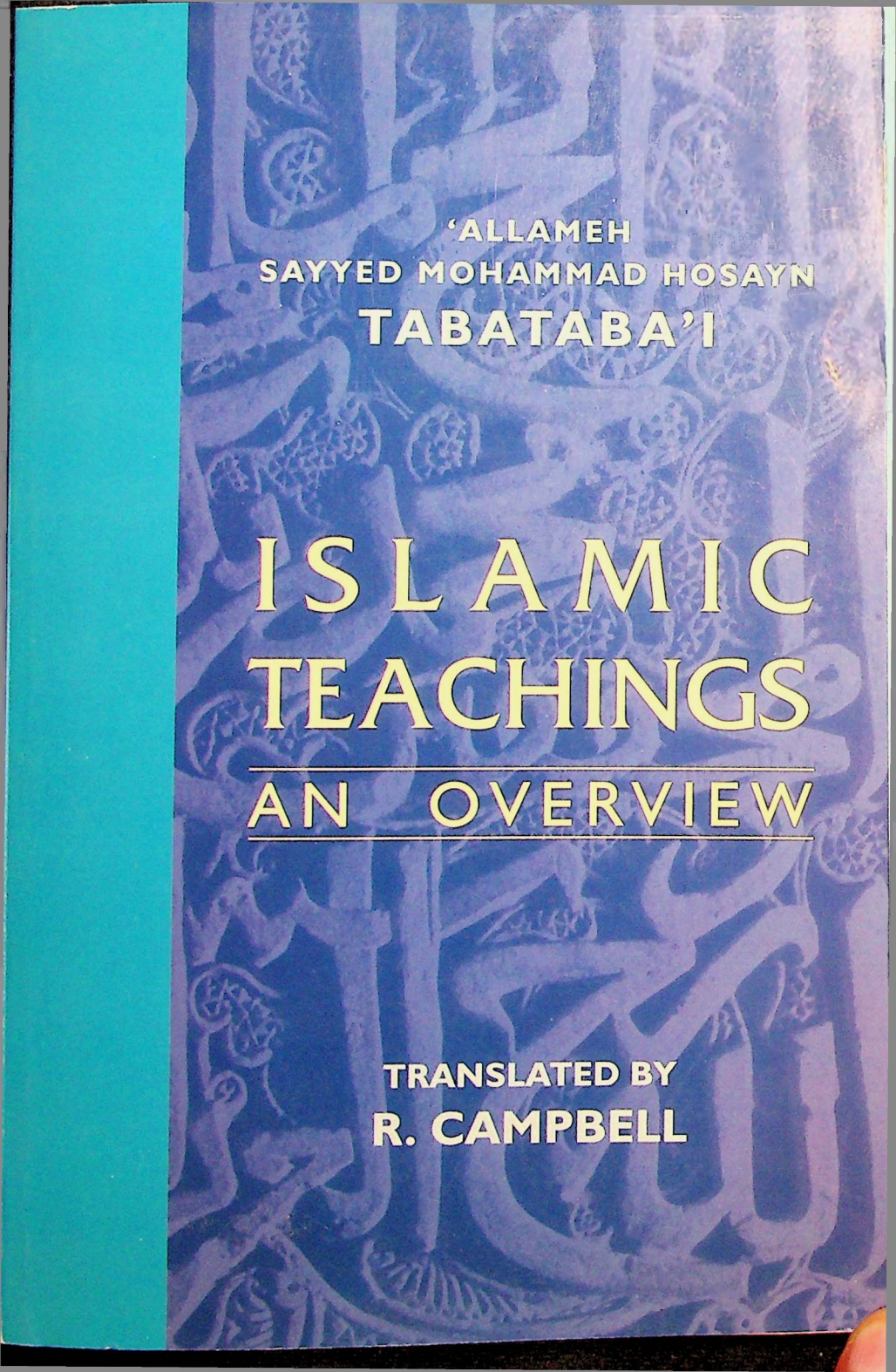
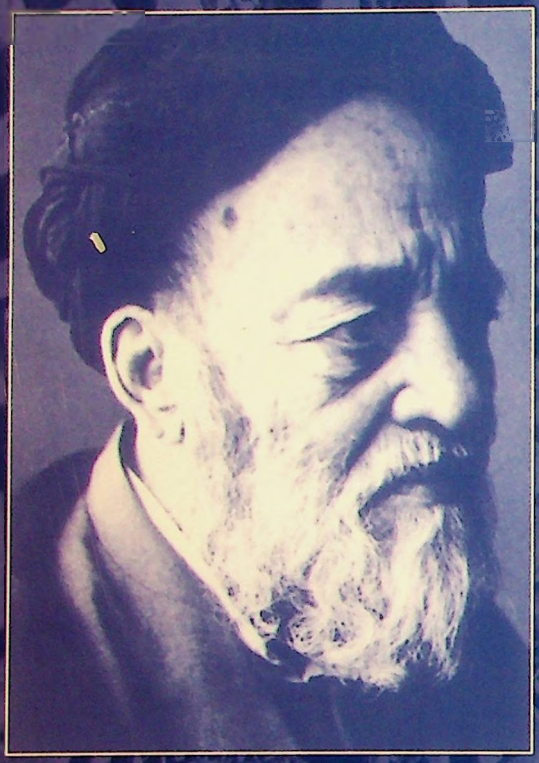

'ALLAMEH
SAYYED MOHAMMAD HOSAYN
TABATABA'I
ISLAMIC
TEACHINGS
AN OVERVIEW
TRANSLATED BY
R. CAMPBELL



'Allameh Sayyed Mohammad Hosayn TABATABA'I 1892-1981

"Religion consists in a set of practical and ethical instructions that the prophets have brought from God for the guidance of mankind. To accept these beliefs and to carry out these instructions lead human beings to happiness in this world and the next."

- from page 19

"Faith is the strongest and firmest assurance against fear and anguish amid life's ebb and flow. Believers do not give up on themselves or feel abject under any circumstance, because they know themselves to be attached to the limitless power of the Creator of the universe. They are mindful of Him and sheltered by Him in all circumstances; their hearts are calm, clear, and strong."

- from page 20

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In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

INTRODUCTION

The present book is an overview of Islamic teachings written in a relatively simple language to offer some understanding to non-specialists unable to engage in deep study of Islamic doctrines.

Writing simply is a valuable method for spreading culture, science, and religion. This style of writing has arisen to make human knowledge available to all — to remove the veil of obscurity and difficulty from specialized and involved scientific and technical subjects and make them readily accessible to everyone. Any subject, however technical, may be so restated that anyone can gain some appreciation of the subject and some understanding in proportion to his or her background and breadth and depth of understanding.

We see this style at its best in the Noble Qur'an. Here the most complex questions in human experience, concerning the most subtle points of metaphysics and human nature, are drawn in the simplest possible language. Here we can only mention one

or two examples of the Qur'an's heights of expressiveness: in demonstrating the reality of the Resurrection and life after death, the Qu'ran, in words as terse and easily grasped as they are sound and logical, says, '[*Man*] *asks: "Who will reanimate the bones that have rotted away?" Say, "He will reanimate them Who first produced them*"' (36:78-79). This is very solid reasoning and a well-founded and convincing argument. The power that creates things from nothingness is able to gather a thing after its parts are dispersed and bring it back to life like before.

It is said that Abu Nasr Farabi[1] exclaimed, 'If only Aristotle were alive, then I would have advanced this Qur'anic reasoning, and he would have accepted the doctrine of physical resurrection'. You see how this expression is at once reasonable and simple enough for anyone to understand with a little thought.

Another example is the simple yet compelling way that the Qur'an approaches the much-belaboured question of ontology: '*Does He not know what He has created? He is the subtle, the aware*' (67:14). Can one who has given beings their being not know their nature and design? This brief statement completely clarifies the matter, and specialists find in this verse a compelling analysis of its subject.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and the Imams have followed the lead of God's Book in explaining the most elevated and complex subjects in a simple manner that is at once profound and accessible. Consider where the Qur'an states, '*We never sent a prophet except with the language of his people, so that he might explain to them*' (14:4). The verse states plainly that the prophets restated spiritual truths with precision in everyday language; they well understood just how to present these truths in the idiom of the people of their time; they were aware of their sensibilities; they had mastered their artistic and literary temper; and they expressed their teachings through the prevalent and accepted forms of the people of their age. The teachings of the prophets are one in

essence, but there are striking differences in how these teachings have been presented to different societies.

The prophets have been directed to observe the principle expressed in this *hadith*: 'We are directed to speak according to their understanding'.[2] Accordingly, points of Islamic doctrine should be presented in a simple, solid way that all can understand; they should be given the literary and aesthetic embellishments they need to make the most striking and deepest impression.

In accordance with this principle and under the inspiration of the Qur'an and *hadith*, our religious scholars have written short, simple books in everyday language that are likewise sound, logical, and well-written. They have clearly realized that public acceptance of an idea is invariably conditional upon the quality of its presentation, the character of the language in which it is expressed — and this is a point that is often forgotten.

Two basic skills are of necessity involved in realizing this method: first, a thorough knowledge of the subject, and second, familiarity with the principles of writing, literacy and aesthetic standards, and the craft of writing simply. One lacking either one of these aptitudes will doubtless prove unable to produce books of use to everyone; it he tries, he will fail.

Accordingly, to prepare short articles of value to humanity on the great questions of the spirit is a major, technically demanding, and difficult undertaking; one who writes on a science for all has carried out a greater and more demanding task than one who writes for an audience of specialists. Therefore, when we speak of writing simply, let it not be supposed that anyone with a little knowledge of a subject and a little experience as a writer can produce such essays. Rather, this task is more difficult and demanding than scientific and technical writing; it will be recalled that one must master two different specialities to undertake it.

When it comes to promulgating religious culture and especially

Islamic culture, such books are urgently needed: people in our society cannot spend long years studying Islam. Articles must be written to acquaint people adequately with Islamic questions; the vast depth and breadth of these questions must not be allowed to stand in the way of public comprehension.

If one cannot draw all the sea's water,
One must drink enough to relieve one's thirst.

Accordingly, researchers who have specialized in and mastered various Islamic questions should also acquire literary skills and master the forms of exposition, so that their knowledge not remain mute, and so that they can convey Islamic culture to contemporary minds.

The book you hold is presented for the sake of this vital end. It was with this mission in mind that the late 'Allameh Tabataba'i brought to bear this extensive and profound knowledge of Islamic teachings and his considerable experience in writing relatively simple and popular works to summarize and interrelate these teachings for a general readership. This is one of a handful of books in this field that can benefit everyone and lend more responsibility to Islamic centers and students.

Centre for Publications
Office for Promulgation of Islam
Howzeh-ye 'Elmiyeh
Qom, Iran

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. Abu Nasr Farabi, the Muslim philospher who died circa 960 A.D. — Trans.

2. A Prophetic *hadith* from *Al-Haya'*, third edition, Vol. 1, p.146.

In the Name of God, May He be Exalted

MY LIFE: AUTHOR'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The present writer, Mohammad Hosayn Tabataba'i, was born into a family of scholars in Tabriz in 1271 A.H. solar/1892 A.D. I lost my mother when I was five years old, and my father when I was nine. To provide for our support, our guardian (the executor of my father's estate) placed my one younger brother and myself in the care of a servant and maidservant. Shortly after our father's death, we were sent to primary school, and then, in time, to secondary school. Eventually, our schooling was entrusted to a tutor who made home visits; in this way we studied Farsi and primary subjects for six years.

There was in those days no set program for primary studies. I remember that, over the period from 1290/1911 to 1296/1917, I studied the Noble Qur'an, which normally was taught before all else, Sa'di's *Golestan* and *Bustan*, the *Illustrated Nesab and Akhlaq*, the *Anvar-e Sohayli*, the *Tarikh-e Mo'jam*, the writings of Amir-e Nezam, and the *Irshad al-Hisab*.[1]

In 1297/1918, I entered the field of religious and Arabic studies and was occupied with readings of texts until 1304/1925.

Over this same seven-year period, in the field of grammar, I studied *Ketab-e Amsela, Sarf-e Mir,* and *Tasrif*; in syntax, *Ketab-e 'Avamel, Enmuzaj, Samadiya, Soyuti, Jami*, and *Moghanni*; in rhetoric, *Ketab-e Motavval;* in jurisprudence, the *Sharh-e Lama'a* and *Makaseb;* in principles of law, the *Ketab-e Ma'alem*, the *Qavanin*, the *Rasa'il*, and the *Kafaya*; in logic, the *Kobra*, the *Hashiya* and the *Sharh-e Shamsiya*; in philosophy, the *Sharh-e Esharat*; and in theology, the *Kashf al-Murad*. This concluded my reading studies in areas other than philosophy and spiritual science.[2]

In 1304/1925, I travelled to Najaf to attend classes given by the late Ayatollah Shaykh Mohammad Hosayn Esfahani. Under his guidance, I undertook a course in principles of law that occupied about six years and a course in jurisprudence of about four years. I studied jurisprudence for about seven years under the late Ayatollah Na'ini and undertook a course in principles of law under him. I also studied jurisprudence under the late Ayatollah Sayyed Abu'l-Hasan Esfahani. I studied Islamic biography under the late Ayatollah Hojjat Kuhkamari.

In the area of philosophy, I had the good fortune to be able to study under the most renowned philosopher of the time, the late Sayyed Hosayn Badkubi. In the course of the six years I was his student, I studied Sabzavari's *Manzuma*, Molla Sadra's *Asfar* and *Masha'er*, Avicenna's *Shifa*, the *Ethologia*, Ibn Tarka's *Tamhid*, and Ibn Maskuya's *Akhlaq*.[3]

Out of the very great concern the late Sayyed Badkubi took for my education, in order to back up my enthusiasm for philosophy with an acquaintance with a rigorous style of thought, he ordered me to study mathematics. To comply with this order, I attended the classes given by Sayyed Abu'l-Qasem Khansari, a master mathematician. I also studied analytical reasoning and plane and solid geometry under him.

Because of difficulty subsisting, I was obliged to return to Tabriz, my birthplace, in 1314/1935. I lived there for ten-odd years, years I must really count as a period of spiritual barrenness in my life, because I was held back from scholarship and reflection by the unavoidable involvements and social contacts entailed in making a living (by farming).

In 1325/1946, I left behind my situation in Tabriz and settled in Qom, where I resumed my work in scholarship. I have remained there up to the present time, early in 1341/1962.

Naturally, everyone has tasted the sweet and the bitter of life in terms of his own experience. I in my turn have found myself in varied environments faced with all kind of vicissitudes, especially since I have spent most of my life as an orphan or a foreigner, or far from friends, or without means, or in other difficulties. I always sensed, however, that an invisible hand has delivered me from every terrible precipice and that a mysterious influence has guided me through a thousand obstacles toward the goal.

Though I be a thorn, and though there
be a flower to grace the meadow,
I grow by that Hand which nurtures me.

When I began my studies and was occupied with grammar and syntax, I took little interest in them and failed to comprehend very much. I spent four years this way. Then divine favour suddenly reached me and changed me, so that I grew excited over my studies and impatient to learn all there was to learn. I never felt weary or discouraged from my studies or philosophical reflections from that time until the conclusion of my schooling about seventeen years later. I forgot all that is fair and foul in the world and thought the sweet and bitter in events equal. I withdrew from social contact with any except scholars; I cut back food and sleep and life's other necessities to the bare minimum and devoted the rest of my time and resources to scholarship and research. I would often spend the night in study until sunrise (especially in spring and summer), and I would always research the next day's lesson in advance, making

whatever exertions were called for to solve any problem that arose, so that, by class time, I would already have a clear understanding of the professor's topic; I never brought any problems or mistakes before the professor.[4]

Short compositions that I prepared while studying in Najaf:

Resale dar Borhan (Monograph on Reasoning)

Resale dar Moghalata (Monograph on Sophistry)

Resale dar Tahlil (Monograph on Analysis)

Resale dar Tarkib (Monograph on Combination)

Resale dar E'tebariyat (Monograph on Ideas of Human Origin)

Resale dar Nobovvat va Manamat (Monograph on Prophecy and Dreams)

Works composed while living in Tabriz:

Resale dar Nobovvat va Manamat (Monograph on Prophecy and Dreams)

Resale dar Asma' va Safat (Monograph on the Names and Attributes)

Resale dar Af'al Monograph on [Divine] Acts)

Resale dar Vasa'et Miyan-e Khoda va Ensan (Monograph on Intermediaries Between God and Man)

Resale dar Ensan Qabl ad-Donya (Monograph on Man Prior to the World)

Resale dar Ensan fi'd-Donya (Monograph on Man in the World)

Resale dar Ensan Ba'd ad-Donya (Monograph on Man After the World)

Resale dar Velayat (Monograph on the Viceregency)

Resale dar Nobovvat (Monograph on Prophecy)

[In these monographs, a comparison is made between rational and narrative forms of knowledge. — *Ketab-e Selsele-ye Tabataba'i dar Azarbayjan* (Geneology of the Tabataba'is in Azarbaijan]

Works composed in Qom:

Tafsir al-Mizan Published in 20 volumes. In this work, the Noble Qur'an is expounded in an unprecedented manner, verse by verse.

Osul-e Falsafe (Ravesh-e Re'alism) (Principles of Philsophy [The Method of Realism].) The Philosophies of the East and West are surveyed in the work, in five volumes.

Annotations to the *Kifayat al-Usul*

Annotations to Molla Sadra, *al-Asfar al-Arba'a* Published in nine volumes.

Vahy, ya Sho'ur-e Marmuz (Revelation, or Mystic Consciousness)

Do Resale dar Velayat va Hokumat-e Eslami (Two Monographs on Islamic Governance and Government)

Mosabeha-ye Sal-e 1338 ba Profesor Korban, Mostashreq-e Faransavi Interviews in 1959 with Professor Corbin, the French Orientalist. Recently republished in one volume under the title *Shi'a* (Shi'ism).

Mosahebeha-ye Sal-e 1339 va 1340 ba Profesor Korban Published in one volume as *Resalat-e Tashayyo' dar Donya-ye Emruz* (The Shi'i Mission in Today's World)

Resale dar E'jaz (Monograph on Miracles)

'Ali wa'l-Falsafat al-Elahiya ('Ali and the Divine Philosophy). Also translated into and published in Farsi.

Shi'a dar Eslam (Shi'ism in Islam)

Qor'an dar Eslam (The Qur'an in Islam)

Majmu'e-ye Maqalat, Porseshha va Pasokha, Bahsha-ye

Motafarge-ye 'Elmi, Falsafi, va...[5] (Collected Articles, Questions and Answers, Assorted Scholarly, Philosophical, and other Discussions

Sunan an-Nabi (Ways of the Prophet). Recently published in 400 pages with a translation and study by Mohammad Hadi Feqhi.

NOTES TO THE AUTHOR'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

1. Various classical works of literature and history. — Trans.

2. Various works in the fields named, not all easily identified. — Trans.

3. Various classical works on philosophy. — Trans.

4. Ayatollah 'Allameh Tabataba'i died in Aban 1360/November 1981. — Trans.

5. By the written permission of the author, this collection of articles has been collected by the Markaz-e Barrasiha-ye Eslami [Center for Islamic Researches] and will when complete be published in two volumes titled, *Barrasiha-ye Eslami* [Islamic Researches] and *Eslam va Ensan-e Mo'aser* [Islam and Contemporary Mankind]. — Publishers of the Farsi edition.

CHAPTER ONE

RELIGION

Religion consists in a set of practical and ethical instructions that the prophets have brought from God for the guidance of mankind.

To accept these beliefs and to carry out these instructions lead human beings to happiness in this world and the next.

Therefore, if we are religious and carry out the instructions of God and the Messenger, we will have good fortune both in this ephemeral world and in the eternal life of the next world.

We know that one is fortunate who has a proper goal in life, who does not lose his way in error, who has good, praiseworthy morals, and who does good works. Living in the midst of the world's tumult, one has a calm, strong heart, full of certainty.

God's religion guides us to this happiness and good fortune, which are unachievable without religion. Religious beliefs reside

in man's heart like secret police that follow him everywhere and restrain him from immoral acts and compel him to virtue.

Faith is the strongest and firmest assurance against fear and anguish amid life's ebb and flow. Believers do not give up on themselves or feel abject under any circumstances, because they know themselves to be attached to the limitless power of the Creator of the universe. They are mindful of Him and sheltered by Him in all circumstances; their hearts are calm, clear, and strong.

Religion commands us to achieve moral excellence and to carry out good works to the best of our abilities. Accordingly, religion is divided into three areas:

1. Beliefs

2. Ethics

3. Acts

I must now expand on this brief summary to convince you of these points.

BELIEFS

Our minds and hearts tell us that this world of being with its wondrous system did not come about by itself; such an astonishing world of creation could not arise without being arranged by someone. There must certainly be a Creator who has brought about this vast and glorious universe through His limitless knowledge and power. He must have launched this creation with its intricate system on the basis of set and immutable laws covering all of being. He must have created nothing in vain and excluded no being from the divine laws governing the universe.

Can one believe that a gracious God, given all the kindness and attention He has extended to His creatures, has left man, the masterwork of the creation, on his own? That He has left human society to live by its own wits, when people are for the most part prisoners of desire and liable to stray into misfortune?

Is the answer not clear without being spoken?

Accordingly, He must have sent instructions for human beings through prophets free of any sort of error, so that they could attain to happiness by following those instructions.

We observe that the precious fruits of action according to religious precepts are not fully realized in this world. Neither do those who do good arrive at their reward, nor do those who spread corruption and oppression realize the requital for their actions. We thus understand that there must be another world in which there is a precise accounting for people's acts, so that if someone has done a good deed, that person realizes the reward, and if he has done an evil deed, he will realize the punishment. Religion reinforces these beliefs and other right beliefs in people and puts people on guard against ignorance.

ETHICS

Religion instructs us to choose good qualities for ourselves and to be good-natured — to embellish ourselves with good qualities. It instructs us to be dutiful, sympathetic, humane, kind, loyal, good-natured, cheerful, and fair; to stand up for our rights but not to exceed them; and not to transgress against others' property, honour, or lives. It instructs us to extend the utmost in self-sacrifice in pursuit of knowledge and courtesy, and, finally, to adopt justice and moderation in all our affairs.

ACTION

Religion commands us to carry out acts beneficial to ourselves and our society and to avoid acts of corruption. It also teaches us to perform acts of worship of the Creator such as prayer and fasting, as marks of servanthood and obedience.

These are the provisions and commandments that religion has brought and to which it has summoned; as we see, some of them pertain to belief, some to ethics, and some to action. As has been said, to accept them and put them into action is the only means to happiness, because, as we know, man cannot find happiness without being a realist, adopting high ethical standards

in life, and acting in accordance with them.

MUST MAN BE BOUND TO A RELIGION?

The first question to arise here is, what connection has human life to religion and theology? Could not life go on in human society without religion and belief in God? Is it not true that someone is called religious who affirms the existence of a God in the world and carries out special acts to please Him?

It is possible for each individual in a society to be made responsible for determining what is beneficial and what is harmful in accordance with laws of human design, and in such a case human laws would have supplanted divine laws and there would be no further need for religion. If we consider closely, however, we see that the decrees and provisions of Islam prove the contrary to be true, because Islam does not only address worship of God but has also provided commands and provisions covering all aspects of individual and social life. It has surveyed the full extent of human life in a marvelous way and has set forth appropriate provisions for every individual and social activity. Finally, it has secured the happiness of the individual in human society from every standpoint, to the greatest possible degree, as any fair-minded person will affirm. As has been explained, God Most High explains Islam in the Noble Qur'an in accordance with the limited compass of human understanding. We mention some verses here as examples:

1. '*Truly, religion before Allah is Surrender [Islam], and those who received the Book did not differ until after knowledge reached them, through transgression among themselves, and as to whosoever disbelieves in Allah's signs, Allah is swift in reckoning*' (3:19).

The religion to which the prophets have summoned the people consists of divine worship and submission to God's commands. The religious scholars of former times, although they knew the difference between truth and falsity, refused to comply with the truth because of their fanaticism and hatred; they each chose a

way of their own. In consequence, various religions appeared on the earth. In truth, this group of people denied God's signs, and God will speedily answer such acts with what they deserve.

2. '*Whoever seeks as a religion something other than Islam, it will not be accepted of him, and he will be a loser in the hereafter*' (3:85).

Whoever searches for and follows another religion than Islam, it will in the end not be accepted from him, and he will not be one of those delivered in the hereafter.

3. '*O you who believe! Enter into submission and do not follow the footsteps of the Devil. Truly he is your open enemy*' (2:208).

O Muslims! Be wholly submitted to God in matters of religion, and, since Satan is your open enemy, do not follow him, but do abstain from adding or subtracting anything to or from religion.

4. '*Fulfill the covenant of Allah when you have made the covenant, and do not break your oaths after making them, and after you have made Allah surety over you. Truly Allah knows what you do*' (16:91).

O Muslims! If you have made a contract, be faithful to that contract, and do not break your word after you have given it and made God your witness, since God knows what you do.

The purport of this verse is that Muslims must act according to and fulfill whatever contract they have made with God and the people.

5. '*Summon to the way of your Lord with wisdom and counsel, and reason with them kindly. Truly your Lord knows best who strays from His way, and He knows best who are under guidance*' (16:125).

Summon the people to God's way by explaining what is true and sound and what is corrupt, with good advice and counsel, and by demonstrating the truth in the best possible manner, because God knows best who has found the way and who is lost.

What this means is that, to advance the cause of the religion, Muslims should speak to anyone in accordance with his or her understanding, in a way that will be useful to that person. If one cannot show someone the way through advice and counsel, one should summon him through debate, set forth as one of the means of establishing the truth.

6. '*When the Qur'an is recited, listen attentively and pay heed, so that you may receive mercy*' (7:205).

When the Qur'an is read, do not engage in conversation but absorb its meaning through your heart, so that you might be embraced by God's mercy.

7. '*O you who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger and those of you who are in authority, and, if you are in dispute over something, refer it to Allah and the Messenger if you believe in Allah and the last day. That will be better and finer in the end*' (4:59).

Believers! Act in accordance with the commands of God, the Messenger, and the leaders whom God and the Messenger have required you to obey. If you believe in God and the Resurrection, resolve your differences in accordance with the Qur'an's and the Messenger's commands, since this is the best practice for you, with the best outcome.

This means that, in an Islamic society, no other basis for resolving differences exists than those of the Qur'an and the words of the Messenger. Any differences must be resolved on these two bases; if a Muslim has resolved a difference through reasoning, this is because he or she has accepted the Qur'an's direction in reasoning.

8. '*It was by Allah's mercy that you were lenient with them, for if you had been stern and cruel-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult with them on the matter. When you are resolved, rely on Allah, for Allah loves those who rely on Him*' (3:159).

It was by means of God's mercy reaching you that you were so

mild and good-natured. If you had been harsh and cold-hearted, they would have scattered from around you. Thus, pardon people's faults, ask forgiveness for them of God, and consult with them on affairs. Since God loves and supports those who rely on Him, whenever you have resolved upon something, rely on God. Since an agreeable manner, benevolence, and consultation in affairs are means to closeness and affection, the members of society should be attached to their leader, if he is to influence them. God commands the leader of the Muslims to be good-natured and to consult. Since it is possible, however, for people to fall into erroneous ideas, He orders him to form his resolve independently after consultation, and to place reliance on God in all matters, considering that no one can oppose God's will.

God Most High presents Judaism and Christianity, whose scriptures are the Torah and the New Testament,[1] and which have social rules and provisions, in the same way, as where He says:

'*How is it that they come to you for adjudication, when they have the Torah, in which Allah has made judgement?... We revealed the Torah, in which are a guidance and a light by which the prophets who surrendered judged the Jews and the rabbis and the priests... And We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps..., and We bestowed on him the Gospel, in which is a guidance and light, confirming what was revealed before it in the Torah... Let the people of the Gospel judge according to what God has revealed within it... We have revealed to you the Book with the Truth, confirming what was revealed before it and a watcher over it. So render judgement between them by what Allah has revealed*' (5:43-48).

The Torah and the New Testament, which the Jews and Christians now hold, confirm this point, in that many legal and penal provisions occur in the Torah, and the New Testament apparently upholds the legal system of the Torah.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing makes it clear that, in Qur'anic terms, religion is a way of life that man cannot avoid. The distinction one can make between religion and a secular social code is that religion stems from God Most High, and the social code is the product of human thought. In other words, religion connects people's social existence with worship of and obedience to God Most High, but in secular social codes, no such connection exists.

BENEFITS OF RELIGION

It is plain from the foregoing that religion has profound powers to reform the individual and society, or rather that it is the sole means of well-being.

A society that is not bound to a religion gives up realism and intellectualism and wastes its precious life on waywardness, superficiality, and negligence. Having abandoned intelligence, it lives an animal existence, short-sighted and mindless. It grows faced with immorality and base behaviour and thus gives up all the distinguishing features of humanity. Not only does such a society fail to reach eternal happiness and ultimate perfection, it also confronts unfortunate and disagreeable consequences of its deviations in this tiny, transient world. Sooner or later, its own neglect will catch up with it, and it will well understand that the only means to happiness is religion and belief in God, and it will regret the consequences of its actions.

God Most High says, '*One prospers who tends it, and one fails who leaves it stunted*' (91:9-10). That is, one who keeps oneself from corruption is saved, whereas one who associates with any sort of illicit pursuit fails to reach his object, happiness and deliverance.

Of course, one must know that human happiness and individual and social prosperity are based upon practice of religious commandments. Apart from that, merely nominal attachment to religion is useless, since what has value is the Truth itself, not summons to the Truth. One who calls himself a Muslim and

who, for all his inner darkness, base morals, and ugly behaviour, awaits the angel of happiness, is just like a patient who pockets the doctor's prescription and expects to get well. Certainly no one will get anywhere that way.

God Most High says, '*Those who believe and the Jews, Christians, and Sabeans, in fact all who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do good — their reward is with their Lord*' (2:62). That is, among all those called Muslims, Jews, Sabeans, or Christians, those who truly believe in God and the Resurrection and act according to high moral standards will find a good reward with God.

Considering the meaning of the verse, it could be supposed that any people who believe in God and the Resurrection and act well will be saved even if they do not accept all or some of the prophets but it must be understood that, in *Surah* Nisa,[2] verses 150 and 151, God calls such people unbelievers, saying: '*Those who disbelieve in Allah and His prophets and who seek to make a distinction among Allah and His prophets [like the Jews, who disbelieve in Jesus and Muhammad, or like the Christians, who disbelieve in Muhammad], saying, "We believe in some and disbelieve in others", and seeking a way in between — these are disbelievers in truth, and We have reserved a humiliating torment for them*' (4:150-151).

Accordingly, one will realize the fruits of his faith who believes in all the prophets and acts ethically.

HUMAN CIVILIZATION

If we consider the factors that gave rise to human societies in past ages, it grows clear that man seeks nothing else in life than happiness, and of course this happiness is not possible except when all the necessities of life have been secured.

On the other hand, man, with his God-given understanding, perceives that he can never procure and prepare all the things he needs and so secure the ease and pleasure he seeks when acting alone. He sees that he cannot solve life's problems and attain

perfection alone, and therefore of necessity he joins in social life to meet his needs. He sees that cooperation with other individuals is the easiest way to reach his objects, and he secures his needs collectively, meaning that each person is made responsible for procuring and preparing certain of these things and then, when the fruits of everyone's labours are combined, each individual draws on and uses them to the extent of his labours and social status and thus conducts his life.

Thus, we labour in concert with and to the benefit of others to secure our happiness; that is, in reality, all having acted for the sake of each other and having pooled the fruits of their labours, each member of society draws a portion of that pooled labour in proportion to his activity and according to his status.

SOCIETY'S NEED FOR RULES

Since the products of individuals' activity are mingled and everyone wants to make use of them, competition and conflict of interests are inevitable products of this continual encounter and relationship. It goes without saying that material interests normally give rise to various forms of discord, rancour, and loss of amity. In order to preserve individuals' amity, society must have a set of rules which can avert chaos if observed.

It is plain that if there were no rules and laws to manage human society, such chaos would arise that it could not survive for even a day.

Of course, such laws vary according to differences in the level of civilization of peoples and nations and differences in their levels of thought and governmental organization, but no society can ever be without a set of customs and rules that at least a majority of its members respect. Never in human history has there arisen a society without any sort of shared manners, customs, and rules.

MAN IS NOT FREE VIS-A-VIS THE RULES

Since man performs all his actions through his own choice and

election, he experiences a certain freedom of action, and, imagining this freedom to be 'absolute' and unconditional and seeking perfect freedom, he flees from all sorts of limitations and chafes under any sort of prohibition directed at him; finally he experiences any limitation touching him as burdensome and frustrating. In this respect, the rules of society, however few, oppose man's freedom-seeking nature, since they limit him to some extent.

From another standpoint, man also appreciates that if he is unwilling to give up some of his freedom to uphold the rules to maintain society, chaos will arise and eliminate all his freedom and comfort.

If he steals a morsel from someone else, without a doubt others will steal morsels from him, and if he oppresses someone, he will in turn be oppressed.

Accordingly, man gives up a part of his freedom in order to preserve a part of it; he respects the rules of society because he has no choice.

A WEAK POINT IN THE EVOLUTION OF RULES

What we have said demonstrates a contradiction between man's search for freedom and the rules of society. That is, laws are like a chain to which man is shackled; he would like to break the chain and be free of the shackles. This is the great and constant danger threatening the rules of society and shaking their foundations.

Accordingly, there must always be provided, along with rules and practical responsibilities, another set of provisions, consisting of punishments for those who would oppose the rules to restrain people from opposition by fear, and expectations of rewards to encourage obedience to laws. Of course, it is undeniable that these approaches aid in enforcing the laws to an extent, but they cannot altogether halt opposition and preserve the influence and rule of law, because laws of punishment, like

other laws are subject to opposition and are ever threatened by man's freedom-seeking nature: people who hold great power can openly and fearlessly exercise their opposition; they can compel the legal and law enforcement apparatus to comply with their wishes.

Those who have no such power can take advantage of the negligence or weakness of those in power to exercise their opposition in secret or to achieve their ends through bribery and mediation or through friendship or blood ties with the influential members of society. Thus they throw the wheel of society off its axis.

The best evidence for this assertion consists in how every day we witness thousands of instances of such opposition and lawlessness in various societies.

THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF THE WEAKNESS OF CIVIL LAW

We must now see where this danger springs from, and how we can tame man's rebellious and freedom-seeking nature and so prevent opposition to the law.

Here is the wellspring of this menace, the major cause of corruption in society, such that even rules cannot prevent it: the normal social processes for creating laws focus on the material side of individuals; they take no account of spiritual values and those individuals' instinctual grasp of those values. Their sole object is harmony and preservation of the system and of an equilibrium in social interaction to keep events from winding up in discord and strife.

What secular law seeks is that its provisions are carried out and that acts in society be controlled. It has no further concern with the interior nature of man and the subjective feelings associated with it, which are the motives behind these acts and the hidden enemies of the rules.

When no attention is paid to the freedom-seeking nature of man

(along with a hundred other instincts, such as selfishness and the concupiscence that is the basic cause of corruption), disorder arises in society, and opposition spreads by the day. All civil laws are always threatened by frontal assaults by the powerful or night raids by sneak thieves arising from these instincts, and no law can prevent corruption and avoid opposition.

WHAT DISTINGUISHES RELIGIOUS LAW FROM OTHER FORMS OF LAW

The most recent method of society for upholding the law is to institute criminal law and appoint police. But, as we have noted, this method cannot restrain the rebellious nature and other unruly instincts of man and make socially based rules feasible.

Besides having been instituted, like laws of human origin, in order to preserve order and punish the rebellious and hostile, religion has powerful means at its disposal to overturn and crush any opposing force.

1. Because of the relation it has made between social life and worship of God Most High, religion imparts a sense of responsibility for every individual and social act, such that man feels responsible to God Most High for his every action and inaction.

God Most High surrounds man in every direction through His boundless power and knowledge and knows every thought he harbours and every secret in his heart; nothing is hidden from Him.

Religion entrusts the reins of watchfulness over man not to just the outward policeman but to an inward one who is never neglectful in his work and whose rewards and punishments one cannot evade.

God Most High says, '*Allah comprehends what they do*' (7:47), '*And He is with you whatever you do*', '*And your Lord will repay the words of each in full*' (11:111), and '*Allah has been a watcher over you*' (4:1).

