, ISP 1981).

One of the pre-requisites of prayer is that the dress of the offerer and the place where he is offering prayers, must not have been acquired by unlawful means. By it, Islam teaches man not to encroach upon other's property, nor to misuse it. As prayer is to be performed at the appointed timings, it teaches discipline and punctuality, and accustoms man to rise early, which is the secret of the success of many world personalities.

We know that it is preferable to perform prayer in a congregation where all stand before Allah in a row or rows without any distinction and carry out the significant and ennobling ritual in a brotherly manner. Congregational prayer teaches the lesson of equality, fraternity, harmony and unity.

FAST

Fasting is another Islamic act of worship, which teaches self-control and resistance to passion.

From the social point of view, it induces people to show practical sympathy to the deprived and the starving. Moreover, from the point of view of health and hygiene, its curative and preventive value cannot be denied. It cleanses the bodily system internally and shakes off the unconsumed food material which usually takes the form of surplus fat and overweight, and becomes the cause of many diseases and discomforts. Fasting is a good precautionary measure against the incidence of a number of diseases. It has curative value too.

HAJJ

The holding of a great conference of world Muslims is another masterpiece of the Islamic teachings in respect

of worship. The ceremonies of Hajj (pilgrimage) are so exciting, pure and inter-woven with fraternity and equality that they deeply impress everyone without any exception.

More than a million Muslims from all quarters of the world perform Hajj every year. This gathering affords an opportunity to the people of all races, languages and nationalities to meet on a common ground without any discrimination. Its ceremonies take a man out of his material shell which is marked with harshness and antagonism, and lift him to an atmosphere full of devotion and virtue. They soften the emotions and enliven the feelings.

The Hajj gatherings also serve the purpose of a national conference on a world level and contribute to homogeneity of the Muslims, both political and economic. These congregations serve as a unifying force and a common bond among the Muslims belonging to diverse social segments, and provide them an opportunity to sit together and exchange ideas. A study of all acts of worship and devotion in Islam will show that everyone of them has both moral and social aspects. This confirms what we said earlier that the benefit of all acts of worship in Islam is for the follower.

MAN'S RELATION TO MAN

This part of Islamic teachings includes all social problems. Islam, with its distinctive system, teaches its adherents how they should be, how they should live and how they should discharge their duties to the society.

The obligations which a Muslim owes, are of a wide and varied nature.

These obligations stand in respect of parents, of teachers, of friends and neighbours, of brothers in religion, of fellow human beings, of even the animals etc. (See:

Islam, Code of Social Life, ISP 1980).

Islam tells that man, being an organ of the social body, has so much importance that nothing can be equal to his life and blood. The Holy Qur'an says: *Whoever killed anyone except as a punishment for manslaughter or causing mischief in the land, should be looked upon as though he had killed all the mankind and he who saved the life of one, should be regarded as though he had saved the mankind.* (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:32)

There is no doubt that in view of the homogeneity of all the organs of the body of a human society, the loss of one individual affects the whole society and thus in a way, the individual and the society become identical.

The Holy Prophet has said that all the believers are the organs of one body. If one organ suffers all other feel uneasy.

Sa'di Shirazi, the celebrated poet of Iran, was inspired by this very Prophetic saying when he said in his well-known couplet that all human beings are the organs of one another.

As we know, in Islam there is no problem of race, colour or geographic region. It is possible that all Muslim societies, on the basis of their adherence to a common ideology, set up a world government with one law and one policy in which all racial and geographical entities may be submerged.

RELATIONS OF MUSLIMS WITH NON-MUSLIMS

Here again Islamic teachings have two aspects:

1. To preserve Muslim identity
2. To establish peaceful relations with the non-Muslims

With a view to maintaining the independence and solidarity of the Muslim society, provisions are made to

save the Muslims from being merge in non-Muslim societies and to protect them against all alien influences, hence, instructions have been given that the Muslims shall not rely on non-Muslims, nor should they disclose their secrets to the non-Muslims. The Holy Qur'an says: *Believers, do not have intimacy with anyone except your own people. Others shall spare nothing to ruin you. They love to see that you suffer.* (Surah Āle Imran, 3:118)

Islam forbids the Muslims to make friends with those who are hostile to Islam, unless they change their policy and give up their hostile attitude.

The Holy Qur'an says: *You will not find people who believe in Allah and the Day of Judgement would establish friendship with those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even they be their fathers, sons, brothers or their relations.* (Surah al-Mujadilah, 58:22)

Islam also wants the Muslims to be a powerful and active nation in the world. It wants them to benefit from the constructive role of the non-Muslims and live with them with mutual respect and in a healthy atmosphere. Islam allows the Muslims to pursue a policy of peaceful co-existence with all people of the Scriptures. It even enjoins upon Muslims to protect them as a minority in Muslim countries, respecting their rights so long as they do not commit a crime.

Such minorities are known in Islamic jurisprudence as Ahluz Zimmah. (The non-Muslims who live under the protection of a Muslim government). Anyhow, there are certain conditions which they have to observe in a Muslim State.

If the interests of the Muslims so demand, they can enter into treaties with the non-Muslims provided that these treaties do not in any way endanger their indepen-

dence, interests and self-respect. The Muslims are bound strictly to adhere to the treaties concluded by them and are not allowed to violate them unless they are violated first by the other party. Adherence to treaties and agreements is a general rule of Islam.

This rule must be observed in respect of the treaties made with both Muslims and non-Muslims. Violation of a treaty on the pretext that the other party is not Muslim is not allowed.

ISLAM ENJOINS UNIVERSAL VIGIL

Every Muslim has two obligatory duties:

1. To invite others to do right
2. To combat corruption

These two duties, which are known in Islamic jurisprudence as *'Amr bil Ma'ruf* (exhortation to do good) and *Naby 'anil Munkar* (restraint from doing evil), enjoin upon all Muslims to keep a constant watch on the society. If they find anybody deviating from the path of justice and truth, they must invite him to the right path and if they find anybody committing a crime or sin, they must restrain him from doing so.

This rule is considered to be an important law of Islam. In this respect, the Holy Qur'an says: *You are the best nation which has been raised for the guidance of mankind. You exhort the people to do good and restrain them from doing evil.* (Surah Ale Imran, 3:110)

Imam Sadiq has said: "He who does not fight corruption, either with his hand or with his tongue or heart is alive only in name".

In fact, the performance of these two important duties is one of the obligations of collective life. In collective living, the happiness and misery of each member

of the society is shared by all others and hence they cannot be indifferent to the conduct of fellow members.

Islam asks every Muslim to keep his social spirit fully alive and hold dear the collective interests. It calls upon every individual to be responsible to all other members of the society and the society to be responsible to all the individuals. All the Muslims have a right to criticize and reform each other and play their role in the formation of a healthy society.

ISLAMIC ECONOMY

As the moral and material well-being of the community is not possible without a balanced and healthy economy, Islam as a progressive religion, does not lose sight of such an important and vital subject. (See: Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir Sadr, *Islam and Schools of Economics*, ISP 1980)

(a) ZAKAT

Islam, in order to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, has legislated the system of zakat, and ordered the rich to pay a proper share of their wealth and individual income as zakat to the public treasury (Baytul Mall). The money, so collected, constitutes a very large amount which can help a lot in combating poverty, narrowing class gap and ensuring an over-all development. The leaders of Islam have said that the amount of zakat has been so precisely determined that if all those on whom zakat is due, pay it honestly, poverty can be totally eradicated. Poverty exists only because a large number of people evade the obligation of this vital duty.

It is obligatory to pay zakat at the rate of 2½% if the specified things have been in the possession of the

owner for full eleven lunar months. They include wheat, barley, palm-date, raisin, camel, cow, sheep/goat, golden coins and silver coins.

The eight categories prescribed for the expenditure of the zakat money fully illustrate the aim and importance of this Islamic law. Zakat thus contributes a lot in the formation of a healthy society.

The details of these eight categories have been given in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an.

Zakat (the welfare tax) is only for the poor, the destitute, the tax collectors, those whose hearts are inclined (towards Islam), ransoming of the captives and for those who cannot pay their debts; in the way of Allah; and the wayfarers. It is an ordinance from Allah. Allah is All-knowing and All wise. (Surah Taubah, 9:60)

It is to be noted that the term 'in the way of Allah' is very wide and covers all development projects as well as such items as education, health, construction of bridges, roads, hospitals etc.

(b) KHUMS

Khums means payment of 20% of yearly savings i.e. 20% of what is left of the total annual income after meeting all expenses of that year. It is an Islamic tax which is levied to meet the requirements of collective life such as help to the needy, eradication of poverty, propagation of Islam and all other material and moral needs of the Muslim society. Khums is due only on the surplus and not the entire income. Hence, they, whose expenditure is more than or equal to their income have to pay nothing on this account. Only those whose income exceeds their expenditure should pay 20% of the surplus to the public treasury. The money so realized comes to a considerable amount

and enables the Muslims to solve many of their religious, social and economic problems.

Khums is not confined to the income earned from service, business etc. It is also levied on what is obtained from mines, what is extracted from the sea by divers, and on unclaimed buried treasure. In all these cases, it is levied on the total income. Only the production expenses are deducted.

The money collected in this manner should be spent on supporting the religious scholars and preachers, propagation of Islamic ideology and doctrines, publishing Islamic literatures, constructing masjids, socio-religious centres, orphanages, schools, hospitals and other projects of public utility.

(c) CHARITY

Spending one's wealth to seek the pleasure and blessings of Allah is called 'charity'.

Islam has attached great importance to giving alms to the needy and the poor. There are many verses in the Holy Qur'an on this subject. Moreover, Islam appreciates if one offers voluntary service and spends his energy for the welfare of the people.

Charity is one of the factors which help in the equitable distribution of wealth and eradication of poverty. Alms may be given for individuals or charitable purposes. Distribution of alms through charitable institutions according to a well-laid out programme and under the supervision of pious people is an effective way of helping the poor.

(d) ENDOWMENT

Creation of endowments helps in the equitable distribution of wealth. The concentration of wealth in the

hands of a few is prevented. There are two kinds of endowments namely:

1. Private Endowment
2. Public Endowment

In the case of private endowments, the beneficiaries are only a few individuals or a limited class such as the children or descendants of the grantor.

In the case of public endowments, which are far more common, the bequeathed property is transferred to the public or a large class of society and becomes a part of public property. Islam has encouraged the creation of endowments and the Imams themselves had set an example in this respect. Through endowments a large portion of private property is turned into public property and thus it becomes available for the service of the masses. This in itself is a big step towards the just and even distribution of the wealth.

HOW IS WEALTH PRODUCED?

From the Islamic point of view, the true and absolute ownership of all things belongs to Allah alone. He owns everything that exists in the universe. His ownership is real and creative because He is the Creator and Sustainer of everything. The Holy Qur'an says: *To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth.* (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:255)

Hence, others can become only the owners with His permission, and in accordance with His commands.

PRIVATE OWNERSHIP

Islam respects private ownership and considers that everybody is the owner of the fruits of his own labour. It recognizes labour as the basis of ownership. This is a natural law which has been endorsed and enforced by

Islam. Everybody is the natural owner of his self and his mental and physical faculties. As his products are in reality only a crystallization of his existing faculties, he is the owner of the products of his labour.

REHABILITATION AND ACQUISITION

The Holy Prophet says: "He, who brings a barren land under cultivation, is the owner of it".

Acquiring minerals and other natural resources before anybody else discovers them is another way of ownership.

According to the Islamic law, he who acquires it, is the owner. As bringing barren land under cultivation and acquiring natural resources involve labour, it is clear that labour is the main factor in creating wealth.

Of course, a government run on the principle of Islam, has a right to arrange the cultivation of barren land and the excavation of minerals so as to utilize the return for the benefit of the general public.

Islam attaches great importance to the rights of the labourers. According to Hadith, ignoring the rights of a labourer is an unpardonable sin.

A well-known Hadith says that the Holy Prophet raised a worker's hand which had swollen as a result of hard work and said: "This is the hand which is liked by Allah and His Prophet".

CIRCULATION OF WEALTH

Islam has imposed special taxes on the stagnant wealth which is not in circulation (such as zakat on gold and silver coins after the completion of one year), and thus has taken a practical step to encourage circulation of wealth. The Holy Qur'an has condemned the hoarders and those who keep their wealth stagnant and do not utilize it for the benefit of the people.

Further, there are the traditions of the Holy Prophet, which induce commerce, agriculture, cattle breeding and setting up of industries. In authentic books of Hadith, there are many extant sayings, which clearly show that Islam aims at the maximum mobilization of all human and financial resources for the benefit of the general people.

USURY AS A GREAT CURSE

Islam wants to boost up production. It strictly forbids usury so that nobody may live on interest without doing any productive work.

Usury upsets the balance of wealth and widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots. It makes the rich richer and the poor poorer.

Islam says that usury is a mortal sin, and nobody can become the owner of the money earned through practising it. The money thus earned must be returned to its rightful owner.

The business carried on through interest is of two kinds, and both of them are unlawful in Islam.

1. Loan Usury
2. Trade Usury

Lending money on the condition that it will be paid back with something added to it, is called usury. It is immaterial whether the rate of interest is large or small, or whether it is paid in cash or in kind. Anyhow, there is no harm if the debtor willingly pays anything out of goodwill without any prior condition.

Trade usury means selling of a thing in exchange for another of the same kind, but with a difference in quantity. For example to sell 10 kilograms of good quality wheat in exchange for 12 kilograms of medium quality wheat will constitute usury. Detailed conditions of such forbidden deals are given in books of Islamic law.

INTEREST-FREE LOANS

Islam exhorts people to give as much interest-free loans as is possible. According to certain traditions, this is such an act of virtue that its reward will be more than that of alms. Probably the reason is that many of those who seek loans are self-respecting people and, even in dire need of money, would not like to accept free aid or alms; whereas, persons who accept alms, do not have such scruples. For this reason, giving interest-free loans is considered more rewarding.

At the same time, Islam allows the creditors to require the deposit of adequate security with them upto the full value of the loan. In case a debtor fails to pay the loan, the creditor is allowed to deduct an equal amount from the security and return the remainder to its owner.

Giving interest-free loan is effective in the cultivation of friendship and love and in removing complexes which often exist between high income and low-income individuals. This is the simplest form of service which the well-off people can render to the less fortunate.

JIHAD AND DEFENCE IN ISLAM

The question of jihad occupies a special place in the Muslim law. In fact, a progressive and compact system cannot be complete without such provisions.

Owing to misinterpretation by ill-informed persons, the inclusion of the question of jihad in Islamic teachings has given rise to much hostile propaganda, so that the enemies began saying that Islam is a religion of the sword and force.

McDonald, in his encyclopedia, asserts that the propagation of Islam through sword and force is one of the religious duties of every Muslim. As the nature and aim

of jihad become clear, not only the hollowness of such criticism becomes obvious, but also the depth, purity and dynamism of the teachings of Islam and their capacity to serve the human society in varying circumstances becomes evident. To prove this truth, we draw the attention of the readers to the following points.

THE SPIRIT OF PACIFISM IS NOT OPPOSED TO FIGHT THE IMPOSED WARS.

Jihad literally means effort and striving. In its widest sense, this word has been used for every kind of intellectual, physical, financial and moral effort for the promotion of the Divine and human objectives.

But in the terminology of Islamic jurisprudence, it means an armed struggle for the protection and progress of the Islamic system.

Now let us see as to when such struggles become unavoidable.

A fight against miscreants who consider the message of Islam a threat to their interests and take a stand to exterminate it, is unavoidable. So long as such elements exist in the world, supports of truth and justice have no alternative but to defend their objectives and their own existence.

