

An Introduction to Ilm al-Kalam

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Murtadha Mutahhari

**Translated by
Ali Quli Qara'i**

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Authors(s):

[Murtadha Mutahhari](#) [1]

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Translator(s):

[Ali Quli Qara'i](#) [3]

The main doctrines of kalam (theology) and their subsequent modifications with special reference to Mu'tazilah, Asha'irah and Shi'ah schools of kalam.

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[Ilm al-Kalam](#) [7]

[Theology](#) [8]

[Traditions](#) [9]

[Kalam](#) [10]

An Introduction to 'Ilm al-Kalam

This long article is a part of Martyr Murtadha Mutahhari's book *Ashna'i ba 'ulum al-Islami* (An Introduction to the Islamic Sciences). The book consists of seven parts:

- (1) logic
- (2) philosophy
- (3) *al-kalam* (Muslim scholastic philosophy)
- (4) *'irfan* (Islamic mysticism)
- (5) *usul al-fiqh* (the principles of jurisprudence)
- (6) *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence)
- (7) *hikmat al-'amali'* (practical philosophy or practical morality).

All the seven parts together serve both as a comprehensive survey of the fundamentals of different branches of Islamic sciences and a general and comprehensive perspective for the proper

understanding of the basic teachings of Islam along with the main points of difference among various sects of Muslims.

This work of Martyr Mutahhari is the best introduction to Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence. From this view, *Ashna'i ba 'ulum al-Islami* deserves to be prescribed as the basic text for all the students of Islamic studies. It is also very useful for non-specialists who wish to acquaint themselves with Islam.

All the introductory books written so far are either by the Orientalists and are naturally biased and fail to give true picture of the development of different Islamic sciences or are written by Muslim scholars who consciously or unknowingly incorporate in the body of books certain misleading notions propagated by the Western scholars of Islam about Muslim philosophy and its various branches.

It also can be said with some justification that no other available introductory text in this field covers all Muslim sects and their specific views. Martyr Murtadha Mutahhari's exposition and evaluation of various theories is objective and unbiased, which is the most essential condition for a book to be prescribed as an introductory text.

In this part, dealing with *'ilm al-kalam*, the author has discussed the main doctrines of *kalam* and their subsequent modifications with special reference to Mu'tazilah, Asha'irah and Shi'ah schools of *kalam*. But he has not ignored other schools and has referred to their relevant doctrines wherever it was necessary for the full understanding of the problem under discussion.]

'ilm al-kalam is one of the Islamic sciences. It discusses the fundamental Islamic beliefs and doctrines which are necessary for a Muslim to believe in. It explains them, argues about them, and defends them.

The scholars of Islam divide Islamic teachings into three parts:

(i) Doctrines (*'aqa'id*): These constitute the issues which must be understood and believed in, such as, the Unity of God, the Divine Attributes, universal and restricted prophethood, etc. However, there are certain differences between Muslim sects as to what constitutes the basic articles of faith (*usul al-Din*) in which belief is necessary.

(ii) Morals (*akhlaq*): These relate to the commands and teachings relating to the spiritual and moral characteristics of human beings, such as, justice, God-fearing (*taqwa*), courage, chastity, wisdom, endurance, loyalty, truthfulness, trustworthiness, etc., and prescribe 'how' a human being should be.

(iii) The Law (*ahkam*): Here the issues relating to practice and the correct manner of performing acts, such as, prayers (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*), *haji*, *jihad*, *al-'amr bil ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, buying, renting, marriage, divorce, division of inheritance and so on, are discussed.

The science which deals with the first of the above-mentioned is *'ilm al-kalam*. The study of the second is *'ilm al-'akhlaq* (ethics). The study of the third is called *'ilm al-fiqh* (the science of jurisprudence). That which is subjected to division in this classification is the corpus of Islamic teachings; that is, those things

which constitute the content of Islam. It does not include all those Islamic studies which form the preliminaries for the study of Islamic teachings, such as, literature, logic, and occasionally philosophy.