If we now compare one who has grown up in an environment of secular law with one who has grown up in an environment of religion, the superiority of religion will be perfectly clear to us, in that a society of religious individuals who practise their religious duties is a society of people who will be free of any mutual suspicion, since they know that God observes what they do in any circumstance. Accordingly, people at large who live in such an environment plainly have nothing to fear from other people's hands or tongues or even their thoughts, whereas no such security is found through the civil codes of the world. Religion also eliminates mistrust in people.

God Most High says, '*You who believe! Refrain from much suspicion, for even a little suspicion is a sin, and do not spy*' (49:12).

People in a religious environment know peace of mind; they will live a completely pleasant and comfortable life and then attain to eternal happiness.

On the other hand, in an environment governed by civil law, one leaves off an illicit act when he sees the police watching, and may resume it whenever he does not.

2. Any religious person perceives, through the guidance of religion, this truth: his life is not confined to the ephemeral life of this world but extends ahead endlessly; it does not end at death. He sees that the only way to eternal happiness and ease lies in observing the religious ordinances that God Most High has sent by means of His prophets. He knows that religious ordinances are given by an all-knowing and all-powerful Lord who will regard man inside and out at His court and judge his hidden and overt behaviour. Accordingly, it is impossible for him to avoid God's decree by concealing an act.

3. A religious person knows by his religious beliefs that every religious injunction he carries out constitutes an act of obedience to his Lord. Although, as a servant, he may deserve no compensation, he will realize a great reward through the grace

of his Lord. From this standpoint, with whatever act of obedience he carries out, in reality he has, by his free choice, carried out a transaction, in which he has freely and gladly given up some of his freedom, in exchange for gaining God's satisfaction and receiving a fine reward.

A religious person, in following religious laws and ordinances, is engaged gladly in a transaction, and whatever he spends in the coin of freedom he gains back several times over. He sells some goods and buys better goods in their place. But when one who is not attached to religion supposes observance of laws and ordinances to be contrary to his interests and his freedom-seeking nature chafes at giving up some of his freedom, he will break his bonds and regain his freedom by one means or another at the first opportunity.

It must be said that religious law differs from civil law in another way. Religious people avoid sin of their own volition, but subjects of civil law abstain from crime only because of fear. Religion governs the whole being of religious people, but civil law rules only the hands and feet. Religion governs both the outer and the inner being, but civil law governs only the outer being. Religion is not merely a policeman who restrains one from reproved acts; it is a teacher and mentor who teaches virtues and perfections to man. Civil law, however, has only this aspect of policeman.

Suppose the profit of civil law to be one measure, that of religious law is thousands. Therefore, those who strive to eradicate religion and pin their hopes on civil law are like someone who, having cut off his own sound leg, attaches a wooden leg in its place.

It grows clear from what has been said that religion is the finest system for organizing human society; it succeeds at compelling people to observe the laws of society better than any other system.

RECOURSES OTHERS HAVE MADE

The undeveloped countries of the world, which have sought to progress and elevate themselves over the last century, in accepting secular governments but failing to note the points of weakness of civil law and failing to use the power of religion, have experienced misfortune; their public life has fallen into a sort of savagery.

In contrast, the developed and self-aware countries of the world, who have discerned the points of weakness of civil laws, have sought for ways to save these laws from utter collapse and wound up following a different road.

These countries have organized their educational systems in such a way that individuals learn a set of sound ethical principles as a matter of course, so that, when they become productive members of their societies, they regard the law as sacred and beyond opposition.

This kind of education makes the observance of the law habitual and, in consequence, contributes appreciably to preserving the well-being of society and saving the civil legal system from collapse.

But we must understand that this sort of thinking takes two different forms in the societies in which it is cultivated:

1. Beliefs in such things as humanitarianism, charity, and kindness towards the underdog that are founded on realism and without doubt are derived from the revealed religions and to which religion summoned people long before developed societies existed. Considering this, such well-being as developed societies have realized through these beliefs must be counted among the blessings of religion.

2. Vain and delusional beliefs that have no value outside the marketplace of superstitions, such as when people are inculcated with the belief that if they suffer and die for the sake of freeing their country, their names will emblazon the pages of history in

gold letters.

Although such superstitious notions yield practical results (for instance, it may be that someone will show valour in battle and kill many of the enemy under the influence of this propaganda), their detrimental effects are many times greater than their benefits, since people are rendered superstitious and their instinctual realism is cut off, because those who have no belief in God and the Day of Requital see death as nothingness; eternal life and attaining one's desires after death are meaningless to them.

One seeks for religion by one's God-given nature. Over the course of his life, man always searches and struggles to attain his own happiness and seeks for effective ways to meet his needs. Without a doubt, man always seeks means that will always work and never leave him in the lurch. On the other hand, we have no means in the world of nature whose effect is perpetual and that will never be defeated or overcome.

The truth that man innately seeks as a means to his own happiness that will never be overturned, as a support that will never be destroyed, and as a way to relate his life to the whole and bring him inner peace is religion. Only the will of God Most High is never defeated or conquered. Only He will never fail us. Islam is the only way of life that has such a relation to God Most High.

Accordingly, it may be said that human instinctual desire is one of the best proofs of the three principles of religion (*tauhid*, prophecy, resurrection)[3] in that this innate sense that is part of the special makeup of man never errs, just as man never confuses the meanings of friendship and enmity or mistakes his own thirst for satiety.

In truth, man sometimes seeks to fly like a bird or to become a star in the sky. Man seeks a real basis for his happiness, absolute tranquility, or a fully human life from the bottom of his heart. So long as he lives, he will never abandon this thought. If there

were no invincible cause (God) in the world of being, man, with his pure nature, would not conceive of one. If there were no absolute, not relative, peace and tranquility (which is the peace of the next world) and if the practice of religion (which has reached us through prophecy) were not founded on truth, no such desire would have left its impress on human nature.

A BRIEF LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

From a religious standpoint, the most reliable source for a concise study of the appearance of religions is the Noble Qur'an, since the Qur'an is devoid of any kind of error, partisanship, or tendentiousness. The Glorious Qur'an treats this subject in summary fashion. It tells us that God's religion, which is Islam ('*Truly to Allah religion is Islam*'), appeared when man first appeared. As the Noble Qur'an explains, today's humanity descends from a single man and a single woman, and the man was named Adam. Adam was a prophet to whom revelations were given. Adam's religion was very simple, consisting of some general precepts, such as that people should think of God, be kind to one another, especially to their parents, and refrain from bloodshed, corruption, and evil.

After the time of Adam and his wife, their descendants lived in the greatest simplicity and harmony. As their numbers grew day by day, they gradually massed and formed a collective life. Then they gradually learned how to live and grew more civilized. As their numbers grew, they divided into various tribes, each of which had leaders whom the members of the tribe looked up to. Even after these leaders died, effigies were made of them and worshipped. This was how idol worship first spread. As we see in traditions passed down by religious leaders and as is confirmed in historical accounts of idolatry, because of the oppression of the weak by the powerful, contradictions arose among people. These fundamental and incidental contradictions led to various forms of social conflict.

With their appearance, these contradictions drew man from the road of happiness and toward misfortune and ruin. They prompted Most Merciful God to raise prophets and send scriptures to resolve them. As God Most High says, '*The people were a single nation, and God sent prophets as bearers of good news and warners, and through them He revealed the Book with the Truth to render judgement between people on that over which they differed*' (2:213).

ISLAM

The pure religion of Islam is the last revealed religion and for this reason the most complete religion. With the coming of this religion, previous religions are abrogated, because with the coming of something complete, there is no further need for an imcomplete form of that thing.

Islam was sent for the sake of humanity by means of our beloved Messenger, Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah (peace and blessings upon him and his family). This gateway to deliverance and eternal happiness was opened to the people of this world so that human societies might leave behind their ages of immaturity and deficient powers of thought to grow ready to acquire their full humanity and the worth to realize sublime spiritual teachings and put them into practice.

Thus, Islam has brought humanity spiritual realities that are appropriate to real human understanding, the high ethical values that distinguish man, and commandments pertaining to every area of human individual and social life. It urges us to put them into practice.

From this standpoint, Islam is a universal and eternal religion. It consists of a set of critical concerns and ethical and practical rules that assure man's happiness in this world and the next if he carries them out. Islam's rules are so composed that any human individual and any human society that carries them out will achieve the best living conditions and the greatest progress toward human perfection possible.

Islam brings its benefits to every person and every society equally: big and small, educated and ignorant, man and woman, black and white, easterner and westerner can enjoy the benefits of this pure religion without distinction. They can thus fulfill their needs in the finest and fullest way, because Islam has founded its culture and rules on the nature of the creation and has considered and provided for human needs. Human nature is structured the same way in all individuals, races, and times; plainly, human societies from east to west are of a kind. That is, all belong to the human species, and big and small, man and woman, educated and ignorant, black and white, and so forth are members of a single family and participate in the basic forms of human life. Various individuals and races have similar needs, and those yet to come are the offspring of this family as well and will inherit these needs.

In sum, Islam is a faith that meets the real and essential needs of man; it is sufficient for everyone and will live on forever.

For this reason, God Most High calls Islam the natural religion and calls upon people to keep human nature alive. The foremost religious figures have called Islam an easy religion that does not treat man severely.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION TO HUMAN TRANQUILITY

Just as religion has a special place in relation to other systems for organizing society, so too does Islam have a special place among religions. Islam is more advantageous to human society than any other system. This grows clear with any comparison betwen Islam and other religions or secular systems.

ISLAM IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER RELIGIONS

Among all religions, Islam is the only one that participates fully in society. Islamic teachings are not like present-day Christian practice, which considers only the people's happiness in the afterlife and is silent about their happiness in this world. They

are not like present-day Jewish practice, which applies itself only to the indoctrination of a people. Like the teachings of the righteous among the magi and of certain other religions, Islamic teachings reject the idea that they should confine themselves to a few limited topics.

Islam fosters all people and brings them happiness in the two worlds for all time. Plainly, there is no other way to reform societies and bring people such happiness, since, in the first place, it is useless to try to reform one society or nation alone in the context of international relations that become more interwoven by the day. This is really like trying to purify a single drop of water in a polluted lake or ocean. In the second place, to reform one society and ignore others is contrary to the spirit of reform. Islamic teachings take into account every idea that can occur to man about himself and the world, all the ethical values that can find their way to the human soul, and all of the actions anyone can display to his surroundings.

In regard to the role of ideas in Islam, those ideas that have a realistic basis, the foremost of which is the idea of *tauhid*, belief in the unity of God Most High, are adopted as principles.

Islamic ethics adopts what the sound mind accepts as a firm principle of *tauhid.*

Then Islam legislates a set of practical rules and laws on the basis of ethics to regulate the finer points of human life. In consequence, the responsibilities of every individual and society are made clear: everyone — black and white, urban and rural, man and woman, great and small, servant and master, rich and poor, in ordinary and exceptional circumstances: '*A good word, like a good tree, its roots fast and its branches reaching to the sky*' (14:24).

Whoever investigates the ethical teachings of Islam and Islamic jurisprudence at first hand will discover a boundless sea whose circumference no far-seeing mind can comprehend and whose depth no thought can fathom. Nevertheless, each element has an

appropriate relationship to the others, and in sum they form a single entity that fosters humanity and directs it to worship of God. The One God has revealed this entity to His beloved Messenger.

ISLAM IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER SOCIAL SYSTEMS

If we look carefully at the system of the developed countries of the world, we note clearly that, although the scientific and industrial progress of these societies is astounding, such that they have extended their power to the moon and Mars and greatly expanded their economies, this progress has nonetheless brought about great misfortune for humanity. In less than a quarter of a century, the world has been drawn into wars in which millions of innocent people have been killed. The people of this world are even now threatened with a third world war that would be the death-knell for humankind.

From their first appearance, these systems have, in the name of humanitarianism and liberation, put the brand of slavery on the rest of the peoples of the world and tied the four continents with the chains of colonialism. They have served Europe unconditionally and allowed an insignificant number of people to rule absolutely over the lives and property of hundreds of millions of innocent people.

Of course, it is undeniable that the developed nations enjoy a high material standard of living and have attained many of the ends people have long wished for, such as social justice, cultural and technological advances, and so forth. Numerous misfortunes, however, have overtaken them, the most important of which consists of continual international conflicts and bloodshed. Moment by moment, the future of the world seems enshrouded in ever more bitter and ominous events.

It is obvious that all these sweet and bitter fruits are the harvest of the tree of civilization and the direct consequence of the way of life of these nations and societies that appear to be on the

road of progress.

It must be understood, however, that its sweet fruit from which humankind has benefited and which has contributed to the happiness of society has grown from high ethical values found in these countries such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, benevolence, and self-sacrifice, not just from law, since the same laws exist in the undeveloped countries of Asia and Africa as well, which nonetheless fall into greater wretchedness by the day.

The fruit of this tree that leaves such a bitter taste in the mouth and led to such misfortune and drives the developed countries to extinction along with the rest arises from such vices as greed, immoderation, cruelty, selfishness, pride, and stubbornness.

If we carefully study the holy commandments of Islam, we note that Islam commands adherence to the first set of these qualities and rejection of the second set. In general, it summons us to whatever action is right and in the best interest of humanity, making such action the basis of its teachings. Islam warns us against any unrighteous action that would bring about disorder in the peaceful life of humanity, even if it is in the best interests of a particular people or nation.

Several conclusions may be drawn from the foregoing:

1. The Islamic system is superior to any secular system and of more benefit to humanity: '*This is the right religion, but most people do not know*' (30:30).

2. The bright spots and sweet fruit of contemporary civilization all arise from the grace of the pure faith of Islam and from its living traces that have been felt by westerners. Islam began summoning people towards these high ethical principles, which westerners have now surpassed us in putting into practice, centuries before western civilization arose.

The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (upon whom be peace) told the people from his deathbed, 'Beware, do not behave in a

way that others excel you in acting according to the Qur'an'.

3. According to the commandments of Islam, one must make ethics one's primary goal and found laws upon ethical values. To forget ethics and to found laws on material interests will gradually draw a society into materialism, so that people will give up the spiritual values that are the sole superiority of man over other animals and substitute for them the predatory ways of wolves and leopards or the placid grazing of cows and sheep. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) said in this connection, 'I was sent to perfect the morals of the people'.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. In the original, the *Taurat* and the *Injil*. Muslim scholars hold that the present-day scriptures here named are not true to the originals. — Trans.

2. *Sura*: a chapter of the Noble Qur'an. — Trans.

3. The concept of *tauhid* has many implications but centers on belief in divine unity and the unity of the relation between God and His creation. Its opposite, an equally complex idea, is *shirk*, in brief, setting other powers up alongside God, polytheism. Those who practice *tauhid* and *shirk* are known as *muwahhids* and *mushriks*, respectively. — Trans.

CHAPTER TWO

BELIEFS

TO CONSIDER THE ORIGIN OF CREATION IS NATURAL

Man, by a God-given instinct, seeks for the cause of every occurrence he witnesses. He never thinks it probable that a thing should come into being of itself, without cause, by chance. The driver whose car stalls steps out and checks the probable cause of the problem. It never occurs to him that the machine should stall when everything is in perfect running order. In trying to get the car started, he uses whatever means he has on hand; he never sits waiting for it to start by chance.

If someone is hungry, he thinks of bread; when he is thirsty, he looks for water; and if he is cold, he puts on extra clothing or starts a fire. He never sits assuring himself that chance will intervene. One who wants to erect a building naturally secures building supplies and the services of an architect and workers; he does not hope that his intentions will realize themselves.

So long as man has existed, mountains, forests, and vast oceans have existed on earth along with him. He has always seen the sun and the moon and shining stars moving regularly and ceaselessly across the sky.

Nonetheless, the world's savants have searched tirelessly for the causes for these wonderful beings and phenomena. They have never been heard to say, 'So long as we have lived, we have observed these in their present forms. Therefore, they have come about of themselves'.

This instinctive curiosity and interest in causes impels us to inquire into how the creation arose and into its marvelous order. We are led to ask, did this vast universe, with all its interconnected parts that really form one immense entity, come about of itself, or did it gain its being from elsewhere?

Is this astonishing system that is in effect throughout the universe, governed by immutable laws admitting no exceptions and guiding every thing toward its own unique destiny, governed by a boundless power and knowledge, or does it arise from chance?

PROOF THAT THERE IS A MAKER

When one puts his instinctive realism to work, wherever he looks in the creation, he sees abundant evidence for a Creator and Sustaining Power, because man perceives instinctively that each created thing enjoys the bounties of being and automatically follows a determinate course, eventually giving up its place to other things. They never bring about their own being, invent their own course of development, or play the least role in producing or organizing their way of existence. We ourselves have not chosen our humanity or human characteristics but have been created human and given these characteristics. Similarly, our instinctive realism will never accept that all these things have come about of themselves through chance and that the system of being have arose willy-nilly. Our intuition does not accept that some neatly stacked fragments of brick tumbled

together by chance. Thus man's instinctive realism proclaims that the world of being certainly has a support that is the Source of being and the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and that this limitless Being and source of knowledge and power is God, from whose oceanic being the system of existence springs.

God Most High says, '*He Who gave everything its nature and guided it*' (20:50).

THEOLOGY AND THE NATIONS

Most people today are religious, believing in and worshipping a God Who created the universe.

People of earlier times held the same beliefs; so far as is known from history, most people have been religious and affirmed the existence of a God in the universe. Among religious societies, however, divergent views have existed, each people describing the Source of creation in its own terms. All these people have agreed, however, on this central point, and such other faiths as Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism join with Islam in this affirmation. Those who deny the existence of a Creator are unable to disprove His existence and always will be, but are honest enough to say, 'We have no proof of His existence', but not to say, 'We have proof of His nonexistence'.

The materialist says, 'I do not know'; he does not say, 'There is no such god'. In other words, the materialist is a doubter, not a disbeliever.

God Most High alludes to this point where He says, '*They say, "There is nothing but our life in the world; we die and we live, and nothing destroys us but time" — when they know nothing but merely guess*' (45:24).

There are signs of religion, theology, and belief and trust in the supernatural in even the oldest traces of early man.

Even in recently discovered continents such as America and Australia, and on islands remote from Europe, Asia, and Africa, indigenous people are found to believe in God and

affirm that the creation has a divine source, although history tells of no associations between them and the Old World.

When we consider that people have everywhere and always believed in God, we see that this belief is innate in man, who affirms the existence of a God of creation by his God-given nature. This is how the Noble Qur'an refers to this innate characteristic of man: '*If you ask them who created them, they answer, "Allah!" Yet they shrug Him off!*' (43:87). It further says, '*If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they answer, "Allah"*' (31:25).

THE EFFECTS OF CURIOSITY ON HUMAN LIFE

If we give an affirmative answer to these questions on the Creator of the universe and the Originator of its order, which arise from our instinctive search for reality, and if we affirm an imperishable source for the universe and its wondrous system, we shall see that everything depends upon His invincible will, which rests on His limitless power and knowledge.

In consequence, a kind of assurance will embrace us, and we shall never succumb to complete hopelessness in the face of the hardships and difficulties that we meet with in life and even the problems for which there is no remedy, because we realize that God holds the rein of every cause, however powerful. We shall never submit completely to any cause, and if things should go our way, we shall not grow proud and cocksure or forget our place in the scheme of things, because we shall know that outward causes do not exist in isolation but arise from the command of God Most High. In sum, we shall perceive that we must glorify nothing in the world other than God and submit completely to no other command than His.

One who answers these questions in the negative, however, is deprived of this hope and this sense of realism and, finally, of this natural nobility and courage.

Here we see that nations dominated by materialism are

committing slow suicide, and people who are wholly attached to sense objects and sensible causes may put an end to their lives when the least misfortunes dampen their hopes for happiness. When, however, those who experience the grace of knowing God find themselves on the brink of death, they do not give up hope but find hope and assurance in knowing they have an all-powerful and all-seeing God.

In the final hours of his life, hemmed in by enemy swords, Imam Husayn (upon whom be peace) declared, 'The only thing that makes this ordeal easy for me is that I see God is constantly observing my actions'.

In the course of some verses on this truth, the Noble Qur'an states plainly, '*Those who say, "Our Lord is Allah", and then walk aright — they shall not fear or grieve*' (45:13). It also says, '*Those who believe and whose hearts find tranquility in remembering Allah — truly hearts find tranquility whenever Allah is mentioned*' (13:28).

HOW TO KNOW GOD, ACCORDING TO THE QUR'AN

The infant who reaches for its mother's breast in reality wants milk, and if it grasps something and conveys it to its mouth to eat, its essential object is something to eat, and if it sees that it has erred and grasped something inedible, it throws it away. Just so, whatever object one pursues, one wants the real thing, and, whenever it grows clear that one has erred and is following a mistaken course, one regrets the error and the wasted effort. In sum, man avoids error and tries as best as he can to find the real thing.

Here it grows clear to us that man is a realist by nature and instinct; that is, he spontaneously seeks for what is real and true. No one learned this instinctive tendency from anyone or anywhere. If someone may at times act stubborn and bridle at the truth, this means that he is caught up in error and cannot

discern what is true and in his best interest. If this were made clear to him, he would not persist in error.

Then too, at times someone will become mentally ill as a result of passionate desire, so that the sweetness of the truth seems bitter to him. At that point, even though he knows what the truth is, he will not abide by it. He resists even though he acknowledges that the truth deserves observance, that he should observe it. It often happens that, owing to addiction to harmful things (such as tobacco, alcohol, and narcotics), someone stifles his own human instincts and knowingly engages in self-destructive acts.

The Noble Qur'an summons us to realism and observance of the truth. It is very insistent on this point, calling upon people in various expressions to maintain their instinctive realism and observance of the truth.

God Most High says, '*What is there beyond truth but error?*' (10:35). He also says, '*Man is at a loss, except those who believe, perform honourable deeds, encourage truth, and encourage patience*' (103:3).

Plainly, all this divine counsel is intended to show that, if we do not maintain our instinctive realism and strive to observe the truth, we shall not attain happiness but shall say and do whatever strikes our fancy and become entangled in daydreams and superstitious notions. Then we become like domestic animals who have strayed far from their track and are victims of our own desires, waywardness, and ignorance.

God Most High says, '*Have you seen someone who has taken his own passion as his god? Would you act as trustee for him? Or do you reckon that most of them hear or understand? They are just like livestock — indeed, they are even further off the track!*' (25:43-44). In sum, what do you think of such a person? Do you suppose that you could educate or reform him? On the other hand, when one's instinctive realism awakens and his inclination to truth comes into play, spiritual truths will present themselves

to him one after another; he will embrace each one as he encounters it and so advance on the road of happiness every day.

QUR'ANIC TEAGHINGS ON THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE

God Most High says, '*Can there be doubt about Allah, the Creator of the heavens and the earth?*' (14:10). In the sunlight, everything is evident to the eye: we see ourselves, others, houses, streets, towns, mountains, forests, and seas. But in the dark of night, all these evident things grow obscure. Then we understand that the light by which we saw those things did not arise from them but from the sun, which illuminated them through some kind of relation. The sun itself shines and illuminates and discloses the earth and what is on it. If the light arose from those things, they would never give it up.

Man and the other animals perceive things through their eyes, ears, and other sense organs and act through their hands, feet, and other internal and external parts. In time, however, these cease to function and in a sense die.

Witnessing this scene, we judge that the intelligence, volition, and movement living things exhibit do not arise from their bodies but from their spirits and souls; when these depart, the bodies cease to live and function.

For instance, if seeing and hearing occurred solely in the eyes and ears, they would persist so long as these organs existed, but this is not so.

Just like the vast world of which we are a part, and whose existence we could never deny, this being and manifestation cannot be doubted. If they sprang from the living thing itself, it would never give them up, but we see with our own eyes that they cease to be one after the other; they are in perpetual flux and transformation; they change from state to state.

We must therefore conclude that all beings find their being from

something else that is their Creator and Producer. As soon as a thing's time of createdness is cut, it disappears into nothingness.

The being whose limitless being supports the manifest universe and sustains all its creatures is called God.

He is a being beyond the reach of nonbeing; if this were not true, He would be like other beings whose beings depend not on themselves, but another.

THE QUR'AN AND *TAUHID*

If someone regards the universe with a pure nature and a calm heart, he will witness evidence of the pure being of the Creator everywhere within it. He will have witnesses to this truth everywhere. Whatever we encounter in this world is a manifestation that God has created, or a quality God has placed in it, or part of the system that governs everything by God's command. Man too is one of these manifestations and a witness to this truth from head to foot, because neither does his being arise from itself nor do the qualities that it exhibits arise from his will. Neither is the program for his life, which proceeds from his first moment of existence, placed in his control, nor can he suppose that this system is a random accident or that his existence and its system arise from the environment of his origin. The being of this environment and the system that governs it are not products of this environment either; they do not come about by chance.

Thus we have no other recourse than to affirm the existence of a source for the creation who produces and sustains all things. It is He Who grants existence to all that exists and Who then guides each thing towards its own particular perfection by a special system.

Since we see a single system in the universe in which things are created interdependent, we must conclude that the Source of creation Who operates its system is One alone.

The Noble Qur'an says, '*If there were gods in it other than God, it*

would be in ruins' (21:22). If multiple gods governed the universe, and, as idolators say, each god presided over a different part — earth and sky, sea and forest each having its own god — because of differences among the gods, each part of the universe would have its own system, and the workings of the universe would necessarily fall into disarray. As we see, however, all the parts of the universe are interdependent and exist in complete harmony. All compose a single system. Accordingly, we must conclude that the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is one.

One might imagine that, supposing these various gods are intelligent and know that their differences are drawing the universe into disarray, they would avoid disagreements. This is a debased notion; a god who creates and manages a universe or a part of one would certainly not think as we think.

In explanation, from the first day we open our eyes to the creation and witness the system in effect in it, we form mental conceptions of this system. Then, as we act to satisfy our everyday needs, we gauge our actions against these mental conceptions in order to adjust them to this system. For instance, when we are hungry or thirsty, we eat or drink to satiety, and, when we are cold, we dress appropriately, because we have observed that this is how these needs are met in the world.

Therefore, from this standpoint, our action follows from our thought, and our thought follows from the world. In consequence, our action is two steps removed from the world. However, a god who manages the universe or a part of it acts outside of the world of action, and it makes no sense that he should work according to a premeditated scheme. This point is well worth noting.

GOD MOST HIGH HAS ALL THE ATTRIBUTES OF PERFECTION

What is perfection? A house is perfect when it meets all the needs of a household. It should have adequate space to seat

guests, a kitchen, a bathroom, and so forth. Insofar as it fails to provide these things, it is deficient.

WHY DOES MAN AT TIMES FAIL TO ACCORD WITH THIS TRUTH?

This truth grows clear to people with the least consideration and is beyond doubt, except that one may at times grow so involved in the day-to-day struggles of living that one has no leisure to consider such ideas as these, and so one neglects them. Or one may be too occupied with the superficial charms of nature and too fond of pleasure to reflect upon and then live by this truth and others like it.

Accordingly, the Noble Qur'an pays great attention to explaining in various ways the manner in which things are created and the system that presides over them. It demonstrates that most people have not developed the mental capacity to consider fine intellectual questions, and this is especially true for those who are enamoured with these superficial charms of nature and fond of life's pleasures.

In any event, man is a part of the creation and never stands apart from the universe and the special and general systems that govern it. Any time he wishes, he can stop to pay attention to the creation and its systems and discern the existence of its Creator and Sustainer.

God Most High says, '*There are signs in the heavens and the earth to those who believe — and there are signs to a folk whose faith is certain in your own makeup and in how animals are propagated. The alternation of night and day, and the sustenance Allah sends down from the sky that revives the earth after its death, and the wheelings of the winds are signs for people who reason*' (45:2-5). The Noble Qur'an contains many verses that summon us to reflect on the creation of natural phenomena, such as the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, the earth, mountains, seas, plants, animals, and man. It points to the wondrous system that governs all of these phenomena, the

system, in fact, that propels the various parts of the universe toward the objects of their creation, their reasons for being. The grain of wheat or the almond falls to the ground to grow into a blooming shrub or fruit-bearing tree. From when the seed enters the womb of the earth and splits open, the embryonic plant emerging and sending its white root into the depths of the earth, to when it reaches its destined form, vast systems are at work that dazzle the reason. The shining sun and stars, the luminous moon and the earth, with their various motions and hidden powers, the mysterious forces that are reposed in that seed, the four seasons, atmospheric conditions, wind and rain, days and nights — all these play a part in the growth of this shrub. They act together as nursemaids to this new form they have cradled until it reaches the zenith of its growth.

A human infant, a much more complex phenomenon than that young shrub, is the product of millions or billions of years of the intricate and orderly workings of the creation. Quite apart from its relationship with the outer world, the everyday life of a human being springs from an amazing system within his being that is many centuries old. The world's scientists have devoted themselves to slowly piercing the veils of this phenomenon, but even now their understanding pales before their ignorance.

Similarly, if an individual has all the natural faculties of man, he is perfect, but if he is lacking one, such as a hand or an eye, from this standpoint, he is deficient.

According to what we have learned, the quality of perfection is something that alleviates a kind of need for being and removes a deficiency. An example is the quality of knowledge, which removes the darkness of ignorance and illuminates the thing known for the knower. Another is power, which enables someone powerful to reach his goals. Others are life, comprehension, and so forth.

Our conscience tells us that the Creator of the universe (that is, He from Whom the being of the universe and its beings spring, Who alleviates any conceivable need, and Who offers every

bounty and perfection) has all the attributes of perfection, because it is unrealistic to imagine that one could extend a perfection to others that he lacks.

In the Noble Qur'an, God Most High praises Himself as having all the attributes of perfection and presents Himself as devoid of all imperfection: '*Your Lord is Absolutely Self-Sufficient, the possessor of mercy*' (6:133), meaning that only He is absolutely free of need and able to meet the needs of any needy one. He also says, '*Allah: There is no god other than Him. His are the most beautiful names*' (20:8). The most beautiful qualities belong to God and none other (it is He Who is living, knowing, seeing, hearing, powerful, creative, and beyond need). Therefore, we must understand God Most High to possess all the attributes of perfection and His holy presence to be devoid of every attribute of imperfection. If He possessed imperfections, He would stand in need; then there would have to be a god greater than He to resolve His needs. 'May He be glorified and exalted above whatever is associated with Him'.

GOD'S POWER AND KNOWLEDGE

Consider the way the parts of this vast universe are intertwined, its wonderful workings and the way the systems it contains work together in an orderly way. It is all in motion, and so every kind of phenomenon is progressing toward its special goal in a thoroughly orderly manner. Any intelligent person can see from this that the universe and all it contains depend for their continued existence on an imperishable Being Who has created them through His boundless power and knowledge, and Who has nurtured every created thing and directed it toward its perfection through His special mercy. It is He Whose being is imperishable, and it is He Who knows all things and is capable of all things.

God Most High says, '*His is possession of the heavens and the earth; He brings life and death; and He is capable of all things. He is the First and the Last, the Outward and Inward, and He knows all things*' (57:23). He says in another verse, '*Allah's is possession*

of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them; He creates what He wills, and Allah is capable of all things' (5:25).

When we say that someone is able to buy an automobile, we mean that he has what is necessary (sufficient money) to buy the automobile, and if we say that someone is able to lift a hundred-pound stone, we mean that he has the strength to do it.

Overall, power to do a thing means having the means to do it, and, given that the needs of everything in the universe in its existence are met by God Most High, we must say that God Most High has the capacity to do anything and that His pure essence is the source of being. God says in another verse, '*Should He not know what He created?*' (67:14). This means that, since every being depends for its being on the boundless being of God Most High, is it inconceivable that a veil should exist between that being and God, or that it should be hidden from God. Rather, everything is clear to Him; He comprehends and rules everything inside and out.

JUSTICE

God Most High is just, because justice is one of the attributes of perfection, and the God of the universe possesses all of them. Also, He repeatedly praises justice and condemns injustice and oppression in His Discourse. He commands people to justice and prohibits injustice, and how could He be characterized by a thing He has condemned or fail to have an attribute He has praised?

In *Sura* Nisa', He says, '*Allah does not an atom's weight of injustice*' (4:40). He also says, '*Your Lord wrongs no one*' (18:49). Elsewhere He says, '*Allah does not will injustice to His servants*' (40:31). He further says in *Sura* Nisa', '*Whatever good befalls you is from Allah, and whatever evil befalls you is from yourself*' (4:79). He further says in *Sura* Sajda, '[*It is*] *He Who made all things good that He created*' (32:7).

Accordingly, everything is made absolutely good in itself; it is

only relatively and by comparison with others that some things are seen to be ugly, unjust, or defective. For instance, we think of the snake and the scorpion as evil and unfair with respect to man, and of a thorn as unattractive when compared to a rose, but these are all beautiful and marvelous beings in their own right.

It is true that, from the standpoint of religious law, God Most High accounts certain human voluntary acts evil and commands us to abstain from them. These are such sins as *shirk*, disobedience to parents, slaughter of the innocent, wine drinking, gambling, and other acts at variance with our religious duties.

Acts that are designated sins are evil in arising through opposition and rebellion against duty (a negative action); they are not attributed to God; rather, where the responsible party exercises choice, the deed is attributed to that party, and he bears the responsibility and accepts the penalty.

MERCY

When we see someone in need, we help him to the best of our ability. We aid the indigent and guide the blind to their destinations. We call such actions merciful and deserving of praise.

Actions that God enacts cannot be other than merciful, because He benefits all by dispensing His limitless bounty and, in giving, He relieves the needs of all beings, without Himself having need of anyone. As He says, '*My mercy extends to all things*' (7:156).

OTHER ATTRIBUTES OF PERFECTION

'*Your Lord is the Absolutely Self-Sufficient, the Possessor of mercy*' (6:133). Whatever goodness and beauty there are in the universe, and whatever attribute of perfection we can think of are gifts from God Most High to His creatures; in this way, He has satisfied one of the needs of the creation. Of course, if He did not Himself possess this perfection, He would be unable to give it to others; instead, like them, He would be in need of

others. Therefore, God draws all the attributes of perfection from His own being; He has not acquired any of them from others or turned in need to anyone. He is Himself characterized by all the attributes of perfection, such as life, knowledge, and power. No quality of imperfection and need such as impotence, ignorance, death, or difficulty can reach His pure presence.

PROPHECY

Although God Most High is free of need from any standpoint, He has, with His perfect power, brought the universe and its various creatures into being and given them innumerable blessings.

Man, like every other living creature, is under God's nurture from his first moment of existence to his last. Each creature is guided by a special system toward a known object while being given the loving attention it deserves at every moment.

If we contemplate only our own life cycle, that is, from infancy through childhood and youth to old age, our conscience will testify to the complete attention that God Most High gives us. Once we grasp this point, our minds will determine beyond a doubt that the Creator of the universe is more kind to each of His creatures than any person could be. Because of this kindness, He always acts in its best interests and never assents to something that is unwise and to their detriment. The human species is one of God's creations, and we know that its best interests and happiness lie in being realistic and acting well, that is, in having sound beliefs, high ethical values, and good behaviour.

Someone might interject here that man, with his God-given mind, can distinguish good from evil and avoid the pitfalls.

It must be realized, however, that our minds alone cannot untie this knot and guide us to realism and right action. All the undesirable qualities and actions that we see in human society stem from persons who have minds and the power of discernment. Because of egotism, greed, and passion, however,

their minds have been overcome by emotions and put at the service of desire. In consequence, they have become lost. Therefore, God Most High must summon and guide us to happiness by another means, one that will never be overcome by desire or err in its guidance. This means is that of prophecy.

THE PROOF OF PROPHECY

It grew clear from our discussion of *tauhid* that, since God Most High created all things, it must be He Who fosters them. To clarify, every phenomenon in the world works, from when it first comes into existence, to obviate its defects and needs one after another and to attain perfection and self-sufficiency to the extent possible for it. It follows an ordered course of continued existence. The One Who orders the thing's course and guides it along from stage to stage is God Most High.

We can draw one sure conclusion in this regard: each species of phenomenon in the world has a unique program that unfolds over its lifetime to govern its behaviour. In other words, every identifiable kind of phenomenon in the world has an identifiable set of roles in life to which God Most High guides it. The Noble Qur'an refers to this truth in this way: '*Our Lord is He Who gave everything its nature, and then guided it*' (20:50). This is true of all aspects of the creation — no exceptions are possible. The heavens above us and the earth below, the elements that compose them all, the compounds that form simple phenomena, all the plants and animals — all are governed by this truth. Man is likewise guided in this way, but there is a difference between man and other things.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MAN AND OTHER BEINGS

The earth was created millions of years ago. It put all its hidden forces to work, and, to the extent its various elements allow, it still operates, displaying its effects in its rotation and orbital movement. It thus assures its continued existence; it will

continue to act in the same way, not failing to perform any of its functions, until some stronger opposing factor intervenes.