In fact, a war in such a case is forced upon the believers in Allah and in social justice against their will. Islam cannot avoid such situations.

Nevertheless, the peace-loving spirit of Islam and its abstinence from using force in dealing with those who do not resort to aggression, antagonism and injustice, are evident from many passages of the Holy Qur'an:

Allah does not forbid you that you should be kind and just to those who did not fight you on account of

faith, nor expelled you from your homes. Surely Allah likes those who deal justly. Allah only forbids you to have friendly relations with those who fought you on account of your faith, expelled you from your homes and helped in your expulsion. Those who make friends with them, are surely unjust. (Surah al-Mumtahinah, 60:8 – 9)

At another place, the Holy Qur'an expressly says that if the enemy lays down arms and shows peaceful intention, the Muslims have no right to be hostile to them.

If they leave you alone and do not fight you and offer you peace, in that case Allah has left no cause for aggression against them. (Surah al-Nisa, 4:90)

In another verse, the Holy Prophet is told: *If they (enemies) incline to peace, incline you also to it.* (Surah al-Anfal, 8:61)

Perhaps no other religion has expressed its peaceful disposition in such clear terms. But Islam's pacifism must not be interpreted to mean that the Muslims are not to take action against those who force large sections of the world people to live under colonial conditions or in a state of idolatry, and watch an aggression against their country as idle spectators.

JIHAD IN THE WAY OF ALLAH AND ITS AIMS

In the books on Islam, the word, 'jihad' has mostly been used in association with the phrase 'in the way of Allah'. This means that jihad cannot be waged for base desires, territorial expansion, imperialistic aims, spoils of war and the like. The aim of jihad must always be Divine and with no personal, material or ulterior motive. On the whole, the aims of jihad can be summarized in the following few lines. While dealing with them we shall also try to refute the objections of the opponents.

FOR THE DEFENCE OF ISLAM

The most important aim of jihad is the defence of Divine truth and justice and the preservation of Islam. During the time of the Holy Prophet, most of the battles were fought for this very purpose.

The Holy Qur'an expressly says: *Permission to take up arms is granted to those who are attacked because they have suffered injustice. Allah has all the power to give victory to those who were unjustly expelled from their homes only because they said, "Allah is our Lord". Had it not been for Allah's repelling some people through the might of the others, the monastries, the churches, synagogues and the masjids in which Allah is very often worshipped would have been ruined.* (Surah al-Hajj, 22:39)

Thus whenever the national sovereignty of the Muslims and their independence and integrity are endangered, it is their duty to rise to the occasion and defend themselves to the last. It is interesting that in this verse the defence of all places of worship has been given equal importance, which is another sign of the peaceable spirit of Islam.

Anyhow, it should be noted that Islam shows neither tolerance toward idol-worship; nor does it recognize idolatry as a religion, nor the temples of idol-worshippers as places of worship. It regards idolatry as a sort of superstition, falsehood, intellectual decadence and a disease which must be cured. That is why Islam has allowed the destruction of the temples of idol-worshippers.

FIGHT AGAINST OPPONENTS

A heavenly system, as a new ideology, has a right to enjoy freedom of propagation and be able to spread in a normal manner through preaching. If certain elements such as idolaters, finding their unlawful interests in danger,

oppose it and try to keep the people in ignorance, and no peaceful solution of the problem is found possible, Islam allows a fight against such elements. Some of the early battles of Islam were of this nature, to which a reference has been made in the Qur'anic verse quoted above. Another object of jihad is freedom of preaching and a logical spread of the true system.

COMBATING INJUSTICE AND CORRUPTION

Owing to the uncompromising opposition of Islam to injustice and tyranny and rescuing the weak and the helpless from the clutches of the tyrants, such as the usurers of Mecca, Islam gives permission for jihad.

Certain early battles of Islam were of the same nature. The Qur'an says: *What stops you from fighting for the cause of Allah and of the helpless men, women and children who say: Our Lord! Deliver us from this town of the oppressors, and appoint for us from you a protector and send to us someone that will help us.* (Surah al-Nisa, 4:75)

PREPAREDNESS FOR JIHAD

So long as brute force is the dominant factor in international relations and a possibility of the Muslim society being subjected to an aggression exists, Islam enjoins upon the Muslims to maintain a state of complete preparedness so as to enable them to defend themselves. The Holy Qur'an has given clear instructions in this respect and in a short verse has expressed all that is required. It says: *Mobilize your (defensive) force as much as you can.* (Surah al-Anfal, 8:60)

Though expenditure on armaments is considered least desirable and most unproductive, Islam has considered it not only essential in the case of need, but also has named

it as monetary jihad. (See: Philosophy of Islam, ISP 1982)

Anyhow, it is not possible to arrest aggression and war simply by strengthening the defence forces and acquiring armaments. Though these steps are necessary yet sometimes it enhances the possibility of the out-break of war. Therefore, Islam proposes that the basic way of securing permanent peace should be to strengthen faith and morality. The Qur'an says: *Believers, submit all of you to the Will of Allah.* (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:208)

This means that the only way to enjoy peace and security is that all enter into the domain of faith, virtue and submission to Allah.

It is in this condition that everyone regards others as his brethren, respects them and believes that all are slaves of Allah and all are loved by Him.

Thus, everybody should look at others interests as his own. Everybody should like for others what he likes for himself and should dislike for others what he dislikes for himself. It is here that toleration and sacrifice in the way of Allah and for the sake of Allah are considered to be the most distinguished and prominent human qualities.

OBSERVANCE OF HUMAN RULES WHILE DEALING WITH THE ENEMY

While many people think the very word 'enemy' is a sufficient justification for all kinds of excessive violence and inhuman acts, Islam with its comprehensive, magnanimous and effective teachings leaves no doubt that a conflict with the enemy must not go beyond the frame-work of the rules of human morality, for every kind of violation of these rules amounts to exceeding the limits prescribed by Allah.

The following precise instructions which the Prophet

of Islam used to give to the soldiers and mujahids before they proceeded to the battlefield, fully show the peaceful disposition of Islam and the Prophet's deep insight:

"March in the name of Allah and seek His help. Fight for His sake and in accordance with His commands. Don't practise deceit or fraud. Don't embezzle the spoils of war. Don't mutilate the body of an enemy after he is killed. Don't harm the women, the children and the aged. Don't interfere with the monks and hermits who live in monasteries and caves. Don't unnecessarily cut down trees. Don't burn the palm plantations of the enemy and don't submerge them in water. Don't destroy fruit-bearing trees and don't set fire to the enemy's crops. Don't kill the useful animals except for your food. Don't poison the enemy's water. Don't resort to trickery and don't launch a surprise night assault".

Islam forbids every resort to inhuman means of fighting such as night assault, biological warfare, burning of cattle, crops and gardens and killing and injuring unarmed personnel. In the rules prescribed for the Islamic battles it is prohibited to shoot the first arrow and to launch the first attack. This means that the Muslims should not attack unless they are attacked. Their war should be defensive and not offensive.

We find that Imam Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, used to give instructions and made every effort that fighting should not start before noon and, if possible, it was delayed till late afternoon so that the distance between the day and the approach of night be not long, and the bloodshed was reduced to the minimum.

The instructions given by the Imam with regard to the treatment with the prisoners of war are yet another proof of the necessity of the observance of rules of human

morality. The POWs are to be treated with kindness and are to be provided with the same food and drink as are used by the Muslims.

PENAL CODE OF ISLAM

It is true that correct training and existence of the living spirit of faith and human morality in any society forestalls many excesses and vices. Nevertheless, the establishment and consolidation of social justice is not possible without a strong judiciary. In every society there exist some such miscreants and unruly persons whose darkness of spirit cannot be removed by the light of faith and morality alone. They are not subdued without the existence of a strong and fair judiciary. That is why Islam in order to enforce its programme of social justice, has not limited itself to moral counsels and spiritual training only but has visualized the formation of a strong judiciary to back its teachings.

JUDICIAL SYSTEM OF ISLAM

Among the qualities of a jurist, two points are most important:

1. He should have complete knowledge of all the details of jurisprudence (*fiqh*).
2. He should possess the qualities of justice, virtue and honesty.

As for the equality of the parties in the court of law, Islam directs the jurist (*qazi*) to treat both the parties equally. The jurist must observe complete impartiality even in acts of ordinary courtesy such as speaking to the parties, looking at them or making them sit or stand.

There must be no discrimination between the litigants on account of their social status.

The Imams have described the office of a jurist as of great importance and responsibility and yet at the same time, involving care and circumspection. Even the slightest lapse on his part is enough to degrade his position.

The Prophet of Islam has said that the tongue of a jurist is between two flames. This means that if he shows any bias towards either party, he will be burnt.

In Islam, accepting a bribe particularly on twisting the judgement in favour of the giver, is a mortal sin. The Prophet said: "Those who offer bribe, those who take it and those who go between them shall all go to Hell".

The judicial system of Islam is very compact and flawless. It occupies a special position among judicial systems of the world today. (See: Philosophy of Islam, ISP 1982).

In the books of Islamic jurisprudence, there exists a special chapter on judicature, which deals with all the principles and details of administration of justice, and describes the qualifications of a jurist, qualifications of witnesses, the way to file a suit, the arguments which the parties can advance in their favour, and the like.

The instructions given by Imam Ali to Malik Ashtar, Governor of Egypt, throw ample light on some of the above points and show the importance which Islam attaches to the high office of the jurist. This instructive letter has been fully elucidated in this book.

CRIMINAL LAWS

Punishment meted out to the criminals must not only be just but deterrent too. At the same time, there should be a scope for reducing the punishment in the case of a repentant and for one who committed a crime in ignorance or through inexperience. Punishments prescribed in Islam

satisfy all the three aspects. For example, in the case of wilful murder, the prescribed punishment is death sentence. The Holy Qur'an says: *People of understanding! The death penalty law as retaliation, secures your life.* (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:179)

But at the same time, the Holy Qur'an allows the heirs of the murdered person to forgive the murderer and accept bloodmoney (*diyat*) from him.

Similarly, in case of certain crimes against chastity, if the offender before being sentenced by the court genuinely repents and is prepared to pay damages, he can be forgiven.

According to Islamic teachings, the best way to eradicate crimes is to concentrate efforts on moral training so that the people may always be conscious of recompense and retribution on the Day of Resurrection.

But, if in spite of such efforts, a crime is committed, then it should be severely dealt with. Islam is against those who succumb to false emotions, and hesitate to accept the justification of death sentence in the case of wilful murders and other punishments in the case of other transgressions. Such people in fact give preference to the interests of the criminals over the interests of the society.

Experience shows that leniency towards hard-baked criminals helps in spreading corruption, and is certainly detrimental to the well-being of the society.

Some people may criticize certain parts of Muslim criminal law and regard them as unduly harsh, but this assumption is false. Severe action is taken only in the case of very serious crimes and only where moral and social security of the nation is endangered. Such instances are found in other systems also. At the most, some societies may not regard the eradication of sexual perversions as

vital; whereas, Islam, with its subtle insight, attaches utmost importance to them.

Although some of the punitive measures as prescribed by Islam look very harsh, the proof of the certain crimes is so difficult, and depends upon such conditions that more than one or two convictions are hardly possible in a year, yet the fact is that these punishments prove a great deterrent to crimes.

The deterrent nature of these punishments produces good moral effect and strikes terror among transgressors. Yet, however, such punishments are inflicted on only a few persons.

It must be fully realized that Muslim law and Islamic teachings which aim at protecting human rights and preventing corruption can be fully effective only if they are all enforced simultaneously.

First of all, an atmosphere should be created where Islamic teachings concerning moral training and social welfare are implemented. In such an atmosphere, the incidence of crimes will be greatly reduced and consequently, there will be fewer occasions to inflict any punishment. As is well-known, most of the crimes are the result of incorrect upbringing and various material and social privations. With the elimination of such factors, incidence of crimes will certainly be minimized.

Consequently the number of criminals will gradually decrease, and also the people who so severely comment upon the harsh punishments meted out to a large number of persons will not be so passionately critical.

Of course, it does not mean that if in certain conditions the programme for moral training or eradication of poverty is not strictly followed, the other Islamic laws and commands should also be ignored. All we mean is that all the items of Islamic programme are interlinked and if they are enforced simultaneously they will produce the best results.

Administration in Islam

The following instructions in the form of a letter were given by Imam Ali to Malik bin Hārith Ashtar, whom he had appointed as Governor of Egypt in the year about 657 A.D.

Its central idea which runs throughout these instructions like one single thread out of which a cloth is woven, is submission to Allah. The sovereignty is of Allah; the governors and the governed are the slaves of Allah.

This letter deals with the cardinal principles of administration as taught by the Holy Qur'an. It is a code which tells us how to establish a benevolent and kind government indicating justice and magnanimity. It is the constitution of a government which is based on moral principles and kindness. It is the code of a government in which the subjects are ruled without consideration of their class, creed and colour; where poverty is neither a stigma nor a disqualification, and where justice is not alloyed with nepotism, favouritism, provincialism or religious fanaticism. This letter is a master-stroke of the policy of higher moral values.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Be it known to you, O Malik, that I am sending you as Governor to a country which in the past has experienced both just and unjust rule. Men will scrutinize your actions with a searching eye, just as you used to scrutinize the

actions of those before you. They will speak of you as you spoke of them. The fact is that the public speak well of only those who do good. It is they who furnish the proof of your actions. Hence the richest treasure that you may wish, should be the treasure of good deeds. Keep your desires under control and deny yourself that which you have been warned against. By such abstinence alone, you will be able to distinguish between what is good and what is bad.

Develop in your heart the feeling of love for your people and let it be the source of kindness and blessing to them. Do not behave with them like a barbarian, and do not appropriate to yourself that which belongs to them. Remember that the citizens of the State are of two categories. They are either your brethren in religion or your brethren in kind. They are subject to infirmities and liable to commit mistakes. Some indeed do commit mistakes, but forgive them just as you would like Allah to forgive you. Bear in mind that you are placed over them, just as I am placed over you. And then there is Allah even above him who has given you the position of a Governor in order that you may look after those under you and be sufficient unto them. Remember! You will be judged by what you do for them.

Do not set yourself against Allah, for neither do you possess the strength to shield yourself against His displeasure, nor can you place yourself outside the pale of His mercy and forgiveness. Do not feel sorry over any act of forgiveness, nor rejoice over any punishment that you may inflict upon someone. Do not rouse yourself to anger, for you will not gain anything out of it.

Do not say, "I am your overlord and dictator, and you should, therefore, bow to my commands", as that will

corrupt your heart, weaken your faith in religion and create disorder in the State. Should you be elated by power, or feel in your mind the slightest feeling of pride and arrogance, then look at the power and majesty of the Divine governance of the universe over which you have absolutely no control. It will restore the sense of balance to your wayward intelligence and give you the sense of calmness and affability. Beware! Never put yourself against the majesty and grandeur of Allah and never imitate His Omnipotence, for Allah degrades every rebel of His and everyone who is cruel to man.

Let your mind respect, through your actions, the rights of Allah and the rights of man, and likewise, persuade your companions and relations to do the same. For, otherwise, you will be doing injustice to yourself and to humanity. Thus, both man and Allah will become your enemies. There is no safety anywhere for one who makes himself an enemy of Allah. He will be regarded as one at war with Allah until he repents and seeks forgiveness. Nothing deprives man of Divine blessings nor excites Divine wrath against him as much as oppression does. Hence, it is for this reason that Allah listens to the voice of the oppressed and deals strongly with the oppressor.