Secondly, in this classification the criterion behind division is the relationship of Islamic teachings to the human being: those things which relate to human reason and intellect are called *'aqa'id*; things which relate to human qualities are called *akhlaq*; and those things which relate to human action and practice are included in *fiqh*.

As I shall discuss in my lectures on *'ilm al-fiqh*, although *fiqh* is a single discipline from the viewpoint of its subject, it consists of numerous disciplines from other viewpoints.

In any case, *'ilm al-kalam* is the study of Islamic doctrines and beliefs. In the past, it was also called "*usul al-Din*" or "*'ilm al-tawhid wa al-sifat*".

The Beginnings of Kalam

Though nothing definite can be said about the beginnings of *'ilm al-kalam* among Muslims, what is certain is that discussion of some of the problems of *kalam*, such as the issue of predestination (*jabr*) and free will (*ikhtiyar*), and that of Divine Justice, became current among Muslims during the first half of the second century of Hijrah. Perhaps the first formal centre of such discussions was the circle of al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728-29).

Among the Muslim personalities of the latter half of the first century, the names of Ma'bad al-Juhani (d. 80/699) and Ghaylan ibn Muslim al-Dimashqi (d. 105/723) have been mentioned, who adamantly defended the ideas of free will (*ikhtiyar*) and man's freedom. There were others who opposed them and supported predestination (*jabr*). The believers in free will were called "*qadariyyah*" and their opponents were known as "*jabriyyah*".

Gradually the points of difference between the two groups extended to a series of other issues in theology, physics, sociology and other problems relating to man and the Resurrection, of which the problem of *jabr* and *ikhtiyar* was only one. During this period, the "*qadariyyah*" came to be called "*Mu'tazilah*" and the "*jabriyyah*" became known as "*Asha'irah*". The Orientalists and their followers insist on considering the beginnings of discursive discussions in the Islamic world from this point or its like.

However, the truth is that rational argumentation about Islamic doctrines starts with the Holy Qur'an itself, and has been followed up in the utterances of the Holy Prophet (S) and especially in the sermons of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (A). This despite the fact that their style and approach are different from those of the Muslim *mutakallimun*¹.

Inquiry or Imitation?

The Holy Qur'an has laid the foundation of faith and belief on thought and reasoning. Throughout, the Qur'an insists that men should attain faith through the agency of thought. In the view of the Qur'an, intellectual servitude is not sufficient for believing and understanding its basic doctrines. Accordingly, one should take up a rational inquiry of the basic principles and doctrines of the faith. For example, the belief that God is One, should be arrived at rationally. The same is true of the prophethood of Muhammad (S). This requirement resulted in the establishment of *'ilm al-'usul* during the first century.

There were many reasons which led to the unprecedented realization of the necessity for the study of the fundamentals of the Islamic faith amongst Muslims and the task of defending them, a realization which led to the emergence of prominent *mutakallimun* during the second, third, and fourth centuries.

These were: embracing of Islam by various nations who brought with them a series of (alien) ideas and notions; mixing and coexistence of the Muslims with people of various religions, such as, the Jews, the Christians, the Magians, and the Sabaeans, and the ensuing religious debates and disputes between the Muslims and those peoples; the emergence of the *Zanadiqah*² in the Islamic world – who were totally against religion – as a result of the general freedom during the rule of the 'Abbasid Caliphs (as long as it did not interfere in the matters of state politics); the birth of philosophy in the Muslim world – which by itself gave birth to doubts and skeptical attitudes.

The First Problem

Apparently, the first problem which was discussed and debated by the Muslims was that of predestination and free will. This was very natural, since it is a primary problem linked with human destiny and which attracts the interest of every thinking adult. Perhaps it is not possible to find a society which has reached intellectual maturity in which this problem was not raised. Secondly, the Holy Qur'an has a large number of verses on this subject, which instigate thought in regard to this problem³.

Accordingly, there is no reason to try to seek another source for the origin of this problem in the Islamic world.