From the time an almond bush sprouts from its seed to its maturity, it performs its functions of feeding and growth (in other words, it follows its course of development). It does not and cannot fail to do so unless some stronger opposing factor intervenes. The same is true of any other phenomenon. Man, however, performs his particular actions by choice, through thought and resolve. How frequently does man fail to perform actions that are to his advantage when no external factor has prevented him, and how often does he do things that are to his detriment, knowingly, with forethought and free choice! Sometimes he refrains from taking an antidote, and sometimes he drinks the poison and kills himself.

Plainly, a being who is created with free choice is under no compulsion to follow divine guidance. That is, the prophets promulgate knowledge given by God of good and evil and of happiness and misery to the people and lead believers to fear God's wrath. The believers are free to embrace what they will of these principles. It is true that man may get an idea of what is good and evil or beneficial and detrimental through use of his mind, but more often than not that mind has given itself up to sensual inclinations and sometimes makes mistakes. This fact demonstrates that divine guidance must be accomplished by some means additional to that of the mind, a means that is wholly free from error. In other words, having led people to understand His commandments in a general way through use of their minds, He must reinforce this understanding by other means.

This means is that of prophecy, by which God Most High teaches His commandments to one of His servants through revelation and assigns him the task of conveying them to the people and making people follow them through fear and hope, encouragement and threats.

God Most High says, '*We inspired you as We inspired Noah and*

the prophets after him...messengers of good news and warning, so that the people might have no argument with Allah after the messengers' (4:163-165).

QUALITIES OF PROPHETS

It grows clear that God Most High must teach some of His servants spiritual truths and laws conducive to human happiness by occult means.

One who conveys divine messages is called a prophet, or messenger, of God, and the totality of the messages that he brings from God is called a religion.

It also grows clear that a prophet must:

1. Be devoid of error in carrying out his task. He must be free of lapses of memory or other mental failings so that he can communicate what he has realized to the people without errors. Otherwise, divine guidance would not reach its object, the law would fail to provide its intended universal guidance, and people would not receive the intended effect.

2. Be devoid of sin and offenses in his speech and actions. Otherwise, his missionary work would fail in its effect, because, if someone's actions are at odds with his speech, people accord no value to his words and even take his actions as proof that he is a liar and a charlatan, saying, 'If he spoke the truth, he would act according to his words'.

One may reduce these two points to one and say that, if a mission is to be correct and effective, a prophet must be free of sin and error. God Most High makes reference to this fact where He says, '[*He is*] *the Knower of the unseen, and He does not express His secret to anyone — except to each prophet He has sent, and He places a guard in front of him and a guard behind, so that He might know if they have promulgated their Lord's message*' (72:26-28).

3. Possess moral virtues such as chastity, courage, and justice. There are all well-accepted virtues, and one who is devoid of any

sort of sin and follows religion completely will never be stained with moral baseness.

PROPHETS IN THE MIDST OF HUMAN SOCIETY

History makes it clear that prophets have lived among us and roused us to follow God's summons, but history does little to illuminate their lives. Only the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings upon him and his family) is preserved for us unambiguously, and the Noble Qur'an, his scripture, containing the sublime goals of religion, has also illuminated the messages and aims of former prophets.

The Noble Qur'an states clearly that God Most High has sent many prophets to the people, all of whom summoned them to *tauhid* and the religion of the truth. It says, for example, '*We sent no prophet before you without inspiring him, saying "There is no God but Me, so worship Me"*' (21:25).

THE PROPHETS OF DECISION AND OTHER PROPHETS

There are five prophets who possessed scriptures and independent teachings, who are referred to in the verse, '*He has instituted the same [religion] for you that He recommended for Noah and that We inspired in you and commended to Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, saying: "Maintain religion, and do not be divided over it"*' (42:13). These five — Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace and blessings upon him and his family), who brought scriptures and revealed laws — are called the prophets of decision (*ulu'l-azm*), but they are not the only prophets. Rather, there has been a prophet for every people, but only some twenty are mentioned in the Noble Qur'an.

As God Most High says, '[*Among the prophets are*] *those We have told you of, and those We have not told you of*' (40:78). He also says, '*Each people has a messenger*' (10:47) and '*Each people has a guide*' (13:7).

The prophets who have come after each of the prophets of decision have summoned humanity to those prophets' revealed laws. They continued their predecessors' missions. God raised the Most Noble Messenger Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah (peace and blessings upon him and his family) as the Seal of the Prophets, to promulgate the final commandments and the most perfect religious ordinances, made the Messenger's scripture the last, and, in consequence, appointed His religion to last until the Resurrection and His revealed law to live on forever.

NOAH

The first prophet Merciful God raised and directed to humanity with a scripture was Noah (upon whom be peace).

Noah (upon whom be peace) summoned the people of his day to *tauhid* and monotheism and directed them to shun *shirk* and idolatry. It is evident from the account in the Noble Qur'an that Noah struggled hard to end class distinctions and uproot oppression and that he spread his teachings through appeal to reason, something new to the humanity of that age.

In the course of a long period of confrontation with ignorant and stubborn people, he took a small group under guidance. God Most High sent a flood to eradicate the unbelievers and cleanse the land of their pollution. Noah (upon whom be peace), who had escaped the flood with a number of his followers, laid the foundations of a new religious society in the world.

This great prophet is the founder of the law of *tauhid* and the first person to be delegated by God to struggle against oppression, injustice, and tyranny. Because of this great service he performed for the religion of truth, God Most High has graced him with a special greeting that will live on so long as human life continues: '*Peace be upon Noah among all the people of the world*' (37:79).

ABRAHAM

After Noah's time, a long age passed in which numerous prophets such as Hud and Saleh guided people to God and uprightness. Nonetheless, *shirk* and idolatry made steady advances and finally overcame the whole world. God Most High, in His supreme wisdom, raised Abraham (upon whom be peace) as a prophet.

Abraham (upon whom be peace) is the perfect example of someone who lives in accord with his true nature. With his pure nature, he sought for the truth, he realized that there is One God over the creation, and he struggled against *shirk* and oppression as long as he lived.

As the Noble Qur'an makes clear and the traditions of the Imams of the Messenger's lineage affirm, Abraham spent his childhood in a cave far from the bustle of life and the clamour of the towns. He saw only his mother, who brought him food and water.

One day he emerged with his mother and went to town to visit his uncle Azar. Whatever he saw was new and a source of amazement to him. His pure soul, roused by exposure to thousands of wonders, sought for the origins of the things it witnessed. He saw the idols that Azar and others fashioned and worshipped. He asked what they were, but attempts to explain that they were divine did not satisfy him. He saw some people worshipping Venus, some worshipping the moon, and others worshipping the sun. Since each of these set in a matter of hours, Abraham would accept none of them as god.

After going through these experiences, Abraham (upon whom be peace) openly and fearlessly declared himself a believer in the One God and made clear his disgust with the prevalent *shirk* and idolatry. He no longer considered any course but struggle against them. Without admitting any feelings of inadequacy or fatigue, he struggled and summoned people to *tauhid.*

At last, he made his way to the idol temple and smashed the

idols. This made him the worst of criminals in the eyes of the people, and he was sentenced to be burned alive. God Most High, however, protected him from the flames, and he emerged from the fire unharmed.

Eventually, Abraham emigrated from Babel, his place of birth, to Syria and Palestine, where he continued his mission.

Toward the end of his life, he had two sons: one Isaac, the progenitor of Israel, and the other Isma'il (Ishmael), the progenitor of the Arabs. By God's command, he took Isma'il and his mother to the Hijaz in his infancy and left them in an uninhabited, waterless, lifeless land amid the Tahama Mountains. There he summoned the bedouin Arabs to *tauhid.* Later, he built the Ka'aba and legislated the practice of Hajj, which the Arabs continued down to the time of the Messenger and the advent of Islam.

Abraham is the father of the religion of the true nature. According to the Qu'ran, he brought a scripture and was the first to refer to God's religion as Islam and to its adherents as Muslims. The religions of *tauhid*, which are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all trace their origins to him, since their respective founders, Moses, Jesus, and the Most Noble Messenger Muhammad (peace and blessings upon him and his family), are all his heirs and follow in his footsteps in their missions.

MOSES

Moses the son of 'Imran is the third of the prophets of decision, those who brought a scripture and a revealed law. He is a son of Israel, a descendent of Jacob.

Moses (upon whom be peace) had an eventful life. When he was born, the Israelites were living an abject life of captivity among the Copts. Their infants were being beheaded by the order of Pharaoh.

Following instructions given in a dream, Moses's mother had laid him in a wooden box and launched it into the Nile. The

current carried it directly to Pharaoh's palace.

Pharaoh commanded that the box be taken and opened; there they found the baby.

At the urging of the queen, Pharaoh spared the child's life, and, since they had no child, they entrusted him to a nursemaid (who was, as it happened, the child's mother).

Moses remained in Pharaoh's court until his early youth. Then, because of involvement in a death, from fear of Pharaoh, he fled to Madyan, where he met the prophet Shu'ayb (upon whom be peace), married one of his daughters, and tended his sheep for some years. Then he took thought for his homeland; he left with his family and servants for Egypt. One night along the road, at Mount Sina, he was chosen as a prophet by God Most High and charged with summoning Pharaoh to *tauhid.* He was also to deliver the Israelites from the Copts and to appoint his brother Aaron as his deputy. When he promulgated his mission and delivered his divine message, however, Pharaoh who was an idolater and displayed his own effigy to the Egyptians as one of the gods, refused to accept the message and did not free the Israelites.

Although Moses (upon whom be peace) summoned the people to *tauhid* for years and enacted many miracles, Pharaoh and his people reacted only with harshness and brutality. Finally, by God's command, Moses (upon whom be peace) led the Israelites from Egypt toward the Sinai by night. As they approached the Red Sea, Pharaoh learned of their departure and pursued them with his army.

Moses (upon whom be peace), through a miracle, divided the Red Sea and crossed it with his people, but Pharaoh was drowned with his army. Later, God revealed the Torah to Moses (upon whom be peace) and established the Mosaic Law among the Israelites.

JESUS, THE MESSIAH

Jesus was the fourth prophet of decision, the fourth prophet to bring a scripture and a revealed code. He was born in a supernatural way: his mother, Mary, was a pious virgin who was engaged in worship in Bethlehem when God caused the Holy Spirit to descend upon her, which brought her the good tidings of the coming of the Messiah and caused her to conceive the Messiah by breathing into her sleeve.

After he was born, he spoke from the cradle in reply to unjust accusations made against his mother and told the people of his prophethood and scripture. Later, as a youth, he began preaching to the people and revived the code of laws revealed to Moses with a few changes. He sent his disciples to all parts to spread his message. In time, as his message was spread, the Jews (from among whom he arose) plotted to kill him, but God saved him, and the Jews wound up crucifying someone else.[1]

It is necessary here to make the point that God Most High affirms in the Noble Qur'an that Jesus was given a scripture called the 'Gospel' (*Injil*), which is not among the gospels that were written after his lifetime, the officially recognized ones being the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. The Noble Qur'an, 4:157, and ancient traditions tell us that the crucifixion of Jesus was in some sense illusory. — Trans.

CHAPTER THREE

THE MESSENGER MUHAMMAD, SON OF 'ABDULLAH

The life history of our honoured Messenger Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah (peace and blessings upon him and his family) is better known to us than those of any earlier prophets. Over the ages, their scriptures, revealed codes, and even personalities have been obscured.

In truth, we have no clear accounts of them except the ones that have come down to us in the Noble Qur'an and the narrations of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and his heirs. By contrast, there is extant a full history of the Most Noble Messenger that adequately describes his life.

The Most Noble Messenger of Islam is the last of the prophets that the Most Gracious God has sent for our guidance.

Fourteen centuries ago, the people of the world lived in a state

in which nothing remained of the religion of *tauhid* but the name. People were wholly estranged from worship and knowledge of God, and their societies were divorced from justice and humane ways. The glorious Ka'aba had been degraded into an idol temple, and the religion of Abraham, the Friend of God, into idolatry.

The Arabs lived a tribal life, and even their towns in the Hijaz, Yemen, and elsewhere were organized on this basis. They lived in the most degraded and backward state imaginable. In place of culture, immodesty, debauchery, drunkenness, and gambling prevailed among them. They buried their infant daughters alive. Most of them lived by theft, banditry, murder, and plunder of each other's possessions and livestock. To kill and tyrannize were their greatest glories.

It was in such an environment that God raised up the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) to reform and guide the people of the world; revealed to him the Qur'an — which is full of true teachings, knowledge of God, illustrations of the meaning of justice, and useful counsel; and appointed him to summon the people to true humanity and observance of truth.

The Most Noble Messenger was born in 570 A.D. (53 years before the Hijra, or Migration to Medina) in Mecca, to a family that was regarded as the purest and most noble of the Arabs.

His father died before he was born, and his mother died when he was only six years old. After two years, his grandfather and guardian 'Abd al-Muttalib also died, and the Messenger was left in the care of his loving uncle Abu Talib (the father of 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful).

Abu Talib raised the Messenger Muhammad like his own son. Up to a few months before the Hijra, he worked hard to take care of him and never allowed him to be neglected.

Like other Arabs, the Arabs of Mecca tended sheep and camels; sometimes, too, they made commercial travels to such nearby

countries as Syria. They were an illiterate people and attached no importance to educating their children.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), like the rest of his folk, did not learn to read or write, but, from his youngest days, he showed many virtues. He never worshipped idols; he never lied; he never stole or behaved treacherously. He abstained completely from malicious or flippant acts. He acted with intelligence and care. These qualities won him the affection of his people in a short time, and he became known as Muhammad the Trustworthy (*al-Amin*). Arabs formed the habit of entrusting their valuables to him and spoke of how trustworthy and capable he was. When he was about twenty, a wealthy Meccan woman (Great Khadija) made him her business agent, and, because of his honesty, correctness, intelligence, and capacity, her business affairs prospered, and she naturally felt attracted to the personality of the man and the greatness that lay behind it. Finally, she proposed marriage to the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). He attended to his spouse's business dealings for years after their wedding.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) had good relations with the people until he was forty; he was counted as one of them, except that his morals were exceptionally high; he was never involved in others' dirty dealings; he did not engage in the oppression, cruelty, and drive for status that were prevalent. He won over people by gaining their respect and confidence. When the Arabs rebuilt the Ka'aba, the tribes wrangled bitterly as to which would replace the Black Stone. They decided to ask the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) to arbitrate. He decreed that a cloak be spread, that the Black Stone be placed in the middle of it, and that the leaders each take a corner of the cloak and lift the stone. Then he himself placed it. Thus he brought an end to a bitter dispute without bloodshed.

Although the Prophet worshipped the One God, and not the

idols, before the beginning of his mission, since he did not directly attack the superstitious beliefs of idolatry, the people did not interfere with him, just as practitioners of various religions such as Jews and Christians lived among the Arabs in peace.

THE STORY OF BAHIRA, THE MONK

Once while the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) had not yet grown up and was still living with his uncle Abu Talib, Abu Talib made a commercial trip to Syria, taking the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) with him.

It was a large, heavily-laden caravan. As they entered Syria, they reached a town called Busra and dismounted near a monastery. They pitched tents and rested. A monk named Bahira came out from the monastery and invited the caravan party to dine. All accepted the monk's invitation and entered the monastery, except that Abu Talib left his nephew to look after their supplies.

Bahira asked, 'Have all come?' Abu Talib replied that all had except for a youth, the youngest of the party. Bahira said, 'Bring him as well'. Abu Talib had left the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) standing under an olive tree. He called for him to come in. Bahira looked closely at the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and told him, 'Come closer, I must speak with you'. He drew the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) aside. Abu Talib joined them. Bahira told the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), 'I will ask you something, and I will swear you to Lat and 'Uzza to answer me'. (Lat and 'Uzza were the names of two idols worshipped by the people of Mecca).

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) replied, 'Nothing is more loathsome to me than these

two idols'.

Bahira then said, 'Let me swear you to the One God that you will answer truly'. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) responded, 'I always speak truly, I never lie. Ask your question'. Bahira asked, 'What thing do you most love?' He answered, 'Solitude'. Bahira asked, 'What do you most watch and love to watch?' He answered, 'The sky and the stars within it'. Bahira asked, 'What do you think?' The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) remained silent, but Bahira closely studied his forehead, finally asking, 'When and with what thought in mind do you sleep?' He answered, 'When, as I watch the sky, I see the stars and find them in my lap, and myself above them'. Bahira asked, 'Do you also dream?' he answered, 'Yes, and whatever I see in dreams, I also see when I am awake'. Bahira continued, 'What, for instance, do you dream of?' The Holy Messenger was silent. Bahira also fell silent. After a short while, Bahira asked, 'May I see between your two shoulders?' Without moving, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) replied, 'Yes. Come and see'. Bahira stood, came close, and removed the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) robe from his shoulders. He saw a black mole and murmured, 'It is the same'. Abu Talib asked, 'The same as what? What are you saying?' Bahira said, 'Tell me. What is your relationship to this boy?' Abu Talib, who loved the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) like a son, replied, 'He is my son'. Bahira retorted, 'No. This boy's father is dead'. Abu Talib asked, 'How did you know? Yes, this is my brother's son'. Bahira said to Abu Talib, 'Listen. This young man has a resplendent and marvelous life ahead of him. If others see what I have seen and they recognize him, they will kill him. Conceal and protect him from enemies'. Abu Talib asked, 'Tell me, who is he?' Bahira answered, 'In his eyes are the marks of a great prophet, and likewise on his back'.

THE STORY OF NESTURIUS, THE MONK

Several years later, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was once again on the road to Damascus, on business for Khadija, taking her goods. Khadija had sent her servant Maysara along with him and instructed her to obey him completely. On this journey too, when they reached Syria, they stopped near the town of Busra, alighting under a tree. There was a monastery near there belonging to a monk named Nesturius, who was acquainted with Maysara. He asked her, 'Who is that resting under that tree?' Maysara replied, 'One of the Quraysh'. The monk said, 'No one has or ever will rest under the tree except one of God's prophets'. Then he asked, 'Do his eyes have a reddish tinge?' She answered, 'Yes. His eyes have always had that quality'. The monk said, 'That is right. He is the last of God's prophets. I wish I might live to see the day he is charged with summoning people to God'.

PROPHECIES FROM THE JEWS OF MEDINA

Numerous Jewish tribes who had read descriptions of the coming prophet had emigrated from their homelands and settled in the Hijaz, especially in Medina and the surrounding area. They were awaiting the appearance of the expected Prophet. Since they were a wealthy people, the Arabs harboured ill feelings towards them and even plundered their properties.

The aggrieved Jews would always say, 'We shall endure your predations and oppression until the expected Prophet emigrates from Mecca and arrives here. Then we will embrace the Holy Messenger and extract our revenge from you'. A major factor in the Medinans' quick acceptance of Islam was their mental preparedness for the news. They embraced the faith, but the Jews later rejected it, because of their stubborn prejudices.

QUR'ANIC REFERENCES TO PROPHECIES OF THE MESSENGER'S COMING

God Most High refers to these prophecies in several places. In relation to the beliefs of a people from among the people of the book, He says, '*Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel, which are in their possession. He will enjoin them to do what is right and forbid them what is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul, and he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear*' (7:157).

He also says, '*When a scripture comes to them from Allah, confirming what they have, although they had been asking for a victory over those who disbelieved — when there comes that which they know* [*to be the truth*]*, they do not believe in it*' (2:89).

THE PERIOD FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE MISSION TO THE HIJRA

In that dark environment of the Arabian Peninsula, which one may without exaggeration call a cesspool of misfortune and a focal point of oppression and corruption in a world full of injustice and tyranny, God Most High raised up His Messenger and a mercy to the people of the world. He charged him with summoning the people to *tauhid* and worship of the One God, with calling them to justice, good works, and strengthening of social bonds, and with rousing them to hold to the truth without carelessness or indulgence. He commissioned him to lay the foundations of human happiness on the bedrock of faith, fear of God, cooperation, and self-sacrifice.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was first charged with forming the basis of the mission, and, since he was in an environment full of obduracy, cruelty, and oppression, he first promulgated his teachings only among persons from whom he had some hope of acceptance. Thus, he led a small number to accept the faith, the first of

whom was (according to accounts) his nephew and protege 'Ali ibn Abu Talib (peace and blessings upon him and his family). The first woman to embrace Islam was his wife Khadija (upon whom be peace).

After a time, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was charged with summoning his close relatives. After a revelation, he invited these (about 40 people in all) to his house and disclosed his divine mission. After that, by the command of God, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) propagated his mission publicly, and the brilliant torch of divine guidance emerged to light the world.

The Arabs, especially the Meccans, reacted harshly to the mission, especially after it was made public. The unbelievers and *mushriks* answered the pure summons with savage cruelty. They had no reasoned response to it.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was at times called a soothsayer and a magician and at others a madman and a poet. He was mocked and ridiculed. When he tried to summon the people to the newly-arisen religion of Islam or when he engaged in worship of God, they heckled him, they dumped dirt clods, thorns, or straw on him, they struck him, they called him names, and, sometimes, they even threw stones at him. Sometimes they would try to coopt him with false promises of wealth and power in an attempt to break his resolution. But the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) never slackened his efforts in the least,although at times he felt sorry for the people in their ignorance and obstinacy. Many verses of the Qu'ran were revealed in this connection in which God Most High expressed sympathy to the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and commanded him to persevere. Sometimes, too, verses would be revealed forbidding the Holy Messenger from inclining at all to their words or moderating his efforts.

The Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) followers were also subjected to the torments of the unbelievers; many actually died under torture. At times of extremity, some asked permission of the Most Noble Messenger to set aside what God had decreed and to conduct an armed uprising. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) would respond, 'God Most High has not commanded me to such a thing; we must be patient'. Under the intense pressure, some also emigrated.

In times, the Muslims' state grew desperate; the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) gave permission for his followers to emigrate to Ethiopia, some days' journey away from the scene of their anguish. A party headed by Ja'far ibn Abu Talib (one of the elect of the Messenger's companions) made the migration. After learning of it, the unbelievers of Mecca sent two seasoned men to the king of Ethiopia with numerous gifts. They sought the extradition of the Mecca migrants. Ja'far ibn Abu Talib addressed the king, his court, the Christian priests, and the nobles; he described the luminous being of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), explained the sublime principles of Islam, and read from *Sura* Maryam.

Ja'far's irreproachable words moved the king and everyone else assembled there to tears. The king denied the Meccans' request and rejected their gifts. He ordered that every measure be taken to provide for the immigrants' comfort.

After this turn of events, the unbelievers made a pact to cut off relations with the Bani Hashim, the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) relations and supporters. They completely halted all social and commercial relations with them. A signed proclamation to that effect was posted on the Ka'aba.

The Bani Hashim, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) among them, were compelled to depart Mecca and to seek asylum in a valley known as Shi'b

Abu Talib. They faced extreme hardship and hunger, and no one dared leave the valley. The days were burning, the nights filled with the wailings of children.

After three years, because of the effacement of the proclamation and numerous complaints from neighbouring tribes, the unbelievers abandoned their pact and the Bani Hashim emerged from their asylum.

About that time, however, Abu Talib, the sole supporter of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), and Khadija, his dear wife, both died, and so matters became yet more difficult for the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). His life was in danger; he could not appear in public or remain long in one place.

A JOURNEY TO TA'IF

The same year that the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and the Bani Hashim emerged from Shi'b Abu Talib (the thirteenth year of the prophetic mission), he made a short journey to Ta'if (a town about one hundred kilometers from Mecca). He summoned the people of Ta'if to Islam, but the ignorant of the town poured out from everywhere, called him names, pelted him with stones, and finally drove him out of the town.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) returned to Mecca and remained there for a time, but, being in danger for his life, he did not appear in public. Considering that conditions were right for doing away with the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), the leaders of Mecca met to devise a plan at their assembly, known as the dar an-Nadwa. This was the plan: each Arab tribe would elect one man to form a party that would attack the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) house and kill him. Plainly, by involving all the tribes, they left the Bani Hashim no one tribe from which to seek retribution, especially since a member of the Bani Hashim

would be among the attackers.

They resolved upon this plan. About forty men from various tribes were designated to kill the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). They surrounded his house by night intending to strike at dawn and carry out their party's plan, but God's will was superior to theirs and rendered their plan a mere daydream. God Most High sent the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) a revelation informing him of their designs. He ordered him to leave Mecca by night and emigrate to Medina.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) told 'Ali (upon whom be peace) of the course of events and ordered him to pass the night in his bed. He made a will to him and left the house by night. On the road, he met Abu Bakr, who accompanied him to Medina.

Some time prior to the migration, some Medinan leaders had met with the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) in Mecca, embracing the faith and also promising to support and defend him with their lives and property should he migrate to Medina.

THE MOST NOBLE MESSENGER'S MIGRATION TO MEDINA

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) reached a cave in Mount Thawr, near Mecca, by night; he remained hidden there for three days. Then he emerged and continued his journey. Finally, he entered Medina and was received by its people.

The unbelievers of Mecca surrounded his house by night and attacked at dawn. They rushed the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) bed with drawn swords, but, contrary to what they expected, they found 'Ali (upon whom be peace) there in the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) place. When they learned that the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings

upon him and his family) had left Mecca, they searched the vicinity and finally returned discouraged.

The Most Noble Messenger settled in Medina. The people of Medina embraced Islam enthusiastically and sincerely aided the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). Medina took on an Islamic look. The city, then called Yathrib, became known as Medinat ar-Rasul ('The Messenger's City'), or simply Medina. It was the first Islamic town. A minority of the Arabs of Medina, about one third of the population, only outwardly conformed to Islam, out of hypocrisy, for fear of the majority.

The Islamic sun shone over the pure skies of Medina, and its light began to spread. One of its first consequences was that the state of war that had existed between the two tribes known as the Aus and the Khazraj was transformed into a state of peace and amity. The believers of Medina clustered like moths around the prophetic flame, and the tribes in the Medinan domain also gradually embraced the faith. God's ordinances were revealed and put into effect one after another. Every day some form of corrupt behaviour would be eradicated, to be replaced by piety and justice. Slowly the believers in Mecca, who were massively harassed by the unbelievers after the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) departure, left behind their old homes and lives and fled to Medina. They were warmly received by their co-religionists there.

The Muslims who had remained in Mecca and who gradually emigrated to Medina were known as the *Muhajirin* ('immigrants'), and the Medinan Muslims were known as the *Ansar* ('helpers').

The numerous Jewish tribes in Medina and its vicinity, and in the fortress cities of Khaybar and Fadak, had long heard from their rabbis and scholars of the coming of the Prophet of Islam; they had passed these stories on to the Arabs. When these tribes were summoned to Islam after the Hijra, however, they did not

answer the summons. In time, a non-aggression pact with special provisions was concluded between the Muslims and the Jews.

The rapid progress of Islam alarmed the unbelievers of Mecca. Their hatred of the Most Noble Messenger and the Muslims grew by the day, and they sought for a way to scatter them. The Muslims too, especially the *Muhajirin*, felt a deep anger toward the Meccans. They were waiting for divine permission to repay the oppressive unbelievers for what they had done and to free the women and innocent children and hapless Muslims still being tormented in Mecca.

The first battle between the Muslims and the unbelievers, known as the battle of Badr, took place in the second year of the Hijra, in a gulch called by that name between Mecca and Medina. In this battle, the unbelievers had about a thousand fully armed and equipped fighters, and the Muslims about a third as many ill-equipped men. By God's grace, however, the Muslims won a clear victory and crushed the unbelievers. The *mushriks* fled to Mecca leaving heavy casualties, many prisoners, and much gear. It is said that seventy unbelievers were killed in this battle, about half of them under 'Ali's (upon whom be peace) sword, and about seventy were taken prisoner.

In the third year of the Hijra, the unbelievers, led by Abu Sufyan, moved on Medina with about three thousand men (five thousand according to some accounts). They confronted the Muslims outside the city, on a plain called Uhud. In this battle, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) formed ranks against the enemy with about seven thousand men. The Muslims had the upper hand at the beginning of the battle, but, due to an error on the part of some Muslims, the Islamic army was defeated. The unbelievers swarmed from all sides and caught the Muslims amid their swords.

The Muslims suffered heavy casualties in this battle. About seventy of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings

upon him and his family) companions were martyred, most of them from among the *Ansar*, but also including his uncle Hamza. The Most Noble Messenger himself (peace and blessings upon him and his family) received a wound on the forehead. One of his front teeth was broken, and a *mushrik* who had struck him on the shoulder shouted, 'I have killed Muhammad', and so the Muslim army scattered. Only 'Ali (upon whom be peace), along with several fighters, stood surrounding the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), and among them only 'Ali survived, resisting and defending the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) until the battle was over.

Toward the end of the day, Islamic soldiers who had fled regrouped around the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and revived the fight. Abu Sufyan's army, however, thought it best to retire to Mecca without endangering their victory.

After the army of unbelievers had travelled some miles, a feeling spread through it that they should have followed through on their victory to take Muslim men and children prisoner and to plunder Muslim property. They discussed making a new attack on Medina, but news reached them that the Muslim army was pursuing them with a view to resuming the battle, and they were quickly frightened into abandoning their plan and hurrying back to Mecca.

What they heard was basically true, because, by God's command, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) had re-equipped the army with the casualties' arms and sent it against the enemy under 'Ali's (upon whom be peace) command.

Although the Muslims suffered heavy casualties in this battle, in fact it had some positive consequences for Islam and the Muslims. More important than the outcome was that they learned through experience the unfortunate consequences of

opposition to the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) orders.

When the two hostile sides ceased fighting, they agreed to conduct another battle at Badr at that same time a year later. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was there with a group of his companions at the appointed time, but the unbelievers failed to appear.

After this battle, the Muslims improved their situation; they furthered their cause everywhere in the Arabian Peninsula except in the region of Mecca and Ta'if.

The third battle between the Arab unbelievers and the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and the last one in which the opposing forces were led by the Meccans was a fierce confrontation known as the Battle of the Trench (*Khandaq*) or the Battle of the Tribes (*Ahzab*). The unbelievers deployed all the forces and means they had in this battle.

After the Battle of Uhud, the leaders of Mecca, foremost among them Abu Sufyan, concurred that, by putting an end to the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), they could put an end to Islam. They invited other Arab tribes to join them in this enterprise. Although the Jewish tribes had concluded a non-aggression pact with the Muslims, they secretly broke their pact and joined in the scheme.

The upshot was that, in the fifth year of the Hijra, a large and well-equipped army of Quraysh, assorted other Arab tribes, and Jewish tribes marched on Medina.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), who already knew of the enemy's intentions, consluted his companions. After much discussion, the proposal of Salman Farsi, an outstanding companion, was accepted: a trench was dug around Medina, and the forces were deployed behind it, inside the city. The enemy force, failing to find a way into the city, was compelled to surround it, and a protracted

battle resulted.

It was in this battle that 'Amr ibn 'Abd Wad, one of the best known Arab knights and valiants, met his death at the hands of 'Ali (upon whom be peace). In the end, because of the wind and cold, the Arab idolaters' fatigue at the length of the siege, and a falling out between them and the Jews, they abandoned the siege and broke up.

After the war of the trench, which was instigated by the Jews, and in which the Arab unbelievers participated, the Jews openly disavowed their pact with Islam. By God's command, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) rebuked the Jewish tribes of Medina and then engaged in a series of battles, all of which ended in Muslim victories. The most important of these was the battle of Khaybar. The site was a fortress heavily defended by seasoned Jewish warriors and well-supplied.

In this battle, 'Ali (upon whom be peace) first killed the famous Jewish champion Marhab Khaybari and scattered the Jewish army. Then he attacked and broke into the fortress, where he raised the banner of victory. These battles in the fifth year of the Hijra marked the end of Jewish power in the Hijaz.

SUMMONING THE KINGS TO ISLAM

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) had settled in Medina, and, as the Meccan Muslims fled the unbelievers' torments and immigrated to Medina, the *Ansar* did their part to provide them a warm reception.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) erected the Prophet's Mosque (*Masjid an-Nabi*) in Medina, and another mosque was slowly under construction. Islamic missionaries were being sent to various places. Pacts were concluded with the Jewish and Arab tribes in and around Medina; Islam was on the advance.

In the sixth year of the Hijra, the Most Noble Messenger (peace

and blessings upon him and his family) wrote letters to such rulers as the shah of Iran, the Roman Emperor, the Khadiv of Egypt, and the ruler of Abyssinia summoning them to Islam.

That same year, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) proceeded to Mecca with a party of believers to perform the 'Umra — the 'Lesser Pilgrimage'. They were not allowed to do this, but a pact was concluded with the unbelievers known as the 'Treaty of Hudayba'. One of its provisions allowed an Arab tribe the freedom to side with either party.

After a while, the unbelievers of Mecca broke the pact. In consequence, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) decided to conquer Mecca; in the eighth year of the Hijra he advanced on the city with ten thousand fighters. The city surrendered without a fight. He smashed all the idols at the Ka'aba. The people at large of Mecca embraced Islam. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) ordered the leaders, who had shown so much enmity to Islam and sanctioned such inhumane treatment of the Messenger and his followers in the course of twenty years, to appear before him. Showing great magnanimity, he pardoned them all, displaying no signs of rancour.

After conquering Mecca, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) conducted mopping-up operations in the vicinity, including numerous battles with Arab idolaters, one of which was the Battle of Hunayn.

This battle, in which the Muslim forces confronted the Hawazan tribe, was one of the most important for the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). Twelve thousand Muslim infantrymen stood against the Hawazan cavalry, numbering several thousand. A fierce fight ensued.

At the outset, the Hawazan forces dealt a crushing blow to the Muslims, to the extent that they all fled except for the Most

Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), 'Ali, who stood across from him holding aloft the banner of Islam, and a handful of others. After several hours, however, first the *Ansar* and then the rest of the Muslims regrouped. They fought hard and defeated the enemy. The Muslims took five thousand prisoners in this battle, but, according to the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) wishes, they were all released. When some people were unwilling to release their prisoners, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) ransomed them.

In the ninth year of the Hijra, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) drew up an army at Tabuk (near the border between the Hijaz and Syria) seeking to battle the Romans, because it had become known that the Roman Emperor had based an army of Romans and Arabs in that area. An encounter known as the Battle of Mu'ta, which had resulted in the death of such Muslim commanders as Ja'far ibn Abu Talib, Zayd ibn Harith, and 'Abdullah ibn Rawaha, had already been fought with the Romans in that region. The Roman army, however, had already left the area. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) remained there for three days to stabilize local affairs, and then returned to Medina.

During the ten years he lived in Medina, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) directed about eighty big and small battles besides the ones mentioned here. He personally participated in about one quarter of them.

In the battles in which he participated, unlike commanders who give orders to attack and kill from a place of safety, he fought side by side with his soldiers at the front, but it never occurred that he ordered anyone's killing.

GHADIR KHUMM AND THE QUESTION OF THE SUCCESSION

The last holdout against complete Islamic control of the Arabian Peninsula was the city of Mecca, the site of God's sanctuary and the Ka'aba. The city fell to the Muslim army in the eighth year of the Hijra, and Ta'if fell shortly thereafter.

In the tenth year of the Hijra, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) set out for Mecca to perform his final, farewell Hajj. After carrying out the rituals of the pilgrimage and imparting necessary teachings to the people, he set out for Medina. On the road, at a locale known as Ghadir Khumm (Ghadir Pond), he ordered the caravan to halt. In the midst of one hundred twenty thousand pilgrims from all over the Arabian Peninsula, he took 'Ali's (upon whom be peace) hand, raised it aloft, and proclaimed him his successor.

With this act, the question of the successor, who was to govern the affairs of the Muslims, guard the *sunna* (the body of customary behaviour based on the Prophet's precedent), and uphold religious customs and laws, was settled for the Islamic society. The intent of the noble verse, '*Messenger! Promulgate what has been revealed to you by your Lord, for if you do not, you will not have conveyed His message*' (5:67), was carried out. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) died shortly after returning to Medina.

THE MOST NOBLE MESSENGER'S STAY IN MEDINA AND THE ADVANCE OF ISLAM

The mission of the Messenger of Islam in Medina was a very high-profile one, felt throughout the city. People of Mecca, Medina, and tribes near and far embraced Islam in droves, so that Islam came to rule the entire Arabian Peninsula in the course of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) ten year stay in Medina.

During these ten years, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was occupied with carrying

out his charge. Not resting for a moment, he transmitted revelations and communicated to the people the sublime teachings of Islam on spiritual values, morals, and laws that he had received from God Most High through these revelations. He counseled the people and answered their questions. He debated opponents and scholars of other nationalities, especially Jews. He conducted national affairs and kept the ship of state afloat.