THE COMMON MAN

Maintain justice in administration and impose it on your own self and seek the consent of the people, for, the discontent of the masses sterilizes the contentment of the privileged few, and the discontent of the few resolves itself into the contentment of the many. Remember! the privileged few will not rally round you in moments of difficulty. They will try to side-track justice. They will ask for more than what they deserve and will show no

gratitude for favours done to them. They will feel restive in the face of trials and tribulations, and will offer no regret for their short-comings. It is the common man who fights the enemy. So live in close contact with the masses and be mindful of their welfare.

Spurn him who exposes the weakness of others. After all, the masses are not free from weaknesses. It is the duty of the ruler to shield them. Do not bring to light that which is hidden, but try to remove those weaknesses which have been brought to light. Allah is watchful of everything that is hidden from you, and He alone will deal with it. Cover up the faults of the public to the best of your ability so that Allah may cover up your faults which you want to keep hidden from the public eye. Untie every knot of hatred for the people and cut asunder every string of enmity between them. Protect yourself from every such act as may not be quite correct for you. Do not make haste in seeking confirmation of tale-telling, for the tale-teller is a deceitful person, appearing in the garb of a friend.

THE COUNSELLORS

Never take counsel with a miser, for he will vitiate your magnanimity and frighten you of poverty. Do not seek advice from a coward too, for he will weaken your resolutions. Do not also take counsel with a greedy person, for he will instil greed in you and turn you into a tyrant. Miserliness, cowardice and greed deprive man of his trust in Allah.

The worst counsellor is he who has served as a counsellor of the unjust rulers and shared their crimes. So, never let men who have been companions of the tyrants or have associated in their crimes, be your counsellors. You can get far better men than these. You can get men gifted

with intelligence and foresight, but unpolluted by sin, men who have never sided a tyrant in his tyranny nor a criminal in his crime. Such men will never be a burden to you. Rather they will be a source of help and strength to you at all times. They will be friends to you and strangers to your enemies. Choose such men alone for companionship both in private and in public. Even among these, show preference to those, who have a habitual regard for truth, however trying to you their truth, at time, may prove to be, and to those who offer you no encouragement in the display of tendencies which Allah does not like for His friends to develop.

Keep close to you the righteous and the pious persons, and make clear to them that they are never to flatter you and never to give you credit for any good that you may not have done, for the tolerance of flattery and unhealthy praise stimulates pride in man and makes him arrogant.

Do not treat the good and the bad alike. That will deter the good, and encourage the bad in their bad pursuits. Recompense everyone according to his deserts. Remember that mutual trust and goodwill between the ruler and the ruled are bred only through benevolence, justice and service. So, cultivate goodwill among the people, for their goodwill alone will save you from troubles. Your benevolence to them will be repaid by their trust in you, and your ill-treatment by their ill will.

Do not disregard the noble traditions set by our forbearers which have promoted harmony and progress among the people, and do not initiate anything which might minimize their usefulness. The men who had established those noble traditions have had their reward; but responsibility will be yours if they are discarded. Try always to learn something from the experience of the

learned and the wise, and frequently consult them in State matters so that you might maintain the peace and goodwill which your predecessors had established in the land.

THE DIFFERENT CLASSES OF PEOPLE

Remember that the people are composed of different classes. The progress of one is dependent on the progress of the other, and none can afford to be independent of the other. We have the army formed of the soldiers of Allah. We have our civil officers and their establishments, our judiciary, our revenue collectors and our public relation officers. The general public itself consists of Muslims and Zimmi and among them are merchants and craftsmen, the unemployed and the indigent. Allah has prescribed for them their individual rights, duties and obligations. They are all defined and preserved in the Holy Qur'an and in the Hadith of the Holy Prophet.

The army, the grace of Allah, is like a fortress to the people and lends dignity to the State. It upholds the prestige of the faith and maintains the peace of the country. Without it, the State cannot stand. In its turn, it cannot stand without the support of the State. Our soldiers have proved stronger before the enemy because of the privilege Allah has given them to fight for Him, but they have their material needs to fulfil and have therefore to depend upon the income provided for them from the State revenue. The military and the civil population which pays the revenue, needs the co-operation of others — the judiciary, civil officers and their establishment. The jurist administers civil and criminal law; the civil officers collect revenue and attend to civil administration with the assistance of their establishment. And then there are the tradesmen and the merchants who add to the revenue of

the State. It is they who run the markets and are in a better position than others to discharge social obligations. Then there is the class of the poor and the needy whose maintenance is the responsibility of the other classes. Allah has given appropriate opportunity of service to one and all; then there are the rights of all these classes over the administration. The administrator has to meet them. He must have regard for the good of the entire population a duty which he cannot fulfil properly unless he takes personal interest in its execution and seeks help from Allah. Indeed, it is obligatory on him to impose this duty on himself and to bear with patience the inconveniences and difficulties which incidentally come to him.

THE ARMY

Be particularly mindful of the welfare of those in the army, who in your opinion, are staunchly faithful to their Allah and the Holy Prophet, and loyal to their chief, and who in the hour of passion, can restrain themselves and listen coolly to sensible remonstrance, and who can succour the weak and smite the strong oppressor; whom violent provocation will not throw into violent temper and who will not falter at any stage.

Keep yourself in close contact with the families of established reputation, integrity, and a glorious past, and draw to yourself men brave and upright in character, generous and benevolent in disposition, for such are the elite of the society.

Care for them with the tenderness with which you care for your children and do not talk before them of any good that you might have done to them, nor disregard any expression of affection which they show in return, for such conduct inspires loyalty, devotion and goodwill.

Attend to every little want of theirs, not resting content with what general help that you might have given to them, for sometimes, timely attention to a little want of theirs brings them immense relief. Surely these people will not forget you in your own hour of need.

It behoves you to select for your commander-in-chief one, who imposes on himself, as a duty, the task of rendering help to his men; who can excel in kindness every other officer; who has to attend to the needs of the men under him, and look after their families when they are away from their homes; so much so, that the entire army should feel united in their joys and in their sorrows. This unity of purpose will give them added strength against the enemy. Continue to maintain a kindly attitude towards them so that they might feel ever attached to you. The fact is that the real happiness of the administrator lies in establishing justice in the State and maintaining affectionate relations with the people. Their sincerity of feeling is expressed in the love and regard they show to you, for on it alone depends the safety of the administration.

Your advice to the army will be of no avail, unless and until you show affection for both soldiers and officers, in order that they might not regard the government as an oppressive burden or contribute to its downfall.

Continue to satisfy their needs, and praise them over and over again for the services they have rendered. Such an attitude, Allah willing, will inspire the brave and induce the timid to deeds of bravery.

Try to enter into the feelings of others and do not foist the mistake of the another and do not grudge dispensing appropriate regards. See to it that you do not show favours to one, who has achieved nothing but merely counts on his family position, and do not withhold proper

reward from one, who has done great deeds but holds a low position in life.

THE REAL GUIDANCE

Turn to Allah and to His Prophet for guidance whenever you feel uncertain regarding your actions. There is the commandment of Allah delivered to those people whom He wishes to guide aright: *"O people of the Faith! Obey Allah and obey His Prophet and obey those from among you who hold authority over you. And refer to Allah and His Prophet whenever there is a difference of opinion among you"*. (Surah al-Nisa, 4:59) To turn to Allah is in reality to consult the Book of Allah; and to turn to the Prophet is to follow his universally accepted traditions.

CHIEF JUSTICE

Select as your chief justice from the people, one who is by far the best among them — one who is not obsessed with domestic worries, one who cannot be intimidated, one who does not err too often, one who does not turn back from the right path once he finds it, one who is not self-centered or avaricious, one who will not decide before knowing the full facts, one who will weigh with care every attendant doubt and pronounce a clear verdict after taking everything into full consideration, one who will not grow restive over the arguments of advocates, one who will examine with patience every new disclosure of fact, one who will be strictly impartial in his decision, one whom flattery cannot mislead, and one who does not exult over his position. But to find such a man is not an easy task.

Once you have selected the right man for the office, pay him handsomely enough, to let him live in comfort and in keeping with his position, enough to keep him

above temptations. Give him a position in your court so high that none can even dream of coveting it and so high that neither backbiting nor intrigue can touch him.

SUBORDINATE JUDICIARY

Beware! The utmost carefulness should be exercised in the selection of the Chief Justice, for it is the high office which the adventurous self-seekers aspire to secure and exploit for their selfish interests. After the selection of your Chief Justice, give careful consideration to the selection of other officers. Confirm them in their appointments after approved apprenticeship and probation. Never select men for responsible posts either out of regard for personal connections or under any influence, for that might lead to injustice and corruption.

Of these, select for higher posts men of experience, who are firm in faith and belong to good families. Such men will not fall an easy prey to temptations and will discharge their duties for the abiding good of others. Increase their salaries so that they may lead a contented life. A contented living is a help to self-purification. They will not feel the urge to tax the earnings of their subordinates for their own upkeep. They will then have no excuse to go against your instructions or misappropriate State funds. Keep a watch over them without their knowledge. Possibly they may develop true honesty and true concern for the public welfare. But if anyone of them is accused of dishonesty, and the guilt is proved by the report of your intelligence department, then regard this as sufficient to convict him. Let the punishment be corporal and let that be dealt with in public at an appointed place of degradation.

REVENUE ADMINISTRATION

Great care is to be exercised in revenue administration, to ensure the prosperity of those who pay the revenue to the State, for on their prosperity depends the prosperity of others, particularly the prosperity of the masses. Indeed, the State thrives on its revenue. You should regard the proper upkeep of the land in cultivation as of greater importance than the collection of revenue, for revenue cannot be derived except by making the land productive. He who demands revenue without helping the cultivator to improve his land, inflicts unmerited hardship on the cultivator and ruins the State. The rule of such a person does not last long. If the cultivators ask for reduction of their land cess for having suffered from epidemics or drought or excess of rains or the barrenness of the soil or floods damaging their crops, then reduce the cess suitably, so that their condition might improve. Do not mind the loss of revenue on that account, for that will return to you one day manifold in the hour of greater prosperity of the land, and will enable you to improve the condition of your towns and raise the prestige of your State.

You will be the object of universal praise. The people will believe in your sense of justice. The confidence which they will place in you in consequence will prove your strength, as they will be found ready to share your burdens.

You may let any number of people settle on the land, but discontent will overtake them if the land is not improved. The cause of the cultivators' ruin is the rulers who are bent feverishly on accumulating wealth at all costs for the fear that their rule might not last long. Such are the people who do not learn from examples or precedents.

CLERICAL ESTABLISHMENT

Keep an eye on your establishment and your scribes and select the best among them for your confidential correspondence; such among these should possess high character and deserve your full confidence — men who may not exploit their privileged position to go against you, and who may not grow neglectful of their duties, and who in the drafting of treaties may not succumb to temptation and harm your interests. They should not only fail to render you proper assistance but save you from trouble. They should be persons, who in carrying out their duties can realize their serious responsibilities, for he who does not realize his own responsibilities can hardly appraise the responsibilities of others. Do not select men for such work merely on the strength of your first impressions, or affection or good faith, for as a matter of fact, the pretensions of a good many, who are really devoid of honesty and good breeding, may cheat even the intelligence of the rulers. Selection should be made after a probationary period — probation, which should be the test of righteousness. In making direct appointments from people, see to it that those selected possess influence with the people, and enjoy the reputation of being honest, for such selection is agreeable both to Allah and the ruler. For every department of administration, let there be a head, whom no trying task might cause worry and no pressure of work annoy.

And remember that each and every short-coming of your establishment or scribes, which you may overlook, will be written down against you in your scroll of deeds.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

You should accept the useful schemes put up before

you by the traders and craftsmen, and help them with useful suggestions. Some of them live in towns and some move from place to place with their wares, and tools and earn their living by manual labour. They are the real source of national revenue gained through trade and industry.

While the general public are not inclined to bear the strain, those engaged in these professions take the trouble of collecting commodities from far and near, from land and from across the sea, and from mountains and forests, and naturally derive benefits.

It is this class of peace-loving people from whom no disturbance need be feared. They love peace and order. Indeed they are incapable of creating disturbance.

Visit every part of the country and establish personal contact with this class and enquire into their conditions. But bear in mind that a good many of them are intensely greedy and indulge in bad dealings. They hoard grain and try to sell it at a higher price and this is most harmful to the public. It is a blot on the name of the ruler not to fight this evil. Prevent them from hoarding; for the Prophet of Allah had prohibited it. See to it that trade is carried on with the utmost ease, that the scales are evenly held and that prices are so fixed that neither the seller nor the buyer is put to a loss. And, in spite of your warning, should anyone go against your commands and commit the crime of hoarding, then inflict upon him a severe punishment.

THE POOR

Beware! Fear Allah when dealing with the problem of the poor who have none to patronize them, who are forlorn, indigent and helpless and are greatly torn in mind victims of the vicissitudes of time. Among them there are some who do not question their lot in life and who,

notwithstanding their misery, do not go about seeking alms. Safeguard their rights for the sake of Allah, for on you rests the responsibility of their protection. Assign for them a portion of the State exchequer (Baytul Mâl), wherever they may be, whether they are close to, or far away, from you. The rights of both these two kinds of people should be equal in your eyes. However preoccupied you may be do not let them slip from your mind, for no excuse whatsoever for the disregard of their rights will be acceptable to Allah. Do not treat their interest to be less important than your own, and never keep them outside the purview of your important considerations, and mark the persons who look down upon them, and keep you in the dark about their condition.

Select from among your officers such men as are righteous and pious and those who can keep you properly informed of the conditions of the poor.

Make such provision for these poor people as shall not oblige you to offer an excuse before Allah on the Day of Judgement, for it is this section of the people which deserves more benevolent treatment. Seek your reward from Allah by giving to each of them what is due to him and enjoin on yourself as a sacred duty the task of meeting the needs of such aged among them as have no independent means of livelihood and are averse to seeking alms. And it is the discharge of this duty that usually proves very trying to rulers, but is very welcome to societies which are gifted with foresight. It is only such societies or nations that truly carry out with equanimity their covenant with Allah to discharge their duty to the poor.

OPEN CONFERENCES

Meet the oppressed and the lowly periodically in an

open conference and, being conscious of the Divine presence there, have a heart-to-heart talk with them, and let none from your armed guards or civil officers or members of the Police Department or the Intelligence Department be by your side, so that the representatives of the poor might state their grievances fearlessly and without reserve. For I have heard the Prophet of Allah say that no nation or society, in which the strong do not discharge their duty to the weak, will occupy a high position. Bear with composure any strong language which they may use, and do not get annoyed if they cannot state their case lucidly. Similarly, Allah will open for you His door of blessings and rewards. If you can give something to them, give it ungrudgingly, and if you cannot afford to give, make clear the position to them.

There are certain things which call for prompt action. Accept the recommendations of your officers about redressing the grievances of your scribes. See to it that petitions or applications submitted for your consideration are brought to your notice the same day even if your officers might try to intercept them. Dispose of the day's work that very day, for the coming day will entail its own task.

COMMUNION WITH ALLAH

And then do not forget to keep aside the best part of your time for communion with Allah, although every moment of yours is for Him only, provided that it is spent sincerely in the service of your people. The obligation which you directly owe to Allah, should be included in your offering the five-time prayers prescribed by the religion. Devote yourself each day and night to prayers. Let your prayer be as perfect and free from blemish as possible, and see to it that no physical discomfort harasses you.

And when you lead a congregational prayer, do not bore people by needlessly prolonging it, so that it may not cause them inconvenience or create a bad taste in them, and lose its effect, because in the congregation there are some sick persons also, and there are also those who have to perform some important duties. When, on receiving an order to proceed to Yemen, I asked the Prophet of Allah, how I should lead the congregation there, he said, "Perform your prayers just as the weakest among you would offer it, and set an example of considerateness to the faithful".