The Orientalists, habitually, make an effort, in order to negate the originality of the Islamic teachings, to trace the roots, at any cost, of all sciences that originated amongst Muslims to the world outside the domains of Islam, in particular the Christian world. Therefore, they insist that the roots of *'ilm al-kalam* should be acknowledged to lie outside Islam, and they make similar attempts with regard to the study of grammar, prosody (and perhaps semantics, rhetoric, and studies of literary and poetic devices), and Islamic *'irfan*.

The problem of determinism and free will (*jabr wa ikhtiyar*) is the same as the problem of predestination and Divine Providence *qada' wa qadar*, the first formulation relates to man and his free will, while the

second one relates to God. This problem also raises the issue of Divine Justice, because there is an explicit connection between determinism and injustice on the one hand, and free will and justice on the other.

The problem of justice raises the issue of the essential good and evil of actions, and the latter in its turn brings along with it the problem of the validity of reason and purely rational judgements. These problems together lead to the discussion of Divine wisdom (that is the notion that there is a judicious purpose and aim behind Divine Acts)⁴, and thereby, gradually, to the debate about the unity of Divine Acts and the unity of the Attributes, as we shall explain later.

The formation of opposite camps in the debates of *kalam*, later acquired a great scope, and extended to many philosophical problems, such as, substance and accident, nature of indivisible particles which constitute physical bodies, the problem of space, etc. This was because, in the view of the *mutakallimun*, discussion of such issues was considered a prelude to the debate about theological matters, particularly those related with *mabda'* (primeval origin) and *ma'ad* (resurrection). In this way many of the problems of philosophy entered *'ilm al-kalam*, and now there are many problems common to both.

If one were to study the books on *kalam*, specially those written after the 7th/13th century, one would see that most of them deal with the same problems as those discussed by philosophers – especially, Muslim philosophers – in their books.

Islamic philosophy and *kalam* have greatly influenced each other. One of the results was that *kalam* raised new problems for philosophy, and philosophy helped in widening the scope of *kalam*, in the sense that dealing with many philosophical problems came to be considered necessary in *kalam*. With God's help, we hope to give an example of each of these two results of reciprocal influence between philosophy and *kalam*.

Al-Kalam al-'Aqli and al-Kalam al-Naqli

Although *'ilm al-kalam* is a rational and discursive discipline, it consists of two parts from the viewpoint of the preliminaries and fundamentals used by it in arguments:

- (i) *'aqli* (rational);
- (ii) *naqli* (transmitted, traditional).

The *'aqli* part of *kalam* consists of the material which is purely rational, and if there is any reference to *naqli* (tradition), it is for the sake of illumination and confirmation of a rational judgement. But in problems such as those related to Divine Unity, prophethood, and some issues of Resurrection, reference to *naql* – the Book and the Prophet's Sunnah – is not sufficient; the argument must be purely rational.

The *naqli* part of *kalam*, although it consists of issues related with the doctrines of the faith – and it is

necessary to believe in them – but since these issues are subordinate to the issue of prophethood, it is enough to quote evidence from the Divine Revelation or the definite *ahadith* of the Prophet (S), e.g. in issues linked with *imamah* (of course, in the Shi'ite faith, wherein belief in *imamah* is considered a part of *usul al-Din*), and most of the issues related with the Resurrection.

1. See Murtadha Mutahhari, *Sayri dar Nahj al-balaghah*, pp.69–76, where the author has discussed the difference between the approach of the Nahj al-balaghah to the problems of theology and metaphysics and the approach of Muslim mutakallimun and philosophers to such problems. (Translator)
2. "Zanadiqah" (sing. zindiq), a term applied heterogeneously and relatively, is used to describe any heretic group whose belief deviates radically from the Islamic doctrines. The author, probably, refers by it to one or more of such sects as the Mu'attilah, who denied the creation and the Creator, reducing the world to an unstable mixture of the four elements, the Manawiyah (Manichaeans); and Mazdakiyyah, who were dualists, etc. (Translator)
3. See Murtadha Mutahhari, *Insan wa sarnewisht* (Man and Destiny).
4. See Murtadha Mutahhari, 'Adl al-ilahi (Divine Justice), "the Introduction," pp. 7–43.