Despite all this, he devoted much of his time to worship of God and spent many days of the year fasting; that is, he maintained a fast for about three continuous months — the months of Rajab, Sha'ban, and Ramazan, and also fasted one separate month. Sometimes he would carry out a fast of his own known as the Fast of Communion (*Rawzat al-Wisal*), in which he would take nothing for several successive days and nights. He would also spend time managing his household and procuring its needs, and he also at times worked for wages to secure a livelihood.

God Most High says, '*They want to blow Allah's light out with their mouths, but He is perfecting His light, no matter how disbelievers may dislike it. He is the One Who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the True Religion, so He may have it prevail over every other religion no matter how those who associate* [*others with Allah*] *may hate it*' (61:8-9). Plainly, God's promise has been progressively realized from the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) time to the present, when more than one billion Muslims are found all over the globe.

He also says, '*You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind. You enjoin good and forbid evil, and you believe in Allah*' (3:110).

A LOOK AT THE SPIRITUAL CHARACTER OF THE MOST NOBLE MESSENGER

According to definitive historical documents, the Most Noble

Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) grew up in the most debased possible environment, a sinkhole of ignorance, corruption, and moral rot. He spent his childhood and youth in such an environment and without the benefit of a formal education. Although he never worshipped idols or picked up the degraded morals that surrounded him, he did grow up among such people, and his rather ordinary life gave no hint of his eventful future, one that would scarcely be expected for a poor and unschooled orphan.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) lived this way until one night, while he was worshipping with his characteristic calm heart and clear mind, his character was transformed.

His quiet, introverted character was transformed into a celestial character. He realized that the accumulated thoughts and beliefs of thousands of years of human society were superstitions, and that the practices of the world's peoples were a form of cruel oppression. He linked the past and the future and discerned perfectly where human happiness lay. The Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) vision and speech were wholly transformed — thereafter, he saw and heard nothing but reality, and he spoke nothing but divine wisdom and counsel. His outlook took wings and, no longer seeking to reform local, everyday commercial concerns, he aspired to reform the world, to overthrow the millennia-old system of human misdirection and oppression. He launched an uprising to revive the realization of truth, brought about the downfall of world powers, and made light of fearsome opposing forces. He spoke of divine wisdom and deduced all the secrets of being from knowledge of the oneness of the Creator.

He expounded the most sublime ethical values man can attain in the clearest possible manner; he made it clear how they relate to one another. He believed more than anyone in what he said and practised whatever he called upon people to do.

He brought divine laws and ordinances including acts of

worship that express the station of servanthood before the glory of the One God in the most beautiful fashion possible. He brought other laws, covering legal rights and punishments that work together perfectly, being founded on *tauhid* and respect for the high ethical potential of human beings.

The laws that the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) brought, considered in their totality, including rules for worship and commerce, are inclusive enough to cover all the questions of individual and social life that could possibly arise and all the various points that can come up with the passage of time.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) himself regarded the laws of his religion as global and perpetual in scope. That is, he believed that his religion could resolve the this-worldy and otherworldly needs of all human societies forever, and that people would need to adopt this practice to secure their happiness. He himself said many times, 'What I have brought you secures your welfare in this world and the next'.

Of course, he did not say this idly, but he was voicing a conclusion he reached after careful study of the creation and consideration of the future of human life. In other words, after, in the first place, achieving perfect accord between his laws and the spiritual and physical nature of man and, in the second place, giving full consideration to the tranformations that were to take place in the future, including the disasters that would befall Muslim society, he adjudged that his religious ordinances would stand to perpetuity.

Predictions by the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) that have been passed down to us through authoritative sources have spoken clearly of general conditions and events from after his death to much later times.

He did all these things in the space of twenty or thirty years, thirteen of which were spent under the scarcely endurable

tortures meted out by the unbelievers of Mecca, and ten of which were occupied with war and mobilization for battle, external struggles with declared enemies, internal struggles with hypocrites and obstructionists, management of the Muslims' affairs, reform of their beliefs, morals, and behaviour, and a thousand other involvements.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) kept to this course through an indestructible resolution to follow and keep alive the truth. His realistic outlook recognized only the truth and allowed nothing to take place contrary to it, even if it would have advanced his own interests or met with public approbation. What he knew to be true he embraced with his heart and soul and never rejected, and what he knew to be false he rejected and never accepted.

HIS SPIRITUAL CHARACTER WAS EXTRAORDINARY

If we consider these facts fairly, no doubt will remain to us that the appearance of such a figure under such conditions is nothing short of miraculous and could have no other cause than divine intervention. In this regard, God Most High refers many times to the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) orphanhood and impoverishment in his early life. He treats the miraculous character He endowed him with as proof that he was worthy of the mission. He says, for instance, '*Did He not find you an orphan and protect you? And did He not find you wandering and direct you? And did He not find you destitute and enrich you?*' (93:6-8). He also says, '*You did not read any scripture before it, and you did not write it with your right hand, otherwise those who follow falsehoods might have doubted*' (29:48). He further says, '*If you are in doubt concerning what We reveal to our servant, then produce a sura like it*' (2:23).

THE PERSONAL CHARACTER OF THE MOST NOBLE MESSENGER

The sole foundation upon which the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) built his religion as the basis of the world's people's happiness was that of *tauhid.*

According to the principle of *tauhid,* the One Who is the Source of the universe and is deserving of worship is the One God. One can glorify and submit oneself to none other than God Most High.

Accordingly, the practice that should be the norm in society consists in all being brothers and equals, and in people giving unconditional obedience to none other than God. God Most High says, '*Say, "People of the Book! Come to an agreement between us and you that we worship none but Allah, and that we associate nothing with Him, and that none of us take others as lords other than Allah"*' (3:64).

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) had no other object than to promulgate the religion of *tauhid.* He summoned the people to *tauhid* by showing the best moral qualities and frankest manner and by putting forward the soundest logic. His companions used this same method in expounding his principles, as God Most High instructed him: '*Say, "This is my way: I call upon Allah through insight, I and whoever follows me"*' (12:108).

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) treated all as brothers and equals and never made exceptions in carrying out religious rules. He made no distinctions between friend and stranger, strong and weak, rich and poor, man and woman, or black and white; he gave each his or her due on the basis of religious laws, saying, 'If my daughter Fatima, who is more dear to me than anyone, were to steal, I would cut off her hand'.

No one had the right to run anyone else's life. People had the greatest possible freedom in matters outside the purview of the

law. (Of course, freedom vis-a-vis the law is meaningless not only in Islam, but according to any code of civil law.)

God Most High alludes to this system of freedom and social justice where he says of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), '*Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write, whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel* [*which are*] *with them. He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul; and he will relieve them of their burden and the fetters that they used to wear. Then those who believe in him, and honour him, and help him, and follow the light that is sent down with him: they are the successful. Say, "People! I am the Messenger of Allah to you all..."* (7:157-158).

It is on this level that the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) claimed no special distinction in his life and that no one having prior acquaintance with him had any advantage over others. He would attend to household chores; he received visitors personally; he would attend to others' needs. He did not sit on a throne or at the head of an assembly. When it was time to travel, he mounted and rode without special ceremonies. If he received some goods, he gave whatever exceeded his essential needs to the poor; sometimes he gave away things he really needed and went hungry. He always lived like the poor and associated with the poor. He would never show any neglect in adjudicating people's rights, but he would go to the greatest lengths to forgive and forget when it came to his own rights. When, during the conquest of Mecca, the leaders of the Quraysh were brought before him, although they had persecuted him to such an extent and stirred up so many plots against him after the Hijra, he showed them no rudeness but forgave them all.

Friend and foe alike pointed to the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) as a moral exemplar. No one equalled him in good manners, cheerfulness,

tolerance, humility, and sobriety. The Noble Qur'an praises his nobility of character where it says, '*You have been molded with tremendous character*' (68:4). He was the first to offer greetings when meeting anyone, including women, children, and slaves. One of his companions asked permission to prostrate himself before him. He replied, 'What are you saying! This is the practice of emperors, and my status is that of a messenger and a servant'.

From the point that God Most High charged him with propagating religion and guiding the people, he never neglected his duties for a moment, and he carried them out tirelessly. In Mecca, thirteen years before the Hijra, despite the intolerable problems that the Arab *mushriks* caused him, he engaged in worship and propagation of God's religion continually. During the ten year period following the Hijra, facing ever-growing problems with enemies of the religion and obstructions created by Jews, hypocrites, and pretended Muslims, and meanwhile engaging in more than eighty battles with the enemies of Islam, he conveyed the principles of religion and laws of Islam to the people in all their stunning breadth.

In addition to managing the affairs of the Islamic society, which by then covered the whole Arabian Peninsula, he personally looked into people's petty complaints and needs, without the aid of a doorkeeper.

Regarding the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) courage and valor, it is enough to note that he arose summoning people to the truth in the face of the whole world of that time, a world ruled by tyranny and prejudice. All the tortures and torments that the tyrants of that day could mete out failed to deter him or make him falter, and he never retreated in a battle.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) kept himself very clean and regarded cleanliness as a sign of faith; as he would say, 'Cleanliness is the kernel of faith'. Besides keeping clean and wearing clean clothes, he would dress

nicely and meet people with a pleasant demeanor. Whenever he would go out, he would go well-dressed. He was also very fond of perfume.

He did not change his demeanor over the course of his life. He remained modest and humble to the end of his life, and, despite his high status, he never assumed any prerogative that would reflect his value to society.

In his life, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) never spoke abusively of anyone. He never said anything flippant, laughed loudly, or did anything frivolous. He was very fond of contemplation. He listened carefully to every complaint and protest that was brought before him before responding. He never broke into anyone's remarks. He never disallowed anyone's freedom of thought, but he would make people's errors clear to them and so place balm on the inward wounds.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was very kind and tender-hearted and always deeply moved at the sight of pain and grief. Despite this, he never declined to punish wrongdoers and made no distinctions among persons in carrying out God's laws.

A Jew and a Muslim were accused of a theft that occurred at the home of one of the *Ansar*. A large party of *Ansar* went before the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and tried to pressure him into punishing the Jew but allowing the Muslim to go free, because the Jews were enemies and because this would preserve the dignity of the Muslims and of the *Ansar* in particular. Because he saw the truth to be contrary to their representations, however, he openly supported the Jew and sentenced the Muslim.

While he was personally ordering the battle lines at the battle of Badr, he reached a warrior who was standing a little in front of the others. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) used a staff to press against the

stomach of that man to make him stand a little farther back, so that the line would be straight. The warrior said, 'Messenger of God! By God, this hurts my stomach — I must retaliate'. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) handed the man his staff and bared his stomach, saying, 'Have your retaliation'. The man ran forward and kissed the Messenger's stomach, saying, 'I know that I will be killed today; I wanted by this means to touch your holy body'. Later he attacked the enemy and fought with his sword until he was martyred.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) always aided the weak and oppressed. He instructed his companions, 'Bring the needs of the needy and the complaints of the weak before me, without fail'.

It is said that his last words were instructions to the people regarding slaves and women. At that he ceased speaking and his eyes were closed to the world. God's blessings be upon him and his honoured heirs.

THE MOST NOBLE MESSENGER'S LEGACY TO THE MUSLIMS

Like other aspects of being, the human world is fated to change and transformation. Also, the pronounced differences that are seen in the makeup of human individuals bring about different sensibilities that in turn result in people's minds varying in their suppleness of thought and sense and their ability to remember.

Accordingly, in the absence of deep roots and faithful and reliable guardians, the beliefs, customs, and rules governing a society would very quickly change beyond recognition. We can best satisfy ourselves on this point by experience and observation.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) did two things to preserve his global and perpetual religion from this danger: He bequeathed the people an indisputable document and left them in the hands of righteous guardians in the form of God's Book and his noble heirs,

respectively. All the schools of Islamic thought have passed down traditions in which the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) says, 'I am leaving and I leave you two precious trusts: one, God's Book, and the other, my heirs. Never separate the two; as long as you cling to these, you will not lose the way'.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NOBLE QUR'AN

The Noble Qur'an is the fountainhead of verities and spiritual values in Islam, the scripture and documentation of the prophethood of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). The Noble Qur'an is the Word of God Most High, a set of teachings that have descended from the Source of glory and the Station of grandeur to the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), to show humanity the way to happiness.

The Noble Qur'an consists of a set of theoretical and practical topics imparted to humanity; when we put these points into practice, happiness in this world and the next is ours.

The Noble Qur'an was gradually revealed over the twenty-three years of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) mission, in answer to the needs of human society.

The Noble Qur'an is a book that has no other object than to guide people to happiness. Using instructive explanations, it

teaches the right beliefs, sound character, and right actions that are the foundation of human individual and social happiness. '*We reveal a Book to you that explains all things*' (16:89).

The Noble Qur'an presents Islamic teachings in summary form; for detailed explanations of them, especially for explanations of legal questions, it directs people to refer to the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family): '*We have revealed the remembrance to you so that you might explain to the people what has been revealed for them*' (16:44); '*We have revealed the Book to you so that you might clarify the matters over which they differ*' (16:64).

One of the objects of the Noble Qur'an is to speak to people in ordinary language and to appeal to their God-given reason, not to call them to blind imitation. It evokes common experiences that we have by our nature and that we cannot avoid or disclaim.

God Most High says, '*It [the Noble Qur'an] is a decisive statement; it is no joke*' (86:13-14). The Noble Qu'ran is a discourse that discriminates truth and falsity, not an idle ramble. It explains matters in such a profound way that its reasoning appeals to all people and will stand for all time. It does not reflect the ordinary way people talk, which considers the few facets of an idea that any one person's thought comprehends and more or less ignores the rest. Rather, it is God's speech, which comprehends everything manifest and hidden and reflects knowledge of every beneficial and harmful consequence.

Thus it is necessary for every Muslim to see realistically and to realize the living truth of God's word through bearing the verses above constantly in mind, not to rely on what others have said and thought. He or she must not turn away from freedom of thought, which is the only faculty unique to man, and which the Noble Qur'an calls upon and reinforces so much. God's Book is a living authority for all people in all times, and could not be addressed to the understanding of a certain few people.

God Most High says, '*May they not act like those who were given the Book previously; the waiting period seemed too long for them, so their hearts were hardened...*' (57:16).

The Noble Qur'an calls upon people to return to their own nature and to accept the truth, meaning that we must first prepare ourselves to accept the truth unconditionally and embrace what we have seen is the truth and of benefit to us in this world and the next, ignoring Satan's temptations and the suggestions of our own desires.

Then we must expose our minds to Islamic teachings; if we find them to be true and see real advantages in accepting and applying them, we will submit ourselves to them and so our way of life and the prevalent customs of society will depend on the rules that our own instinctual nature and inclinations call for.

Finally, this will be a unified system all of whose parts and contents will be in complete harmony with the particular makeup of human beings and wholly devoid of contradictions and conflicts. It will not be the system of conflicting forces that has sprung up in place of spiritual values, or the material values that may or may not be rational.

In characterizing the Noble Qur'an, God Most High says, '*It guides to the Truth and the straight path*' (46:30), and '*This Qur'an guides to that which is straightest*' (17:9). In another verse, He states that the reason for the power and soundness of Islam is its conformance with the created nature of man. Clearly, a practice that answers the natural desires and real needs of man is the best approach to human happiness: '*Set your purpose for religion as an upright person — the nature [arising from] Allah, by which He created man. There is no altering Allah's creation. This is the right religion, but most people do not know*' (30:30). He further says, '*This is a book that We have revealed to you so that you may draw the people from darkness into light*' (14:1).

The Noble Qur'an summons us to the clear path that clearly

leads to the final destination. This path is necessarily the one that gives the right answers to our innate desires and agrees with the outlook of the sound mind that is called the 'innate religion' (*ad-din al-fitri*) in Islam.

A practice, however, that arises through the influence of society, based on caprice and meant to satisfy individuals' lusts and angers is nothing but a descent into darkness; in truth, it is to follow a road that will never reach a destination. The same may be said for a practice of blind imitation of one's ancestors, or one adopted uncritically by a weak, undeveloped country from more powerful nations, without regard to the differences in their situations. God Most High says, '*Is one who was dead and whom We have brought to life and placed a light by which he walks among people like one whose state is as one of darkness from which he cannot emerge*?' (6:122).

At this point we may appreciate the importance and greatness of this holy book to Islam and Muslims. Fourteen centuries have passed since the Noble Qur'an was revealed, and yet it has held an honoured position in the most varied human societies and attracted people's attention everywhere ever since.

The Noble Qur'an is a divine book, the nucleus of the worldwide and eternal religion of Islam. All of the sublime teachings of Islam are represented there in compelling form; from this standpoint, its value is equal to that of God's religion. Beyond this, the Noble Qur'an is God's speech and a miracle of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) that will live forever.

THE NOBLE QUR'AN IS A MIRACLE

It is established that Arabic is a powerful and versatile language that can express the subjective states of human beings in the clearest and most precise manner possible. No other language approaches Arabic in this respect.

History testifies that the Arabs of the *Jahiliyya* (the time of

ignorance, the pre-Islamic period), most of whom were nomads, knowing nothing of urban life and lacking all the finer things in life, were nonetheless capable of a level of eloquence unrivaled in history.

Eloquent discourse was the supreme value in Arab culture, and great respect was paid to beautiful and cultivated speech. Just as the Arabs placed their idols in the Ka'aba, they attached charming and affecting poems by their foremost orators and poets to its walls. While they employed a language of such breadth and so many special tokens and exact rules without any error, they went overboard in adorning their words.

In the days when the verses of the Noble Qur'an were first being revealed to the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and being read to the people, they created a stir among the Arabs and their orators. The compelling, sweet, and meaningful discourse of the Noble Qur'an so found its way to their hearts and entranced the spiritually aware that the eloquent speeches were forgotten and the fine poems (known as the *Mu'alliqat*, the 'hanging' poems, because of their attachment of the Ka'aba) that had been hung from the Ka'aba were taken down.

God's words were so indescribably beautiful and moving that all hearts were drawn to them; with their sweet form, they sealed the lips of the orators.

On the other hand, these words were most bitter and disagreeable to the *mushriks* and idolaters, because they expounded the religion of *tauhid* and attacked the practice of *shirk* and idolatry with a compelling exposition and unassailable logic. They scorned the idols that people called gods, to which they prayed, and to which they made sacrifices; they called them lifeless, impotent effigies of wood and stone, lacking any special virtue. The savage Arabs, overcome with pride and arrogance, living their lives on the basis of bloodshed and banditry, were called upon to embrace the worship of the Truth and respect for justice

and humanity. Instead, they fought back and sought for ways to extinguish this shining torch of guidance, but their ill-conceived efforts brought them nothing but despair.

In the early days of the prophetic mission, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was brought before a famed Arab orator named Walid. The Messenger recited some verses from the beginning of the *sura* Ha Mim Sajda. For all his pride and conceit, Walid listened attentively until the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) reached the verse, '*If they turn away, then say, "I warn you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt that struck 'Ad and Thamud*"' (41:13). Then Walid's appearance changed, he began shaking uncontrollably and seemed to have lost his senses; the assembly then broke up and the people dispersed.

After that, some people went to Walid and complained, 'You disgraced us in front of Muhammad'. Walid replied, 'No, I swear to God, you know that I fear no one and covet nothing, and you know that I am a literary man and skilled speaker. What I heard Muhammad say was nothing like people's speech. It was so compelling and enchanting, you couldn't call it poetry or prose. It was pithy and profound. If I must judge the matter, I really can't say. Allow me three days to consider'. They came back in three days; then Walid said, 'Muhammad's words are magic and sorcery that put a spell on people'.

Guided by Walid's words, the *mushriks* declared the Noble Qur'an to be magic. They avoided hearing it and forbade the people from listening to it. Sometimes when the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) would recite the Qur'an in the Masjid al-Haram, they would shout and clap so that others would not hear him.

Nonetheless, once people had fallen in love with the eloquence of the Noble Qur'an, they would take advantage of the darkness of night to gather behind the wall of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) house and listen

to its recitation. Then they would murmur to each other, 'This speech cannot be a human creation'. In this connection, God Most High says, '*We are most aware of what they listen for when they listen to you, and when they discuss in secret, the evildoers will say, "You are only following a man who is bewitched*"' (17:47).

When the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) would recite the Noble Qur'an and summon people to the religion before the Ka'aba, the Arab orators, having to pass by him, would bend over to avoid being seen or recognized. God Most High says of this, '*They double up so that they may hide from him*' (11:5).

ACCUSATIONS AGAINST THE MOST NOBLE MESSENGER

Not only did the unbelievers and *mushriks* call the Noble Qur'an magic, they called the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) whole mission magic. Whenever he summoned the people to God's way and imparted spiritual truths or counsel to them, they would say, 'He's working magic', although he was offering insights to whose rightness the human mind with its God-given conscience testifies and showing the right road, the plain practice exactly representing the happiness and prosperity of human society. They had no excuse for refusing to accept it; no one can justly call such a teaching magic.

Is it magic to say, 'Do not worship the piece of wood or stone that you yourself have carved', or 'Do not make sacrifices of your sons and daughters; do not follow superstitious practices?' Can one refer to such virtues as uprightness, benevolence, humanitarianism, peacefulness, purity, justice, and respect for human rights as magic?

God Most High speaks in reference to this point: '*If you say that they will be raised up after death, those who disbelieve say, "This is nothing but obvious magic*"' (11:7).

THE QUR'AN LAYS DOWN A CHALLENGE TO THE *MUSHRIKS*

The unbelievers and *mushirks* being so attached to the superstitious practice of idolatry, were never prepared to accept the summons to Islam and acknowledge the truth. Thus, they called the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) a liar and said that the Noble Qur'an was his own invention.

In order to refute this accusation, the Noble Qur'an challenged the foremost orators to put forward verses equal to the Qur'an's and thus to show that the Islamic summons was groundless. As God Most High says, '*Or do they say, "He has invented it"? No, they will not believe. So let them produce its like if they are truthful*' (52:33-34). He further says, '*Or do they say, "He has invented it"? Say, "Then produce a sura like it and call upon whomever you can besides Allah, if you are truthful*'" (10:38).

The Arab unbelievers and *mushriks*, masters of eloquence that they were, and for all their prideful boasting, shrank from this challenge and so tranformed this literary contest into a bloody struggle. It was easier for them to be killed than to accept defeat and disgrace in the literary arena. The Arab orators failed to contend with the Noble Qur'an, not only those living at the time of the revelations, but also those born in later ages. Failing the test, they had to retreat from the field.

It is human nature that, whenever an artistic masterpiece of great performance appears and attracts popular attention, even if it has no more impact on social life than boxing or tightrope walking, some people will get the idea of equalling or topping it. Thus there have always been people making tireless efforts to outdo this scripture. Failing, as they always do, the orators could not but fall back on the explanation that the Noble Qur'an is magic, since magic can make true appear false and vice-versa, but the moving language of the Noble Qur'an has nothing to do with magic but flows from a natural beauty. Since its words

impart teachings and summon to objectives whose reality and truth we understand through our native and God-given intelligence, since it demands that we revere the truth and act in accordance with benevolence, justice, and humanitarianism, values we cannot reasonably reject, they are nothing but the plain truth. The Arab orators could not sustain the argument that the Noble Qur'an simply stands at the pinnacle of human discourse and is unrivaled in beauty, eloquence, and fascination. This is evidence that it is the word of God.

In other words, in the case of every trait or talent, such as courage, or reading and writing and the like, in the course of human history a genius will appear who leads the field. Why should not the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) with his special style occupy the peak of eloquence in the field of Arabic letters, but his words be those of a human being and so open to rivals? The orators contemporary with the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) did not say this, and the opponents of the Noble Qur'an could not claim or prove such a thing. Whatever trait or talent that has been brought to the peak of its development by some genius is finally something arising from the capacities of human beings, a product of human nature. Thus, it is possible for others to follow the road that genius has opened and, through the necessary struggle and effort, to do something like what that genius has done, or something in the same manner but better in at least some respects. In that case, the original genius who opened the road becomes a mere forerunner. For instance, no one can outdo the legendary Arab Hatim Ta'i in generosity, but one can carry out deeds similar to his. One cannot outdo Mir, the Iranian calligrapher, in calligraphy or Mani (the founder of the Manichaen sect) in painting, but, with enough effort, one can write a word in the style of Mir or paint a little picture in the style of Mani.

According to the same general law, if the Noble Qur'an were the

finest example of human eloquence (not the word of God), the possibility would exist for others (especially the best-known rhetoricians of the world) through practice to imitate this style in order to produce a book, or at least a *sura*, similar to the Noble Qur'an. In offering the challenge, the Noble Qur'an asks people to produce a discourse like its own, not better: '*If you are in doubt concerning what We reveal to our servant, then produce a sura like it, and call your witnesses besides Allah if you are truthful*' (2:23).

In conclusion, it must be noted that the Noble Qur'an is inimitable in respect not only to its eloquence and wonderful style but also to its contents: it offers real answers to all the needs of humanity. It offers authoritative teachings on the unseen, on spiritual truths, and on other matters to humanity at large. For these reasons, no one will ever succeed in producing anything like it.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE HEIRS OF THE MOST NOBLE MESSENGER

The Arabic phrase *ahl al-bayt* (literally, 'people of the house') both formally and commonly refers to a man's household, the society in miniature within his home: his wife and children, as well as servants; in short, all who live within the sphere of the master of the house.

Sometimes the phrase is generalized to apply to close relatives, such as one's father and mother, one's sister, one's nephews and nieces, and one's aunts and uncles and their children.

But neither of these common meanings is intended when the traditional sources refer to the *ahl al-bayt* of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). According to the accounts that have reached us through unbroken chains of transmission, both Sunni and Shi'i, *ahl al-bayt* is a blessed name that applies only to the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), 'Ali,

Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn (upon whom be peace). Accordingly, the remainder of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) household and relations are not members of his *ahl al-bayt* in this sense, although they would be in common usage. Even Khadija, the most honoured of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) wives and Fatima's (upon whom be peace) mother, and Ibrahim, the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) natural son and greatest glory, do not belong to his *ahl al-bayt*.

According to these accounts and others, the nine of twelve Imams who descend from Imam Husayn (upon whom be peace) also belong to his *ahl al-bayt*. Accordingly, the *ahl al-bayt* are these fourteen, also known as the Fourteen Most Pure. When one speaks of the *ahl al-bayt* of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), one normally means these thirteen persons who survived or descended from him and are related to him.

These persons, whom I will refer to as the *Heirs* of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), are recognized in Islam as having many special virtues and stations no one else may hold. Two stations are the most important of these: 1. In accordance with the noble verse, '*Allah wills to remove impurity from you, People of the House, and to purify you thoroughly*' (33:33), they hold the station of purity, and accordingly, no sin can arise from them. 2. In accordance with the noble Prophetic *hadith* known as 'Thaqalayn' referred to earlier, these Heirs are always at one with the Noble Qur'an and never depart from God's Book. Accordingly, they are never in error about the meaning of the Noble Qur'an and the Plain Religion.

These two stations imply that the words and deeds of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) Heirs are as authoritative as his own. This is the belief of Shi'a Muslims.

THE DOCUMENTED VIRTUES OF 'ALI AND THE OTHER HEIRS

Many Prophetic *ahadith* have been transmitted on 'Ali's virtues and those of the other Heirs. I will mention three stories that have reached us.

1. In the sixth year of the Hijra, the Christians of the town of Najran sent a delegation of leaders and learned men to Medina. The members first engaged in disputation and wrangling with the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), but they were defeated, and God revealed the verse known as the Verse of Imprecation (*mubahila*): '*Whoever disputes with you concerning him [Jesus], after the knowledge that has come to you, say, "Come! We will summon our children and your children, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, then we will pray humbly and invoke Allah's curse upon those who lie*"' (3:61). The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) proposed the imprecation to the delegation from Najran in just the form the verse commanded, that their women and children be brought, and that they invoke the curse of God's torment upon the liars.

The delegation from Najran accepted the imprecation, and it was arranged for the following day. Then a large crowd of Muslims and also the people from Najran stood waiting for the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) to come out, waiting to see with what ceremonies he would emerge and also whom he would bring to the imprecation. He emerged with his arm over Husayn's shoulder, holding Hasan's hand, and followed by Fatima, who was followed in turn by 'Ali (upon whom be peace). The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) instructed his holy company, 'When I pray, say, "Amen!"'.

The Najran delegation was shaken at the sight of this shining company, who projected truth and reality from head to foot and who had taken no refuge save God Most High. The head of the delegation told his companions, 'I swear to God, I see faces that,

should they turn to the Divine Presence, all the Christians on earth would perish'. Thus they approached the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and asked to be excused from the imprecation. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) said, 'Then embrace Islam!' They replied, 'We have no capacity to fight the Muslims; we shall pay taxes annually and live in the sphere of Islam'. Thus the dispute came to an end.

That 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn (upon whom be peace) accompanied the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) on this occasion shows that 'our children, our women, and ourselves' in the verse refers to these persons alone. To clarify, when the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) said, 'ourselves', he meant himself and 'Ali (upon whom be peace); when he said, 'our women', he meant Fatima (upon whom be peace); and when he said, 'our children', he meant Hasan and Husayn (upon whom be peace).

It grows perfectly clear here that 'Ali (upon whom be peace) stood on a level with the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) himself, and also that the Heirs of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) were four, since anyone's *ahl al-bayt* consists of those who would customarily be referred to as 'ourselves and our wives and children'. If any other people other than these four were members of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) *ahl al-bayt*, he would have brought them to participate in the imprecation.

At this point, too, we must accept that these four are infallible, because God Most High has testified to the infallibility of the Heirs of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family): '*Allah wills to remove impurity from you, People of the House, and purify you thoroughly*' (33:33).

2. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) is reported to have said, 'My *ahl al-bayt* is like

Noah's ark; whoever boards it is saved, and whoever refuses to is drowned'.

3. It is reported through unbroken chains of transmission that the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) said, 'I leave you two precious things that will never be separated: God's Book and my descendants and *ahl al-bayt*; so long as you cling to these, you will not be lost'.

THE IMAMATE

A governmental organization that is set up in a country to manage the people's public affairs does not function automatically; so long as there are no capable individuals working to manage it, it will not be viable, and people will not reap the benefits of good government.

The same rule applies to any other organization that arises in human society, such as various economic and cultural organizations. They can never dispense with competent and honest managers; lacking them, they will quickly decline. This is a plain, easily perceived truth to which abundant experience testifies.

Plainly, this rule applies to the organization of Islam, which may be called the most far-flung organization in the world. It needs managers to survive, and there must always be worthy individuals to communicate its culture and laws to the people and to enforce its ordinances to the letter in the Islamic society, not allowing any slackening in their observance and preservation.

The position of leadership in religious and civil matters in the Islamic society is known as the *imamate*, and its holder is known as the *Imam*. It is the belief of Shi'i Muslims that God Most High must have designated an Imam for the people after the death of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) to uphold the culture and laws of the religion and to guide people on the way of truth.

Anyone who studies Islamic ideas in a scholarly way and

considers the matter fairly will see that the imamate is one of the essential principles of Islam. Verses in which God Most High has described the organization of His religion make this point clear.

PROOF OF THE IMAMATE

As was made clear in the chapter, 'The Messenger Muhammad', the care and attention that the Sustainer of the universe lavishes on His creation implies that He guides every creature to a predetermined goal (which is to attain the state of perfection). For instance, a fruit tree is guided to grow, blossom, and bring forth fruit; its life follows a different course than that of a bird, which follows its own special course of development and pursues its own special goal. Thus, each creature is guided along a course uniquely its own to a destination uniquely its own. Clearly, man, too, is one of God's creatures and is guided by the same law.

It is likewise clear that, since human beings find happiness in their lives through exercise of free choice, the special guidance appropriate to man must be supplied through the summons, indoctrination, and religious teachings that are sent by means of prophets, if man is not to plead that God Most High has failed to guide him. Note the noble verse, '*Messengers bearing good news and warning, so that the people might have no case against Allah after the messengers. Allah is ever powerful, wise*' (4:165). It points out that, for the same reason that a prophet must be sent and a summons made to religion, there must be someone as infallible as that prophet to uphold the religion and guide the people after he dies. God Most High must appoint someone bearing similar perfections (apart from revelation and prophecy) in the prophet's place to preserve the culture and laws of the religion intact and guide the people. Otherwise, the program of general guidance would collapse, and people would have an airtight case against God.

ONE CANNOT BE FREE OF NEED FOR THE IMAM

Just as, due to the errors and failings to which it is prone, reason cannot obviate people's need for God's prophets, neither can the presence of religious scholars and their efforts to promulgate the faith amid the community of believers relieve the people's need for the Imam. As we have seen, people indisputably either observe religion or do not, but the point is that God's religion must reach the people without being altered, degraded, or lost.

Certainly, however pious the religious scholars of the community are, they are not infallible or above sin and error. It is, if generally unlikely, not impossible that they might (however unwittingly) distort some of the culture or laws of the religion. The best testament to this assertion consists of the various schools of thought and divergences in view that have come about within Islam.

Accordingly, it is in all events necessary that an Imam exist to preserve the real culture and laws of God's religion, so that, whenever people find the aptitude, they can turn to this figure for guidance.

WHAT THE MOST NOBLE MESSENGER SAID ABOUT THE GUARDIANSHIP

In characterizing the honoured Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings upon him and his family), God Most High says, '*There has come to you a prophet from among yourselves; he takes seriously how you have come to grief, is anxious about you, compassionate, merciful towards believers*' (9:128). It is unbelievable that the honoured Messenger, who, according to the Noble Qur'an, held nothing dearer than his community of believers, would overlook and remain silent on a divine precept that had such a central importance for the Islamic society for the whole of his life.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) knew better than anyone that the vast and highly

organized institution of Islam was not something he was to lead for a decade or two, but that it was to be all-embracing and perpetual and must be managed as long as human life goes on. Thus, he contemplated events thousands of years after his own time and issued the necessary instructions concerning them. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) knew that a religion is a social organization, and that no social organization can maintain itself for an hour without proper leadership. Accordingly, a leader is necessary who will preserve the culture and laws of the religion, who will keep the wheels of society turning and guide people to happiness in this world and the next. How can it be supposed that he should have taken no interest in the day after the day he would die?

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was in the habit of appointing someone to manage the people's affairs in his place whenever he was about to leave Medina for battle or Hajj. Similarly, he would appoint governors for towns that had fallen into Muslim hands and commanders for armed parties heading for battle. At times, he would say, 'Your commander is so-and-so, and if he is killed, so-and-so, and if he is killed, so-and-so'. Given such a method, how can it be believed that, when he journeyed to the afterlife, he named no one to succeed him?

In sum, one who looks deeply into the sublime goals of Islam and of the magnificent figure who brought it to us will, beyond a doubt, affirm that the issues of the imamate and the guardianship (*wilaya*) have been fully resolved and clarified.

THE MESSENGER NAMES HIS SUCCESSOR

In regard to the question of the guardianship and governance of the Muslims' affairs after his time, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) did not content himself with general discussions. Rather, he directly addressed the question from the first day of his mission, right along with such questions as the nature of *tauhid* and prophecy. What he

did was to proclaim 'Ali (upon whom be peace) the guardian of religious and civil matters and his successor in all Muslim affairs.

According to widely accepted accounts, on the very day that the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was first charged with public summons to the faith, he called together his relations, and assembled them; there he disclosed, confirmed, and established the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali's (upon whom be peace) position of minister, guardian, and successor. Additionally, during the last days of his life, at Ghadir Khumm, in the midst of one hundred and twenty thousand people, he seized the hand of 'Ali (upon whom be peace) and raised it aloft, saying, 'For whomever I am leader, 'Ali is leader'.

Apart from all this, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has referred to the Imams who were to succeed him by number, name, and other qualities.

In a well-known account narrated by both Shi'i and Sunni sources, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) says, 'The Imams are twelve in number and all belong to the Quraysh'. Then he lists their names one after the other. In another account, he tells Jabir ibn 'Abdullah Ansari, 'You will live to see the fifth Imam; convey my greetings to him'.

Furthermore, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) specifically appointed the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (upon whom be peace) as his successor. 'Ali (upon whom be peace) in turn named his own successor, as did each subsequent Imam.

THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE IMAM

These accounts make it clear that, like the Messenger, the Imam must be free of sin and error. Otherwise, the religious summons would be defective, and divine guidance would lose its effect.