ALOOFNESS NOT DESIRABLE

With regard to the observance of all that I have said, bear one more thing in mind. Never, for any length of time, keep yourself aloof from the people, for to do so is to keep oneself ignorant of their affairs. It develops in the ruler a wrong perspective and renders him unable to distinguish between what is important and what is unimportant, between right and wrong, and between truth and falsehood. The ruler is after all a human being; and he cannot form a correct view of anything which is out of sight.

There is no distinctive sign attached to truth which may enable one to distinguish between the different varieties of truth and falsehood. The fact is that you must be one of the two: either you are just or unjust. If you are just, then you will not keep yourself away from the people, but will listen to them and meet their requirements.

On the contrary, if you are unjust, the people themselves will keep away from you. Then what is the good of your keeping aloof? In any case, aloofness is not desirable, especially when it is your duty to attend to the needs of the people. Complaints of oppression against your officers, or petitions for justice, should not prove irksome to you.

Take it for granted that those immediately about and around you will like to exploit their position to covet what belongs to others and commit acts of injustice. Suppress such a tendency in them. Make a rule of your conduct never to give even a small piece of land to any of your relations. In this way they will be prevented from causing harm to the interests of others and you also will be saved from the displeasure of both Allah and men.

Deal justice squarely regardless of the fact that someone is related to you or not. If any of your relations or companions violates the law, award him the punishment prescribed by law, however painful it might be to you personally, for it will be all to the good of the State. If at any time people suspect that you have been unjust to them in any respect, disclose your mind to them and remove their suspicions. In this way, your mind will become attuned to the sense of justice, and people will begin to love you. It will also fulfil your wish that you enjoy their confidence.

PEACE AND TREATIES

Bear in mind that you do not throw away the offer of peace which your enemy may himself make. Accept it, for that will please Allah. Peace is a source of comfort to the army. It reduces your worries and promotes peace and order in the State. But beware! Be on your guard when the treaty of peace is signed, for certain types of enemies propose terms of peace to lull you into a sense of security only to attack you again unawares. So you should exercise the utmost vigilance on your part and place no undue faith in their protestations. But, if under the peace treaty you have accepted any obligations, discharge them scrupulously. It is a trust and must be faithfully upheld and whenever

you have made a promise, keep it with all the strength that you command, for whatever difference of opinion might exist on other matters, there is nothing so noble as the fulfilment of a promise. This is recognized even among the non-Muslims, for they know the dire consequences which follow the breaking of covenants. So never make excuses in discharging your responsibilities and never break a promise, nor cheat your enemy, for breach of promise is an act against Allah, and none, except the positively wicked acts against Allah.

Indeed Divine promises are a blessing spread over all mankind. The promise of Allah is a refuge sought after even by the most powerful on earth, for there is no risk of being cheated. So, do not make a promise which you cannot keep; nor attack your enemy without ultimatum because none, except a wretched ignorant being, would dare defy Allah who, in His infinite mercy has made pacts and treaties as tools of utmost sanctity for His creatures; in fact, peace provides shelter under the lively shade of which all seek asylum and in the vicinity of which all hasten for a sojourn. A treaty should, therefore, be free from fraud, duplicity and deception.

Never execute a pact open to interpretations, but once it is executed, don't exploit equivocation, if any; nor repudiate any treaty concluded in the light of Divine injunctions, even in the face of grievous difficulties. As there is reward in life Hereafter, it is better to face difficulties rather than violate the treaty with a traumatic sense of accountability on the Day of Judgement.

Beware! Abstain from shedding blood without a valid cause, as it invites the wrath of Almighty, exposes one to His severest punishment, deprives one of His blessings and shortens one's span of life; and on the Day of Judgement

it is this crime for which one will have to answer first. So, beware! Do not wish to build the strength of your State on blood for, it is this blood which ultimately weakens the State and passes it on to other hands. Wilful murder is not excusable before me and before the Almighty.

Murder is a crime which is punishable by death. If, on any account the corporal punishment dealt by the State for any lesser crime results in the death of the guilty, let not the prestige of the State stand in the way of the deceased's relations claiming blood-money.

LAST INSTRUCTIONS

Shun self-adoration; do not indulge in self-praise nor encourage others to extol you, because of all the ruses to undo good deeds of pious men, Satan relies most upon praise and flattery.

Neither over-rate nor indulge in tall talks about the favours you have showered on people. Breach of promise annoys Allah and man alike. Allah, the Most Exalted, says in the Holy Qur'an: *It is most hateful in the sight of Allah if you do not act upon what you say.* (Surah Saff, 61:2)

Do not make haste to do a thing before its time, nor put it off when the right moment arrives. Do not insist on doing a wrong thing, nor show slackness in rectifying a wrong thing. Perform everything at its proper time and let everything occupy its proper place. When the people as a whole agree upon a thing, do not impose your own view on them and do not neglect to discharge the responsibility that rests on you in consequence. For the eyes of the people will be on you, and you are answerable for whatever you do to them. The slightest dereliction of duty will bring its own retribution. Keep your anger under control and keep your hands and tongue in check. The best way to restrain

your rage is to defer punishment till you are calmed and restored to yourself. You cannot achieve it unless you remember that you have ultimately to return to your Sustainer.

It is imperative that you carefully study the precepts which have inspired just and good rulers who have preceded you. Give close thought to the example of our Holy Prophet, his Hadith, and the commandments of the Holy Qur'an and whatever you might have assimilated from my own way of dealing with things. Endeavour to the best of your ability to carry out the instructions which I have given here, and which you have solemnly undertaken to follow. By means of this order, I enjoin on you not to succumb to the promptings of your own heart, nor to turn away from the discharge of duties entrusted to you.

I seek refuge in the Almighty and His unlimited sphere of blessings, and invite you to pray with me that He may give us both the grace to surrender willingly our will to His will, and to enable us to acquit ourselves well before Him and His creation, so that mankind cherishes our memory and our work survives. I seek of Allah the culmination of His blessings and pray that He may grant you and me His grace and the honour of martyrdom in His cause. Indeed, we have to return to Him. I invoke His blessings on the Prophet of Allah and his blessed progeny.¹

¹The famous Arab Christian scholar, jurist, poet and philosopher, Abdul Maseeh Antaki, who died sometime in the early 20th century, while discussing this letter writes that it is a far superior code than one handed down by Moses or Hamurabi. It explains what human administration should be and how it is to be carried out, and it justifies the claims of Muslims that Islam wants to introduce a Godly administration of the people, for the people and by the people, and it wants that a ruler should rule not to please himself,

but to bring happiness to the ruled, and no religion before Islam tried to achieve this end. Ali should be congratulated for having introduced these principles in his government and for having written them down for posterity.

According to a well known historian Mas'udi (*Muruj-uz-Zahab* vol. II, page 33, Egypt), Imam Ali is credited with no fewer than 480 treatises, lectures, and epistles on a variety of subjects dealing with philosophy, religion, law and politics, as collected by Zayd Ibn Wahab in the Imam's own lifetime. So highly valued are these contributions both for their contents and their intrinsic literary worth that some of his masterpieces have formed throughout the course of Islamic history, subject of study in centres of Muslim learning. Indeed, his reputation seems to have travelled into Europe at the time of the Renaissance.

Edward Powcock, (1604—1691) a professor at the University of Oxford, published the first English translation of his 'Sayings', and delivered in 1639 a series of lectures on his 'Rhetoric'

This letter according to *Fehrist-i-Tusi* (page 33) was first copied during the time of Imam Ali (P) by Asbagh Ibn Nabata and was later on reproduced and referred to in their writings by various Arab and Egyptian scholars, chief of them being Nasr, son of Muzahim (148 A.H.), Jahiz Basari (225 A.H.), Ibn Abil Hadid (655 A.H.), Ibn Abduh (the reformer of Egypt) and Allama Mustafa Bek Najib, the great scholar of Egypt. The last named regards this letter as "A basic guide in Islamic administration".

"But for his assassination", to quote the language of a French historian, "The Moslem world might have witnessed the realization of the Holy Prophet's teachings, in the actual amalgamation of Reason with Law and in impersonation of the first principles of true philosophy in positive action". The same passionate devotion to knowledge and learning which distinguished Muhammad (P) breathed in every word of his Disciple. With a liberality of mind far beyond that of his age in which he lived was joined a sincere devoutness of spirit and earnestness of faith. His sermons, faithfully preserved by one of his descendants and his litanies or psalms, portray a devout up-looking towards the Source of God, and an unbounded faith in humanity. (Syed Amir Ali, "The Spirit of Islam" page 363).

The Pillars of Islam

The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him, was born in Mecca in the month of Rabiul Awwal in the Year of the Elephant 570 A.D. (fifty-three years before the beginning of the Hegira calendar). He was born amidst the family of Banu Hashim of the tribe of Quraysh, who were considered the most honoured of the Arab families. The Prophet's father, Abdullah, had died before he was born. The name of his mother was Āminah bint Wahab. His birth was accompanied by many signs from which the world could know that the "Deliverer" had appeared.

At first, the Prophet was nursed for a few days by Thawbiyah, manumitted slave girl of his uncle Abu Lahab. Shortly, after following the Arab custom, he was handed over to a bedouin nurse, Halimah bint Abi Zawayb who belonged to the tribe of Banu Sa'd.

In the fifth year of his life, he was returned to his mother whom he lost in his sixth year. Now the orphan child was entrusted to the safe hands of his paternal grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, who reared him with great love and care.

From his early childhood the Prophet showed signs of his being Divinely prepared for the great task ahead of him. He never took part in the idolatrous rituals of his tribe and never told a lie. He had excellent habits and an unimpeachable character which endeared him to all those

who came in contact with him. Soon he was known by the epithet of the 'truthful' and 'trustworthy'.

He was not more than eight when his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib also died. On his death-bed, the old grandfather entrusted him to the charge of his son Abu Talib, who nobly fulfilled his duties as a guardian till the last hour of his life. He loved his nephew even more than his own sons. 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 Qurashite women, Khadijah, 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 he was able to make an outstanding profit.

On this journey Khadijah's slave, Maysarah accompanied the Prophet, and on return, extolled his habits and character before her. She was so impressed that she proposed to him. Soon the marriage was solemnized and it was a great success.

After his marriage, the Prophet shifted to Khadijah's house. His life was now more stable. There was complete accord and temperamental compatibility between the wife and the husband.

It was during this very period that the first signs of his Prophethood began to appear. Every now and then, the Prophet retired to the cave of Hira, in the mountains

of the Tihamah region near Mecca, and passed there a few days and sometimes a month away from the dreary environment of heathenism and the wild orgies of merry-making. He passed his time in deep meditation and worship of the Lord of the universe.

At the age of forty, when he was in spiritual retreat, he was chosen by Allah to become a Prophet and was given the mission of preaching the new religion. At that moment the first chapter of the Qur'an, al-'Alaq (The Clot) was revealed to him. That very day he returned to his house and on the way met his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, who after hearing 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 Islam.

The Prophet continued to convey his message quietly and unobtrusively to the selected persons whom he considered responsive to his call. Gradually the number of his followers came to forty. They were mostly young and belonged to the various sectors of society. They first learnt the Holy Qur'an and the rudiments of Islam. They offered their prayers secretly and in solitary places. To train every new believer the Holy Prophet detailed a senior Muslim.

CALL TO THE KINSMEN

After three years of preaching in this way, Allah allowed his Prophet to take advantage of the tribal conditions prevailing in that society: *Warn your close relations and be kind to your believing followers. If they disobey you, tell them, I condemn your disobedient deeds.* (Surah Ash-Shu'ara, 26:214 – 216)

The Messenger of Allah invited his kinsmen to a feast. Some forty people assembled there. As soon as he started

preaching, his uncle, Abdul Uzza alias Abu Lahab snubbed him, and the people dispersed in confusion.

Sometime later he again invited his kinsmen. This time despite Abu Lahab's opposition and threats, the Prophet was able to say what he wanted to, and it was only Ali who responded to his call and strongly supported him. Thereupon, the Prophet addressing him, declared: "You are my brother, my successor and my vizier (deputy)". (In accordance with documents transmitted from the Household of the Prophet and extant poems composed by Abu Talib, the Shi'ah believe that Abu Talib had also embraced Islam; however, since 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 Quraysh).

GENERAL CALL

After this period, according to Divine instructions, the Prophet began to preach his mission openly. He received the revelation which said: *Proclaim openly what you are commanded and give no importance to those who associate false gods with Allah.* (Surah al-Hijr, 15:94)

Now the Holy Prophet mounted the hill of Safa and called Quraysh there. When they were assembled, he said to them: "If I tell you that the enemy is approaching you, will you believe me?" All of them said: "Yes, we will". "I warn you against a severe punishment", said he. "O children of Abdul Muttalib! O children of Abd Manaf! O children of Zuhrah! Save yourselves from Hell. I can't be of any use to you before Allah". This declaration was the beginning of a persistent conflict. Nevertheless, it had a far-reaching effect on the spread of Islam. The Quraysh did all they could to curb the nascent Islam. They exerted all sorts of pressure on the Holy Prophet. Many physically

and financially weak Muslims were tortured. But they all stood fast. It was Abu Talib who lent full support to the Holy Prophet during this period of trials and tribulations, and saved him from the machinations of the infidels.

TO ETHIOPIA

When the opposition and the excesses of the Quraysh became unbearable, the Holy Prophet allowed a number of Muslims to migrate to Ethiopia. In all, some 80 men and 18 women sailed to the hospitable country of the Negus.

BOYCOTT AND DETENTION

When the Quraysh failed in their attempt to stop the migration of the Muslims, they decided to boycott the Bani Hashim, the Prophet's family. This social boycott continued for three years during which the Bani Hashim were forced to take refuge in the "mountain pass of Abu Talib", a fort in one of the valleys of Mecca. No one had any dealings or transactions with them. At last, the siege was lifted as it had failed to browbeat the Bani Hashim.

YEAR OF MOURNING

But the relief was only temporary. The following year the Muslims had to suffer a severe blow in the death of Abu Talib who was the staunchest and most influential protector of the Holy Prophet. Shortly afterwards, Khadijah, the beloved wife of the Holy Prophet also died. Khadijah, besides being prudent and sagacious, was a woman of sympathetic disposition and noble character. She unhesitatingly spent her wealth for the cause of Islam. Throughout his life the Holy Prophet retained the tenderest recollections of her love and fidelity. He very often praised Khadijah and mentioned her glorious deeds.

Another of his wives, Ayesha confessed that she did not envy any of the Prophet's wives except Khadijah though she did not see her. She also related that whenever the Prophet slaughtered a sheep, he sent a portion of the meat to the friends of Khadijah. The year, in which these two sad events occurred, is known in the Muslim history as "Ām al-Huzn," the Year of Mourning.

REJECTION BY TĀ'IF

Having been disappointed with the Quraysh and weighed down by the loss of his venerable protector and his cherished wife, the Holy Prophet turned his attention to other tribes. He went to Tā'if, stayed there for about a month and saw the prominent people of the place and conveyed to them the message of Truth, but Tā'if proved to be like Mecca in its treatment to the Holy Prophet. The people of Tā'if not only rejected the call of the Prophet, but also encouraged the town rabble to fling stones at him. He came back severely disappointed.

It was the usual practice of the Holy Prophet to contact the tribesmen, who assembled at Mecca and Mina during the season of pilgrimage, to preach Islam.

THE HEGIRA

One day the Holy Prophet came across a group of people belonging to the tribe of the Khazraj. As usual, he approached them and recited to them some verses of the Holy Qur'an which astounded them, and they immediately accepted the new faith. On going back to their town, Medina, called Yathrib, they started preaching Islam.

The following year, twelve persons came from Medina and at Aqabah, a place near Mina, pledged their allegiance to the Holy Prophet. This event is known as the first

pledge of Aqabah. The Holy Prophet sent Mu'ab bin Umayr along with them to teach them the commands of the religion and propagate Islam.