Definition and subject matter of 'ilm al-kalam

For a definition of *'ilm al-kalam*, it is sufficient to say that, 'It is a science which studies the basic doctrines of the Islamic faith (*usul al-Din*). It identifies the basic doctrines and seeks to prove their validity and answers any doubts which may be cast upon them.'

In texts on logic and philosophy it is mentioned that every science has a special subject of its own, and that the various sciences are distinguished from one another due to their separate subject matter.

This is certainly true, and those sciences whose subject matter has a real unity are such. However, there is nothing wrong if we form a discipline whose unity of subject matter and the problems covered by it is an arbitrary and conventional one, in the sense that it covers diverse, mutually exclusive subjects, which are given an arbitrary unity because they serve a single purpose and objective.

In sciences whose subject has an essential unity, there is no possibility of overlapping of problems. But in sciences in which there is a conventional unity among the issues dealt with, there is nothing wrong if there is an overlapping of issues. The commonness of the problems between philosophy and *kalam*, psychology and *kalam*, or sociology and *kalam*, is due to this reason.

Some Islamic scholars have sought to define and outline the subject matter of *'ilm al-kalam*, and have expressed various opinions. But this is a mistake; because a clear-cut delineation of the subject of study is possible for only those sciences which have an essential unity among the problems dealt with. But in those sciences in which there is a conventional unity of problems dealt with, there can be no unity of subject. Here we cannot discuss this issue further.

The Name "Ilm al-Kalam"

Another point is why this discipline has been called "*ilm al-kalam*", and when this name was given to it. Some have said that it was called "*kalam*" (*lit.* speech) because it gives an added power of speech and argument to one who is well-versed in it. Some say that the reason lies in the habit of the experts of this science who began their own statements in their books with the expression "*al-kalamu fi kadha*".

Others explain that it was called "*kalam*" because it discussed issues regarding which the *Ahl al-Hadith* preferred to maintain complete silence. Yet according to others this name came to be in vogue when the issue whether the Holy Qur'an (called "*kalamullahi*") ,the Divine Utterance¹, i.e. the Holy Qur'an) is created (*makhlūq*) or not, became a matter for hot debate amongst the Muslim – a controversy which led to animosity between the two opposite camps and bloodshed of many.

This is also the reason why that period is remembered as a "time of severe hardship" – *mihnah*. That is, since most of the debates about the doctrines of the faith revolved around the *huduth* (createdness, temporality) or the *qidam* (pre al-ternity) of the "Utterance" or *kalam* of God, this discipline which discussed the principal doctrines of the faith came to be called "*ilm al-kalam*" (*lit.* the science of the Utterance). These are the various opinions that have been expressed about the reason why *ilm al-kalam* was given this name.

The Various Schools of Kalam

The Muslims differed with one another in matters of the Law (*fiqh*), following differing paths and dividing into various sects, such as Ja'fari, Zaydi, Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki and Hanbali, each of which has a *fiqh* of its own. Similarly, from the viewpoint of the doctrine, they divided into various schools, each with its own set of principal doctrines. The most important of these schools are: the Shi'ah, the Mu'tazilah, the 'Asha'irah, and the Murji'ah.

Here it is possible that the question may arise as to the reason behind such regretful division of the Muslims into sects in matters dealing with *kalam* and *fiqh*, and why they could not maintain their unity in these spheres. The difference in matters of *kalam* causes disunity in their Islamic outlook, and the disagreement in the matter of *fiqh* deprives them of the unity of action.

Both this question and the regret are justified. But it is necessary to pay attention to the two following points:

- (i) The disagreement in issues of *fiqh* among the Muslims is not so great as to shatter the foundations of the unity of doctrinal outlook and mode of practice. There is so much common in their doctrinal and practical matters that the points of difference can hardly inflict any serious blow.
- (ii) Theoretical differences and divergence of views is inevitable in societies in spite of their unity and

agreement in principles, and as long as the roots of the differences lie in methods of inference, and not in vested interests, they are even beneficial; because they cause mobility, dynamism, discussion, curiosity, and progress. Only when the differences are accompanied by prejudices and emotional and illogical alignments, and lead individuals to slander, defame, and treat one another with contempt, instead of motivating them to endeavour towards reforming themselves, that they are a cause of misfortune.