THE IMAM'S MORAL VIRTUES

The Imam must possess such moral virtues as courage and valour, chastity, magnanimity, and justice, because one who is infallible must act according to all religious laws, and the religion requires good moral qualities. The Imam must excel all other people in moral excellence, because it would be meaningless for one to lead his moral equal or superior, and certainly that would be inconsistent with divine justice.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE IMAM

Since the Imam is in charge of the religion and the leader of the world's people, it is necessary that he know about everything that bears on human needs and human happiness in this world and the next. That a leader in the sense should be ignorant is contrary to reason and meaningless in respect to general divine guidance.

THE FOURTEEN INFALLIBLE PERSONS

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), Fatima (upon whom be peace), and the twelve Imams (upon whom be peace) are called the fourteen infallible persons, and, among them, the first five — the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn (upon whom be peace) — are known as the people of the cloak, because the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) once drew a cloak over his head and gathered the four others under it. There he prayed, and God Most High revealed the Verse of Purification concerning them: '*Allah wills to remove impurity from you, People of the House, and purify you thoroughly*' (33:33).

THE IMAMS OF GUIDANCE, UPON WHOM BE PEACE

The Imams of guidance, who succeed the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) as leaders of the people in religious and civic affairs, are twelve in number:

1. The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (upon whom be peace)

2. Imam Hasan Mujtaba (upon whom be peace)

3. Imam Husayn, Lord of the Martyrs (upon whom be peace)

4. Imam Sajjad (upon whom be peace)

5. Imam Muhammad Baqir (upon whom be peace)

6. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (upon whom be peace)

7. Imam Musa Kazim (upon whom be peace)

8. Imam Riza (upon whom be peace)

9. Imam Muhammad Taqi (upon whom be peace)

10. Imam 'Ali an-Naqi (upon whom be peace)

11. Imam Hasan 'Askari (upon whom be peace)

12. The Imam Mahdi or Imam of the Age, Muhammad ibn Hasan (upon whom be peace)

THE CONDUCT OF THE HEIRS

The Heirs (upon whom be peace) are perfect exemplars of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) teachings; their conduct is precisely his conduct.

Of course, over the period of two hundred and fifty years from 11 A.H. (the year of the Most Noble Messenger's [peace and blessings upon him and his family] death) to 260 A.H. (the year of the occultation of the Imam Mahdi), during which the Imams associated with the people, the social environment underwent significant changes, as did the outward manner of life of the Imams. They did not, however, abandon the essential object of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) method, which consisted in preserving the principles of the religion with their implementations from alteration, and in doing everything possible to educate the people.

The twenty-three years of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace

and blessings upon him and his family) mission fell into three distinct phases. The first three years were a time of secret promulgation; the next ten years were a period of open promulgation, in which, however, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and his followers were subjected to intense persecution and likewise lacked the freedom of action to effect clear reforms in society; and the last ten years (after the Hijra) found the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) in an environment where he could most fully realize his goals of putting the truth into practice, dramatically advancing the cause of Islam, and imparting fresh realizations to the people by the day.

Plainly, these three different environments each had their own exigencies and displayed the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) conduct in varying ways.

The various environments with which the Imams were faced all had something in common with that of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) mission before the Hijra. Sometimes they resembled the first three years of the prophetic mission, in which no sort of demonstration of the truth was possible. Then the Imams had to carry out their task with the greatest caution. This is true of the time of the fourth Imam and the end of the period of the sixth Imam. Sometimes they most resembled the ten years prior to the Hijra, when the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) openly promulgated the faith in Mecca, but he and his followers were severely persecuted under a regime to which they could not mount an effective challenge. Then the Imam openly taught religious concepts and promulgated rules, but he was unable to avoid persecution, and new difficulties were created every day.

If there was a time somewhat resembling the period after the Hijra, it was that of the caliphate of the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (upon whom be peace), and a portion of the lifetimes of Fatima, Imam Hasan, and Imam Husayn (upon

whom be peace) — the last of these in particular was all too brief, a time mirroring the days of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), when the truth showed forth unveiled.

In sum, it may be said that, except as I have indicated, the Imams never had the power of open, radical opposition to the tyrannical rulers and governors of their time. Accordingly, they were obliged to adopt the policy known as *taqiyya* — dissimulation, concealment of their true aims by their speech and actions — in order to avoid giving the governments of their time a pretext for further repressive actions. Even so, their enemies on all sides sought for any possible pretext to extinguish the light of guidance and eliminate all trace of the Imams.

HOW THE IMAMS WERE DIFFERENT FROM THE GOVERNMENTS OF THEIR TIME

The various governments that arose in Islamic society after the time of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and called themselves Islamic were all fundamentally at odds with the Heirs (upon whom be peace), and their implacable enmity to the truth is a strand of history that never ended.

To the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), one of the most important virtues of the Heirs was their special understanding of the teachings of the Noble Qur'an and of what is permitted and what is forbidden. This should have been enough to earn them the highest respect and veneration of the Muslim community. But that community has not uniformly extended the respect that their station demands.

Recall that, on the first day that he announced his mission, when he first called upon his relations to embrace Islam, the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) named 'Ali (upon whom be peace) as his successor, as he clearly did toward the end of his life at Ghadir Khumm and on other occasions. After his death, however, people chose others

to succeed him; the Heirs (upon whom be peace) were deprived of what was rightfully theirs, and in consequence the rulers of the day saw them as dangerous rivals. They were terrified of them and so tried to assassinate them whenever opportunities arose.

The most profound source of difference between the Heirs and these govenments lay in the fact that the Heirs considered an Islamic State to be obliged to preserve and carry out the divine laws of Islam, whereas, as we can see from their actions, these governments did not consider it necessary to observe these laws fully or to model their conduct on that of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family).

In several places in the Noble Qur'an, God Most High forbade the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and his followers to alter God's laws and warned them against the least inclination contrary to any of them. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), too, adopted a mode of conduct fully conforming to these unalterable laws, making no distinctions as to time, place, and person in carrying them out.

To observe these laws and enforce them no matter who was involved was incumbent upon everyone, including the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). The *Shari'ah*, as these laws are collectively known, was in force and effect everywhere.

Because of this prevailing justice and equality, all distinctions among people had been effaced. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), who was ruler and to whom God commanded obedience, assumed no distinctions in his personal or social life and enjoyed no luxuries. He established no official ceremonies and did not parade his greatness before the people. He did not try to create an atmosphere of glory and awe around himself and was not recognizable by any special emblems from those around him.

None of the various social classes sought to elevate itself above the others through special distinctions. Man and woman, noble and humble, rich and poor, powerful and weak, city dweller and villager, slave and free, black and white all stood on the same footing. Everyone was charged with performing their religious obligations; everyone was free of having to submit to the powerful and to tyrants.

If we consider the matter a little, it grows clear to us (especially concerning all the experience from the time of the Most Noble Messenger [peace and blessings upon him and his family] to the present) that the sole object of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) in his pure conduct was that the divine laws of Islam be carried out among the people in a fair and equitable way, as well as be preserved from alteration and corruption. The governments that followed, however, did not conform to the conduct of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) but totally altered his methods. This had the following consequences:

1. Almost overnight, extreme class distinctions returned to the Islamic society, which became divided into two groups: the powerful and the weak. The very lives of the one group and all they possessed became playthings for the other group.

2. The Muslim governments gradually altered Islamic laws and refused to carry out these laws and rules, sometimes in the name of the welfare of Islamic society and sometimes in that of security and State policy. They went further in this course by the day, and matters reached a point at which the organizations that bore the name of Islamic government felt themselves under no compunction to observe and carry out Islamic laws. The fate of laws is plain when there is no proper authority to enforce them.

In brief, the fact that the Muslim governments contemporary with the Heirs (upon whom be peace) tampered with Islamic laws and rules to suit their own short-term interests and the results of this tampering set these governments' conduct completely at odds with that of the Most Noble Messenger

(peace and blessings upon him and his family). By contrast, the Heirs (upon whom be peace) recognized that the order of the Noble Qur'an to conform to the conduct of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) is binding for all time.

This basic contradiction led directly to these governments' relentless attacks on the Heirs (upon whom be peace) and willingness to use any means available to attempt to silence them.

The Heirs (upon whom be peace), too, in accordance with their divine duty, went on working to promulgate the real religion and educate pious people in spite of all the difficulties they faced and the schemes of intransigent enemies.

In order to see the truth of this, it is sufficient to take a look at the historical record and see how large the Shi'i population was during the five years of the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali's caliphate. Of course, this large population had built up over his twenty-five years of seclusion. Similarly, the Shi'is who visited Imam Baqir (upon whom be peace) in huge numbers had been quietly educated by Imam Sajjad (upon whom be peace), and the hundreds of thousands of Shi'is and adherents to the Heirs who were associated with Imam Riza (May God be well pleased with him) were reaping the fruits of spiritual teachings that Imam Musa ibn Ja'far had sown in a dark prison cell.

Finally, through the continued educational efforts of the Heirs, the Shi'is grew from a handful of people at the time of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) death to a tremendous number at the end of the Imams' era.

WHAT WAS EXCEPTIONAL ABOUT THE METHOD OF THE HEIRS

As I have noted, the Heirs of the Prophet passed their lifetimes under oppressive conditions and discharged their responsibilities

under conditions of *taqiyya* in extremely difficult circumstances. Only four of them were able to operate freely, without *taqiyya*, and that for a very short time. Here I will briefly survey the lives of the Heirs (upon whom be peace).

'ALI

The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (upon whom be peace) was the first perfect exemplar of the teachings of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family).

'Ali (upon whom be peace) was raised by the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) from early childhood and followed him like a shadow until the very end of the latter's life. He was like a moth before the prophetic flame; the final moment when he was separated from the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) was when he embraced his corpse and laid it to rest.

'Ali has a universal character, and one may venture to say that more has been said about this great figure than about any other figure in history. Scholars and writers — both Shi'i and Sunni, both Muslim and non-Muslim — have written more than a thousand books about his character.

Notwithstanding the vast amount of research that friend and foe have carried out about this figure, no one has succeeded in finding an Achilles heel to his faith or in faulting his courage, chastity, spiritual culture, sense of justice, or other virtues, because he was one to whom everything but virtue and perfection was foreign.

As history testifies, among all those who held power since the death of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), 'Ali (upon whom be peace) is the only one who acted in accordance with the conduct of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) over the entire period he held power in Islamic society without deviating from it in the least and who carried out Islamic laws

just as they were carried out in the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) time without any tampering.

After the death of the second caliph, and according to his instructions, a six-member committee was formed to appoint a new caliph. After prolonged discussion, the choice had been narrowed to 'Ali (upon whom be peace) and 'Uthman. The caliphate was offered to 'Ali, on condition that he 'observe the conduct of the first and second caliphs among the people'. He declined, saying, 'I will not advance a step beyond what I know to be true'. Then the position was offered to 'Uthman with the same condition, and he accepted it. After he assumed the office, however, he adopted an altogether different course.

'Ali (upon whom be peace) was unrivaled among the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) companions in heroism, self-sacrifice, and self-effacement in service of the Truth. It is undeniable that, if this self-sacrificing hero of Islam had not lived, the *mushriks* could readily have snuffed out the light of prophecy on any number of occasions: on the night of the Hijra, or at the Battles of Badr, Uhud, the Trench, Khaybar.

From the first day he emerged into society, 'Ali (upon whom be peace) lived very simply. During and after the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) life and even during the time he was caliph, 'Ali (upon whom be peace) lived, dressed, and ate like the poorest of the poor. He said, 'One holding power in a society should live in a way that consoles the needy and those in distress, not in a way that makes them envious and breaks their hearts'. The day he was martyred, although he ruled the entire Islamic domain, he had only 700 dirhams, with which he was going to employ a household servant.

'Ali (upon whom be peace) worked for a living, doing farm work by preference. He also planted trees and dug canals. Whatever he acquired by these means, as well as his abundant

booty from battles, he distributed to the poor. He set aside any land he developed as a trust, or he sold it and gave the proceeds to the needy. One year while he was caliph, he ordered that the income from his trust properties be shown to him and then spent. When it was amassed, it amounted to 4,000 gold dinars.

In all the battles in which 'Ali (upon whom be peace) participated, he never faced a rival without overpowering him. Never did he show his back to an enemy. He said, 'If the whole Arab nation were to oppose me and do battle with me, I would not back down. I have no fear'.

Notwithstanding the fact that no one in history approaches 'Ali in bravery, there was no limit to his kindness, sensitivity, and generosity of spirit. He never killed women, children, or those helpless in battle. He never made captives; he never pursued those who fled. During the Battle of Siffin, Mu'awiya's army took the offensive and occupied the bank of the Euphrates.[1] They cut off 'Ali's army's approach to this vital source of water. When later, through bloody battle, 'Ali's army gained control of the river bank, he ordered that the enemy have access to the water.

While he was caliph, 'Ali admitted everyone without any doorman or other intermediary. He went about on foot, visiting the markets and lanes, enjoining people to be pious and to observe each other's rights. He came to the aid of the indigent and widows kindly and humbly. He sheltered homeless orphans in his own home and personally provided for their needs and educated them.

'Ali (upon whom be peace) poured much energy into promulgating knowledge, which he prized greatly. As he said, 'There is no ailment like ignorance'. During the bloody Battle of the Camel, he was arraying his forces when an Arab approached and asked, 'What is the meaning of *tauhid*?' People expostulated on all sides, 'What kind of time is this for such a question?' 'Ali (upon whom be peace) held them back from the Arab, saying,

'We do battle for the very purpose of establishing such truths'. Then he took the Arab in tow and explained the concept to him in compelling terms while continuing to marshal his troops.

Another story comes to us from the Battle of Siffin that likewise shows 'Ali's (upon whom be peace) extraordinary religious discipline and divine power. While the two armies had surged against each other like two foaming seas and blood was spilling everywhere, he reached one of his soldiers and asked for some water to drink. The soldier brought forth a wooden cup, filled it with water, and proffered it. 'Ali (upon whom be peace), seeing a crack in the cup, said, 'To drink water from such a cup is disapproved in Islam'. The soldier responded, 'In such a situation, standing under a rain of enemy arrows and swords, we have no leisure for such fine points'. The answer he received, in short, was: 'We battle so that just such religious ordinances will be enforced. There is no such thing as major and minor ordinances'.

'Ali (upon whom be peace) was the first person after the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) to approach spiritual realities in the manner of philosophical reflection, that is, by free exercise of reason. He used many technical terms and laid out and organized the rules of Arabic grammar in order to protect the Noble Qur'an from copyists' errors.

The exact scholarship, spiritual culture, and consideration of ethical, social, political, and even mathematical problems shown in 'Ali's (upon whom be peace) discourses, letters, and other documents that have reached us are astonishing.

The wealth of these documents makes 'Ali (upon whom be peace) the best known individual among Muslims to have a full realization of the sublime goals of the Noble Qur'an and the critical and practical concepts of Islam as they should be realized. They testify to the soundness of the Prophetic saying, 'I am the city of knowledge, and 'Ali is its gate'. Furthermore, he combined this knowledge with action.

In short, 'Ali's outstanding character is beyond description, and his virtues are innumerable. Never in history has someone's character drawn the attention of the world's scholars and thinkers to such an extent.

FATIMA, THE MAGNIFICENT, THE MOST TRUE

Fatima was the beloved daughter of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). She gained her father's deepest affection through her profound knowledge, faith, piety, virtues, and fine qualities.

Because of her knowledge, asceticism, and worship, her father gave her the title of the 'Foremost among Women' (*Sayyidat an-Nisa*). The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) said, 'Fatima's pleasure is my pleasure, and my pleasure is God's pleasure. Fatima's anger is my anger, and my anger is God's anger'.

Fatima was born of Khadija in the sixth year of prophetic mission. She married the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali in the second year of the Hijra and died three months and some days after the death of her father.

In her life, she always placed God's pleasure above her own. She brought up her children and apportioned the household chores between herself and her servant, assigning them one day to herself and the next to the servant. She addressed problems affecting Muslim women and spent her free time in worship. She retained only what was absolutely necessary of her private means, particularly the bountiful income from Fadak (a village near Khaybar), spending the rest in God's way, and sometimes giving her day's provisions to the poor and leaving herself hungry. The extended discourse she gave to the Companions and other Muslims at the Prophet's Mosque, her remonstrations to the first caliph when he had ordered her Fadak properties confiscated, and her other recorded discourses and remarks bespeak a great courageous and constant spirit.

Fatima was the beloved daughter of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), the wife of the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (upon whom be peace), and the mother to eleven Imams of Islam. All the descendants of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) are her descendants. She is accorded the station of infallibility according to the text of the Noble Qur'an.

IMAM HASAN AND IMAM HUSAYN

These two illustrious figures are brothers, sons of 'Ali and Fatima (upon whom be peace). The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) loved them to excess and called them his sons, not bearing to see them uncomfortable or unhappy. He said, 'These two sons of mine are Imams standing up or sitting'. The phrase 'standing up or sitting' is an allusion to Husayn's open claim to the caliphate and uprising and war with the enemies of the faith, and Hasan's abstention from these. He also said, 'Hasan and Husayn are the two leaders of the youths of Paradise'.

In accordance with the testament of his grandfather, Imam Hasan was chosen for the caliphate. The people swore their allegiance, and for six months he had charge of the affairs of the Islamic lands, except for Syria and Egypt, where Mu'awiya held sway. He modeled his conduct on that of his father.

During that period, Imam Hasan raised an army to quell Mu'awiya's revolt, but it finally grew clear to him that the people had been taken in by Mu'awiya and that the heads of his army were in correspondence with Mu'awiya and awaiting Mu'awiya's orders to kill or arrest him. Thus he was compelled to propose a truce.

Imam Hasan made such a truce with Mu'awiya, who failed to abide by its conditions. After the pact was concluded, Mu'awiya came to Iraq. He mounted the pulpit before assembled Muslims and proclaimed, 'I did not fight with you for the sake of the religion, so that you would pray or fast. I wanted to rule you,

and now I have obtained my object'. Then he said, 'The pact I concluded with Hasan is now under my feet'.

After the conclusion of the truce, Imam Hasan (upon whom be peace) lived about nine and one-half years under Mu'awiya's domination, in bleak circumstances and under bitterly oppressive conditions. He enjoyed no personal safety, even within his own home; finally his own wife Ju'da poisoned him at Mu'awiya's instigation.

After Imam Hasan's martyrdom, his brother Imam Husayn (upon whom be peace) succeeded him as guide to the people by God's command and in accordance with his last will. But conditions did not change; Mu'awiya was calling the shots and managed to cut off all of Imam Husayn's opportunities.

After about three and one-half years, Mu'awiya died, and the caliphate, which had degenerated into a sultanate, passed to his son Yazid. Yazid, by contrast with his hypocritical father, was drunk with conceit and openly indulged in revelry, indecent acts, and rowdiness. As soon as this vain youth assumed control of Muslim affairs, he ordered his governor in Medina to extract an oath of allegiance from Imam Husayn or else to send back his head. When the governor demanded the oath, Imam Husayn stalled for time. He set out for Mecca with his party by night and sought refuge in God's Sanctuary, which is a recognized place of refuge in Islam. After staying there for some months, he realized that Yazid would not relent, and, unless he gave the oath, he would surely be killed. Then too, thousands of letters had arrived from Iraq over these months pledging support and urging him to rise against the Umayyad oppressors.

Imam Husayn understood from his own experience and from indications and the prevailing social climate that an uprising on his part would not succeed. Nonetheless, he resolved to refuse the oath and to fight to the death. He set out with his party for Kufa in a state of revolt. En route, on the plain of Karbala (about seventy kilometers from Kufa), he encountered a large enemy force.

Imam Husayn had called upon no one to join him in his fateful journey and had expressed to members of his party his firm resolve to meet martyrdom, giving them the choice to part company with him. In consequence, on the day he faced the enemy army, he was accompanied by an insignificant number who were committed and resigned to their fate. Thus the enemy army tightly encircled them without difficulty and cut off even their water. There they were caught between the oath of allegiance and death.

Imam Husayn did not submit to the oath but prepared for death. One day, he and his party fought the enemy from the morning until the afternoon; in that battle he, his sons, his nephews, his cousin, and his other companions were martyred, numbering about seventy in all. Only his dear son Imam Sajjad, who was too ill to fight, remained alive.

After martyring Imam Husayn (upon whom be peace), the enemy force plundered his goods and placed his family in captivity, sending them on from Karbala to Kufa and from Kufa to Damascus along with the severed heads of the martyrs.

During this period of captivity, Imam Sajjad (upon whom be peace) and Zaynab, Imam Husayn's sister, made a series of speeches that laid bare the truth about the Umayyad tyranny for all the world to see. Imam Sajjad (upon whom be peace) gave a notable sermon in Damascus, and Zaynab made a series of public speeches in Kufa including speeches at the Kufan governor Ibn Ziyad's assemblies and a speech in the presence of Yazid in Damascus.

In any event, Imam Husayn's uprising against the unbridled tyranny and injustice of the Umayyads, which, as we have seen, resulted in his and his relations' and friends' martyrdom, the plunder of his worldly goods, and captivity for his wife and child, was a memorable occurrence, the like of which cannot be found in the pages of history. One may venture to say that Islam owes its survival to this event; if it had not happened, the Umayyads would have eradicated all trace of Islam.

WERE THE METHODS OF IMAM HASAN AND IMAM HUSAYN DIFFERENT?

Although the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has named both of these outstanding figures as rightful Imams, their methods appear to be different. Some have gone so far as to say that the two brothers had such contrasting outlooks that one made peace when he had forty thousand fighting men at his disposal, while the other fought to the death, losing his infant son and companions, when he had only forty (apart from his family) in his company.

A careful scrutiny, however, proves the contrary of this view. We see that, whereas Imam Hasan (upon whom be peace) lived through about nine and one-half years of Mu'awiya's reign without openly opposing him, Imam Husayn (upon whom be peace) too spent about the same amount of time under Mu'awiya's rule after his brother was martyred without rising up in rebellion or open opposition.

Accordingly, one must seek for the real source of this apparent difference in the different policies of Mu'awiya and Yazid, not in any different outlooks of the two great Imams.

Mu'awiya's policy was not founded on immoderation; he did not openly jeer at religious law. Mu'awiya presented himself as one of the companions and a scribe of the revelation. Because his sister was one of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) wives, known as the Mother of the Faithful, he called himself the Uncle of the Faithful. He had been carefully groomed by the second caliph, who enjoyed the full trust and highest esteem of the people.

Additionally, Mu'awiya generally appointed companions of the Prophet, who enjoyed the respect and veneration of the people (such as Abu Hurayra, 'Amr ibn 'As, Samra, Yusr, and Mughira ibn Shu'ba), to governmental and other sensitive positions in the nation and thus gained public confidence. Numerous stories were circulated among the people about the virtues of these

companions, their privileged religious state, their being forgiven whatever they did, and so forth. Thus, whatever Mu'awiya did, if it could be rationalized and justified, these cohorts would undertake to rationalize and justify it, and if not, they would attempt to silence the protests, first with substantial bribes, and, failing that, by murder: tens of thousands of innocent followers of 'Ali (upon whom be peace), other Muslims, and even companions of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) were killed.

In everything he did, Mu'awiya maintained a facade of religiosity. He also maintained an attitude of patient forbearance and gained the people's affection and compliance through his mildness of manner. He would even answer verbal abuse and contentiousness with good cheer and generosity; this was the backdrop for his policies.

He extended outward signs of respect to Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn and sent them expensive gifts, but he likewise publicly proclaimed that whoever transmitted a Prophetic saying praising the Heirs (upon whom be peace) would stand to forfeit his life and property, whereas whoever transmitted such a saying praising the companions of the Prophet would gain a reward.

He ordered preachers in Muslim pulpits to curse 'Ali (upon whom be peace) and ordered his supporters to be killed wherever they were found. The order was carried out with such zeal that many of 'Ali's enemies were killed on accusation of being among his sympathizers.

The foregoing makes it clear that for Imam Hasan (upn whom be peace) to lead an uprising could only be to the detriment of Islam; it could have no other result than the senseless spilling of his blood and that of his supporters. It is even conceivable that Mu'awiya would have employed people associated with him to kill him and then put on a show of bereavement to appease public sentiment. Then he could conduct a massacre of Shi'is in supposed reprisal and revenge for the Imam's death, such as he had before in the case of 'Uthman.

Yazid's political style, however, bore no resemblance to that of his father. He was a self-satisfied abandoned youth who knew no logic but force and gave no thought to public opinion.

In the first year of his reign, he massacred the descendants of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family).

In the second year, he sacked Medina and left his soldiers free to kill and plunder for three days.

In the third year, he destroyed the Ka'aba.

Thus Husayn's uprising won an ever-deepening and more openly expressed public sympathy, which at first took the form of bloody revolts and gradually led to a vast number of Muslims acting on their native love of the truth and emerging as adherents to the Heirs.

This was why Mu'awiya had enjoined Yazid not to act against Husayn (upon whom be peace). But do you suppose that Yazid's intoxication and egomania would allow him to see where his own self-interest lay?

IMAM SAJJAD

Imam Sajjad (upon whom be peace) followed two different methods at different periods of his Imamate, both of which correspond to methods generally pursued by other Imams.

Imam Sajjad (upon whom be peace) participated in Imam Husayn's uprising and accompanied his father to Karbala, being a witness to the tragic event. After his father's martyrdom, he was made captive and taken from Karbala to Kufa and from Kufa to Damascus. Throughout his captivity, he never resorted to *taqiyya* but always spoke out and made the truth known. His speeches and protests on necessary occasions made manifest the worthiness and glory of the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings upon him and his family) Heirs, the cruel injustice suffered by his father, and the enormities perpetrated by the Umayyad regime. They opened the floodgates of popular

sentiment.

After he was released from captivity and returned to Medina, however, moving from a dangerous environment to a peaceful one, he secluded himself, closed his door to strangers, and occupied himself with worship and with quietly educating persons who followed the true way. Over the thirty-five years of his residence there, he directly or indirectly educated a large number of people and imbued them with Islamic culture.

All the invocations that Imam Sajjad delivered from the pulpit in his celestial style have been collected into a work called *Safihe-ye Sajjadiya*. They include all the sublime teachings of Islam.

IMAM MUHAMMAD BAQIR

It was possible to an extent to promulgate the religious sciences during the Imamate of Imam Baqir. Because of the exertions of the Umayyads, Prophetic sayings about the Heirs had been generally lost. Although thousands of sayings would be needed as the basis of law, barely five hundred of those transmitted by the companions had survived.

To make a long story short, as a final outcome of the events at Karbala, and because of Imam Sajjad's thirty-five years of exertions, there was a host of Shi'is in society, who were in desperate need of guidance in matters of Islamic jurisprudence.

And since, because of internal dissension and the general softness and inadequacy of its leadership, the Umayyad dynasty was crumbling, the fifth Imam was able to make use of the time to promulgate the sciences imparted to the Heirs and Islamic jurisprudence. He trained many fine scholars in the traditions of his school of thought.

IMAM JA'FAR SADIQ

In the era of the sixth Imam (upon whom be peace), the times were even more propitious for the dissemination of the Islamic sciences. For one thing, in consequence of Imam Muhammad

Baqir's promulgation of authentic Prophetic sayings, and because of the outreach efforts by his students, the people better understood their need for authentic Islamic culture and were hungry to hear these sayings.

For another thing, the Umayyad dynasty had fallen, and the 'Abbasid dynasty had not yet fully established itself. Also, the 'Abbasid clan was still displaying friendship toward the Heirs, since they had ridden the wave of anti-Umayyad sentiment to power, invoking the cruelties borne by the Heirs and the blood of the martyrs of Karbala.

Imam Ja'far (upon whom be peace) undertook to promulgate various sciences, and scholars swarmed to his door from all over to pose questions about various facets of Islamic culture, ethics, and the lives of the Prophets and the Imams, and to hear his answers, to gain the benefit of his wisdom and counsel.

Imam Ja'far (upon whom be peace) held discussions with people in all walks of life and debated representatives of various sects. He fostered students in the various sciences and published hundreds of books containing Prophetic sayings and scholarly studies that are collectively known as the *Usul*.

Making use of the brief respite available to him in that suffocating time, he trained thousands of students and disclosed priceless treasure-hoards of Islamic sciences and culture. More than forty thousand scholars availed themselves of this abundant source of learning.

Imam Ja'far instructed his students to write down his teachings and commit his own writings to memory. He said, 'A time of disorder will come and many works will be lost. Then you will need these books and writings; they will be the only source to which Muslims can refer for questions of science and religion'. Accordingly, his students brought pen and ink and wrote down whatever they heard in his assemblies.

Imam Ja'far spent every hour of his life (except when resting) teaching in public or private and making his boundless wealth

of knowledge available to everyone.

In sum, the wonderful discourses and invaluable guidance lifted the curtain of ignorance and re-established the true religion of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). For this reason, he is regarded as the founder of the Shi'i path, which since his time has been known as the Ja'fari school of thought.

IMAM MUSA KAZIM

After overthrowing the Umayyad government and seizing the caliphate, the 'Abbasids homed in on the descendants of Fatima and threw all their might into eradicating the progeny of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family). They beheaded them, they buried them alive, they buried them in the foundations of buildings. They burned down the sixth Imam's house, and they summoned him to Iraq for interrogation a number of times. Accordingly, toward the end of the sixth Imam's life, the necessity for *taqiyya* grew more stringent, and, since he was under close surveillance, he admitted only a few elect Shi'as. Finally, he was martyred — poisoned — by order of the second 'Abbasid caliph, Mansur. Thus the tenure of the seventh Imam, Imam Musa Kazim (upon whom be peace) began under the most intense and mounting pressure from his enemies.

Despite the most stringent need for caution and *taqiyya*, he engaged in promulgating the religious sciences and made many Prophetic sayings available to the Shi'as, to the extent that he left more teachings on jurisprudence than any other Imam, with the exceptions of the fifth and sixth Imams. Because of the stringent conditions, most of the accounts he transmitted were attributed to such fictitious figures as 'the Scholar' and 'Abd as-Salih', not explicitly to Imam Musa.

Imam Musa (upon whom be peace) was contemporary with the four 'Abbasid caliphs Mansur, Hadi, Mahdi, and Harun. They kept him under continual pressure. Finally, Harun ordered him

imprisoned. For years, he was tranferred from prison to prison, and he was in prison when he was finally poisoned and martyred.

IMAM RIZA

Anyone who gives informed and fair consideration to the history of those times will perceive that, however much the Heirs (upon whom be peace) were tortured and oppressed by the caliphs of their time and by other enemies, the numbers and conviction of their followers grew in proportion. To these people, the caliphate was nothing but a vile and tainted institution.

These caliphs half-consciously accepted this perception and were actually incapacitated by it. After Ma'mun, the seventh 'Abbasid caliph and a contemporary of Imam Riza (upon whom be peace) murdered his brother Amin and assumed office, he conceived a scheme for ridding himself of this psychological torment and for putting a stop to the spread of Shi'ism at one stroke, without using force.

To implement this object, he proposed to appoint Imam Riza (upon whom be peace) his successor, so that the Imam would be tainted in the eyes of the Shi'a by the decadent institution of the caliphate. Thus belief in the greatness and purity of the Imams would be expunged from their minds. The special character of the Imamate, the basis of the Shi'i school of thought, would cease to exist, and so the sect would disintegrate all by itself.

Such a policy would have another beneficial consequence, that of putting a stop to the continual uprisings of Fatima's descendants aimed at overthrowing the 'Abbasid caliphate. After seeing the transfer of the office to their own line, they would naturally refrain from further bloody uprisings. Of course, after implementing this policy, Ma'mun would find it easy to dispose of Imam Riza (upon whom be peace).

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Ma'mun offered the Imam first the caliphate directly and then the succession. After encouragement, urging, and finally threats,

Imam Riza (upon whom be peace) agreed on condition that he be excused from dismissals, appointments, and other involvements in matters of State.

Making the most of this circumstance, the Imam extended guidance to the people, imparting priceless elucidations of Islamic culture and spiritual truths (in which Ma'mun evinced a strong interest), which have survived in numbers roughly equal to those reaching us from the Commander of the Faithful (upon whom be peace) and in greater numbers than those of any other Imam.

One of the special graces of the eighth Imam lay in the fact that Shi'as brought many sayings attributed to the Heirs to him, and he identified and rejected numerous fabricated accounts that had been introduced by ill-intentioned people.

An official journey the Imam made as the designated successor from Medina to Marv excited an amazing outpouring of popular support all along the way, especially in Iran. People thronged around him night and day, sometimes having travelled great distances, to learn religious law and culture.

The Imam's unprecedented popularity indicated to Ma'mun that he had made a serious miscalculation. In order to mend the breach in his policies, he martyred the Imam by having him poisoned and so returned to the long-time policies of the caliphs toward the Heirs and their adherents, the Shi'as.

IMAM MUHAMMAD TAQI, IMAM 'ALI AN-NAQI, AND IMAM HASAN 'ASKARI

These three great Imams all lived under much the same conditions. After the martyrdom of Imam Riza (upon whom be peace), Ma'mun summoned the Imam's only son, Muhammad Taqi, to Baghdad. He treated him kindly, giving him his daughter in marriage, and kept him there with full honors.

Although this behaviour appears friendly, Ma'mun was pursuing his same policy by keeping the Imam under close surveillance in

every respect. Likewise, the residence of Imam 'Ali an-Naqi and Imam Hasan 'Askari in Samarra, then the 'Abbasid capital, was in fact designed as a detention.

The total time these three great figures held the Imamate was fifty-seven years. During their time, the number of Shi'i Muslims in Iran, Iraq, and Syria reached the hundreds of thousands and included thousands of trained collectors of traditions. Nonetheless, very few sayings are attributed to these three Imams. They did not live very long lives, either — the ninth Imam was martyred at the age of twenty-five; the tenth, at age forty; and the eleventh, in his twenty-seventh year. This fact shows the crippling level of control the opposition was subjected to in those times. These Imams were not free to carry out their function. Nevertheless priceless sayings on the principles of religion have reached us from them.

THE IMAM OF THE AGE AND PROMISED MAHDI

In the time of Imam Hasan 'Askari, the caliphate adopted a resolution to get rid of his successor by any means possible and so to put an end to the Imamate and, in consequence, the Shi'i sect. Imam 'Askari was put under an even stricter watch for this reason.

Accordingly, the birth of the Imam of the Age (upon whom be peace) was concealed, and he was kept hidden until he was six (so long as his father was alive). No one ever saw him except for a few select Shi'as.

After his father was martyred, by God's command he went into occultation, during a period known as the 'Lesser Occultation' (*al-ghaybat as-sughra*). During this period, four special deputies in succession would answer the questions of the Shi'as and resolve their problems. After that, the Imam went into the 'Greater Occultation' (*al-ghaybat al-kubra*), until a day when, by God's command, he will reappear to fill the world with justice as it is now filled with oppression.

Numerous traditions of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and the Imams (upon whom be peace) have reached us by way of both Sunni and Shi'i traditionists on the personal characteristics of the Mahdi and the nature of his occultation. Also, numerous prominent Shi'as had the opportunity to meet with the Imam Mahdi, witness his beauty, and hear from his father the good news of his Imamhood.

Apart from this, in considering the topics of prophecy and the Imamate, we reached the conclusion that humanity can never lack for God's religion or for an Imam to safeguard it.

WHAT ETHICAL CONCLUSIONS MAY WE DRAW?

What we may conclude from such a brief survey of the history of God's prophets and religious leaders is that they were realistic men who would make any sacrifice to realize the truth, and who called upon all people to do likewise.

In other words, they strove to bring human individuals and societies to their just fruition. They sought to free people from the grip of ignorance and superstition and to grace them with correct ideas and beliefs. They wanted to see a humanity that was stained by the temperament of beasts, like predators that rend each other to fill their stomachs, elevated to the true nature of humanity and realizing it in their everyday lives to earn their true happiness.

These leaders, in other words, did not pursue their own individual happiness but devoted their lives to opening the road to happiness for human society. That is, they found their own happiness (which is everyone's real object) in working for the good of all, and they sought to help others to attain this same level, so that each would want for everyone what he wanted for himself, and not want for others what he did not want for himself.

It was through their relentless quest for reality and pursuit of the

truth that these great figures realized how crucial it is for humankind to carry out the great mandate of universal compassion and all the lesser mandates that spring from it. They were especially endowed with the quality of self-sacrifice and unsparingly sacrificed their wealth and persons for the sake of the truth. They struck at the roots of every vice that springs from malevolence. They abstained from miserliness, shunned self-satisfaction, refused to lie, slandered no one, and made designs on no one's wealth or position. I treat these qualities and their consequences in the chapter on 'Ethics' below.