In the third year, a delegation met him secretly in the stillness of night at the same spot. They invited the Holy Prophet to their town and promised to provide him all help. Abbas, an uncle of the Holy Prophet, though still a non-Muslim, was present on this occasion. This event is known in history as the second pledge of Aqabah.

Now the Holy Prophet allowed the Muslims to migrate to Medina in small groups. Fearing the Holy Prophet might escape, the Quraysh conspired to kill him. Allah informed His Prophet of this conspiracy and bade him migrate: *And (remember) how the disbelievers plotted against you with a view to either detain you or to kill you or to banish you. They were planning, but Allah was also planning. And Allah is the best planner.* (Surah Anfal, 8:32)

In order to camouflage the Quraysh who lay in ambush for the Prophet to kill him, he bade Ali lie on his bed and left Mecca unobserved along with Abu Bakr. For three nights they lay hidden in a cave known as Thaur. When the chase by the Quraysh slackened, they proceeded to Medina by an unfrequented path.

After travelling for several days, the Holy Prophet arrived at Quba, a suburb of Medina, where he stayed for two days waiting for the arrival of Ali. With this migration (Hegira) a new era began in the history of Islam.

MEDINA AS A STATE

Following the Hegira, Islam entered a new phase — the phase of consolidation and building up of a social order based on Islamic teachings. The construction of a masjid was the first step taken in this direction. Around

the masjid, several residential quarters were built. The building was simple in form and structure. Its walls were of mud and its roofs were of palm leaves. This masjid is now called Masjid-un-Nabi.

The priority given to the building of the masjid was a practical demonstration of the fact that Islam was based on submission to Allah.

No government house was built. The masjid served as the house of worship, the assembly hall, the court of justice, the school and the army head-quarter.

FORMULA OF FRATERNAL COEXISTENCE

When the Holy Prophet arrived at Medina, its tribal society had divided interests and conflicting views. The most important elements living there were:

1. THE MUSLIMS

The Muslims consisted of the Muhajirs (immigrants) and the Ansar (helpers). The designation of 'Ansar' was conferred by the Holy Prophet on the tribes of the Aws and the Khazraj for their help in the cause of Islam in the hour of trial. The Muhajirs were the early Muslims who migrated from Mecca to escape sufferings at the hands of the infidels. They abandoned their homes, property and kith and kin for the sake of their faith.

In order to meet the post-Hegira situation, Islam took a number of steps, some of them being long term and some short term. This was with a view to laying the foundation of a new social order.

First of all, it introduced the concept of brotherhood in faith in its deepest form as a general policy: *Man, We have created you from a male and a female, and have divided you into nations and tribes so that you may get to*

know one another. Surely the most honourable of you in the sight of Allah is he who is the best among you in conduct. (Surah al-Hujurat, 49:13)

The Prophet did away with the pre-Islamic custom of boasting about one's pedigree and made knowledge and piety as the criterion of one's value in Islamic life.

He gave a practical shape to this idea by establishing brotherhood between the Muhajirs and the Ansar. He bade every Ansar adopt a Muhajir as his brother. This law remained in force till it was repealed after the Battle of Badr. It is not surprising that many Ansar surrendered half of their property in favour of their Muhajir brothers.

This system not only established grand fraternal ties between the Muhajirs and the Ansar but also solved, in a natural manner, the economic problem, which the Muhajirs were confronted with.

It may be recalled that the Muhajirs on their part did not unduly exploit the generous sentiments of the Ansar. They did all they could to become self-dependent as early as possible.

2. THE JEWS

The second element was that of the Jews who lived both inside and outside Medina and were different from other Medinites in so far as their religion and social customs were concerned.

The Holy Prophet adopted special measures to pacify the Jews. A major part of the constitution of the Medina State known as "Covenant of Medina", which revealed the Prophet as the master-mind of his age, concerned them. Here are some of the important clauses of that covenant:

(a) All the Muslims, whether of Quraysh or of Medina, and all those who have made a common cause with them,

constitute one nation.

(b) Everyone shall enjoy the security of life and property, irrespective of his social position. The Muslims are linked together in a common bond.

(c) The Jews belonging to the various branches of Bani Awf etc. will form one composite nation with the Muslims. They shall have the same freedom of practising their religion as the Muslims. Those guilty of injustice and crime shall be punished.

(d) The Jews and the Muslims shall bear their own expenses, but shall join in fighting the enemies of those who have accepted this constitution.

(e) All disputes between those who have accepted this constitution shall be referred to Allah's Prophet Muhammad for arbitration. (See, Ibne Hisham, *Siratun Nabi*, vol. 2. pp. 147 - 148)

3. THE HYPOCRITES

The third important component was of the hypocrites who, prompted by popular enthusiasm, had professed Islam only in name, but were ever ready to hoodwink the Muslims.

The hypocrites had varied motives for being hostile to Islam. Some of them thought that it had dealt a blow to their material interests while others regarded it as a menace to their pagan beliefs and rituals. Some of them even looked at the question from a parochial angle and regarded the Muhajirs as intruders. The Prophet showed considerable tolerance towards the hypocrites.

IMPORTANCE OF THE HEGIRA

The Hegira had profound impact on the trend of events. It proved to be a happy augury for the Divine

mission and it was from that period that Islam marched forward. Its first fruit was the establishment of the first Islamic State under the leadership of the Holy Prophet.

MILITARY POLICY

The establishment of the Islamic State entailed the formation of a military policy. As its main aim was to convey the Divine message to humanity, the Islamic State worked to remove all the hurdles standing in the way of the Celestial light reaching the people.

For practical purposes the military policy of the State assumed two forms i.e. offensive and defensive. However, in both the cases, the strategic goal was the same viz. the removal of the barriers in the way of Islamic mission.

PEACE-TREATY OF HUDAYBIYAH

The Battle of the Ditch was the last attempt by the Quraysh to vanquish Islam. Since then, they were lying dormant and stricken with awe. Now the rumours were that the Muslims were carrying out secret negotiations with the Jews of Khyber, so as to enter into an alliance with them. The Holy Prophet decided to forestall this action and reconcile the Quraysh. For this purpose, he chose the sacred season of Hajj.

Accompanied by 1500 followers, the Prophet set out for Mecca. All the Muslims were in a state of "Ihram" and their swords were in their sheaths. The Holy Prophet had proclaimed that he wanted to perform Hajj and had no intention to fight.

Anyhow, the Quraysh looked at his move with suspicion and posted a large army under the command of Khalid bin Walid to bar his way to Mecca.

A few days after the Holy Prophet had encamped at

Hudaybiyah, a few miles away from Mecca, the Quraysh sent a delegation to find out his real intention. The delegation was assured that the Muslims wanted nothing, except performing Hajj. Though the members of the delegation were convinced of the goodwill of the Prophet the Quraysh remained adamant.

Later, the Holy Prophet sent Uthman bin Affan as his emissary to Mecca. The Quraysh detained him for three days. In the meantime, it was rumoured that Uthman had been assassinated.

Thereupon, the Holy Prophet asked his companions to pledge their readiness to fight if need be. This pledge is called Bay'atur Rizwan ('The Pledge of Pleasure' or 'The Pledge Under the Tree'). Allah has extolled those who made this pledge. The Holy Qur'an says: *Allah is pleased with the believers for their pledging obedience to you under the tree. He knew whatever was in their hearts, thus, He granted them confidence and rewarded them with an immediate victory.* (Surah al-Fatah, 48:18)

After much difficulty, a peace treaty was concluded by which the Quraysh saved their face and the Prophet obtained all he really wanted. It was a deed of his superb statesmanship. The main provisions of the treaty were:

- (a) Hostilities should cease for a period of ten years.
- (b) Anyone from among the Quraysh coming to the Holy Prophet, without the permission of his tribe, should be sent back to the Quraysh, but if anyone from among the Muslims, goes to the Quraysh, he shall not be repatriated.
- (c) Any tribe desirous of making an alliance with Muhammad or with the Quraysh should be at liberty to do so.
- (d) Muhammad and his companions shall go back this year, and they shall be permitted next year to visit Mecca

and remain there for three days with their swords in their sheaths.

Some Muslims, among whom Umar bin Khattab was the most prominent person, failing to understand the significance of the treaty, had serious doubts about its usefulness. They stubbornly stuck to their notion till Allah described it as a 'Clear Victory'.

The treaty had far-reaching effects. It practically ended the hostilities between the Muslims and the Meccans, thus paving the way for the propagation of Islam. It gave the opponents an occasion to reflect over the merits of the religion against which they had hitherto struggled in vain. It gave the Muslims a respite to consolidate their society and State.

NEW HORIZONS

Islam, from its very inception in Mecca, has been very particular about proclaiming that it is a universal religion aiming at the guidance of entire humanity.

The message of Islam provides every opportunity for man to grow and flourish. Islam is the religion which conforms to human nature and caters for all human needs; that is why it is the universal religion.

Many verses reveal its universal nature; e.g. *We have not sent you (Muhammad) but as a source of blessing to the whole world.* (Surah al-Anbiya, 21:107)

The earliest followers of Islam belonged to various races. They included both the Arabs and the non-Arabs, such as Hamzah ibn Abdul Muttalib, Ammar, Salman Farsi – the Persian, Bilal – the African, Suhayb – the Greek etc.

In pursuance of this policy, the Holy Prophet first approached the Arab tribes excluding the Quraysh, and then wrote letters to the world leaders, including the kings

of the Byzantine and Persia, the biggest powers of those days.

CONQUEST OF MECCA

Two years after the conclusion of the peace treaty of Hdaybiyah, the conquest of Mecca was complete. The Holy Prophet smashed the idols in the Ka'bah exclaiming in the words of the Holy Qur'an: *Truth has come and falsehood has vanished away.* (Surah Bani Israel, 17:81)

Ali ibn Abi Talib helped him in this task. The Holy Prophet treated the vanquished enemy most generously and declared general amnesty.

FAREWELL PILGRIMAGE

In 10 A.H. The Holy Prophet announced that he was going to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage. With this announcement, people from all corners of Arabia rallied round him for pilgrimage. Their number is reported to have exceeded 1,00,000. At Arafât the Holy Prophet delivered a remarkable sermon well-known in the annals of Islam. He outlawed usury and declared that all Muslims, irrespective of their race and colour, were brothers. An Arab was in no way superior to a non-Arab. He said that as men have rights over women, women also have rights over men. This sermon has been rightly described as the first 'Charter of Human Rights'.

THE PLEDGE OF GHADIR

On his way back to Medina, the Holy Prophet along with all those who had accompanied him, halted at a place called Ghadir Khum. There he was directed by Allah to appoint Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor and Commander of the faithful. It was a hot day and the time was about

the midday. It was not without significance that this particular time and place was chosen for this historical announcement of utmost importance. Many of the Muslims were not to meet the Holy Prophet any more. For them it was the parting time. The Prophet asked all the Muslims to assemble round him. Then he delivered a sermon. It was reported by 30 companions of the Holy Prophet including Zayd bin Arqam. Some others have reported it from 110 companions and 84 Tab'e'in. It is the most authentic tradition which has been consecutively narrated by eminent scholars and traditionists. It runs as follows: The Holy Prophet said: "Allah is my Master and I am the master of the believers. They have to give me preference even over themselves. Whoever considers me to be his master, must regard Ali also as such. O Allah! Befriend him who is the supporter of Ali, and be enemy of him who is enemy of Ali".¹

After the sermon was over, the Holy Prophet offered his midday prayers and then asked the Muslims to pledge their allegiance to their Imam, Ali. All the Muslims present on the occasion followed his command.

LAST WILL

Shortly after coming back to Medina, the Prophet fell ill. One day when his illness became more severe he said: "Get me an inkpot, pen, and a piece of paper. I would like

¹al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah by Ibn Hajar Haythami Makki al-Shafe'i p. 25, printed al-Maymanah Egypt; Majma'uz Zawaid by Haythami Shafe'i p. 164 printed Maktabah al-Qudsi; Tarikh Damishq by Ibn 'Asakir Shafe'i; Al-Ghadir by Allamah Amini, vol. I. pp. 26 - 27 printed Beirut; Abaqatul Anwār by Hāmid Husayn vol. 12 p. 312 printed Isphahan; etc.

to write something for your guidance after me". After saying that the Holy Prophet became unconscious. Someone present at that time remarked that the Holy Prophet was speaking incoherently. When he regained consciousness, those who were present asked him whether they should bring the inkpot, pen, and the paper, the Holy Prophet said: "No, not after what you have said. Anyhow I direct you to be good to my Ahl Bayt after me". The Holy Qur'an says: *Say (O' Mubammad!) I do not ask of you any recompense (for my Propbethood) except that you should love my kinsmen.* (Surah al-Shura, 42:32)

When his end approached, he gave the necessary instructions to Imam Ali as to what he wished to be done after his demise. At last he passed away with his head in the lap of Imam Ali.

PERSONALITY OF THE PROPHET

The Prophet was an embodiment of all the virtues and qualities of a believer which are described in the Holy Qur'an. He was at one and the same time the greatest thinker, the most devoted worshipper and extremely just in his dealings with his family and people at large. None can describe him better than Allah who said that His Messenger possessed the noblest character. One of his wives said that his character was the Holy Qur'an. Allah has said: *You have an excellent model in the Messenger of Allah.* (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:21)

Again the Holy Qur'an says: *Mubammad, tell them, "If you love Allah then follow me; Allah will love you"*. (Surah Ale Imran, 3:31)

As Prophet Muhammad was under the Divine care, he was distinguished from the members of the society in which he was brought up. From the very beginning, he was

known and respected for his high and noble character. Even the pagans who knew him, called him 'the truthful' and 'the trustworthy'.

SOCIAL ASPECT OF HIS LIFE

Imam Husayn, reporting from his father, says that the Holy Prophet was always cheerful and courteous. He never shouted or found fault with anybody. He never used foul language. Anas bin Mālik says, "I served him for ten years. Even if I did something which he did not like, he never asked me why I had done that".

AS A LEADER

A fair-minded person who studies various aspects of the personality of the Holy Prophet as a man, as the head of a family, as a member of the society, as a judge, as an administrator, as a teacher, and as a military commander, will come to the conclusion that his all round perfection is a definite proof of his being a Divine Messenger. Human history has not witnessed any other person reaching a similar degree of perfection.

As a military commander he was bold, courageous and far-sighted. He had a wonderful grasp of strategic realities and planned manoeuvre in advance. He could fight and win the Battle of Badr with a small and ill-equipped force. He stood firm after suffering a reverse at Uhud. It was his personal courage which turned the tide at the Battle of Hunayn and converted the initial defeat into a final victory. In the Battle of Khyber and on the eve of the Conquest of Mecca, he took full advantage of the element of surprise. On many occasions he took special measures to demoralize or confuse the enemy.

Besides being a military commander, the Holy

Prophet made wonderful contributions for the welfare of humanity at large. First he himself acted upon something and then he asked others to follow him. He established the "rights" of the people when rights were being trampled; he administered "justice" when tyranny was rampant everywhere; he introduced "equality" when undue discrimination was so common; and he gave "freedom" to the people when they were groaning under the yoke of the tyrants.

This is a brief life-sketch and character of the Prophet of Islam. He founded a religion which taught men to worship, obey, and fear Allah only, and to seek help from Him alone. The Islamic Shari'ah, being a comprehensive code, covers all the aspects of human life including "rights", "justice", "equality" and "freedom". The knowledge of the Shari'ah was transmitted by the Holy Prophet to his Ahl Bayt, who are the guards and guardians of the ummah after him.

THE PROGENY OF THE HOLY PROPHET

The Ahl Bayt are purified and honoured by Allah. This fact has been explained and supported by the celebrated statement of the Holy Prophet, narrated by a large number of his companions, that he was leaving two inseparable precious entities among his followers i.e. The Book of Allah and his Ahl Bayt and that whosoever adheres to these two shall be saved from going astray.¹

¹Sahih Tirmizi vol. 5, p. 328 printed Darul Fikr, Beirut; Jame'ul Usul by Ibn Athir vol. 1, p. 187 printed Egypt; Yanabi'ul Mawaddah by Qandozi al-Hanafi p. 33, 40, 226 and 355, printed Haidariyah; Kanzul 'Ummal by Muttaqi al-Hindi vol. 1, p. 154; Miftahun Naja by Badakhshi p. 9; Musnad Ahmad bin Hambal vol. 3 p. 17, 26 printed

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On another occasion the Prophet said: My Ahl Bayt are like the Ark of Noah; whoever got into it was saved, and whoever turned away from it was drowned and lost.

The Hadiths and historical reports unanimously affirm that the term Ahl Bayt applies to none but Fatimah tuz Zahra, Ali al-Murtaza, Hasan al-Mujtaba and Husayn al-Shaheed.

The Ahl Bayt mentioned in the thirty third verse of Surah al-Ahzab include none but Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn¹, and the other nine Imams descending from Imam Husayn, all of whom possess the same excellence of infallibility.

FATIMA TUZ ZAHRA

We have given an account of the life-sketch of the Holy Prophet and shall later give the life history of the Twelve Infallible Imams. It seems appropriate to mention the name of the illustrious daughter of the Holy Prophet — Lady Fatima tuz Zahra — the wife of the Commander of the faithful and mother of Hasan and Husayn.

Lady Fatimah is a central figure among the Ahl Bayt. She is the daughter of the Prophet, wife of Ali and mother of Hasan and Husayn and grandmother of the other nine infallible Imams.

(Footnote Contd.....)

al-Maymaniyah Egypt; al-Mo'jam al-Saghir by Tabrani vol. 1, p. 131 printed Darun Nasr Egypt; Mustadrak by Hâkim vol. 3, p. 109; al-Fathul Kabir by Nabahani vol. 1, p. 252 printed Darul Ahya' Egypt; Sahih Muslim, Kitabul Fazâ'il, chapter Fazâ'il Ali bin Abi Talib vol. 2, p. 362 printed, Isa al-Halabi.

¹Sahih Muslim vol. 7, p. 130; Sahih Tirmizi vol. 12, p. 85; Musnad Ahmad bin Hambal vol. 4, p. 170; Musnad Tialsi vol. 8; Tafsir Tabari vol. 22, p. 5; Tafsir ibn Kathir vol. 3, p. 485; Mustadrak Hâkim vol. 3, p. 158.

She was born in Mecca on Friday, the 20th of Jumadi-II, eight years before Hegira.

It was she about whom the Holy Prophet said: "Whoever hurts Fatimah hurts me and whoever hurts me hurts Allah".

Fatimah inherited the genius and wisdom, determination and will power, piety and sanctity, generosity and benevolence, devotion and worship of Allah, self-sacrifice and hospitality, forbearance and patience, and knowledge and nobility of disposition from her illustrious father. "I often witnessed my mother", says Imam Husayn, "absorbed in prayer from dusk to dawn". Her generosity and compassion for the poor was such that no destitute ever returned from her door without being attended to.

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ
 أَنَا سَيِّدُ النَّبِيِّينَ وَعَلِيٌّ سَيِّدُ الْوَصِيِّينَ
 وَأَنَّ أَوْصِيَائِي بَعْدِي اثْنَى عَشَرَ أَوْ لَهُمْ
 عَلِيٌّ وَأَخْرَهُمُ الْمَهْدِيُّ . (كتاب سورة القرين)

SUCCESSORS OF THE HOLY PROPHET

One who sows a seed, wishes the sapling to grow and flourish. In his lifetime the Holy Prophet always appointed an administrator immediately after a village or a town was conquered. Whenever he sent troops to fight a battle, he appointed a commander and sometimes, even several alternative commanders. Whenever he proceeded on journey or went out to take part in a battle, he invariably appointed his successor to hold the charge of Medina.

The Holy Prophet was not unaware of the fact that the Muslim society, after his death, needed an infallible head to administer the Divine laws and to promote Islamic objectives. He also knew that without an infallible head, the Muslim community could not stay as a living and vigorous nation.

Hence, how can it be said that the Holy Prophet who endeared himself to Islam more than anything else, could have left it unattended and unguarded.

At the same time, it was also not possible that he would leave the selection of his successor to the choice of the people, because he (successor) must have special qualities of knowledge, piety and infallibility. Obviously it is not people but Allah, who is the best judge, for how can the merits of the highest order be determined by consultation or election by the people?

Like the prophecies about the coming of the Holy

Prophet, the prophecies about the Twelve Imams are also found in the heavenly scriptures.

The Old Testament corroborates the statement in relating the Divine promise to Prophet Abraham about his two sons, Isaac; and Ishmael:

“And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation”. (Genesis 17:20)

“And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee”. (Genesis 17:7)

In the words of Allah, as reported in the Old Testament, the twelve princes are the Twelve Imams, who were from the seed of Ishmael son of Abraham. According to the covenant which Allah established with Abraham he was endowed with the Divine light of guidance. The seed of Abraham was bifurcated and passed into the two channels namely that of Ishmael and Isaac. Through Isaac the seed passed on to Jesus Christ and through Ishmael it passed on to Abdul Muttalib. Again it bifurcated into two channels and passed through Abdullah to Prophet Muhammad and through Abu Talib, to Imam Ali.

An authentic and universally accepted Hadith reports the Holy Prophet as saying explicitly on several occasions that he would be followed by twelve commanders¹ and according to another version twelve caliphs² the first of

¹Sahih Bukhari p. 175, Egypt (1355); Sahih Tirmizi vol. 2, p. 45, Dehli (1342).

²Sahih Muslim vol. 2, p. 191, Egypt (1348); Sunan Abi Daud vol. 2, 207 (Egypt); Musnad Ahmad bin Hambal vol. 5, p. 106,

Contd.....

them being Ali and the last Mahdi.

Hence, it is evident that the successor of the Holy Prophet must be nominated by none except Allah. That is why the Holy Prophet introduced Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor on various occasions. We have all heard the event of Ghadir. It was one such occasion. This event is recorded in all the books of history.

This event took place towards the end of the Holy Prophet's life when he was returning from the Farewell Pilgrimage. At a place known as Ghadir Khum, the Holy Prophet formally proclaimed Ali as his successor and the Commander of the faithful in the presence of tens of thousands of people.

Unfortunately certain people for various reasons did not allow this will of the Holy Prophet to be implemented and thus it became the source of a split among the Muslims.

Each of the eleven other members of the Prophet's House (Ahl Bayt) who succeeded him, was also nominated by the Imam preceding him. The chain of authority and the reports of these nominations are recorded in all authentic books of Hadith.

As mentioned earlier, the Imams have been selected exclusively through nomination by the Holy Prophet or the preceding Imam. Infact, they have been appointed by Allah who alone can determine their suitability.

Besides, history bears testimony to the fact that Imam Ali and other Imams possessed those outstanding

(Footnote Contd.....)

Egypt (1313); Mustadrak Hākim vol. 2, p. 618 (Hyderabad); Taysir al-Wusul 'ala Jame'ul Usul vol. 2, p. 34 Egypt (1346); Tarikh Baghdad vol. 14, p. 353; Yanabi'ul Mawaddah p. 445 (Istanbul) Muntakhab Kanzul Ummal vol. 5, p. 312.

virtues which made them the leaders of the Muslim Ummah. A study of history and the sources of Hadith show that none of the companions of the Holy Prophet was equal to Imam Ali in knowledge, piety, valour and other virtues.

FUNCTIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS OF AN IMAM

Islam prescribes very high qualifications for a Divine leader. He should be the wisest, the most virtuous, and the most gallant of all. He should also be immune from every kind of sin and transgression, error and lapse.

The Holy Prophet and the Imams, besides being religious leaders, are, in their capacity as leaders of society, responsible for all government functions, and as such should possess the requisite qualifications to shoulder that responsibility.

The Holy Prophet is the founder of religion and the Imam is its protector. Both of them are appointed by Allah. The Prophet alone receives revelation and the Imam is heir to all the Prophetic knowledge. The Imam does not receive revelation, but in association with the Almighty Allah, he is only next to the Prophet.

Both the Prophet and the Imam have a special constructive role to play and shirk no sacrifice in the interest of the Muslim Ummah.

The role performed by Imam Husayn in fighting the hypocrites and in toppling over the machine of tyranny is undeniable. Imam Baqir and Imam Sadiq were conspicuous in spreading Islamic knowledge and other sciences. Imam Riza defended the Islamic tenets and provided intellectual guidance against the invasion of foreign ideas at the time of the spread of Islam over vast territories of the world. The same is true of the role performed by other

Imams in their respective circumstances. Thus, besides performing the functions which were common to all of them as religious heads, each of these leaders had a special mission in relation to the special circumstances of his age and time, and history tells us that each Imam performed his duties most majestically by sacrificing his life in the way of Allah.

It has already been proved that an Imam must be nominated by Allah and His Prophet, for none else can know who is infallible.

As such, it was the bounden duty of the Prophet to introduce his successor to the people. Had he not done so, he would have failed in his Prophetic mission. That is why the Shi'ah believe that the Prophet of Islam did nominate his successor, who was none else but Ali ibn Abi Talib.

The Prophet not only nominated his immediate successor but also named all the succeeding Imams. He said that there would be twelve caliphs after him and all of them would belong to the tribe of Quraysh. The first one would be Ali and the last one, the promised Mahdi. In another Hadith names of all the twelve Imams have been expressly mentioned.

IMAM ALI MURTAZA

Imam Ali, peace be on him, the first Imam, was the cousin of the Holy Prophet. He was born in the Sacred House (i.e. the Ka'bah) in Mecca on Friday, the thirteenth day of the month of Rajab, thirty years after the Year of the Elephant (570 A.D.). Nobody before or after him has ever been born in the House of Allah, the Most High. His father Abu Talib was the only real brother of Prophet's father Abdullah bin Abdul Muttalib.

His mother was Fatimah, daughter of Asad b. Hashim

b. Abd Manaf. She was like a mother to the Prophet of Allah. Imam Ali was brought up under the tutelage of the Holy Prophet. As Imam Ali says: "The Holy Prophet brought me up in his own arms and fed me with his own morsel. I followed him wherever he went, like a baby camel following its mother. Each day a new aspect of his character would beam out of his noble person and I would accept it and follow it as a command".

His close and inseparable companionship with the Holy Prophet for ten years made him assimilate all his (Prophet's) characteristics, knowledge, wisdom, self-sacrifice, forbearance, bravery, generosity, oratory and eloquence. From his very childhood he prostrated before Allah along with the Holy Prophet. He himself has said: "I was the first to pray to Allah along with the Holy Prophet". (Nahjul Balaghah)

The famous historian, Allamah Mas'udi says: "Hazrat Ali followed in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet, all along his childhood. Allah created him pure and holy and kept him steadfast on the right path". (Murujuz Zahab)

Though Ali is indisputably the first to embrace Islam when the Holy Prophet called upon his listeners to do so, yet for the very fact that since his infancy he was brought up by the Prophet and followed him in every action and deed including prostration before Allah, he can be said to be born a Muslim.

Imam Ali, always accompanied the Holy Prophet to help and protect him from his enemies. He used to write down the verses of the Holy Qur'an and discuss them with the Holy Prophet as soon as they were revealed by Angel Gabriel. He was so closely associated with the Prophet of Allah that as soon as a verse was revealed to him during the day or night, Imam Ali was the first to hear it.

On the occasion of "establishing the bond of brotherhood" (Muākh'at) among the Muhajirs and the Ansar, the Holy Prophet said: "O Ali! You are my brother in this world as well as in the Hereafter".¹ He also said, "I am the City of Knowledge and Ali is its Gate".²

Umar ibn Khattab narrates that the Prophet said: "You are to me as Aaron was to Moses".³

The Holy Prophet has also said: "Ali is with truth and truth is with Ali, and they will not part with each other until they reach (me) at the Cistern of Kauthar".⁴

"Every Prophet has a successor and heir and Ali is my successor and heir".⁵

The character and calibre of Imam Ali is described by Allamah Mas'udi in these words, "If the fact of being the first Muslim, a comrade of the Prophet in exile, his faithful companion in the struggle for faith, his intimate associate in life, and his kinsman; if true knowledge of the spirit of the Prophet's teachings and of the Book; if self-abnegation and dispensing of justice; if honesty, purity, and love of truth; if the knowledge of law and science, constitute a claim to pre-eminence, then all

¹Sahih Tirmizi vol. 5, p. 300, printed Darul Fikr Beirut; Mustadrak Hākim vol. 3, p. 14; Fusulul Muhimmah of Ibn Sabbagh Māliki p. 21, printed al-Haidriyah.

²Tirmizi in his Sahih vol. 2, p. 299 narrates on the authority of Abdullah bin Umar Riaz by Muhibuddin Tabari vol. 2, p. 167.

³Zakha'irul Uqba by Muhibuddin Tabari p. 58, printed in Cairo 1356 A.H.

⁴Tarikh al-Baghdadi p. 321; Majma'uz Zawa'id by Haythami al-Shafe'i vol. 7, p. 235; Kanzul Ummal vol. 6, p. 157.

⁵Yanabi'ul Mawadah; Fusulul Muhimmah; Musnad of Ahmad bin Hambal.

must regard Ali as the foremost Muslim. We shall search in vain to find, either among his predecessors or among his successors, those attributes". (Murujuz Zahab)

In the last year of his life, the Holy Prophet went to Mecca to perform pilgrimage. On his return journey when he reached Ghadir Khum, this verse was revealed to him: *Messenger, announce what is revealed to you from your Lord. If you will not announce, it would be as though you have not conveyed My Message. Allah protects you from men. He does not guide the unbelievers.* (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:67)

In compliance with Allah's command the Messenger of Allah stopped there and ordered other Muslims also to stop. Some 70,000 people assembled around him. He ordered a pulpit to be raised. After the pulpit was ready, he ascended it and lifted Ali ibn Abi Talib on his hands so that people might see him. Then he said: "Whoever considers me to be his master should consider Ali also to be his master. O Allah! Be the friend of him who is the friend of Ali and be the enemy of him who is the enemy of Ali"¹

Gibbon says, "The birth, the alliance and the character of Ali which exalted him above the rest of his countrymen, might justify his claim to the vacant throne of Arabia. The son of Abu Talib was in his own right, the Chief of Bani Hashim and the hereditary prince or guardian of the city temple of Mecca". (Gibbon abridged by W. Smith p. 466)

Besides having many other superior merits, Ali was an eminent poet, a brave soldier and a venerable saint; his wisdom still breathes in a collection of moral and religious sayings and every antagonist, in the combats of the

¹Al-Mustadrak of Hākim Neshapuri; Manāqib of Khawarazmi al-Hanafi; Yanabi'ul Mawadah of Qandozi al-Hanafi etc.

tongue or the sword, was subdued by his eloquence and valour. (See: Peak of Eloquence, ISP 1977)

From the first hour of his mission to the last rites of his funeral, the Holy Prophet was never forsaken by a generous friend, whom he delighted to call his brother, his vicegerent, and the faithful Aaron of a second Moses; and with whom he married his most loving daughter, Fatima tuz Zahra.