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Mu'awiya: the first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty (661-680 A.D.). For more on his and his successor's reigns, see pp.129-135. — Trans.

CHAPTER SIX

THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection is one of the three central principles of the holy religion of Islam, in which belief is incumbent. Everyone without exception knows the difference between the beneficent and the maleficent through his God-given conscience. Everyone knows that to do good is well and necessary (if not everyone carries this out) and that to do evil is undesirable and avoidance-worthy (if not everyone actually avoids it). There is no doubt that the good and evil of beneficence and maleficence are in the nature of consequences of these two qualities. There is likewise no doubt that the day never comes in this world when the beneficent and maleficent experience full consequences of their good and evil deeds. We see with our own eyes how many beneficent people spend their lives in utterly miserable circumstances, and how many evildoers, absolute criminals and scoundrels, have prosperous and successful lives built on their vile and shameful conduct.

Accordingly, if man had no future existence in any world other than this one, in which his good and evil acts would be reckoned and he would receive an appropriate requital, the idea that good deeds should be carried out and that bad deeds should be avoided would never have occurred to him.

One must not suppose that the requital for a good deed consists in the deed's contributing to the development of social structures through which people attain happiness so that the doer finally reaps some of the benefits of the deed. One likewise must not suppose that the requital for a misdeed consists in the evildoer's finally being caught up in the social decline to which his act contributed. The powerless may think this way, but when persons have reached the pinnacle of power, they are beyond the reach of the vicissitudes of society. Rather, the more corrupt and disordered is the society, and the worse the lot of the common people, the more these elements prosper. This fact does not prove, however, that these elements have no innate recognition of right and wrong.

One further must not suppose that their requital will consist in seeing their names blackened and their memory cursed. This will only happen after they die and all trace of them is gone, especially of the pleasurable times they enjoyed.

Setting aside these suppositions, there would seem to be no reason left for us to recognize good as good and worth acquiring, and bad as bad and avoidance-worthy. To believe in such a thing would be merely superstitious if there were no such thing as the resurrection. Therefore, we must understand how this pure and unshakable belief that is part of our created nature shows us that God Most High will raise everyone up from the dead and survey their deeds, giving an eternal bounty to the beneficent and giving the evildoers what they deserve. This occasion is called the Day of Resurrection.

VARIOUS RELIGIONS AND SECTS AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION

All the religions and sects that call upon people to worship God Most High and that enjoin good and forbid evil hold to the doctrine of a resurrection and an afterlife for man after death. This is because they can entertain no doubts that a beneficent act will have value only when it leads to a reward, and, since no such reward is witnessed in this life, there must be an afterlife in another world after death.

Apart from that, evidence has been found in very ancient burial sites that ancient peoples believed in a life after death and, in accordance with this belief, carried out rituals to secure the comfort of the dead in the other world.

THE RESURRECTION ACCORDING TO THE QUR'AN

The Noble Qur'an reminds us of the Resurrection in the course of hundreds of verses, seeking to dispel any doubt about it. It cites the Resurrection in many cases to aid visualization and lend immediacy and conviction to explanations of the absoluteness of divine power. It says, for instance, '*Has man not seen how We created him from a drop of semen? Yet he is an open adversary. He makes up something to be compared with Us and forgets how he was created. He even says, "Who will revive* [*our*] *bones once they have rotted away?" Say, "The One Who raised them up in the first place will revive them, and He is Aware of all creation*"' (36:77-79).

Sometimes the Noble Qur'an points out God's power through the image of the world's return to life in spring after the death of winter; for instance, it says, '*Among His signs: that you see the earth desolate, but when We send water down upon it, it stirs and sprouts. The One Who revives it is the reviver of the dead; He is capable of anything*' (41:39). Sometimes it seeks to awaken man's God-given nature through logical reasoning to lead it to confess the truth of this concept, as where it says, '*We did not create*

heaven and earth and all that is between them in vain. That is the supposition of those who disbelieve. Those who disbelieve should beware of the fire! Shall We treat those who believe and do good works like those who spread corruption on the earth? Shall We treat the pious like the wicked?' (38:27-28). Heaven and earth were not created in vain, for if people came into being only to wander the earth a few days and then die, to be replaced by others who would live the same way, the creation would indeed be a vain plaything, but nothing proceeds from God, the Wise, in vain. The pious cannot be treated like the wicked, because neither realizes the full fruits of their actions in this world. If there were no other world, in which each group realizes the appropriate fruits of their action, the two groups would have the same standing before God, and this is contrary to divine justice.

FROM DEATH TO RESURRECTION

According to Islam, man is a creature composed of body and soul, or body and spirit. Man's body is itself a material composite and subject to material laws — that is, it has mass and weight, its existence is limited in time and place, it is affected by heat and cold and the like, and it gradually ages and wears out. Finally, as God Most High ordains, one day it decomposes and disappears.

The human soul, on the other hand, is not material and has none of these material properties. Instead, it has such spiritual properties as knowledge, feeling, thought, and will, or kindness, malevolence, happiness, pain, hope, and fear. There is no common measure between these properties and the material ones, but the heart, the brain, and the rest of the organs of the body obey the soul and its properties in their innumerable activities. No one organ of the body can be identified as the command center.

God Most High says, '*We created man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a drop in a secure place. Then We turned the drop into a clot, then We turned the clot into tissue, and then We turned the tissue into bones and clothed the bones with flesh.*

Then We reproduced him as a fresh creation' (23:12-14).

THE MEANING OF DEATH

According to Islam, death does not mean that we cease to exist. It means, rather, that the human soul, which is imperishable, severs its tie to the body, and, in consequence, that the body perishes and the disembodied soul continues its life without it.

God Most High says, '*They say, "When we have sunk deep in the earth, shall we take part in some fresh creation?" Indeed they disbelieve in the meeting with their Lord. Say, "The Angel of Death who has been given charge of you will gather you in. Then you will be returned to your Lord*"' (23:10-11). The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'You will not cease to exist, but rather you will be transferred from one dwelling to another'.

THE BARZAKH (*AL-'ALAM AL-BARZAKH*)

Islam holds that we live in a special mode after death. If one has done good deeds, one enjoys riches and happiness, and if one has done evil, one will suffer torment. At the time of the Resurrection, all will be gathered for reckoning. Where we live from death to the Day of Resurrection is called the *barzakh*.

God Most High says, '*Behind them is a barrier (barzakh) until the day they are raised*' (23:100). He also says, '*Do not think of those who are killed in the way of Allah as dead. No, they are living. They will be provided for by their Lord*' (3:169).

CHAPTER SEVEN

MORALS

All the countless resources that we have available today and strive day and night to acquire and use were not originally at man's disposal. They gradually became available for use through human effort.

In any event, from the time of the first human beings to the present, people have ceaselessly used their God-given nature to strive for better means of life. One who does not employ his vital powers or his external or internal organs — his eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet, or his brains, heart, lungs and liver — will be nothing but a corpse.

Thus man works and acts in various ways not just because he is compelled to do so but because he is human, and because he perceives through his innate intelligence that he must struggle to realize his wishes and to secure his happiness by any means

available. Also, people feel that they must carry out a set of appointed tasks whatever their manner of life or environment — religious or secular, under the rule of law or under tyranny, urban or rural. By fulfilling these tasks, they realize the true aims of humanity and create a satisfying life for themselves.

Of course, the value of these tasks, which constitute the sole means to happiness, is the value of humanity itself, which is the most precious commodity conceivable, and which we would exchange for nothing else. Thus to know and to carry out one's duty is the most important practical problem that we face in our lives, because its importance is the importance of man. One who shirks his clear duty or sometimes falls short of performing it confesses his baseness and worthlessness. With his every breach of faith, he strikes a fresh blow against his society and, in truth, himself.

God Most High says, '*Man is at a loss, except those who believe, perform honorable deeds, encourage Truth, and recommend patience*' (103:2-3). He also says, '*Corruption appears on land and sea because of what people's hands have done*' (30:41).

DIFFERENT VIEWS OF DUTY

We have a clear responsibility to discern what our duty is and to carry it out. We shall never find anyone who, speaking from his innate human nature, denies this fact. Since duty is so closely related to human happiness, and since religion propounds a different view of human life than do secular systems, duty under religion will necessarily be different from duty under other systems.

Religion holds that human life is a boundless, endless life not terminating at death. What this endless life realizes after death is the product of the pure and right beliefs, good moral qualities, and pious acts that one has enacted in this world while alive. Accordingly, religion takes into view eternal life in the next world when assigning duties to individuals and societies in this. Religion sets forth its rules in the light of the knowledge and

worship of God and service to Him whose invaluable effects will be revealed after death and at the Resurrection.

Secular systems (of whatever sort) consider only the ephemeral life of this world and set out duties for man that aid him in pursuing the material life and benefits that he shares with the other animals. In truth, they arrange an animal life for man that springs from the feelings of grazing animals and their predators. They pay no attention to man's realism and his eternal life, so filled with spiritual values. Thus sublime human moral values are gradually lost to secular societies (as experience shows conclusively), whose moral decline becomes more evident by the day.

Some say that the basis of religion is imitation and the acceptance of a series of duties and rules without question, but that secular systems are able to adapt to the exigencies of the time.

Those who have made this point have failed to note that any laws and rules in a society must be carried out without question. One never observes individuals in a country carrying out its existing laws in a spirit of debate and scientific discussion. No one is excused from observing a law because he finds it unsound. There is no difference between religious and secular codes in this respect.

One can discern the broad logic of the laws of a nation and deduce some (not all) of their particulars by studying its natural and social conditions and researching its general approach to life. This holds for a religion as well; through study of the creation and the natural needs of man, one can discern the broad lines of religious law (the system based on nature) and many of its particulars. The Noble Qur'an and many traditions call us to reasoned reflection and make reference to the sound policy many rules represent. Many traditions have reached us from the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and the Heirs (upon whom be peace) on the reasoning behind these rules.

KNOWING ONE'S DUTY

As I pointed out at the beginning of this work, the holy religion of Islam constitutes a universal and eternal program for human life in both worlds revealed to the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) by God Most High. It is to be carried out in human society and to navigate the ship of humanity out of the whirlpool of ignorance and misfortune.

Considering that religion is a program for living, it must necessarily set forth a task for man in this regard that it expects him to carry out. Overall, our life has to do with three things: 1. God Most High, Whose creatures we are, to Whose grace we owe more than to anything else, and toward Whose holy presence we must above all know our duties. 2. Ourselves. 3. Our fellow human beings, with whom we must live and cooperate. Accordingly, by this rule, we have three overall sets of duties: toward God, toward ourselves, and toward others.

MAN'S DUTIES TOWARD GOD

Our duties toward God Most High are our most important duties. We must strive to perform them with a pure heart and will. Our first duty is to recognize our Creator. Since the being of God Most High is the source for the being of every creature, every phenomenon, to know Him enlightens any being capable of insight. Disregard of this intuitive realization is the source for every sort of ignorance, blindness, and indifference to duty. One who remains heedless toward knowledge of the truth and who thus extinguishes his inner vision has no way to attain real happiness.

As we see, people who turn away from knowledge of God and attach no importance to this truth in their lives are wholly lost to human spiritual values and know no other logic than that of grazing animals and predators. God Most High says, '*So shun anyone who avoids mentioning Us and who only wants the worldly life; that will be their range of knowledge*' (53:29).

It must of course be recalled that knowledge of God is a

necessity for man as a realistic and instinctively rational being. Wherever in the creation he looks with his God-given mind, he witnesses signs of God's existence, knowledge, and power. Accordingly, man does not create his knowledge of God, but rather he pays attention to this plain and unconcealable truth and answers his own conscience — which is summoning him to God at every moment — affirmatively, expelling all doubt from his heart by holding fast to this knowledge.

WORSHIP OF GOD

Our first duty is to know God, and our second is to worship Him. As we come to recognize the Truth, it grows clear that our happiness, our sole object, lies in carrying out the program that Merciful God has set out for our lives and promulgated through His prophets. Therefore, service to God and obedience to His command is the one duty before which all other duties shrink to insignificance.

God Most High says, '*Your Lord has decreed that you worship [and obey] none but Him*' (17:23). He also says, '*Did I not charge you, progeny of Adam, not to worship Satan — for he is your open enemy — but that you worship Me? This is the straight road*' (36:60-61). Accordingly, it is our duty to recognize our status of servanthood and need, to consciously recollect the boundless greatness of God Most High, and to obey His commands, knowing that He comprehends our beings in every respect. We must not worship anything other than God Most High, and we must not extend obedience to anyone but the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) and the Imams of Guidance (upon whom be peace), to whom God Most High has commanded obedience.

God Most High says, '*Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger and those among you who hold command*' (4:59). Of course, in obeying God and those who hold command in religion, the Imams, one must hold everything related to God in total reverence. One must recall the holy name of God and the names of those in command of religion with the proper courtesies. One

must strive to do honour to God's Book (the Noble Qur'an), the Holy Ka'aba, mosques, and the shrines of the Imams. As God Most High says, '*Whoever glorifies Allah's ceremonies should do so from heartfelt heedfulness*' (22:32).

MAN'S DUTIES TOWARD HIMSELF

Whatever method man adopts in his life, whatever road he follows, he seeks, in truth, only his own happiness. Since knowing what constitutes happiness for a thing derives from knowing the thing itself (until we know ourselves, for instance, we shall not know our real needs, which we must satisfy to attain happiness), man's essential task is to know himself, so that he can see what constitutes his happiness. He can thus use the means he has available to relieve his needs and avoid throwing his precious life, his only asset, away.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, 'Whoever knows himself knows his God'. The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali has said, 'Whoever knows himself has attained the highest level of spiritual knowledge'. After man attains self-knowledge, he realizes that his greatest task is to honour his essential humanity. He must not crush this radiant essence; he must strive to maintain his outer and inner health, so that he may attain to an eternal life of enjoyment. The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali has said, 'If one honours oneself, sensual temptations will appear mean and trivial'. Our being is composed of two things: body and soul. It is our duty to strive to keep both sound and resilient. The holy faith of Islam has issued precise instructions sufficient to enable us to keep body and soul healthy.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

The holy faith of Islam has adequately covered the issue of physical health through a series of rules such as prohibitions against eating blood, carrion, the flesh of certain animals, or poisonous foods, prohibitions against drinking alcoholic beverages or impure water, prohibitions against gluttony and

self-inflicted injury, and other prohibitions too numerous to name here.

Cleanliness is one of the most important aspects of health. The pure faith of Islam has accordingly given great attention to this principle, greater attention than any other religion has given to it. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, 'Cleanliness is part of faith,' and cleanliness could receive no greater commendation.

Numerous injunctions to bathe have reached us from great religious figures. Imam Musa Kazim (upon whom be peace) has said, 'Bathing every other day makes one beefy and strong'. The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali has said, 'What a fine edifice the bathhouse is, that removes man's impurities'.

Beyond offering general injunctions to cleanliness, Islam commends specific acts of hygiene, such as trimming the nails, shaving superfluous head and body hair, washing one's hands before and after eating, combing the hair, rinsing the mouth and cleansing the nostrils, sweeping out one's house, and cleaning up walks, doorways, areas under trees, and so forth. Additionally, Islam has decreed that acts of worship must always be accompanied by cleanliness; for example, the body and clothing must be cleansed of filth. Several times each day, one must prepare for ritual prayer by performing the cleansing known as *wuzu*. The ritual bathing known as *ghusl* may be required for prayers and fasting. Since water must reach the skin without being blocked by oil or dirt on these occasions, the necessity for the body to be clean is clearly implied.

The blessed *sura* Muddaththir was one of the first to be revealed to the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) at the beginning of his mission. In its fourth verse, God Most High commands that clothing be kept clean, '*Purify your clothing*' (74:4). It is incumbent that one's clothes be clean in the special legal sense at time of prayer, but it is commendable to keep oneself clean and free of filth whatever one is doing; each of the infallible Imams (upon whom be peace)

have enjoined this on various occasions. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, 'Whoever puts on clothes should keep them clean'. The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali has said, 'To clean one's clothes dispels grief and sorrow and also renders one's prayers acceptable'. Imam Sadiq and Imam Kazim (upon whom be peace) are related to have said, 'To have ten or twenty shirts into which to change is not excessive'.

In addition to keeping their persons and clothing clean, Muslims must dress well and maintain a good appearance in public. Hazrat Ali has said, 'Wear costly clothing and adorn yourself, because God is beautiful and loves beauty, but [your clothing] must be lawfully acquired'. He then cited this verse, '*Say, Who has forbidden Allah's adornments that He has provided for His servants, and the wholesome things that He provides?*' (7:32).

Our mouths, in consuming food, become contaminated with food particles, with cling to the bases of the teeth, the surface of the tongue, and other parts of the mouth. Fermentation, decay, and other chemical reactions involving these particles can produce evil odors and even poisons that can be assimilated along with one's food. Besides, an afflicted person's breath can foul the air and vex other people in a gathering. Accordingly, the revealed law of Islam calls upon Muslims to brush their teeth and rinse out their mouths with clean water at least daily, and recommends this particularly before *wuzu*.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, 'If I did not fear the hardship it would cause, I would make it obligatory for all Muslims to brush their teeth'. He said on another occasion, 'The angel Gabriel always commended brushing one's teeth; I even supposed it would eventually be made obligatory'.

People must breathe, and the air generally found around human habitations is not free of dust and pollutants. Of course, to breathe such air can harm the respiratory system. To avoid such harm, Merciful God has caused hairs to grow within the human

nose to prevent dust from reaching the lungs. Nonetheless, dust sometimes accumulates in the nose and prevents its hairs from fully performing their function. The holy law of Islam has accordingly commended Muslims to rinse their nostrils several times before performing *wuzu*. By drawing clean water into the nose, one preserves the health of his respiratory system.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Man perceives the worth of good qualities and their importance for the individual and for society through his God-given conscience. Accordingly, no one is found in human society who does not praise moral virtues and venerate one who possesses them.

The importance man gives to moral virtues needs no explaining, and Islam's extensive moral commandments are plain to anyone. God Most High says, '*A soul and He who tempered it, and filled it with its [sense of] iniquity and its [sense of] duty — whoever purifies it will prosper, while whoever stunts it will fail*' (91:7-10).

Imam Sadiq (upon whom be peace) has said in explication of this verse, 'God has shown man what is good and must be done and what is evil and must be foregone'.

LEARNING

To possess knowledge is a spiritual virtue, and the superiority of the wise over the ignorant is as plain as day.

Man is distinguished from the other animals by his power of reason and wealth of knowledge. Other animals have each their own fixed repertoire of instincts, by which they meet their needs in a stereotyped fashion. They can never hope to progress, and they cannot blaze new paths for themselves or others. Only man adds daily to his stock of knowledge and enriches his material and spiritual life through discovery of natural and supernatural laws, studying past ages and laying the foundation for his own and others' futures.

Islam does more to encourage people to acquire knowledge than

any other ancient or modern social system, than any other religion or legal code. In order to found a radically new culture, Islam has made it incumbent for every Muslim man and woman to acquire knowledge. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) and the Imams (upon whom be peace) have left us numerous injunctions in this regard. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, 'To acquire knowledge is incumbent upon every Muslim'. These accounts speak of knowledge (*'ilm*) in the most inclusive possible sense, including all the branches of knowledge. To acquire knowledge is incumbent on everyone, without regard to gender or nature.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has also said, 'Strive to acquire knowledge from the cradle to the grave'. Each religious obligation is associated with a time. All of them call for maturity; that is, one is required to observe them only upon reaching maturity. Some religious obligations lapse with old age and infirmity. To acquire knowledge, however, is incumbent on us from the day we are born to the day we die, through all the so-called stages of our lives. According to this principle, a Muslim must pursue learning throughout his life and add to his or her stock of knowledge every day of it. The above-quoted tradition has extended the time for this obligation and rendered it universal.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has further said, 'Seek knowledge, though it be in China', and 'Knowledge is the most precious of things, which the believer has lost. He will pursue it even if he must seek it in China'. In accordance with this command, each Muslim is charged with acquiring knowledge, even if he or she must travel great distances. In the end, one must be prepared to pay any price to recover what one has lost.

Another saying of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) maintains, 'Wisdom is the cherished goal of the believers; he will acquire it wherever he

finds it'. The only condition to acquiring knowledge is that it be useful to society.

Islam strongly encourages study of the secrets of creation and contemplation of heaven and earth, human nature, history, and the relics of past peoples (philosophy, mathematical and natural sciences, and other areas), as well as study of moral and legal questions (as they appear in Islamic moral and legal philosophy) and development of technologies that contribute to human welfare. The following account illustrates how highly the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) valued knowledge. When some unbelievers fell captive to the Muslims during the battle of Badr, he ordered heavy ransoms be demanded to free them, except that some prisoners who knew how to read and write were exempted, on condition that each of them teach the art to ten young Muslims. This was the first adult education program known to history, a great honour to Muslims. It is noteworthy that the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) commanded something that has not been witnessed in history before or since: that knowledge be accepted in place of booty, not along with it. No one in the world has seen a victorious commander accept instruction for the young in place of ransom and booty.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) visited these classes personally. He called together those who knew how to read and write and ordered that the youths be tested to see what progress they had made. Whatever youths showed the most progress through these tests were given the greatest encouragement. One historian records that a woman named ash-Shifa', who had learned to read and write in pre-Islamic times, used to come to the Most Noble Messenger's (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) house and teach reading and writing to his wives. He praised and encouraged her for her efforts.

THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDENTS

The significance attached to reaching any goal and the associated effort are in proportion to the goal itself. Since, as anyone knows by his God-given nature, nothing is more important in human life than knowledge, it follows that no one is more valuable than a student. Islam, as a religion founded on our true nature, maintains such value for students. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, 'One who pursues studies is beloved of God'.

Although *jihad*, struggle for the sake of faith, is one of the pillars of faith, and although the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) or the Imam has given orders to wage war, in which Muslims at large must participate, those who are studying the religious sciences are excused from this duty. There must always be a sufficient number of Muslims acquiring knowledge at places of learning. God Most High says, '*The believers should not all go out to fight. Of every troop of them, a party should go to study religion, so that they may admonish their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware*' (9:122).

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHERS

The teacher is the shining light of learning who dispels the shadows of ignorance and illiteracy from the world. It is the teacher who leads the inwardly blind and ignorant to see and know, and who guides them to the Holy Land and Paradise of happiness. Thus Islam holds that teachers must be respected and obeyed as the holiest and most respected people in society. To demonstrate their deservedly high status, it is sufficient to cite the sage remark of Imam 'Ali: 'Whoever has taught me a word has made me his slave'. He has also said, 'There are three sorts of people: first, scholars of divinity; second, those who acquire knowledge for the sake of delivering themselves and others; and third, those who sit like flies on livestock and buzz around with every gust of wind [or, by other accounts, "who swarm to wherever they smell a foul odor"]'.

RESPECT FOR SCHOLARS

In explaining the worth of knowledge and great stature of scholars, the Noble Qur'an says, '*Allah will raise those of you who believe and those who have knowledge to high degrees*' (58:11). The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) valued scholars to such an extent that he said, 'The death of a tribe is easier to bear and less harmful than the death of one scholar'.

Similarly, God Most High says in another verse, '*Are those who know equal to those who do not know? But the wise will heed*' (39:9). The verse shows that the learned and the ignorant are never equal. The scholar has an essential superiority over one who is bereft of knowledge. We may gather from this verse that in speaking of knowledge, the Noble Qur'an does not mean knowledge of religion only but refers to anything that enlightens people and aids them in questions of this world and the next.

Imam Muhammad Baqir (upn whom be peace) has illustrated the superiority of scholars over anchorites and ascetics in this way: 'A scholar who puts his scholarship to use is superior to seventy thousand anchorites'. The worth of any given person in the eyes of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) is determined by that person's knowledge: 'The most scholarly person is one who is always using the knowledge of others to add to his knowledge. Man's worth lies in knowledge; therefore, the greater one's knowledge, the greater one's worth, and the less one's knowledge, the less one's worth'.

THE TASKS OF THE TEACHER AND THE STUDENT

The Noble Qur'an regards knowledge as the real life of man and holds that, without knowledge, a human being is no different from a corpse. Accordingly, the student must make his teacher the focus of his life and consider him the source of his life and gradually realize his real life from his teacher. He must never fail

to give him all due honour and respect. Even if the teacher acts harshly and angrily in teaching him, the student must never react with defiance. He should always pay respect to the teacher in his presence and in his absence, while he is alive and after his death.

Correspondingly, the teacher must hold himself responsible for the student's life and must not rest until the student has attained the level of an honourable member of the community. He should not become disheartened if his students sometimes fail to absorb his teachings, but he should praise them when they do make progress. He must never say or do anything to impair their morale.

TWO PRIME EXAMPLES OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

All contemporary social systems conceal secrets whose disclosure to people generally would impair their rulers' ability to govern and frustrate those rulers' private lusts. This is why they are always keeping truths hidden from people at large. The policies they set in motion prove contrary to reason and to the interests of society and people generally, so they fear that, if these matters were disclosed, they would be flooded with criticism and their interests would be endangered. This is why the Christian Church and other ecclesiastical bodies do not allow people freedom of thought but reserve to themselves the right to alter and interpret religious learning and to expound the scriptures. The people are supposed to accept whatever they say without question or independent exploration. This approach has blighted many religious systems, as the state of present-day Christianity illustrates.

This is not true of Islam, however, because it expresses confidence in its own worth and admits no points of obscurity and darkness within itself, by contrast with all other religious and non-religious systems. This fact has the following consequences: 1. Islam conceals no truth, nor does it permit its adherents to do so. The laws of this pure religion are aligned

with the laws of nature and creation, and no reality can contradict them. In Islam, to conceal the truth is a major sin. God Most High expressly curses those who conceal the truth where He says, '*Those who hide the proofs and the guidance that We have revealed, after We had made it clear to the people in the scripture — Allah curses them, and those who curse will curse them*' (2:159). 2. Islam has commanded its adherents to subject its truths and concepts to independent thought. It tells them to stop wherever the least doubt occurs to them and proceed no further, but to strive freely to resolve their doubt with perfect fairness and open minds, so that their shining faith will never be shadowed by doubt and perplexity. God Most High says, '*Do not follow what you do not know*' (17:36).

REFRAINING FROM FREE THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION OF THE TRUTH

To perceive truths through thought and reflection and to accept them are the most valuable product of the human organism, the sole distinction of man over other animals, and the basis of man's nobility and glory. Our fellow-feeling and instinctive realism never permit us to deprive people of their freedom of thought by imposing imitative beliefs or to lead them astray by concealing truths and so paralyze pious thoughts. One cannot, however, ignore the fact that someone may refuse to comprehend a truth or intransigently refuse to allow it to unfold. To express it to that person may place one's life or property in danger. Realism and regard for human welfare demand silence, and the needs to preserve the sanctity and veneration of sacred values, to keep humanity from being led astray, and to protect persons from other dangers to their lives, wealth, and possessions require concealment of truths.

In numerous traditions, the Imams (upon whom be peace) have strictly prohibited people from thinking about certain realities that are beyond the capacity of human individuals to understand. God Most High expressly allows concealment of the truth under conditions of *taqiyya* in two places in the Noble Qur'an: Al-i

'Imran:28 and an-Nahl:106.

CONCLUSION

In several situations, Islam holds that it is not merely permissible but mandatory that the truth remain hidden: 1. In the case of *taqiyya*, where there is no hope of the truth advancing, and expression of it leads to danger of life, wealth, or property. 2. Where the truth would make no sense to someone and to express it would lead him astray or provoke him to scorn and make fun of it. 3. Where free thought in the absence of intellectual capacity would distort the truth and lead one astray.

IJTIHAD AND *TAQLID*

The needs that the human species has in its environment and the actions it must undertake to relieve them are too numerous for the average person to recite. How then is he to acquire all the specialized knowledge they represent?

From another standpoint, since man carries out his activities through thought and volition and needs adequate information to decide upon a course of action, he must either inform himself about things he intends to carry out or ask informed people how to do them and act accordingly to their instructions, as we instinctively turn to a physician to cure our illnesses or rely on an architect to design a building, a mason to construct it, and a carpenter to fabricate the doors and windows. Therefore, except in minor instances, we consistently make use of this principle of relying on others' expertise, which is termed *taqlid.*

Someone who says, 'I will not allow myself to be governed by *taqlid*' either does not understand what he is saying or is mentally disturbed. Islam itself adopts this method in founding its law code on innate human nature. Islam commands its adherents to learn its principles and its decrees, and there is no source for its principles other than God's Book and the *sunna* (practice) of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) and the Imams (upon whom be peace).

Plainly, it is not for everyone to learn all the principles of religion from the Book and the *sunna*; this is not feasible for some Muslims, or rather, it is only possible for a limited number.

It thus follows naturally that implementation of this religious injunction should be accomplished by Muslims who are in no position to reason through all these principles and decrees turning to others who are conversant with the reasoning behind religious commandments to carry out this task.

A scholar who has the expertise to reason through these decrees is called a *mujtahid*, and his act of reasoning is known as *ijtihad*. One who resorts to a *mujtahid* is called a *muqallid*, and his act of resort is known as *taqlid*.

It must certainly be realized that *taqlid* applies only to acts of worship, commercial transactions, and other concrete acts covered by religious law. The principles of religion are a question of belief, and one must never rely on others' views in questions of belief, because what is sought here is belief and faith, not action. One can never suppose that someone else's faith is one's own.

One can never say, 'God is One, because that is what my forbears have said or what our scholars say,' or else, 'There is indeed life after death, because all Muslims believe that'. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon each Muslim to understand the principles of his religion through independent reasoning, however rudimentary.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DUTIES TOWARD OTHERS

DUTIES TOWARD ONE'S MOTHER AND FATHER

It is by means of the mother and father that the child is created and receives its early upbringing. Accordingly, the holy faith of Islam greatly encourages us to obey and respect our parents, to the point that God Most High commends kindness to parents immediately after making reference to *tauhid*. He says, '*Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and that you show kindness to your parents*' (17:23). In traditions that enumerate the major sins, misbehavior toward one's parents immediately follows *shirk*. The verse just mentioned continues, '*If one or both of them reach old age while with you, never scold them or repulse them, but speak to them kindly. And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy, and say, "My Lord! Have mercy, for they cared for me when I was little*"' (17:23-24).

How well did Zal express it to her son
When she saw him strong as an elephant,
more than a match for a leopard,
'If you will recollect your tender years,
When you were helpless in my arms,
You have never shown me unkindness these days,
When you are a lion-man, and I, an old woman'[1]

In the holy religion of Islam, obedience to one's parents is mandatory except when they order one to refrain from a mandatory act or to commit a forbidden one. Experience teaches that those who vex their parents will not be successful in life and will not be delivered in the end.

DISOBEDIENCE TO PARENTS

Within the family, the mother and father stand to the children in the relation of a tree's roots to its branches: just as the propagation and life of the branches depend on the roots, so are the mother and father the foundation of the child's life. Considering the human society is composed of two strata, the parents and the offspring, the mother and father are the taproot of society.

To act badly toward one's mother and father and to vex them, beyond being ungrateful and mean-spirited in the extreme, erodes one's humanity and is destructive to society, since the mother and father will react to the child's disrespect with unkindness and neglect. From another standpoint, if members of the younger generation regard their parents with disrespect, they will expect no better from their own offspring; they will entertain no hopes of kindness and support from them in their own old age and infirmity, and so they will be discouraged from raising their own family. We see this to be the case with many young people today.

If this way of thinking were to become universal, procreation would cease, since an intelligent person would never devote his life to raising a sapling that would never yield fruit or shade and

the sight of which would bring nothing but pain. We might suppose that the government could encourage people to form families through various incentives and thus solve the reproductive problem. It must be mentioned, however, that no social custom can long survive without support from nature (such as the kind feelings that exist between parents and children). Beyond that, in suppressing these natural instincts, people necessarily deny themselves the corresponding joys of the spirit completely.

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

The things that we are obliged to do are termed 'rights' with respect to those who will benefit from them and 'duties' or responsibilities with respect to those who must carry them out. For instance, when someone performs a task for someone else for wages, to pay those wages is the duty of the employer, and to be paid them is the right of the worker. If the employer fails to pay these wages, the worker can demand them and assert his rights.

Since man is not created to live in this world forever, he must eventually depart. To preserve the human species from oblivion, God has arranged a method of reproduction. He has equipped people with the means to regenerate their kind and with the corresponding emotions.

In being so fully equipped, people naturally regard their offspring as part of themselves and see their offsprings' lives as the perpetuation of their own lives on earth. People will thus make every effort and endure hardships to comfort and please their children because, if their children were to fail or perish, it would be as if they themselves had failed or perished. In reality, they only act in obedience to what the order of the creation dictates, that the human species be preserved. Therefore, it is the duty of the mother and the father to carry out the decree of law and conscience alike with regard to their children, to bring them up well, so that they grow up to be worthwhile people. They must grant the child the humanity that they grant themselves. Let us

turn to a part of what comes under this heading.

1. From the first day the child shows understanding of speech and gestures, parents must lay the foundations in his or her psyche of moral virtues and good qualities. Insofar as they can, they should avoid frightening him with superstitions and should prevent evil and indecent acts. They should also abstain from lying, backbiting, and indecent or abusive language in his presence. They should behave virtuously in front of him so that he will grow up to be chaste and of fine character. They should express industry, aspiration, and fairness so that he will assimilate their love of justice and their humanitarianism and have no part in intimidation, base intentions, and egotism.

2. Until the child is old enough to decide for himself, the parents must pay attention to his diet, sleep, and other needs. They must attend to his physical health, so that he has a sound mind and body and a strong constitution and is ready to be educated.

3. As soon as the child is ready for schooling (usually at age seven), the parents should entrust him to his teacher. They should expend every effort to find a competent teacher so that what he will hear will have a positive effect on him, refining his spirit, purifying his soul, and cultivating his morals.

4. When the child reaches an age that admits of participating in public gatherings or family get-togethers, the parents should take him with them to these meetings and acquaint him with the proper ways to associate with people so that he becomes familiar with social custom.

RESPECT FOR ELDERS

It is obligatory to extend respect of older people. As the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said. 'To honour and respect the old is to honour and respect God'.

DUTIES TOWARD RELATIONS

People to whom one is related through one's mother and father

are a natural source of social ties. Blood or genetic relationship makes one part of a larger family. In consideration of this natural unity, Islam commands its adherents to be kind to their relatives. The Noble Qur'an and traditions of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) and the Imams (upon whom be peace) have strongly urged them to do so.

God Most High says, '*Heed Allah through Whom you hold one another responsible, as well as any ties of kinship. God is watching over you*' (4:1).

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, 'I urge my folk to be kind to relations; even if relations are separated by a year's journey, they must not sever their bonds of kinship'.

DUTIES TOWARD NEIGHBOURS

Since neighbours' proximity allows them to develop close ties and naturally makes them like a big family, a neighbour's friendliness or animosity has more effect than that of other people.

Someone who engages in nightlong revelry in his home is not going to bother someone living on the other side of town, but he will deny rest to his neighbour. A powerful man who spends his life carousing in his mansion will not upset poor people living far away, but he is fanning the flames of resentment in his indigent neighbour in his shack, and a day will come when he will pay for his behaviour. For reasons like these, the holy law of Islam has strongly urged us to look after our neighbours' interests.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, 'Gabriel has so urged neighbours' rights upon me that I have supposed that God Most High would include one's neighbour among one's heirs'. He has also said, 'One who believes in God and the Resurrection will never vex his neighbour. If he borrows from him, he returns the loan. He

shares in the neighbour's joys and sorrows. He must not trouble his neighbour, even if that person is an unbeliever'. He has further said, 'If someone vexes his neighbour, the scent of Paradise will not reach his nostrils; if someone does not observe his neighbour's rights, he is not one of us; and, if someone is sated and, knowing that his neighbour is hungry, offers him nothing, he is not a Muslim'.

DUTIES TOWARD THE POOR AND NEEDY

Clearly, society is organized to provide for individuals needs. The most important task for the members of any society is to come to the aid of the needy and powerless and somehow to provide for the needs of those who cannot provide for their needs themselves.

It has grown evident today that indifference of the rich to the plight of the poor is the greatest danger threatening the survival of society, and that the rich themselves are the first casualties of this threat.

Fourteen centuries ago, Islam, noting this danger, commanded the rich to apportion a certain part of their wealth among the poor every year. Beyond alleviating their needs to this extent, it is commended to expend whatever one can to ease the lives of the poor, for the sake of God. As God Most High says, '*You will not attain to piety until you spend part of what you love*' (3:92). Innumerable traditions have reached us concerning service to the people. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, 'The best of people is the most useful to the people'. He has also said, 'On the Day of Resurrection, the one with the highest place in the regard of God Most High will be the one who most advanced the welfare of God's servants'.