In the 40th year of Hegira, in the small hours of the morning of 19th of Ramazan, Imam Ali was struck with a poisoned sword by a Kharajite, Abdul Rahman ibn Muljam, while offering his prayers in the Masjid of Kufah. He died on the 21st day of Ramazan, and was buried in Najaf Ashraf (Iraq). He was born in the House of Allah and was also martyred in the House of Allah, the Masjid of Kufah. The Lion of Allah, the bravest and the gentlest Muslim who ever lived, began his glorious life with devotion to Allah and His Prophet and ended it likewise.

Do not consider those who are slain for the cause of Allah to be dead. They are alive but you do not perceive.
(Surah al-Baqarah, 2:154)

IMAM HASAN MUJTABA

The elder son of Imam Ali was born in Medina on 15th day of Ramazan, in the 3rd A.H. Having received the happy news of his grandson's birth, the Holy Prophet came to the house of his beloved daughter Fatimah, took the newly born in his arms and named him 'Hasan'.

The first phase of seven years of the second Imam's infancy was blessed with the gracious patronage of the Holy Prophet, who gifted him with all his great qualities and adorned him with Divine knowledge to such an extent that he was outstanding in knowledge, tolerance, intelli-

gence, bounty and valour. He was infallible by birth and was endowed with heavenly knowledge.

Jabir bin Abdullah Ansari narrates from the Prophet that: "Whoever wants to see the chief of the Paradise should look at the face of Hasan bin Ali".

Ghazali has narrated in his book *Ihya'ul Ulum* that the Holy Prophet said: "Hasan resembles me in feature and figure".

The Prophet said, "Hasan and Husayn are my sons. Whoever loved them loved me, and he who loved me loved Allah, and who loved Allah entered the Paradise. He who displeased Hasan and Husayn displeased me, and he who displeases me displeased Allah and he who displeased Allah shall go to Hell".¹

The demise of the Holy Prophet was followed by an eventful era when the Muslim world came in the grip of expansionism and conquest. But even under such a revolutionary phase, Imam Hasan, kept devoting himself to the sacred mission of peacefully propagating Islam and the teachings of the Holy Prophet along with his illustrious father, Imam Ali.

The majority of Muslims pledged their allegiance to him after the demise of Imam Ali. No sooner had he taken the reins of leadership than he had to meet the challenge of Mu'awiyah, the Governor of Syria, who had declared war against him. In compliance with the Will of Allah and with a view to avoiding the bloodshed of Muslims, he entered into a peace treaty with Mu'awiyah on terms which saved Islam and averted a civil war. But this peace treaty was never meant as a surrender of the leadership to Mu'awiyah. It meant only as an interim

¹A 'alāmul Wara' chapter of Faza'ilus Sibtayn of Tabari.

transfer of the administration. Having relieved himself of the administrative responsibilities, Imam Hasan devoted himself to the propagation of Islam and the teachings of the Holy Prophet in Medina.

IMAM HUSAYN SHAHEED

The Holy Prophet said: "Husayn is from me and I am from Husayn. Allah loves him who loves Husayn".¹

Ya'la bin Murra narrated the following tradition from Sahih Tirmizi:

Imam Husayn the third Imam was born in Medina on 3rd day of Sha'ban, 3 A.H. On his birth the Prophet prophesied that Islam would be rescued and rejuvenated by his second grandson, Husayn.

Yazid, son of Mu'awiyah, was known for his devilish character and brutish conduct. He was known as the most licentious of men. The people having known and understood the character of Yazid, formed a covenant by which Mu'awiyah could not appoint Yazid as his successor. Known to a few, there existed an undertaking between Imam Hasan and Mu'awiyah whereby Mu'awiyah had pledged not to nominate Yazid as his successor. Mu'awiyah violated this undertaking and nominated Yazid as his successor.

Yazid demanded allegiance from Imam Husayn, who could have never agreed to it at any cost. People, fearing death and destruction at the hands of the tyrant Yazid, had yielded to him but Husayn's indomitable spirit would never yield to the devil. Thus he never agreed to undo what his grandfather, the Holy Prophet, had established.

The refusal of the Holy Imam to pay allegiance to

¹Faza'ilul Khamsah.

that fiend, marked the start of his persecution. As a result, he retired to Medina where he led a secluded life. Even there he was not allowed to live in peace and was forced to seek refuge in Mecca where also he was harassed, and Yazid plotted to murder him in the very precincts of the great sanctuary of Ka'bah.

In order to safeguard the great sanctuary, Husayn decided to leave Mecca for Kufah just a day before the pilgrimage. When asked the reason for the mysterious departure from Mecca, foregoing the pilgrimage which was to be held only the next day, he said that he would perform the year's pilgrimage at Karbala, offering the sacrifice not of any animals, but of his kith and kin and of some faithful friends.

When the Holy Imam, with his entourage, reached Karbala, he declared: "This is the land, the land of sufferings and tortures". He alighted from his horse and ordered his followers to encamp there, saying, "Here shall we and our children be martyred. This is the land about which my grandfather, the Prophet, had foretold and his prophecy will certainly be fulfilled".

At dawn of the 10th Muharram 61 A.H., the Imam was completely surrounded by a large army of Yazid and he saw Ibn Sa'd ordering his forces to march towards him. Husayn gathered his followers and addressed them thus: "Allah has this day permitted us to be engaged in a Holy war and He shall reward us for our martyrdom. So prepare yourselves to fight against the enemies of Islam with patience and perseverance. O' sons of the noble and self-respecting persons, be patient! Death is nothing but a bridge which you must cross after facing trials and tribulations so as to reach Heaven and its joys. Who of you are those who do not like to go from this prison (world) to the

lofty palaces (Paradise)?” Having heard the Imam’s address, all his companions were overwhelmed and cried out, “O master! We are all ready to defend you and your Ahl Bayt, and to sacrifice our lives for the cause of Islam”.

Husayn sent out from his camp his followers one after the other to fight and sacrifice their lives in the way of Allah. Lastly, when all his men and children had laid down their lives, the Imam brought his six-month old son, Ali Asghar, and, holding him in his own hands, demanded some water for the babe who was dying of thirst. The thirst of the baby was quenched by a deadly poisoned arrow thrown by Hurmala of the brute force of Yazid. The arrow pierced through the baby’s neck and stuck to the arms of the helpless father. At last, when the six-month old baby was also killed, Husayn addressed Allah thus: “O Lord! Your Husayn has offered in Your way whatever You had blessed him with. Bless Your Husayn, O Lord! By the acceptance of this sacrifice. Everything Husayn could do till now was through Your help and by Your grace”. Lastly the Imam came into the field and was martyred. The details of his merciless slaughter are heart-rending. The forces of Yazid, having martyred Imam Husayn, cut and severed his head from his body and raised it on a lance. The severed head of the Holy Imam began glorifying Allah from the point of the lance saying “*Allabo Akbar*” (All glory be to Allah who is the Greatest!).

After his head was chopped off, the body of Husayn was trampled, his tents were looted and his Ahl Bayt were made captives. Husayn’s kith and kin were then despatched to Damascus in a very uncomfortable way to face further ordeals.

IMAM ALI ZAYNUL ĀBEDIN

The fourth Imam, Ali bin Husayn was born in Medina on 15th of Jumadi-I, 37 A.H. (685 A.D.). He was popularly titled as 'Zaynul Ābedin'.

Imam Zaynul Ābedin lived for about 34 years after his father and passed all his life in prayers and supplications to Allah and in remembrance of his martyred father. It is for his perpetual prayers and prostrations before Allah that he came to be called 'Sajjad'.

The Holy Imam was not given the time to offer his prayers peacefully, nor could he deliver any sermons. This Vicegerent of Allah on earth, therefore, adopted a third course which proved to be very beneficial to his followers. He went on compiling supplicative invocations for the daily use of man in his endeavour to approach the Almighty Allah. The invaluable collection of his edited invocations is known as 'Sahifa Kamilah'. The collection is an invaluable treasure of wonderfully effective invocations to Allah in an inimitably beautiful language. Those who have even come across the invocations, would know their excellence and blessedness. Through these invocations, the Imam gave all the necessary guidance to the faithful during his seclusion. (See: Shaykh Muhammad Riza Muzaffar, Beliefs of Shi'ite School, ISP 1983).

IMAM MUHAMMAD BAQIR

The fifth Imam Muhammad Baqir was born in Medina on 1st of Rajab, 57 A.H. (677 A.D.). He was popularly titled as 'Baqir'.

Imam Baqir was brought up in the Holy lap of his grandfather Imam Husayn. For 34 years he was under the gracious patronage of his father, Imam Ali Zaynul Ābedin.

A famous Muslim scholar Ibn Hajar 'Asqalāni, says:

“Imam Muhammad Baqir has disclosed the secrets of knowledge and wisdom and unfolded the principles of spiritual and religious guidance. Nobody can deny his exalted character, his God-given knowledge, his Divinely-gifted wisdom, and his obligation and gratitude for the spread of knowledge. He was a sacred and a highly talented spiritual leader and for this reason, he was popularly titled as ‘Baqir’ which means ‘the expounder of knowledge’. Kind-hearted, spotless in character, sacred of soul and noble by nature, the Imam devoted all his time in submission to Allah and in advocating the teachings of the Holy Prophet and his descendants. It is beyond the power of a man to recount the deep impression of knowledge and guidance left by the Imam on the hearts of the faithful. His sayings about devotion and abstinence, knowledge and wisdom, religious exercise, and submission to Allah are so great in number that the size of this book is quite insufficient to cover them all”. (Sawa‘iq al-Muhriqah)

IMAM JA‘FAR SADIQ

The sixth Imam, Ja‘far Sadiq was born on Friday, the 17th of Rabiul Awwal, 83 A.H. in Medina. His famous title was ‘Sadiq’ (the truthful). He was brought up by his grandfather, Imam Zaynul Ābedin for 12 years, and then remained under the patronage of his father, Imam Muhammad Baqir for nineteen years.

The period of his Imamate coincided with the most revolutionary and eventful era of the Muslim history which saw the downfall of the Umayyad Empire and the rise of the Abbasid dynasty. The internal wars and political upheavals were bringing about speedy changes in the government. Thus, the Holy Imam witnessed the reigns of various kings starting from Abdul Malik down to the

Umayyad ruler, Marwān ibn Hakam. He survived till the time of Abul Abbas Saffah and Mansur among the Abbasids. It was due to the political strife between two groups viz. the Umayyads and the Abbasids that the Imam was left alone undisturbed to carry out his devotional duties peacefully. The Imam fulfilled his mission by propagating Islam and spreading the teachings of the Holy Prophet.

The downfall of the Umayyads and the rise of the Abbasids were the two important events in Muslim history. This was the most chaotic and revolutionary period when the Muslims had been demoralized and the teachings of the Holy Prophet were neglected. The state of anarchy was rampant. It was amid such deadly gloom that the virtuous personage of Imam Ja'far Sadiq stood like a beacon light, shedding its lustre to illumine the vast stretches of sinful darkness all around. The world got inclined towards his virtuous and admirable personality. Abu Salma Khallal offered him the throne of caliphate, but the Imam, keeping up the characteristic tradition of his ancestors, flatly declined to accept it on account of the critical conditions prevailing at that time. On account of his great learning, he was always triumphant in his many debates with the priests of rival orders like the Christians and the Jews.

The versatile genius of Imam Sadiq in all branches of knowledge was acclaimed throughout the Muslim world. This attracted students from far-off places towards him till the number of his disciples had reached four thousand. The scholars and experts in Divine law have quoted many traditions from him. His disciples compiled hundreds of books on various branches of science and art. Besides 'Fiqh' (jurisprudence), 'Hadith' (tradition), 'Tafsir' (exegesis), the Imam also imparted lessons on mathematics and chemistry to some of his disciples. Jabir bin Hayyan Tartusi, a

famous scholar of mathematics, was one of the Imam's disciples who benefited from the Imam's knowledge and guidance, and was able to write 400 books on different subjects.

It is an undeniable historical truth that all the great scholars of Islam were indebted for their learning to Ahl Bayt, who were the fountain of knowledge and learning for all.

Allamah Shibli, in his book, 'Seeratun No'man' writes: "Abu Hanifah remained for a considerable period in the attendance of Imam Sadiq, acquiring from him a great deal of precious knowledge in Fiqh and Hadith.

Both the sects — Shi'ah and Sunni — believe that the source of Abu Hanifah's knowledge was mostly derived from his association with Imam Sadiq".

The Imam devoted his whole life to the cause of preaching the teachings of the Holy Prophet. Because of his immensely great knowledge and noble teachings the people gathered round him with all the devotion and reverence which was his due. This excited the jealousy of the Abbasid ruler Mansur Dawaneqi, who fearing the popularity of the Imam, decided to do away with him. He was thus poisoned to death on 15th of Rajab 148 A.H.

IMAM MUSA KAZIM

Imam Musa, the seventh Imam, was born on Sunday the 7th of Safar, 128 A.H. at Abwa (Medina).

'Kazim' was his famous title. His matchless devotion and worship to Allah has also earned for him the epithet of 'Abdus Saleh' (Virtuous Slave of Allah). Generosity was synonymous with his name and no needy ever returned from his door empty-handed. Even after his death, he continued to be obliging. He was generous to his devotees

who came to his Holy shrine with prayers and which were invariably granted by Allah.

After the demise of Imam Sadiq, Imam Kazim succeeded him as the seventh Imam. The period of his Imamate continued for 35 years. In the first decade of his Imamate, Imam Kazim could peacefully execute the responsibilities of Imamate and carried on the propagation of the teachings of the Holy Prophet. But later he fell a victim to the ruling king's tyranny. He, however, passed a greater part of his life helping the poor and the needy. Such was his unbounded generosity that he used to patronize and help the poor and the destitute of Medina by providing them cash, food, clothes and other necessities of sustenance in secret. It continued to be a riddle for the receivers of gifts throughout the Imam's lifetime as to who their benefactor was, but the secret was not revealed until after his death.

Time and circumstances did not permit him to establish institutions to impart religious knowledge to his followers, like his father, Imam Sadiq who was also never allowed to address a congregation. He carried on his mission of preaching and guiding the people quietly. He also wrote a few books of which the most famous is 'Musnad Imam Musa Kazim'.

IMAM ALI RIZA

Imam Ali was born on 11th of Zil Qa'dah, 148 A.H. in Medina. Riza was his famous title.

Imam Ali Riza was brought up under the guidance of his father for 35 years. His own insight and brilliance in religious matters combined with the excellent training and education given by his father, made him unique in his spiritual leadership. Imam Riza was a living example of the

piety of the Holy Prophet and the chivalry and generosity of Imam Ali.

Imam Riza had inherited great qualities of head and heart from his ancestors. He was a versatile genius and had full command over many languages. Ibn Athir Jazeri has penned very rightly that Imam Riza was undoubtedly the greatest sage, saint and scholar of the second century Hegira.

Ma'mun could not help holding him in great esteem because of the Imam's piety, wisdom, knowledge, modesty, decorum and personality. Therefore, he decided to nominate him as the rightful heir to the throne. In 200 Hegira, he summoned the Abbasids to his court. Thirty three thousand Abbasids responded to the invitation and were entertained as royal guests. During their stay at the capital, Ma'mun very closely observed and noted their capabilities and eventually arrived at the conclusion that not one of them deserved to succeed him. He, therefore, spoke to them all in an assembly in 201 A.H. telling them in categorical terms that none of the Abbasids deserved to succeed him. He demanded allegiance to Imam Riza from the people in this very meeting and declared that in future, royal robes would be green — the colour, which had the unique distinction of being that of the Imam's dress. A royal decree was published saying that Imam Riza would succeed Ma'mun and that his title would be "*Ali Riza min Āle Mubammad*".

— Even after the declaration of succession when there was every opportunity for the Imam to live a splendid worldly royal life, he did not pay any heed to material comforts and devoted himself completely to imparting the Islamic ideology of the Holy Qur'an and the teachings of the Holy Prophet. He spent most of his time praying to Allah and serving the people. Ma'mun poisoned him to

death on 23rd of Zil Qa'dah 203 A.H.

IMAM MUHAMMAD TAQI

Imam Muhammad Taqi was born on Friday, the 10th of Rajab, 195 A.H. in Medina. (811 A.D.) His famous title was 'Taqi' (pious).

Imam Taqi was brought up by his father, Imam Riza for four years. Under the force of circumstances, Imam Riza had to migrate from Medina to Khurasan (Iran) leaving his young son behind him at Medina. The Imam was fully aware of the treacherous character of the ruling king and was sure that he would not return to Medina. So, before his departure from Medina, he declared his son Muhammad Taqi as his successor, and imparted to him all his treasures of Divine knowledge and spiritual genius. The span of life of Imam Taqi was shorter than that of his predecessors as well as his successors. He became Imam at the age of eight and was poisoned to death at the age of twenty-five, yet his knowledge had no bounds and he commanded great respect and esteem.

The Holy Imam was the symbol of Prophet's affability and Imam Ali's attainments. His hereditary qualities comprised gallantry, piety, charity, learning, forgiveness and tolerance. The brightest and the most outstanding phases of his nature and character were to show hospitality and courtesy to all without discrimination, to help the needy, to observe equality under all circumstances, to live a simple life, to help the orphans, the poor and the homeless, to impart learning to those interested in the acquisition of knowledge and guide the people to the right path.

For the consolidation of his empire, it was realized by Ma'mun, the Abbasids emperor, that it was necessary to win the sympathy and support of the Iranians who

had always been friendly to the Ahl Bayt. Consequently Ma'mun was forced from a political point of view, to establish contacts with the tribe of Bani Fatimah at the expense of the ties with Bani Abbas and thereby win the favour of the Shi'ah. Accordingly he declared Imam Riza as his heir even against the Imam's will and got his sister Umme Habiba married to the Imam. Ma'mun expected that Imam Riza would lend him his support in political affairs of the State. But when he discovered that the Imam was little interested in political matters and that the masses were more and more submitting themselves to him due to his spiritual eminence, Ma'mun got him poisoned. Yet the exigency which directed him to nominate Imam Riza as his heir and successor still continued. Hence, he desired to marry his daughter Ummul Fazl to Imam Taqi and with this object in view summoned the Imam from Medina to Iraq.

The Bani Abbas were extremely disconcerted when they came to know that Ma'mun was planning to marry his daughter to Imam Taqi. A delegation of some leading persons waited on him in order to dissuade him from his intention. But Ma'mun continued to admire the learning and excellence of the Imam.

He would say that though Imam Taqi was still young, he was a true successor of his father in all virtues and that the profoundest scholars of the Muslim world could not compete with him. When the Abbasids noticed that Ma'mun attributed the Imam's superiority to his learning, they chose Yahya bin Aksam, the greatest scholar and jurist of Baghdad, to contend with him.

Ma'mun issued a proclamation and organized a grand meeting for the contest which resulted in a huge gathering of people from all parts of the kingdom. Apart from the

nobles and high officials, there were as many as nine hundred chairs reserved for scholars and learned men only. The world wondered how a young child could contest with the veteran judge (Qazi ul-Quzat) and the greatest scholars of Iraq in religious laws.

Imam Taqi was seated beside Ma'mun on his throne face to face with Yahya bin Aksam, who addressed the Imam thus: "Do you permit me to ask you a question?" "Ask me whatever you wish", said the Imam in the typical tone of his ancestors.

Yahya then asked the Imam, "What is your verdict about a man who indulges in hunting while he is in the state of 'Ehram'? (In the code of religious law, hunting is forbidden for a pilgrim). The Imam at once replied, "Your question is vague and misleading. You should have definitely mentioned whether he hunted within the bounds of the Holy Ka'bah or outside, whether he was literate or illiterate, whether he was slave or a free citizen, whether he was a minor or a major, whether it was for the first time or he had done it previously also, whether his victim was a bird or some other creature, whether he hunted in day or at night, whether the hunter repented of his action or persisted in it, whether he hunted secretly or openly, whether the 'Ehram' was for Umra or for Hajj? Unless all these points are explained, no specific answer can be given to this question".

Qazi Yahya was non-plused while listening to these words of the Imam and the entire gathering was dumb-founded. There was no limit to Ma'mun's pleasure. He expressed his sentiments of joy and admiration thus, *Absanta, Absanta yā Aba Ja'far*. "Bravo! Well done! O Abu Ja'far! Your learning and attainments are beyond all praise".

As Ma'mun wanted that the Imam's opponent was

fully exposed, he said to the Imam, "You may also put some questions to Yahya bin Aksam".

Then Yahya also reluctantly said to the Imam, "Yes, you may ask me some questions. If I know the answer, I will reply, otherwise I shall request you to give its answer".

Thereupon, the Imam asked a question to which Yahya could not reply. Eventually, the Imam answered his question.

Then Ma'mun addressed the audience thus: "Did I not say that the Imam comes of a family which has been chosen by Allah as the repository of knowledge and learning? Is there anyone in the world who can match even the children of this family?"

All of them shouted "Undoubtedly, there is no parallel to Muhammad Taqi".

At the same assembly, Mamun wedded his daughter, Ummul Fazl to the Imam and liberally distributed charity and gifts among his subjects as a mark of rejoicing. One year after his marriage, the Imam returned to Medina from Baghdad with his wife and there he set about preaching the commands of Allah.

His wife Mamun's daughter, Ummul Fazl, poisoned him to death on the 29th or 30th of Zil Qa'dah 220 A.H.

IMAM ALI NAQI

Imam Ali Naqi was born at Surba in the environs of Medina on Friday, the 15th of Zil Hajj, 212 A.H. or on 5th of Rajab 214 A.H.

Imam Naqi, like his father, was also elevated to the rank of an Imam in his childhood. He was six years old when his father, Imam Taqi was martyred. After the death of Mamun, Mo'tasim succeeded him and was later followed by Caliph Wasiq Billah. In the first five years of the reign

of Wasiq, Imam Naqi lived peacefully. After Wasiq Billah, Mutawakkil came to power. Being too occupied in State affairs, Mutawakkil did not get any time to harass the Imam and his followers for four years. But as soon as he freed himself from State affairs, he started to molest the Imam. The Holy Imam devoted himself to the sacred mission of preaching in Medina and thus earned the gratitude of the people as well as their allegiance and recognition of his great knowledge and attributes. This reputation of the Imam evoked the jealousy and malice of Mutawakkil against him.

The Governor of Medina wrote to Mutawakkil that Imam Naqi had been manoeuvring a coup against the government and a multitude of Muslims were pledged to his support. Although enraged by this news, Mutawakkil still preferred the diplomacy of not arresting the Holy Imam under the garb of pretended respect and love towards the Imam. He, however, put him under life-imprisonment after inviting him to his palace. He was poisoned to death on the 3rd of Rajab 254 A.H.

IMAM HASAN ASKARI

Imam Hasan Askari was born on Monday, 8th of Rabi-II, 232 A.H. in Medina. He was popularly known as 'Askari'.

Imam Askari spent twenty-two years of his life under the patronage of his father, Imam Ali Naqi, after whose martyrdom he became the Divinely commissioned Imam.

During his time, the Abbasid rulers were entangled in political tussles. They, however, very much dreaded the existence of Imam Askari, the rightful and Divinely ordained Imam of the family of the Holy Prophet, and knew that the son of this Holy Imam would be the saviour

of humanity for all times until the Day of Judgement. So these rulers inflicted all sorts of pains on the Imam, and hence, a larger part of his life was passed in prison and many restrictions were placed on his movements. In spite of this, he always discharged the duties of the Imamate with great composure and dignity.

The Holy Imam was ever busy imparting religious knowledge and guiding people towards the straight path. History shows that the exegetes of the Holy Qur'an have often quoted the interpretation of the verses of the Holy Qur'an from Imam Askari.

Mo'tamad, the Abbasid ruler of the time, realizing that the world was ringing with the praises of the Imam became restless with jealousy, and dreading that the people would openly declare their allegiance to the Imam, had him martyred with poison on 8th of Rabi-I 260 A.H.

IMAM MUHAMMAD MAHDI

There existed a good deal of harmony and uniformity between the aspects pertaining to the births of Prophet Muhammad, the last Prophet of Allah and Imam Mahdi, the last Imam. Just as the coming of the Holy Prophet was prophesied well in advance by the preceding Prophets, similarly the impending news of the gracious birth of Imam Mahdi was foretold by the Holy Prophet.

Innumerable traditions in this context, quoted right from the Holy Prophet, from the glowing contents of many books of Masanid, Sahah and Akhbār and of Shi'ah scholars, did exist. Many Sunni scholars have accumulated these Hadith (reports) in complete volumes also, e.g. '*al-Bayan fi Akhbār Sabibuz Zaman*' by Hafiz Muhammad bin Yusuf Shafi'i and '*Sahih Abu Daud*' and '*Sunan Ibn Maja*'. All these books record the Hadith bearing evidence

of the advent of the Mahdi. (See: *The Awaited Saviour*, ISP, 1979).

The Imam was born in Samarra, on 15th of Sha'ban, 255 A.H. The momentous and singular aspects of his birth greatly resemble those under which the Prophet Moses was born. The birth of Moses had signalled the downfall and extinction of the Empire of Pharaoh, who had ordered the slaying of all the newly-born male children of Bani Israel. The Abbasid kings were similarly apprehensive of many traditions of the Holy Prophet about the birth of the Mahdi, who was to bring a curse on to their (Abbasid) very empire. They were, therefore, lying in ambush to discover the birth of the Imam and put an end to his life. But the event of the Imam's birth was enveloped and shielded by the same Divine protection and miraculous phenomenon which had marked the historical birth of Prophet Moses. His birth remained strictly confidential and his nursery shrouded in secrecy. It was known only to a few devotees.

When the mother of the Imam was brought before Mo'tamad and inquiries made about the birth of the twelfth Imam, she, in order to safeguard her own life as well as to protect her son, replied that she had never felt the symptoms of maternity and spasms. So, for the moment, he did not harass her, but did put her under the strict surveillance of Qazi Abu Shorab, entrusting him with the task of killing any child born to her.

Soon after this incident, the Abbasid kingdom passed through a revolutionary phase which greatly bewildered Mo'tamad. He was forced to face the invasion of Sahib Zanj, who raided the Hijaz and Yemen and let loose the hounds of loot and arson throughout the Abbasid kingdom, subjecting the administration of Baghdad, the capital, to utter chaos. Mo'tamad was, therefore, naturally too

occupied with warfare to pay any attention towards the mother of the Imam, who was released after six months and questioned no further about the birth of the twelfth Holy Imam.

Imam Mahdi was brought up by his father, Imam Askari, the eleventh Imam, who resorted to the same protective measures in rearing his child as Abu Talib had adopted in connection with safeguarding the Holy Prophet. He used to take care of his child in one portion of the house for a few days and then shift him to another with a view not to disclose the exact whereabouts of the child.

While Imam Askari kept the birth of the child and the affairs of his infancy a well-guarded secret, he did put him within access to some exclusive devotees and sincere friends in order to familiarize them with their would-be Imam to whom they would pledge their allegiance.

Mentioned below are the names, quoted from the authentic books of both Sunni and Shi'ah of a few persons who had the honour of having personally seen Imam, Mahdi.

When Imam Askari's son was born, he named him Muhammad and on the third day after his birth, showing him to some of his followers, declared thus: "Here is my successor and your would-be Imam. He is the very '*Qa'im*' in whose reverence your heads will bow down. He will reappear to fill the earth with blessings and justice after it will have been abounding in sins and vices".

Ali b. Bilāl, Ahmad b. Hilāl, Muhammad b. Mu'awiyah b. Hakam and Hasan b. Ayyub b. Nuh mentioned that they called upon Imam Askari with a deputation of forty persons. The Imam showed them his child and said: "This is your Imam after me. All of you should animously submit

your allegiance to him and should not allow any controversy on the subject which will lead you to peril. Mind that he will no more be visible to you”.

Imam Askari died on the 8th of Rabi-I, 260 A.H. and the day marked the inception of his son's Imamate a source of spiritual guidance for the whole universe. As according to Allah's Will, all the affairs pertaining to the Holy Imam were to remain strictly behind the curtain, he commissioned some of his deputies and ambassadors, who had been looking after the religious affairs from the time of his father and acting as the associates between the people and the occult Imam. They conveyed the problems and religious queries of the people to the Imam and brought back his answers to the people.

It was by the Divine Will that he disappeared and shall reappear by the Will of Allah. This will be a prelude to the Day of Judgement.

During the period of the Ghaybat (occultation) it is our duty to be expecting the appearance of the Imam. We must devise a sound and judicious system of social development based on the Holy Qur'an and present it to the world. We must prove the excellence and efficacy of Divine laws to the people and attract their attention to the Divine system. We must fight superstitions and false beliefs and pave the way for the establishment of Islamic world government in the light of the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and traditions of the Holy Prophet. We must chalk out a programme for solving the world problems and put it at the disposal of world reformers. We must enlighten the thoughts of the people of the world and, at the same time, prepare ourselves for the appearance of the Imam and the emergence of a just world government. (See: Murtaza Mutahhary, *The Awaited Saviour*, ISP, 1979)

**OUR LOVE AND ATTACHMENT
TO OTHER SECTS OF THE UMMAH**

Though we differ with the Sunnis on the question of caliphate and succession to the Holy Prophet, we consider all Muslims to be our brethren and co-religionists. Our Allah is the same; our Prophet is the same; our religion is the same; our Book is the same, and our Ka'bah is the same. We consider their honour and progress to be our honour and progress; their success and victory to be our success and victory, and their disgrace and defeat to be our disgrace and defeat. We share with them both in happiness and grief.

In this respect we have been inspired by our great leader, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib. Had he wanted, he could have defended his right to caliphate, but in the larger interest of Islam, he, not only abstained from fighting the caliphs, but also rendered help to them on critical occasions. He never hesitated to take any action in the interests of the Muslim Ummah.

We believe that the only way for the Muslim world to live as a strong nation, regain its past glory and get rid of foreign domination, is to keep the Muslims away from dissension and discord, and to let them concentrate their energies on the achievement of their goals, so that they may take collective steps in the way of the glory of Islam, thus ensuring progress and prosperity for the Muslims.

Obey Allah and His Messenger. Do not quarrel with each other lest you fail or lose honour. (Surah al-Anfal, 8:46)

and

Hold fast all of you together to Allah's bond (Islam) and do not be divided (among yourself). (Surah Ale Imran, 3:103)

The End

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لا إله إلا الله
محمد رسول الله

I S L A M

“Have you fully realized what Islam is?
It is indeed a religion founded on truth.

It is such a fountain-head of learning
that several streams of wisdom
and knowledge flow from it.

It is such a lamp
that several lamps will be lighted from it.

It is a lofty beacon
illuminating the path of Allah.

It is such a set of principles and beliefs
that will satisfy every seeker of truth and reality.

Know you all!
that Allah has made Islam the most sublime path
for the attainment of His supreme pleasure
and the highest standard of His obedience.

He has favoured it with
noble precepts
exalted principles
undeniable wisdom
undoubtable arguments
and unchallengeable supremacy.

It is upto you to maintain the eminence
and dignity granted to it by the Lord,
to follow it sincerely,
to do justice to its articles of faith and belief,
to obey implicitly its tenets and orders
and to give it the proper place in your lives”.

Imam Ali (Peace be on him)