In disaster, be a helper to the helpers,
So that divine grace will come to your aid.
At all events, there will one day sprout,
The seed of goodness that you plant now.

DUTIES TOWARDS SOCIETY

As we know, human individuals do engage in mutual aid and so benefit from each other's efforts in meeting their own needs. The societies that form from such people are like a greater human being of whom individuals are members or organs.

Each of the organs of the human body has a specialized task and contributes to its own well being while contributing to that of the other organs. Correspondingly, it benefits from their activities. If any of these organs were to become egotistical and not to serve the other organs (for instance, if the eyes refused to help with what the hands or feet were doing, or the mouth were to grow so engrossed in chewing that it would refuse to swallow), a person would soon die, along with these individualistic, egotistical organs.

The individual members of a society have tasks analogous to those of the organs of a body. That is, a person must think of his own interests in the context of the interests of society and consider what would be profitable to society in his work, if he is himself to profit from his labours. He must benefit everyone if he is to realize a benefit. He must defend others' rights if his are to be preserved.

This is a truth that we comprehend through our God-given nature. The holy faith of Islam, too, in resting upon this nature and creation, decrees nothing less.

The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) has said, 'A Muslim is one from whose hand and tongue other Muslims are safe'. He has also said, 'Muslims are brothers to each other; they are one in the hand, heart, and purpose in the face of outsiders'. He further said, 'Whoever rises in the morning and gives no thought to the affairs of Muslims is not a Muslim'.

There was an incident that illustrates this point at the Battle of Tabuk, as the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) was advancing with the army of Islam

toward the border of the Roman Empire. Three men did not participate in the battle, and, when the army returned and they went out to meet and greet him, he averted his face from them and made no reply. So did the other Muslims. No one in Medina would even speak to their wives, and they were finally compelled to take refuge in the surrounding hills and express their contrition and repentance. After several days, God accepted their repentance, and they returned to the city.

NOTES TO CHAPTER EIGHT

1. From the *Shahname*, the epic poem by Ferdousi. — Trans.

CHAPTER NINE

JUSTICE

The Noble Qur'an and the traditions of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) and the Imams (upon whom be peace) speak of two kinds of justice: individual and social. The holy faith of Islam has given thorough consideration to both kinds.

INDIVIDUAL JUSTICE

Individual justice means that one abstain from lying, backbiting, and other major sins and not persist in committing other sins. One who is characterized by individual justice is called 'just', and, according to Islamic rules, if he has a scholarly bent, he can become a judge, a governor, a *mujtahid*, or holder of other responsible positions in society. But someone not characterized by individual justice cannot hold such positions, even if he is a great scholar.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Social justice means that we not transgress against others' rights but that we regard everyone as equal under God's law. We must not exceed the due limits in enforcing religious rules and must not deviate from the true way under the sway of feelings and emotions. God Most High says, '*Allah enjoins justice*' (16:90). He also says, '*Allah commands...that , if you adjudicate among people, you adjudicate with justice*' (4:58). We are enjoined to speak and act justly in countless verses and traditions. God Most High expressly curses the unjust in several verses.

INJUSTICE, OPPRESSION

God Most High censures oppression in hundreds of verses as an ugly quality fit only for beasts of prey. (Oppression is treated in two-thirds of the Noble Qur'an's one hundred and fourteen *suras*.)

No one can be found who does not perceive the wrongness and evil of oppression with his natural conscience, or who does not more or less realize what agonizing misfortunes oppression has visited upon human society, what slaughter, how many broken homes.

Experience shows conclusively that, however solidly the palace of oppression may stand, it will not endure; sooner or later, it will collapse upon the oppressors. God Most High says, '*Certainly Allah will not guide the tyrants*' (6:114). The Imams have told us that a state may be guilty of unbelief and endure, but it cannot tyrannize and endure.

GOOD SOCIAL RELATIONS

We have no choice but to live in society and to associate with people. Beyond a doubt, social intercourse exists to keep our social natures alive and so to assure our ongoing material and spiritual progress and to help us to better solve our problems in life.

It follows that we should encounter people in a way that wins

their affection and good will and that we should always grow more social and make more friends. If people's contacts with someone are onerous or acrimonious, they will come to dislike him, and a day will come when everyone will avoid him. Such a person will become a social outcast and will find himself alone in a crowd, a foreigner in his own country. Such a state is one of the most bitter misfortunes that can befall anyone. This is why the holy faith of Islam recommends that its adherents maintain good social relationships and helps them to do so with high norms for social behaviour and with traditional manners that are unexcelled expressions of grace and courtesy. For example, it has ordained that Muslims greet each other when they meet, and it is a virtue to be the first to extend a greeting, as the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) always was. He greeted women and children, and, if someone greeted him, he always replied with a finer greeting. God Most High says, '*When you are greeted, make a better greeting or return it*' (4:86). He has also ordered that we be humble when meeting others and offer respect to each according to his social station. God Most High says, '*The servants of the Merciful are those who walk upon the earth humbly and, when the ignorant address them, answer, "Peace"*' (25:63).

It must be noted that humility here does not mean regarding oneself as contemptible before people and denying one's own humanity. Rather, it means that one does not parade one's presumed virtues and privileges before others or treat them with contempt. Respect for others correspondingly does not mean deferring to them to the point of fawning servility but rather means that one must value each according to his religious and social merit, honouring great men and women according to their greatness and likewise honouring the common humanity of others.

To respect others also does not mean that one pass over anyone's unworthy act in silence, or participate in an assembly of legislators all of whom behave in a way contrary to human

dignity or act contrary to religious law, or try to blend into society out of fear of notoriety. To respect others is really to respect their human dignity and religious and moral attainment, not to respect their external forms. When someone has cast off his human dignity and religious merit, there remains no reason to honour him. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'One must not offend against God in order to obey others'.

ANNOYING OTHERS AND MISCHIEF

These are two similar vices, in that one annoys others by abusing them verbally and saying things that vex them or by abusing them physically by doing things that make them uncomfortable. Mischief, correspondingly, consists of doing things that cause people harm. At any rate, these two vices occupy a point diametrically opposite to what man has sought in forming society, an easier life and peace of mind.

Accordingly, because the holy law of Islam attaches the greatest importance to the well-being of society, it has forbidden these two vices. God Most High says, '*Those who annoy believing men and believing women without their having deserved it will assume [the guilt of] slander and [commit] a clear offense against themselves*' (33:58). The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'One who annoys Muslims has annoyed me, and to annoy me is to annoy God. Such people have been cursed in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Qur'an'. He also said, 'If someone glares at a Muslim to frighten him, God will frighten him on the Day of Resurrection'.

KEEPING GOOD COMPANY

Although we may associate with many people, life is such that we are bound to associate with some people more than others. These people are known as our friends.

Of course, this friendship and closeness is a kind of correspondence in morals, approaches to life, occupations, and the like between two people or more. Association results in one party

gradually acquiring the habits and morals of the other, and so we should therefore choose to associate with good people, since we shall thus pick up their moral virtues, as well as benefiting from their unalloyed friendship and good will. We shall additionally enjoy their lasting friendship and good will and even rise in the estimation of people at large.

The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali has said, 'The best of friends is the one who guides you to good deeds'. He has also said, 'A man is judged by who his friend is'.

First say who you spend your time with,
So I may say who you are.
Whatever is the worth of your associates,
That is your soul's worth.

ASSOCIATING WITH EVIL PEOPLE

To associate with bad people and evildoers leads to all sorts of misfortune and bad ends. To demonstrate this point, it is enough to note that, if we ask criminals and malefactors like thieves and robbers how they went wrong, they will invariably respond, 'Associating with bad people has brought us to this state.' We will not find an antisocial person in a thousand who took up an evil course on his own initiative.

The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali has said, 'Shun the company of evil people, lest an evil associate turn you into someone like himself, since he will not accept you until he does this'. He has also said, 'Shun the friendship of the evildoer, since he will sell you out for a paltry sum'.

Associate little with bad people, or you'll get stuck,
The human psyche is very impressionable.

TRUTHFULNESS

Mutual relationships of human individuals, the basis of human society, are based upon speech. Accordingly, the truthful speech that discloses a hidden reality to someone else is an essential cornerstone of society, and society realizes important benefits from it that it could never do without.

We can sum up the benefits of truthfulness in a few sentences: 1. One who speaks truthfully enjoys the confidence of his fellows, who are relieved of the need to scrutinize everything he says. 2. Such a one has a clear conscience and is not tormented by his own lying. 3. Such a one is true to his word and does not betray a trust, since honest speech is conjoined with honest behaviour. 4. Truthfulness eliminates most dissension and conflict, most disputes arise from one or both parties denying the truth. 5. Many moral faults and offenses against laws and rules are automatically prevented, since the main reason people lie is to cover up such behaviour.

The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali has said, 'The real Muslim is one who prefers speaking the truth even when it is ruinous to him over lying even when it benefits him, and who finds inner peace in so doing'.

HARMFUL EFFECTS OF LIES

The previous discussion makes clear the harmful effects of lying. The liar is the enemy of human society and is labouring to ruin society with his lies, which are a gross treachery. Lies are like opiates that extinguish society's consciousness and capacity to understand by concealing reality, or they are like alcoholic drinks in making people drunk and denying their reason and power to distinguish good from evil. This is why Islam considers lying a major sin and holds that the liar has no religion. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) says, 'Three sorts of people are hypocrites, though they may pray and fast: liars, people who are not true to their word, and people who betray a trust'. The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali says, 'Anyone who tastes the pleasures of faith gives up lying, even in jest'. Not only is lying condemned as a sin in religious law, it is plainly unacceptable to reason. Obviously, an outbreak of lying in society will swiftly destroy the bonds of trust that are all that holds society together. As these bonds are eroded, people's extreme mutual suspicion will isolate them, although they may still have the appearance of a social body.

In our lives, we are continually involved with things external to ourselves. By acting upon and working with these things, we maintain our lives and attain our wants. Thus we as human beings use our intelligence and will to extend the reach of our lives on the basis of knowledge. We operate by thinking, and so our efforts depend directly upon the information available to us. We are continually organizing our mental conceptions and carrying out external activities according to them. For this reason, we find it absolutely essential to have correct information; insofar as we are denied it — not being told of the pitfalls before us or how far we must go, for instance — we shall certainly fail to accomplish anything. It thus grows clear that lies pose a grave danger to social life and that the liar is a degraded and dishonourable being who is society's enemy, discredited before the people and cursed by God.

BACKBITING AND SLANDER

To speak ill of others and censure them is called backbiting (*ghiba*) when true and slander (*iftira'* or *bihtan*) when false.

Of course, God Most High has created no one (except for the Prophets and the Imams) free of sin, and anyone, being imperfect, can slip or fall. People generally live behind the veil that God Most High has, through His far-reaching wisdom, drawn over their acts. If this divine veil were lifted to expose all our faults and errors, everyone would flee each other in loathing, and society would crumble to its foundations. This is why God Most High has forbidden backbiting, so that we should be protected from talk behind our backs, and so that our outward lives should appear beautiful, and this outward beauty should penetrate our inward ugliness. God Most High says, '*Do not backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of your dead brother?*' (49:12).

Slander is ranked as more reprehensible than backbiting, and its vileness is patent to reason. God Most High presupposes its vile and unacceptable character where He says, '*Those who do not believe in Allah's signs are merely inventing a lie; such men are*

liars' (16:105).

TRANSGRESSIONS AGAINST PEOPLE'S HONOUR

According to Islam, it is a major sin to rend the veil of chastity and, depending on the circumstances, harsh penalties such as lashing, beheading, and stoning have been imposed for such acts.

Even if such ugly acts are committed by mutual consent, they undermine the foundations of the principle of heredity to which Islam has paid great attention and disrupt the functioning of the inheritance laws. Finally, they dissolve the natural bonds of affection between parents and children and so eliminate the natural effects of reproduction that in reality keep society intact.

SELF-RESPECT AND MORAL RECTITUDE

The order of the creation, which has made man social and obliged him to cooperate, has equipped him in a sense to lift himself up by his own bootstraps and to use the fruits of his labour to maintain his life in its own social environment.

A little consideration of this point leaves no room for doubt that self-respect consists in our employing our own God-given powers to reach our goals, not in depending on others' powers. This is one of the moral values innate in human nature. Self-respect is a dam that holds us back from a base existence and numerous evil and impermissible acts. One who has no self-respect and who depends upon others can readily hand over his will and individuality to others. He will do whatever they say, greedy for some morsel, sacrificing whatever they demand from him — his freedom, his dignity, his honour.

Most crimes, such as murder, banditry, theft, pickpocketing, perjury, sycophancy, treason, and selling out to foreigners, are the evil fruits of greed and parasitism. One who proudly wears the crown of self-respect, however, will not bow before any grandeur except the grandeur of God Most High and will kneel before no authority and pomp. Such a one will always rise to

defend what he recognizes to be the truth. Self-respect is the best means for attaining and preserving one's moral rectitude.

CHARITY AND AID TO THE NEEDY

It is certain that the needy in any society have a right to help, and that it is the responsibility of the well-off to extend that help; they cannot shirk this duty. The holy law of Islam likewise urges that this right be observed, holding the well-off responsible for aiding the indigent.

In the Glorious Qur'an, God Most High refers to Himself as the Beneficient, the Bountiful, and the Forgiving and urges His servants to assimilate these qualities, to the point that He says, '*Allah is with the beneficent*' (2:194), '*Whatever they expend, it reverts to yourselves*' (2:272), and '*Those who...spend...from what He has provided for them may hope for a business that will never slacken*' (35:29).

When we carefully consider the social situation and the benefits of charity, the nobility these verses express becomes clear. In truth, all the productive forces of a society are meant to benefit everyone, but, in a society where some are too indigent to work, the production of wealth declines in direct proportion. The undesirable effects reach everyone; things may reach a point where the formerly well-off are worse off than anyone. If the well-off extend their beneficence and generosity to aid the indigent, however, they realize wonderful benefits, including: 1. others' affection, 2. a great deal of respect, for little capital outlay, 3. popular support (people will back those who do good), 4. freedom from the danger that the rage of the dispossessed will someday become a wildfire, engulfing everything, and 5. returns many times over their own small capital investment, as the economy begins functioning. There are innumerable Qur'anic verses and traditions urging charity and extolling its virtues.

COOPERATION

This generosity and beneficence constitute only one of the

many forms of cooperation, the basis of human society. The real nature of society is individuals' joining hands to do the work for everyone, put everyone's life on a secure footing, and take care of everyone's needs through mutual aid. One must not suppose that the holy faith of Islam asks our beneficience only through sacrifice of wealth. Rather, to come to the aid of the needy, even if money is not what they need, is what the holy faith of Islam, as well as the human conscience, is seeking.

To teach someone illiterate, to take the hand of someone blind, to guide someone lost, to aid one who has fallen — all are manifestations of generosity and beneficence, just as they all manifest the cooperation that we have assented to and relied upon since the time societies were first formed. It is obvious that, if people fail to carry out some aspects of the work of society, the basic operations will not get carried out and that, if people are unwilling to fulfill some minor functions, they will prove unwilling to carry out the task as a whole.

CHARITABLE WORKS AND DONATIONS

The value of an act of beneficence lies in its results. Of course, the more universal or enduring are these results, the more beneficial is the act. To cure a sick person is an act of beneficence and generosity, but it bears no comparison with building and operating a hospital that treats hundreds of patients a day. It is a virtue to teach a student, but this does not approach the value of establishing an institution that graduates hundreds of students every year. Thus, endowments and charitable works that have widespread and enduring effects represent an especially high degree of charity.

In the language of the holy law, such works are known as 'alms of lasting consequence' (*as-sadaqa al-jariya*). The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'Two things are a credit to a man: one is a pious offspring, and the other is alms of lasting consequence'. Traditions testify that God Most High grants blessings to one who engages in charity.

SELF-SACRIFICE

It is certain that, in the dictionary of the human conscience, life is synonymous with life with honour. A life that is not paired with honour and human happiness is no life at all. Rather, it is a death more bitter than natural death, and someone who does not value his own honour and happiness must flee such a base existence as a living death.

In whatever environment we inhabit, in whatever manner we choose to live, we understand through our God-given nature that death in the cause of what we hold sacred is a blessing. According to religious reasoning, nothing is more clearer or more logical than this, and has less to do with idle supposition or superstition. One who dies defending his own religious community by religious commandment knows that he has deprived himself of nothing but has given up his sweet yet ephemeral life in God's way to receive a sweeter, more precious, and eternal life whereby his happiness can never decline. As God Most High says, '*Do not think of those who are killed in Allah's way as dead. No, they are living, provided for by their Lord*' (3:169).

In secular systems, by contrast, human life is seen as confined to this ephemeral earthly life. They cannot say that we have a life or attain to happiness after death. They can only try to inculcate an irrational notion that one who is killed for his country or holy motherland will be remembered as a national hero whose name will be inscribed in gold in the book of history, to live on forever in this manner.

No pious act is as honored in Islam as laying down one's life in God's way. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'For any virtuous act, there is an act of superior virtue, up to martyrdom, to which no act is superior'. The Muslims of the first generation sought divine forgiveness through the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) and so attained the lofty state of martyrdom through his prayers. People did not cry for

those who had departed the world through martyrdom, since they were alive and had not died.

GENEROSITY AND MUNIFICENCE

There is no need to explain the part property has in regulating life. It can assume such importance that many people regard it as the whole of life and can conceive of no other attainment for man than possession of wealth and devote all their energies to amassing money. Being so greedy and enamoured of wealth makes them stingy and unwilling to part with any of it for anyone. They may go a step farther and become misers who refuse to spend anything for their own benefit, so that neither do they eat nor do they feed anyone else. Making money becomes their only source of pleasure.

People who are given over to the vice of stinginess (and of course this is all the more true of misers) have become alienated from their human nature and are bankrupt in the marketplace of life, because:

1. They seek only their own happiness and prosperity in life; they are individualists, although human nature presents life to us as social, and individual life is doomed to perish in any event.

2. In displaying their wealth to others, they force the poor to be submissive and make them bow down like slaves without ever doing anything to help them. They thus perpetuate the spirit of idolatry and so corrode any sort of courage, loftiness of nature, or human dignity in society.

3. Besides crushing their own finer feelings of kindness, compassion, and fellow-feeling, they give rise to all sorts of criminality and baseness in society. Poverty is the biggest natural factor in such criminal or antisocial behaviour as villification, unchastity, theft, banditry, and murder, along with the rage, resentment, and vengefulness that the downtrodden feel toward the rich, which the stingy and miserly rich further inflame. Thus the stingy man is really Public Enemy Number One of society and will inevitably earn people's repugnance

along with God's anger and divine retribution.

The Noble Qur'an includes many verses condemning the vice of stinginess and conversely praising the virtue of generosity, charity in God's way, and aid to the needy. God Most High promises that wealth given in charity will be returned to the giver ten, seventy, or seven hundred times over. Experience likewise shows that those who open-handedly and nobly aid the poor or work for social progress steadily grow wealthier. If they should someday meet with hard times, they enjoy people's affection and the help they once extended to others all comes back to them.

Apart from the fact that they ease their consciences by acting well and nobly, the generous are responding to the divine summons both to fulfill incumbent duties and to carry out commendable actions. They have given expression to human feelings of kindness, sympathy, and humanitarianism and have gained the unalloyed affection and respect of the public. Finally, they have attained God's pleasure and eternal happiness at little cost.

JIHAD

Any creature will defend its life and interests and will arm itself in any way it can to combat its enemy. A human being has a natural conviction that he must defend himself and that he must destroy his enemy, who will stop at nothing to destroy him. Likewise, if someone interferes with his vital interests, he will rise to their defense and repel the aggressor by any means possible.

This innate tendency in a human individual is likewise innate in human societies. That is, an enemy who menaces the individuals of a society or the very independence of that society is effectively under a death sentence in that society. So long as man and human societies have existed, the idea has persisted that an individual or a society are free to resolve upon the most severe measures to confront their mortal enemies.

Islam as a religion concerned with society and founded upon *tauhid* regards those who refuse to submit to truth and justice as its mortal enemies and a disruptive force in society. It accords them no human dignity and worth. Since it presents itself as a universal religion and restricts its adherence to no nationalities or frontiers, it wars against anyone whose values are infected with *shirk* and who cannot be brought to acknowledge the truth and the holy law through plain reasoning and sage counsel, until he submits to the rule of truth and justice.

This is the essence of Islam's rules on *jihad*. They accord fully with the method that any human society naturally adopts in dealing with its mortal enemies.

Contrary to the assertions of its detractors, Islam is not the religion of the sword. Islam has never acted imperialistically, through the sword or political maneuvering. Rather, it is the religion God has created in conformity with people's created natures and to which He summons them by appeal to their native intelligence and reason, through His celestial speech.

A religion whose universal greeting is '*Salam*' ('Peace') and whose global program is, according to the Noble Qur'an, founded on the principle '*Peace is better*' (4:128), could never be the religion of the sword and force.

During the lifetime of the Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family), as the light of Islam spread across the Arabian peninsula and the Muslims were engaged in major, fierce battles, no more than two hundred Muslims and less than a thousand unbelievers were killed, the latter figure including seven hundred members of the Qurayza tribe who were executed as a result of arbitration they had chosen. How unjust it is to call such a faith the religion of the sword!

CASES WHEN WAR IS CALLED FOR IN ISLAM

Islam is at war with four classes of people:

1. *Mushriks*, that is, those who disbelieve in *tauhid*, prophecy,

and the Resurrection. They must be first summoned to Islam, clearly enough that no point of doubt or other pretext remains. The precepts of the religion must be explained to them clearly. If they then embrace the religion, they are brothers of all other Muslims and share in their good times and bad. If they do not embrace it, and if they do not bow to it after these precepts have been made plain to them, Islam will make it a duty to wage *jihad* against them.

2. People of the Book (Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians), whom Islam holds are religious folk, possessing revealed scriptures and believing in *tauhid*, prophecy, and the Resurrection. Islam offers sanctuary to them on condition of payment of the poll-tax known as the *jizya*. This indicates their acceptance of Islamic rule, under which they retain their independence, are allowed to act according to their own religious rules, and are as secure in their lives and property as are any Muslims. In return, they pay the *jizya*, a token sum, to Muslim society. They may not, however, circulate anti-Islamic propaganda, aid the enemies of Islam, or do other things detrimental to Muslims.

3. Rebels, that is, Muslims who conduct armed uprisings against Islam and shed Muslims' blood. Islamic society wars against them until they surrender and cease from rebellion.

4. Enemies of the faith, who seek to undermine the foundations of the religion or to overthrow Islamic government. It is incumbent upon all Muslims to defend their faith against such persons as unbelieving belligerents.

If Islam and Muslim policy dictate, Islamic society can conclude temporary non-aggression pacts with the enemies of Islam. It does not have the right, however, to open friendly relations with them in a manner that would allow their words and actions to have a detrimental influence on Muslims' thoughts and actions.

FLIGHT FROM *JIHAD* AND DEFENSE

To turn one's back on the enemy and flee the battlefield means that one values one's own survival more highly than the survival

of society. It is, in truth, to abandon sacred values, along with the lives and property of one's fellows, to an enemy that threatens every aspect of that society's existence.

Thus, desertion for the cause of *jihad* and defense is accounted a major sin. God Most High expressly promises hellfire to the deserter, saying, '*Whoever turns his back on [the unbelievers], unless in a maneuver or turning to join a detachment, has incurred Allah's wrath, and his habitation will be hell*' (8:16).

DEFENDING ONE'S HOMELAND

For the reasons I have stated, defense of Islamic society and of Muslims' homes is one of the most important responsibilities Islam makes incumbent upon us. God Most High says, '*Do not claim those who are killed in the way of Allah "dead". No, they are living, only you do not perceive it*' (2:154).

The story of the men who took their lives in their hands and advanced into battle in the early days of Islam and of the martyrs who weltered in their own blood is astonishing as well as instructive. It was they who secured the foundations of this holy faith with their pure blood and their torn bodies.

COMBATING SOCIETY'S ENEMIES WITHIN

Just as we are obliged by nature to combat the external enemies of a society and preserve it from injury, so we must combat society's internal enemies. One is society's internal enemy whose opposition to extant law and custom creates disorder in public life. Organized societies must use their police power and punish their adversaries in various ways to maintain order and commerce.

Islam, in addition to providing various police powers and penalties, makes it incumbent upon all the members of society to enjoin good and forbid evil. Thus it broadens this struggle and makes it more effective. The main difference between Islam and other social systems lies in the fact that the others attempt only to reform people's actions, but Islam pays attention to both

their actions and their moral values, combating corruption on both levels.

The sins and acts of disobedience that Islam has forbidden are acts that have unfortunate consequences for society. One must qualify this by noting that some acts directly corrupt the individual or individuals who commit them and so create a chink in society's armour. They are like localized wounds or symptoms of an organ of someone's body. Most sins against the bond of servanthood or in neglect of what is due God, such as failure to pray or to fast, are of this kind. Other actions directly threaten the life of the body. To lie or make false accusations are actions of this kind. According to Islam, disregard of one's duties toward one's parents, backbiting, and transgression against people's rights also have this status.

DEFENSE OF THE TRUTH

There is another sort of defense that is much more profound and sweeping than defense of one's homeland, and this is defense of the Truth, the sole object of the holy faith of Islam. This divine method exists to promulgate the Truth and reality; thus, our faith is known as the *Religion of Truth*, meaning a religion that belongs to the Truth, contains nothing but the Truth, and has no other object than the Truth.

In describing His book, which comprehends all realities, God Most High says, '[*It*] *guides people to the truth and to the straight way*' (46:30). Accordingly, it is necessary for every Muslim to accord with the truth, to speak the truth, and to defend the truth with all his power and in any way possible.

HOMICIDE

A form of evil that is reprehended in the holy law of Islam is homicide and killing of the innocent.

To kill someone is a major sin; God Most High equates killing one person with killing all people. This can only mean that to kill one person is a blow to the humanity that is the same in one

person or a thousand.

EMBEZZLEMENT OF THE WEALTH OF ORPHANS

To the same extent that goodness toward the people is lauded by reason and by the holy law, evil conduct toward God's servants is reproved. In the holy law, however, there are some evils that are forbidden with particular vehemence. One of these is embezzlement of the wealth of orphans, which Islam regards as a major sin. The Noble Qur'an says explicitly that one who consumes the wealth of orphans is really consuming fire and will one day be consumed by the Fire. As the Imams have explained, the reason for all this emphasis is that, although an adult may be able to resist and to defend his rights when oppressed, a minor orphan has no such ability.

DESPAIR OF GOD'S MERCY

According to Islam, one of the most perilous sins is despair of God's mercy. God Most High says, '*Say, "My servants who have acted extravagantly against themselves — do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all offenses; He is the Most Forgiving, the Merciful*"' (39:53). Elsewhere, one who despairs of God's mercy is considered an unbeliever, because such a one no longer has any motive in his life to do good or to abstain from minor and major sins or other reproved acts (the basic motive for these things being 'hope of God's mercy' or 'hope of deliverance from God's wrath'). Such a one has no such hope and is no different in his subjective state from one who has no religion.

ANGER

Anger is a state that arouses one to thought of revenge when it arises and that subsides when revenge has been taken. If one does not exercise the greatest self-control when under the influence of anger, one quickly becomes irrational and capable of justifying the most heinous acts to oneself. The process can reach a point at which one becomes more predatory than any natural predator.

Islam insists that this state be curbed and sharply reproves indulging it. God Most High, showing great favour to those who suppress their anger and show forbearance when they are angry, says, for instance, '[*Allah loves*] *those who control their anger*' (3:134). He also says that believers are '*those who forgive when they are provoked to anger*' (42:37).

BRIBERY

To accept money or gifts in return for a judgment or any other action that falls within the official responsibilities of the recipient is known as 'bribery'.

Bribery is a major sin in Islam, and one who commits it is denied the social benefits of religion (justice) and deserves God's torment. This is made clear in the Noble Qur'an and the *sunna*. The Most Noble Messenger (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has cursed anyone who gives or receives a bribe or acts as an intermediary in bribery. Also, Imam Ja'far has said, 'To accept a bribe in return for a judgment is tantamount to disbelief in God'. This degree of censure is for accepting a bribe to render justice; the sin of accepting a bribe to render injustice is much graver, and the punishment correspondingly harsher.

THEFT

Theft is an evil and illicit occupation that threatens the security of wealth in a society. Plainly, a person's prime asset in life is the wealth and property that he has spent his life acquiring, and he strives to protect it from any sort of encroachment. It provides backing for social life. Of course, to break through this wall of protection, disrupting this system, is to destroy the capital that someone has spent a life in acquiring. It means that the major portion of someone's efforts has gone to waste and been rendered ineffective.

Accordingly, Islam has established as a punishment for this vile act, against which the thief's own conscience recoils, that the thief's hand (four fingers of the right hand) be severed. God Most High says, '*As for thieves, male or female, cut off their*

hands as a requital for their acts' (5:38).

GIVING SHORT WEIGHT

According to Islam, to give short weight is a major sin. God Most High censures and warns the perpetrators, saying: '*Woe unto those who defraud...Do they not consider that they will be raised again, to a terrible day?*' (83:4-5). One who gives short weight, besides oppressing the people and embezzling their wealth, loses their trust and denies himself their business and finally his capital.

PUNISHMENT FOR SINS IN GENERAL IN ISLAM

Islam designates the sorts of behavior that I have described as major sins, and God Most High has explicitly promised that their perpetrators will be tormented.

Apart from the fact that severe punishments have been prescribed for some of them, those who commit them even once lose their honour, which is to say that the dignity accorded a member in good standing of human society is denied them.

One who commits a major sin gives up his honour and the privileges he enjoys as a member in good standing of society. He cannot occupy various posts in the Islamic government, cannot be a leader, and cannot lead communal prayers. His testimony is not accepted to anyone's advantage or detriment. His status will remain the same until he regains his honour through repentance and sustained piety.

THE NECESSITY OF WORK AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Work is the foundation of the creation and the sole assurance that any created being will survive. God Most High has equipped each created being in accordance with its nature with the means to gain what is beneficial to it and to ward off harm.

Human beings, the most marvelous and complex forms in

creation, have greater needs than other creatures and must accordingly engage in more activities to secure these innumerable needs and to maintain the family structure that is natural to them. Islam, as a religion in accord with nature and society, has accordingly made it incumbent to have a legitimate occupation. The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'To pursue livelihood is incumbent upon every Muslim man and woman'. Islam accords no value to people who sit idle. When the Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) would see a physically powerful man, he would ask, 'Does he work?' If he was answered in the negative, he would comment, 'He has lowered himself in my eyes'. That is, to the Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family), an unemployed person (and not elderly or disabled) was worthless.

In Islam, every person must, in accordance with his own aptitude and proclivity, choose one of the many occupations to which God Most High has guided human thought and so gain his livelihood. Thus he carries his part of the burden to provide for people's comfort. God Most High says, '*Man has nothing except what he struggles for*' (53:39). In brief, Islam urges work and earning one's livelihood in the strongest terms and has not neglected economic activity under the most difficult circumstances. Imam Sadiq (upon whom be peace) told one of his companions named Hisham, 'Even during battle, when the hostile forces are facing each other and the flames of war are lapping them, you must not neglect your economic role and the necessary activities to procure a livelihood; pursue your pecuniary efforts under these difficult conditions'. Thus, to be unemployed due to laziness is strictly forbidden in Islam.

IN REPROOF OF IDLENESS

The preceding discussion makes it clear that work and striving are the straight road that the creation has laid out before man. By following it, man attains his happiness. To deviate from this natural course even a little can only lead to ruin. To deviate

from something that is the basis for the system by which we live can only lead to misfortune in this life and the next. Thus, the seventh Imam (upon whom be peace) has said, 'Do not let weakness and fatigue show in your work; otherwise you will lose this world and the next'. The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) cursed those who had grown used to idleness and so became a burden to others.

Today, psychological and sociological studies have made it clear that many social ills arise from unemployment. Unemployment stops the wheel of society's economic and cultural life from turning and contributes to every sort of moral decline and superstitious outlook.

THE VIRTUES OF FARMING

It is by farming that society is fed, and, because of its importance, farming is one of the best occupations for people, and Islam greatly encourages taking it up. The sixth Imam (upon whom be peace) has said, 'On the Day of Resurrection, farmers will occupy a higher station than any others'. The fifth Imam (upon whom be peace) has said, 'No work is better or of more general benefit than farming, since good and bad people, grazing animals, and birds all benefit from it and so wordlessly pray for the farmer'. The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'A Muslim who plants a tree or grows a crop of which people, birds and grazing animals eat receives the reward for almsgiving'.

Muslims are charged with making the most of their natural abilities, to the extent that one of the Holy Imams has said, 'If the hour should arrive for the world to be annihilated and the sun to collapse into chaos and one of you is holding a sapling, if you still can plant it, do plant it'. That is, do not let the thought of the annihilation of the world hold you back from a noble deed. The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'God curse one who has water and earth and becomes destitute'.

SELF-RELIANCE

It was repeatedly mentioned in the section titled 'Beliefs' that the general program of Islam consists in our worshipping no one but the One God and bowing before no one but Him, the Fosterer of the Universe.

All beings whatever have been created and fostered by God and eat what He has provided. No one has precedence over anyone else except one who relies on God.

Every Muslim should rely on himself and use the gift of self-reliance that God Most High has given him. He should employ the means that have been provided him and go about his life; he should not pin his hopes on others and so partner a new idol with God every day. The servant must know that he is eating his own bread and not the master's bread. He must know that he is reaping the fruits of his own exertions and not getting free handouts from his employer. Any employee needs to feel sure that he is getting paid for his work and not getting a free ride from his chief or his office or the state or society. In sum, a free man must not pin his hopes on or bow to anyone but God, or he will inwardly suffer the same baseness and enslavement of *shirk* that idolaters manifest outwardly.

In conclusion, it must be noted that self-reliance means using one's innate self-worth in life and not sitting in expectation of others' help. It does not mean cutting oneself off from God Most High and imagining one can realize all one's aims alone.

HARM CAUSED BY A LIFE OF DEPENDENCY

To live as a parasite on others is really to give up one's honour as a human being and the dignity of independence. It is the source of every sort of crime and antisocial act arising from abjectness and degradation.

One who seeks to live off favours from others really has put his own intelligence and will on the auction block. He must flatter, he must do whatever they want and ask (constructive or

pointless, good or evil). He submits to any shame and disgrace, he adulates foreigners, he consents to any form of injustice and oppression, and, finally, he is indifferent to all the rules and bounds of human life.

It is forbidden in Islam to beg except out of necessity, and the financial assistance to the poor that Islam ordains only applies to those poor whose earnings do not meet their needs or those who are unable to work.

CHAPTER TEN

ORDINANCES

As I noted at the beginning of this book, Islam's rules and teachings are of three kinds: credal, moral and juridical. This third kind covers Islamic ordinances. After we have acknowledged God, we must carry out such actions as prayers and fasting as signs of servanthood and compliance. Here I will explain the ordinances applying to prayer, and then those applying to fasting.

RITUAL PRAYER

God Most High says, '[*The inhabitants of Hell will be asked*], "*What has brought you to this fire?*" *They will answer, "We did not pray*"' (74:42-43). The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'Ritual prayer is a pillar of religion; if one's prayer is accepted by God, then one's other acts of worship are accepted, and, if it is not accepted, then they are not accepted'. Just as if someone bathes five times

daily, dirt does not collect on his body, so offering ritual prayers five times a day cleanses one of sin.

It must of course be realized that one who offers prayers without concentration is like one who does not pray at all. God Most High says in the Glorious Qur'an, '*Woe upon worshippers who are inattentive in prayer*' (107:4-5). Once the Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) entered a mosque and saw someone praying without fully bowing or prostrating; he said, 'If this man departs from this world in this condition, he will not depart this world as a Muslim'.

Accordingly, one must pray humbly and mindful to Whom one is speaking. One must carry out the bows, prostrations, and other actions correctly to gain the sublime benefits of prayer.

God says in the Noble Qur'an, '*Prayer restrains one from lewdness and iniquity*' (29:45). This is naturally true because prayer is surrounded by customs that, if observed, never allow evil actions. For example, one such custom is that the place of prayer and the worshipper's clothing must not have been illegally obtained; if so much as a thread of clothing was illegally obtained, the prayer is not valid. The worshipper in being compelled to abstain from what is forbidden to this extent is prevented from using property obtained by forbidden means or trampling on someone's rights. Furthermore, prayers are only accepted when one has set aside all greed, envy, and other vices and evil characteristics; certainly, these vicious characteristics are the origin of all misdeeds and the worshipper, in removing himself from these characteristics, will remove himself from evil and unseemly acts. If some people, despite the fact that they pray, commit evil acts, this is because they do not act according to Islam's regulations for prayer. Accordingly, their prayers will not be accepted, and they will not realize the sublime fruits of prayer.

The Holy Lawgiver of Islam has accorded so much importance to prayer as to require it of those who are dying. If they are unable to speak the *Sura Hamd* and other words of prayer

aloud, they must say it to themselves, and if they are too weak to stand in prayer, they should pray sitting, and if they are too weak to sit, they must pray lying down. The point is that we are never exempted from prayer. If in the midst of battle, amidst the terror and confusion, one cannot find the *qibla*, one must nonetheless pray in any direction feasible.

OBLIGATORY PRAYERS

Six kinds of prayers are obligatory: 1. daily prayers, 2. *ayat* prayers, 3. funeral prayers, 4. prayers obligatory during circumambulation [of the Ka'aba], 5. prayers omitted by the parents, obligatory upon the oldest son, and 6. prayers one was hired to offer, or prayers one has vowed to offer.

PRELIMINARIES TO PRAYER

To pray, that is, to come before the Lord of the world and express servanthood and worship of His sacred essence, calls for necessary preliminaries without which the prayer is not valid. These preliminaries consist of: 1. cleanliness, 2. timeliness, 3. proper dress, 4. proper place, and 5. turning to the *qibla*. I will now discuss these in more detail.

CLEANLINESS

The worshipper must be ritually clean while praying; that is, he must precede his prayer with the ablution *wuzu* or the ritual bathings *ghusl* or *tayammum* as appropriate; his body and clothing must not be tainted with impurities.

IMPURITIES

Several things constitute impurities, including: 1. and 2. urine and feces[1] of an animal whose flesh is forbidden and which has spurting blood, that is, whose arteries spurt blood when severed, such as the wolf, fox, and rabbit, or of a bird or other animal whose flesh has become forbidden because it has eaten filth. 3. The carcass of an animal with spurting blood, whether its flesh is permissible or forbidden. Formerly lifeless parts of the carcass, however, such as the wool, hair, and nails, are considered

pure. 4. The blood itself of an animal with spurting blood, whether its flesh is permissible or forbidden. 5. and 6. The dog and wild pig, all parts of which are impure, including the hair. 7. Alcoholic beverages and all essentially liquid intoxicants. 8. Beer.

PURIFYING AGENTS

Anything by which impurities can be removed is a purifying agent (*mutahhir*); these include: 1. Water, which purifies anything but only if it is itself pure, so that things like watermelon juice and rose water do not remove impurity, and ritual ablutions and bathing performed with them are not valid.[2] 2. Earth, which cleans the soles of the feet or the shoes. 3. Sunlight, which purifies the earth and tainted mats that are dried by its rays. 4. Transformation, by which an impure thing changes into a pure thing, as when a dog falls into a salt marsh and turns into salt. 5. Transfer, as when human blood or the blood of an animal having spurting blood is transferred to an animal not having spurting blood like a fly or a mosquito. 6. Removal of the impurity from outside an animal or inside a human being, as when an animal's back or the inside of a person's nose becomes bloody and then is cleansed with the removal of the blood, leaving no further need for cleansing with water. 7. By consequence, whereby, when one impure thing is cleansed, another becomes pure as a consequence, as when an unbeliever becomes a Muslim and his children also become pure as a consequence. 8. Reduction, which is when grape juice, which becomes impure by boiling, is reduced by two-thirds through evaporation, the remainder again becomes pure.

WUZU AND ORDINANCES PERTAINING TO IT

It is recommended that one brush one's teeth and rinse out one's mouth and one's nostrils before performing *wuzu*.

For *wuzu*, one must wash the face from the hairline to the chin and the hands and forearms from the elbow to the fingertips, and one must wipe the front part of the head and the tops of the

feet. The following things must also be observed: 1. The relevant body parts must be pure. 2. The water used must be clean, pure, and lawfully acquired. 3. One must form the intention of carrying out *wuzu* to please God. Thus, if one carries it out to cool off or for some other reason, it is invalid. 4. One must observe the correct sequence of washing first the face, then the right hand, and then the left, and after that of wiping the head and then the feet. 5. The actions of *wuzu* must be done in unbroken succession, without allowing one member to dry while another is being washing or wiped. If, however, one performs them in unbroken succession but they dry quickly because of extreme heat and dry air, the *wuzu* is still valid.

Note that it is not necessary to wipe the skin of the head, but one may merely wipe the hair toward the front of the head. If, however, hair from elsewhere on the head is gathered to the front, it should be pushed back. Also, if the hair at the front is long enough to be combed, say, across the face, one must wipe the hair to its roots or part the hair and wipe the skin.

THINGS THAT INVALIDATE *WUZU*

Eight things invalidate *wuzu*: 1. urination, 2. defecation, 3. breaking wind, through the anus or some other opening created by surgery or a wound, 4. unconsciousness, 5. intoxication, 6. sleep through which both the eyes and the ears cease to function — if one ceases to see but continues hearing, *wuzu* remains valid, 7. lunacy, 8. sexual discharge, or other things that would require *ghusl*, ritual bathing, such as copious menstrual discharge.

GHUSL, RITUAL BATHING

Ghusl is two kinds, sequential and by immersion. Sequential *ghusl* consists of washing first the head and neck, then the right side of the body, and then the left side of the body. *Ghusl* by immersion consists of one immersing the entire body in water at once. *Ghusl* may be either incumbent or recommended; there are numerous occasions when bathing is recommended in

Islamic law, but only seven occasions when it is incumbent: 1. after sexual emissions, 2. bathing of the dead, 3. bathing oneself after contact with a corpse that was not bathed and has become cold, 4. having taken a vow to bathe, 5. at the cessation of menstruation, 6. after childbirth, and 7. after copius menstrual discharge. The first four forms apply to both men and women, and the last three only to women.

These things are forbidden to those who had had sexual emissions: 1. to touch the Noble Qur'an or the names of God, the Prophet, or the Imams, 2. to enter the Masjid al-Haram or the mosque of Medina, 3. to stop over in another mosque or to leave something there, and 4. to read one of the four *suras* that require prostration, that is, an-Najm, Iqra', Alif Lam Mim Tanzil, and Ha Mim Sajda. One should consult scholarly treatises for other rules applying to sexual emissions, menstruation, and childbirth.

Note that, as with *wuzu*, one must form the proper intention prior to performing *ghusl*, and the body must be clean, with nothing preventing water from reaching the skin.

TAYAMMUM

Tayammum is a ritual bath performed with earth or sand when one is unable to perform *wuzu* or *ghusl* for reasons such as lack of time, illness, or lack of water. Four things are required for *tayammum*: 1. intention, 2. to strike the palms of both hands at once on earth or other valid substances for *tayammum*, 3. to draw the palms of the two hands across the entire forehead from the hairline to the eyebrows, over the nose, and (preferably) rubbing the eyebrows, and 4. to draw the palm of the left hand across the right hand and forearm, and then to draw the palm of the right hand across the left hand and forearm. If the *tayammum* is in place of *wuzu*, this is sufficient, but if it is in place of *ghusl*, one should strike the hands on the ground and wipe the backs of the hands one more time.

RULES RELATING TO *TAYAMMUM*

1. In the absence of earth, one must perform *tayammum* with sand, and in the absence of sand, dirt clods, and, in the absence of dirt clods, stones, and in the absence of all these, dirt and dust that has been gathered. 2. *Tayammum* with plaster or other minerals is not valid. 3. If one can afford to purchase water, although it is expensive, one cannot perform *tayammum*. One must purchase water and perform *wuzu* or *ghusl*.

TIMELINESS

The *zuhr* (noontime) and *'asr* (afternoon) prayers have prescribed times that overlap.[3] The time for *zuhr* prayer extends from noon until no time remains to offer it. If someone mistakenly offers his *'asr* prayers during this time, his prayers are invalid.

The time for *'asr* prayer extends until no time remains to offer it before time for the *maghrib* (sunset) prayer. If one has not offered the *zuhr* prayer by this time, its time has lapsed, and one must offer the *'asr* prayer. The *zuhr* prayer and the *'asr* prayer have a shared time between the times exclusive to each, during which, if someone mistakenly offers the entire *'asr* before the *zuhr* prayer, his prayer is nonetheless valid, and he must later offer the *zuhr* prayer.

The *maghrib* and *'isha* (evening) prayers likewise have their specific times and a shared time. The time specific to the *maghrib* prayer extends from after sunset until no time remains to perform the three *rak'as* of the *maghrib* prayer.[4] The time specific to the *'isha* prayer extends until no time remains to offer it before midnight.[5] If one has not offered the *maghrib* prayer by this time, one must first offer the *'isha* prayer, and then the *maghrib* prayer. These two prayers have a time in common between the times specific to each, and if, during this time, someone mistakenly offers the *'isha* prayer before having offered the *maghrib* prayer, his prayer is valid, and he must afterwards offer the *maghrib* prayer.

PROPER DRESS

Several rules apply to the clothing of the worshipper: 1. It must be lawful; that is, it must either belong to him or be worn with the permission of its lawful owner. 2. It must not be ritually unclean. 3. It must not consist of animal skins, whether of animals whose flesh may be eaten or not. 4. It must not be made of the wool, hair, or down of an animal whose flesh may not be eaten, except one may offer prayers while wearing sable fur. 5. If the worshipper is male, his clothing may not include threads of silk or gold, nor may he wear gold ornaments. The same prohibition applies at all other times, not just during prayer.

PROPER PLACE

Several rules apply to the place where prayers are to be offered: 1. It must be lawful. 2. It must not be in motion, except that prayers may be offered in a moving vehicle such as an automobile or a ship in case of necessity; if the vehicle is moving away from the *qibla*, the worshipper should turn to it. 3. If the place is ritually unclean but not damp enough to dampen the body or clothing, it is acceptable, except that the prayer is invalidated if the place touched by the forehead in prostration is unclean, even if it is dry. 4. The place touched by the forehead may not be higher or lower than the places touched by the knees or the toes by more than the span across the four fingers.

TURNING TO THE *QIBLA*

The house of the Ka'aba, which stands resplendent in Mecca, is the *qibla*, and one must face it in prayer. However, if someone is far away, it is sufficient that he stand or sit to pray in a direction said to be the *qibla*. The same applies to other acts that must be performed while facing the *qibla*, such as slaughtering animals.

One unable to perform prayers even while sitting must perform them while lying on his right side, or, barring that, on his left side, with the front of his body facing the *qibla*. If this is impossible, he should lie on his back, with the soles of his feet facing the *qibla*.

If the worshippper is unable to learn from investigation which way is the *qibla*, he should try to get an idea from the *mihrabs* of mosques, graves in Muslim cemeteries, or other indications.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF PRAYER

There are eleven essential, or incumbent, elements of prayer: 1. intention, 2. the *takbir al-ahram* (pronouncing 'Allahu Akbar' at the beginning of prayer), 3. *qiyam* (standing), 4. *qara'at* (recitation of the *Sura Hamd* and another *sura*), 5. *ruku'* (bowing), 6. *sajda* (prostration), 7. *tashahhud* (testimony that Allah is the One God and Muhammad is His Prophet), 8. *salam* (greetings and blessings on the Most Noble Prophet and the pious), 9. proper sequence, 10. *tumanina*, offering one's prayers with dignity and calm, and 11. *muwalat*, offering all parts of the prayer in uninterrupted succession. Five of the eleven elements are pillars of prayer, or central elements, such that the prayer is invalid if they are omitted or added to intentionally or inadvertently. Omitting or adding to the others renders the prayer invalid only if done intentionally.

PILLARS OF PRAYERS

The pillars of prayer are: 1. intention, 2. the *takbir al-ahram*, 3. to stand (*qiyam*) while pronouncing the *takbir al-ahram* and standing in sequence with the *ruku'*, 4. the *ruku'*, and 5. the two prostrations (*sajda*).

INTENTION

Intention consists in one's offering prayer to carry out God's command. It is not necessary to express the intention verbally to oneself or aloud, as for instance by saying, 'I will offer the four *rak'as* of the *zuhr* prayer to carry out God's command.

THE *TAKBIR AL-AHRAM*

After the call to prayer (*azan*) and the *iqama* with intention, the prayer commences with saying 'Allahu Akbar'. Since saying this renders such acts as eating, drinking, laughing, and turning one's back to the *qibla* forbidden, this act of glorification is

called the *takbir al-ahram*, the glorification that forbids. It is recommended that one raise one's hands while pronouncing the *takbir*; by this action, we call to mind the greatness of God and the smallness of all else, which we set aside.

QIYAM

It is a pillar to stand while pronouncing the *takbir* and to stand in sequence with the *ruku'*, but not a pillar to stand while reciting the *Sura Hamd* and the other *sura*, or to stand after *ruku'*. Accordingly, if one forgets the *ruku'* but recollects it before reaching the *sajda*, he must first stand in *qiyam* and then bow in *ruku'*.

RUKU'

After reciting the two *suras*, one must bow to the extent that the hands reach the knees. This action is called *ruku'*, during which one must say '*Subhana Rabbi l-'Azim wa bi hamdihi*' (Glory to my Lord, the Sublime, and praise to Him) once or else '*Subhanallah*' (Glory to God) three times. After *ruku'*, one must rise to a fully erect posture and then go on to the *sajda*.

SAJDA

Sajda, prostration, means placing one's forehead, hands, kneecaps, and tips of the big toes on the ground and saying either '*Subhana Rabbi l-'A'la wa bi hamdihi*' (Glory to my Lord the Highest, and praise to Him) once or else '*Subhanallah*' three times. One then sits. The *sajda* is then repeated twice, accompanied by the same utterance.

The site which the forehead touches must be earth or something that grows from it; foodstuffs, apparel, or mineral materials are not permissible.

THE *TASHAHHUD* AND THE *SALAM*

If the prayer consists of two *rak'as*, after one has risen from the two *sajdas*, one pronounces the *Sura Hamd* and the other *sura*. One then carries out the *qunut*,[6] and, after the *ruku'* and the two

sajdas, one recites the *tashahhud*[7] and the *salam*[8]. If the prayer consists of three *rak'as*, one rises after the *tashahhud* and either recites the *Sura Hamd* alone or says '*Subhana 'llah wa l-hamdu lillahi wa la ilaha illa 'llah wa 'llahu akbar*' three times. Then one carries out the two *rukus*, the *tashahhud*, and the *salam*. If the prayer consists of four *rak'as*, one performs the fourth *rak'a* just like the third and utters the *salam* after the *tashahhud*.

THE PRAYER OF SIGNS

This prayer becomes incumbent in four circumstances: an eclipse of the sun, an eclipse of the moon (even if partial and no source of fear to anyone), an earthquake (even if no one is frightened), and weather conditions such as lightning and thunder or black or red winds (if most people are frightened).

The prayer of signs consists of two *rak'as*, each including five *ruku's*. It is prescribed that one first form one's intention, then say the *takbir*, recite the *Sura Hamd* and one other complete *sura*, bow in *ruku'*, rise, recite the two *suras* again, bow in *ruku'*, and so on for five cycles. After rising from the fifth *ruku'*, one performs two *sajdas*. One then rises and performs a second *rak'a* in the same way. One then recites the *tashahhud* and offers the *salam*.

In the prayer of the signs, one may divide a *sura* into five portions, first forming the intention, then reciting the *Sura Hamd*, then reciting at least one verse of the *sura*, then bowing in *ruku'*, then rising, and without reciting the *Sura Hamd* again, reciting the second portion of the previous *sura* and bowing in *ruku'* again, and continuing in this way until one has completed the *sura* before the fifth *ruku'* and final two *sajdas*. One performs the second *rak'a* according to the same rule and finishes the prayer.

THE TRAVELLER'S PRAYER

Someone who is travelling should shorten his prayers of four *rak'as* to two *rak'as* when six conditions are met: 1. His journey must be one of at least eight farsangs (about 48 kilometers), one

way or round trip. 2. He must have resolved to travel at least eight farsangs when he began. 3. He must not give up his intention *en route*. 4. His journey must not have a sinful purpose. 5. He must not be a traveller by profession. Accordingly, one who travels for a living (such as a truck driver) must offer his prayers in full unless he has remained at his home for ten days, after which he should perform the shorter prayers during his next three trips. 6. He must reach the limit of *tarakhkhus*, which means that he must have travelled too far from home to see the city wall or hear the call to prayer there.

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYERS

It is recommended that Muslims say their daily prayers in congregations; the spiritual reward of congregational prayers is thousands of times greater than that of solitary prayers.

There are several conditions of congregational prayers: I. That the *Imam* (prayer leader) must be of age (fifteen), believing, just, and of legitimate birth. He must perform the prayers correctly. If the congregation is male, the leader must also be male. 2. There must be no curtain or other object obstructing the congregation's view of the *imam*, except that there is no objection to a curtain or some such thing if the *Imam* is a woman. 3. The *Imam's* position may not be elevated above that of the congregation, except that there is no objection to a slight elevation (equal to the span of four fingers or less). 4. The congregation must stand behind the *Imam* or in line with him.

Here are a few rules applying to congregational prayers: 1. Members of the congregation should themselves recite all parts of the prayer except for the *Sura Hamd* and the other *sura*. If, however, the worshipper's first or second *rak'a* is the *Imam's* third or fourth *rak'a*, he must himself recite the two *suras*, and if he fails to keep up with the *Imam* because he must recite the second *sura*, he should recite only the *Hamd* and catch up with the *Imam* during the *ruku'*. If he still cannot catch up, he should resolve to complete the prayer in private. 2. The congregation should perform the *ruku'*, the *sajda*, and the other acts of prayer

together with the *Imam* or slightly after him. The congregation must certainly perform the *takbir* and the *salam* after the *Imam* has begun performing them, however. 3. If the worshipper joins the prayer while the *Imam* is in *ruku'* and joins in *ruku'*, his prayer is valid and counts as one *rak'a*.

FASTING

Fasting is an element of the holy faith of Islam. Everyone of majority must fast during the month of Ramazan, which means that, in obedience to God's command, one must abstain from anything that would invalidate one's fast from the call to prayer at dawn until dusk.

The holy act of observing the fast is heavily stressed and highly prized in Islam. The rewards and punishments associated with the fast are so important that, although God has prescribed them in advance, He says that He Himself will administer them. According to the Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family), God has said, 'The fast is for My sake, and I will give the requital for it'. When we observe the special conditions attached to it, the fast is a powerful means to free us from bondage to psychic cravings, whims, and lust and to cleanse the spirit of the pollution of carnal sin. The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) told one Jabir ibn 'Abdallah Ansari, 'Jabir, this is the month of Ramazan, when whoever fasts during the day and remains awake and mindful of God during the night, and preserves his stomach from what is forbidden and his lap from pollution, and holds his tongue, will emerge from sin just as he emerges from this month'. Jabir responded, 'Prophet of God! What good news this is!' The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) continued, 'But Jabir, the conditions for this fast are very hard!' Imam Sadiq (upon whom be peace) has said, 'The fast is a firm shield against the fires of hell'.

RAMAZAN IS GOD'S MONTH

Islamic writings have applied many interesting and attractive

names to Ramazan, such as 'the blessed month' and the 'springtime of recital of the Qur'an'. The most sublime and beautiful phrase that has been given it, however, is 'God's month'. Although, of course, every month is God's month, this month nonetheless deserves this designation because of its special importance. The name itself conveys the month's special spiritual value. The greatest of the scriptures, the Glorious Qur'an, was revealed during Ramazan.

When the blessed month of Ramazan arrives, the gates of the mercy of the Fosterer are opened to His servants. A special purity and luminous quality are seen in the human spirit, and those who fast feel a special readiness to purify their souls and reform their morals. The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) once said this regarding the glory and worth of 'God's month' on the last Friday of Sha'ban: 'People! God's month is brought to you with blessings, mercy, and forgiveness. It is a month that the Fosterer regards as the best of months. Its days are the best of days, its nights are the best of nights, and its hours are the best of hours. It is a month in which you are invited to be guests at God's table and are recipients of His kindness and generosity. In this month, your breath bears the spiritual reward for glorification and remembrance of God, and your sleep will have the requital for worship. In this month, whenever you turn to God's court, and rest at His threshold, He will answer your call, so ask God with sincerity and a pure heart to grant you success in carrying out the fast and reading the Qur'an, for one is unfortunate who is denied God's forgiveness and mercy in this bountiful and blessed month'.

FASTING CONDUCES TO PIETY

God Most High says in the Glorious Qur'an, '*Believers! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before, so that you may be virtuous*' (2:183). Islam commands its adherents to fast for one complete month (Ramazan) to allow time for the state of piety in its fullest sense to appear in them. Whenever

someone abstains from satisfying his natural physical wants, he can well manage to abstain from acting on his psychological impulses.

Of course, Islam does not hold it to be sufficient to abstain from food and drink to reach such a state of perfection through fasting. Rather, it commands the fasting person to abstain from anything that conduces to pollution and commission of sin and from anything that, through Satanic suggestion, encourages his rebellious psychological impulses.

THINGS THAT INVALIDATE A FAST

Several things void a fast, including: 1. eating or drinking, even things that are not normally consumed, such as dirt or tree sap, 2. sexual intercourse, 3. masturbation leading to ejaculation, 4. ascribing false statements to God, the Prophet, or his successors, 5. allowing thick dust to reach the throat, 6. immersing the head completely in water, 7. remaining in a state of impurity after sexual intercourse, menstruation, or parturition until the call to morning prayers, 8. using liquids for an enema, and 9. intentional vomiting. The reader is referred to scholarly studies for further explanation.

COMMERCE

Commerce means buying and selling or monetary transactions, such that the owner of the goods, the 'seller', transfers ownership of them in exchange for a sum of money, or, conversely, that the 'buyer' pays money to the seller in exchange for the goods. As may be seen, commerce is a contractual matter and needs two parties (the seller and the buyer) to take place. Accordingly, such general conditions on contracts as majority, sound mind, intention, and authority must be met.

Commercial actions are in the realm of binding contracts, which means neither of the contracting parties may revoke them after they have been agreed upon. The Lawgiver of Islam, however, considering that sometimes the buyer or seller may suffer considerable loss through negligence or error, and that this

would be contrary to social welfare, has established two safeguards against such destructive outcomes: The first is known as 'rescission' (*iqala*), which holds that, if one party regrets the transaction and asks the other to rescind it, it is recommended that he do so. The second is called 'right of withdrawal' (*khiyar*), which is a special authority a party may exercise to revoke the transaction under certain circumstances. Here are some of the better known forms of this right: 1. when the meeting at which the transaction was made is still in progress, 2. when one of the parties to the transaction has suffered loss through being deceived, as for instance when goods were sold for less than, or purchased for greater than, their real value, in which case the deceived party may rescind the transaction at once, 3. when the buyer receives defective goods, in which case he may demand an exchange or rescind the transaction, 4. any transaction involving domestic animals, which the buyer may rescind any time up to three days after the time of purchase, and 5. conditional transactions, which either party may revoke if the condition is not met.

CASH, CREDIT, AND ADVANCE PAYMENT

Transactions fall into four categories in respect to how goods and money exchange hands: 1. cash transactions, in which both goods and payment are exchanged just when the transaction is concluded, 2. credit transactions, when the goods are transferred to the buyer at the time of the transaction, but payment is delayed, 3. advance payment transactions, when payment is made at once, but the goods are delivered later, and 4. 'unripe' transactions, when both payment and delivery of goods are delayed. Of these four categories, the first three are sound, and the fourth is invalid.

CONFESSION

The importance of confession for a society in reviving rights that are in danger of being crushed and lost goes without saying. A couple of words can reveal something that would otherwise

involve the whole judicial apparatus of constructing a case, obtaining testimony, and inference. According to Islam, confession is also of great importance to the individual, in that it calls upon an instinctual tendency that Islam makes the greatest effort to keep alive and put to work. This is man's instinctive love of truth, the very contrary to his sensualism. God Most High addresses this speech to Islam's adherents: '*Believers! Stand up for justice as witnesses to Allah, even if it be detrimental to yourselves or your parents*' (4:135). The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'Speak the truth, even if it is detrimental to you'.

In legal terms, confession is speech that establishes the rights of another against the speaker, as for instance if one were to say, 'I owe so-and-so fifty dollars'. One making a confession must be of majority and sound mind, and he must make it of his own free will. Accordingly, the confession of a child, or of someone insane, drunk, talking in his sleep, or under coercion, is invalid.

FOOD AND DRINK

In the holy law of Islam, anything that is fit to be eaten or drunk is licit, with certain exceptions that have been described either in God's Book or in the *sunna* of the Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family). These exceptions, consumption of which is forbidden, fall into two categories: living and lifeless.

The living things covered include creatures of the water, land, and air.

Of marine and fresh-water creatures, only water birds and fish with scales may be eaten; the rest, such as eels, sturgeons, turtles, seals, and porpoises, may not be eaten.

Land animals are of two kinds: domestic and wild. Among domestic animals, the sheep, goat, cow and camel are permitted. The flesh of horses, mules, and donkeys is permitted but disapproved. That of other animals such as dogs and cats is forbidden. Among wild animals, one may consume flesh of

cattle, wild sheep, mountain goats, onagers, and gazelles. Of the rest, all flesh of predators and clawed animals, such as lions, leopards, wolves, foxes, jackals, and rabbits, is forbidden.

One may consume the flesh of birds that have crops and gizzards, that flap their wings frequently in flight, and that do not have claws, such as chickens, pigeons, doves, and partridges. The rest are forbidden. Certain forms of locusts are permitted, concerning which the reader should seek detailed discussions in scholarly treatises.

No flesh of any animal is permitted unless it has been properly slaughtered, as discussed in scholarly treatises.

The non-living things are either solid or liquid.

Of solids: 1. The carcass of any animal, whether its flesh is permitted or forbidden, is forbidden. The same holds for unclean things, such as the excrement of forbidden animals or foodstuffs that have become unclean through contact with unclean things. 2. Earth is forbidden. 3. Deadly poisons are forbidden. 4. Things which naturally arouse disgust in people are forbidden, such as the excrement of permitted animals, their nasal mucous, and the contents of their intestines. Likewise, fifteen parts of the bodies of permitted animals are forbidden. (Please refer to scholarly treatises for further discussion).

Of liquids: 1. Every sort of intoxicant is forbidden, even in small quantities. 2. The milk of animals whose flesh is forbidden, such as pigs, cats, and dogs, is forbidden. 3. The blood of animals with spurting blood is forbidden. 4. Unclean fluids such as the urine and semen of animals with spurting blood are forbidden. 5. Liquids into which something unclean has fallen are forbidden.

Forbidden things may be consumed in times of urgent necessity, to the extent needed to relieve the necessity. This would be true, for instance, if someone would face death from hunger, would fall ill or grow critically ill, or fall behind his companions from weakness on a journey and perhaps perish, unless he ate

forbidden things. This exception does not hold for someone who is intent on theft, or who has left his country with the object of mounting a rebellion against the Islamic government.

A NOTE ON DIET

One of our foremost duties is to maintain our health, which anyone understands whose God-given intelligence is functioning at all. The effect various foods and beverages have on our health is transparent. Beyond that, they have an appreciable effect on our spiritual and moral well-being and social relationships. We can never doubt that the psychological state and social conduct of someone drunk are not the same as that of someone sober. Similarly, if someone grows accustomed to eating or drinking revolting things, the individual and social effects of this habit on him will be unbearable for his friends and acquaintances.

Here we understand through our God-given nature that we must accept some limitations on our diet. We must not eat or drink anything that can be consumed. God Most High, Who has expressly stated that He has created everything on the earth for man, Who has no need of man and what pertains to human life, and Who sees and knows best what is advantageous or detrimental to His creatures, has declared some foods and drinks licit and others forbidden.

Imam Riza (upon whom be peace) has said, 'God has made no food or drink licit unless it were beneficial to man, and He has forbidden none unless it would be harmful or fatal'. The wisdom of forbidding certain things is patent to any clear-sighted person, and the logic of forbidding other things emerges with study. There remain a few prohibitions whose rationale has not reached us, but it may someday grow clear to us, or, if not, it may still bear some wisdom and good sense. Considering that these rules stem from God's limitless knowledge, it must be said that they represent the best and most efficacious wisdom and sound policy available, even if we, with our brief lifetimes and limited scientific means, fail to perceive why.

USURPATION

One who seizes another's property by force and appropriates it without any grounds for ownership, or who forcibly seizes it and uses it even without claiming ownership, has committed the act known in law as 'usurpation' (*ghasab*). Usurpation is therefore taking possession of another's property without any such proper occasion as purchase, rental, or permission.

It grows clear from this that usurpation is an undesirable act that disrupts the principle of private possession and ownership. To the extent that this principle is necessary to maintain society, to that extent usurpation subverts society and prevents social progress.

If the influential members of society are allowed to lay their hands on the fruits of the labours of the poor without justification, the principle of private possession and ownership will be undermined. Everyone will adopt the same attitude toward what belongs to those weaker than themselves, and the poor will have to resort to any sort of self-abasement to enjoy the fruits of their own labours. In consequence, society will degenerate into a slave market, and law will fall into discredit and be replaced by the logic of force. Accordingly, Islam has set forth severe rules for punishing the usurper and holds that usurpation is a major sin. God's Book and the *sunna* teach us that God will forgive any sin except *shirk*, and that any sin, even *shirk*, can be forgiven upon repentance, but that one who usurps what belongs to others has no hope of escape from being called to account and punished by God unless he wins forgiveness from those whose rights he has abused.

Some ordinances on usurpation follow: 1. It is incumbent upon the usurper to return the usurped property to its rightful owner at once. If the rightful owner is not alive, the property must be returned to his heirs. Even if return of the propety would cause serious harm, as for instance if someone had usurped a stone or steel beam and used it along with hundreds of thousands of others to construct a building, he is obliged to demolish that

structure, remove the usurped stone or beam, and return it to its owner unless the owner is willing to accept compensation for it. Similarly, if one usurps a few kilos of wheat and mixes them in a carload of barley, and the owner will not accept compensation, the usurper will have to remove every grain of wheat from the mix and return them all to their owner. 2. If usurped property is damaged, the usurper must pay for the damage as well as return the property. 3. If the usurped property is consumed, he must pay what it is worth. 4. If he deprives the rightful owner of the benefits from the usurped property, without having himself benefitted from it, he must make good on these benefits. An example would be if someone usurps a rental car and leaves it parked for several days.

Also, if someone adds value to usurped property, as if for instance he has usurped a sheep and fattened it on rich fodder, he has no right to the added value. If this value is separable, the property and any compensation such as fair rental value must be returned to the rightful owner, but the usurper may keep the added value. This holds, for instance, of usurped land that is cultivated, and the harvest that is realized.

PREEMPTION

If two persons jointly own a house or other property and one of them sells his part to a third party, the other partner has the right to acquire this part on the same terms and for the same price. This right is known as the right of preemption (*shuf'a*). Plainly, this right was established in Islam in order to regulate partnerships and prevent damages and other abuses that could result from actions of the partners. It often happens that an action of a new partner winds up working to the detriment of the partner possessing the right of preemption, or that their differing tastes lead to a succession of disagreements and conflicts, or that the possessor of the right of preemption gains benefits from free ownership of the property with no corresponding losses to the partner who sells. Preemption applies to land, houses, gardens, and other immovable property, not to movable

property.

PLACING BARREN LANDS UNDER CULTIVATION

To develop lands that have not been used (whether they have never been developed or where formerly developed and then abandoned by their inhabitants, becoming totally unused or turning into meadows or rushes) is always considered a good work in Islam. Besides entitling one to ownership, it leads to a spiritual reward. The Most Noble Prophet (peace and blessings upon him and his family) has said, 'Whoever places barren land under cultivation, that land belongs to him'. Imam Sadiq (upon whom be peace) has said, 'Whatever community develops land has prior right to it; the land belongs to them'. In Islam, barren lands belong to God, the Prophet, and the Imam (that is, they belong to the Islamic government); they are spoils.

One may place barren lands under cultivation and assume ownership of them under the following conditions (if several persons seek ownership, the one who acts first has priority): 1. permission of the Imam or his deputy, 2. that no one else has marked its boundaries with stones or the like, 3. that it not fall within someone else's property limits by virtue of being a river bank, adjoining a well, bounding cultivated land, or the like, and 4. that it not be exempted land such as the site of a deserted mosque, land held in trust, or public property of Muslims such as streets or roadways. (A word of explanation: To develop land has a customary meaning, according to which to say 'So-and-so developed some land' establishes his ownership of it. Of course, development means different things in different contexts; in agriculture it is accomplished by plowing, whereas in construction it is accomplished by erecting a wall.) 5. Minerals that are exposed and which anyone can remove without excavation and extraction are free for everyone to avail themselves of to the extent of their needs. However, if removal of minerals requires excavation, extraction, and other forms of skilled labour, as is the case with gold or copper mining, the one who extends the effort to extract them becomes their owner. 6. Large streams

and rivers are the common property of Muslims, along with floods of rain and snow melt that pour from the mountains. Whoever is nearer to them or more upstream has precedence over others.

LOST PROPERTY

Any property that is found and whose owner is unknown is called 'lost property' (*luqta*): 1. If such an object has a value of no more than a *mithqal* (about five grams) of silver, the finder may pick it up and use it, but if it has a greater value, he should not pick it up, and, if he does, he must seek for its owner by usual means for one year and surrender the object upon finding him. If he does not find the owner, he should give it as alms to the poor on his behalf. 2. If such an object is found in a ruin whose inhabitants have become extinct, or in a cave or on barren lands with no owner, then it belongs to the finder. If it is found on lands under ownership, the finder should ask its previous owners about it. If they lost or hid it and can identify it, he must return it to them. Otherwise, it is his. 3. If an animal with no known owner is found, the rules for lost property apply to it. 4. If a lost child is found on the road, it is incumbent upon every Muslim to take it along and take care of it. 5. If stolen property is entrusted to someone, the rules for lost property apply to it. He must surrender it to its original owner; he may not return it to the thief.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TEN

1. The site contaminated by urine must be cleaned with pure water, but the site contaminated by feces may be cleaned by water or by three stones or similar things if the feces have not spread beyond the immediate area. Otherwise, it must be cleaned with water. It must also be noted that if the feces cannot be removed with three stones, more

must be used to clean the area completely.

2. A volume of water having a weight of at least about 384 kilograms is called a *kur* and is considered not to become impure when tainted with impurity, whereas a lesser volume, called *qalil*, does become impure. *Qalil* water can be made pure by addition of enough pure water (including rain) to make a *kur* volume.

3. If a stick or some such thing is plunged straight into the ground, it will cast a shadow to the west in the morning, when the sun is out, and, as the sun rises, the shadow will shorten. It will reach its shortest length at noon, after which it will extend to the east, lengthening as the sun progresses west. Accordingly, when the shadow has reached its shortest length and begins to lengthen, noon has clearly passed. It must be noted that, in some cities, such as Mecca, the shadow will totally disappear at noon, and it will be clear that noon has passed when the shadow reappears.

4. The time of *maghrib* begins about fifteen minutes after the setting of the sun. It is marked by the disappearance of the redness of the sky to the west that appears after the sun sets.

5. Midnight in Islamic law is eleven and one-quarter hours after noon.

6. After reciting the *suras*, one raises the hands towards the face and recites any desired supplication, such as '*Rabbana atina fi'd-dunya hasanatan wa fil'l-akhirati hasanatan wa qina azab an-nar*' ('Our Lord, give us a benefaction in this world and a benefaction in the next world, and spare us the torment of fire').

7. The *tashahhud* consists in saying this sentence: '*Ashhadu an la ilaha illa 'llahu wahduhu la sharika lahu wa ashhadu an Muhammadan 'abduhu wa rasuluhu. Allahuma salla 'ala Muhammadin wa ali Muhammad*' ('I bear witness that there is no god but Allah in His oneness, Who has no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Prophet. God bless Muhammad and his progeny').

8. The *salam* consists in saying: '*As-salamu 'alayka ayyuha 'n-nabiyu wa rahmatu 'llahi wa barakatuhu. As-salamu 'alayna wa 'ala 'ibadi 'illahi 's-salihin. As-salamu 'alaykum wa rahmatu 'llahi wa barakatuh*' ('Peace upon you, O Prophet, and God's mercy and blessing. Peace upon ourselves and upon God's righteous servants. Peace upon you all and God's mercy and blessing').

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