In the Shi'ite faith, the people are obliged to imitate a living *mujtahid*, and the *mujtahidun* are obliged to independently ponder the issues and form their independent opinions and not to be content with what has been handed down by the ancestors. *Ijtihad* and independence of thought inherently lead to difference of views; but this divergence of opinions has given life and dynamism to the Shi'ite *fiqh*.

Therefore, difference in itself cannot be condemned. What is condemnable is the difference which originates in evil intentions and selfish interests, or when it centres around issues which drive Muslims on separate paths, such as the issue of *imamah* and leadership, not the difference in secondary and non-basic matters.

To undertake an examination of the intellectual history of the Muslims so as to find which differences originated in evil intentions, vested interests, and prejudices, and which were a natural product of their intellectual life, whether all points of difference in the sphere of *kalam* should be regarded as fundamental, or whether all problems in *fiqh* should be regarded as secondary, or if it is possible that a difference in *kalam* may not be of fundamental significance whereas one in *fiqh* may have such importance – these are questions which lie outside the brief scope of this lecture.

Before we take up the schools of *kalam* for discussion, it is essential to point out that there has been a group of scholars in the Islamic world which was basically opposed to the very idea of *'ilm al-kalam* and rational debate about Islamic doctrines, considering it a taboo and an innovation in the faith (*bid'ah*). They are known as "Ahl al-Hadith." Ahmad ibn Hanbal, one of the imams of jurisprudence of the Ahl al-Sunnah, stands foremost among them.

The Hanbalis are totally against *kalam*, Mu'tazilite or Ash'arite, not to speak of the Shi'ite *kalam*. In fact they are basically opposed to logic and philosophy. Ibn Taymiyyah, who was one of the eminent scholars of the Sunni world, gave a verdict declaring *kalam* and logic as 'unlawful'. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, another figure among the Ahl al-Hadith, has written a book called *Sawn al-mantiq wa al-kalam 'an al-mantiq wa al-kalam* ("Protecting speech and logic from [the evil of] *'ilm al-kalam* and the science of logic").

Malik ibn Anas is another Sunni imam who considers any debate or inquiry about doctrinal matters to be unlawful. We have explained the Shi'ite viewpoint in this matter, in the introduction to Vol.V of *Usul al-falsafah wa rawish al-riyalism*[2](#)

The important schools of *kalam*, as mentioned earlier, are: Shi'ah, Mu'tazilah, Asha'irah, and Murji'ah.

Some sects of the Khawarij and the Batinis, such as the Isma'ilis, have also been considered as schools of Islamic *kalam*³.

However, in my view, none of these two sects can be considered as belonging to the schools of Islamic *kalam*. The Khawarij, although they held specific beliefs in the matters of doctrine, and perhaps were the first to raise doctrinal problems by expressing certain beliefs about *Imamah*, the *kufr* (apostasy) of the *fasiq* (evil-doer, one who commits major sins), and considered the disbelievers in these beliefs as apostates, but they did not, firstly, create a rationalist school of thought in the Muslim world, and, secondly, their thinking was so much deviated – from the viewpoint of the Shi'ites – that it is difficult to count them among Muslims.

What makes things easy is that the Khawarij ultimately became extinct and only one of their sects, called "Abadiyyah" has some followers today. The Abadiyyah were the most moderate of all the Khawarij, and that is the reason why they have survived until today.

The Batinis, too, have so much liberally interfered in Islamic ideas on the basis of esotericism that it is possible to say that they have twisted Islam out of its shape, and that is the reason why the Muslim world is not ready to consider them as one of the sects of Islam.

About thirty years ago when the Dar al-Taqrīb Bayna al-Madhahib al-Islamiyyah was established in Cairo, the Imamiyyah Shi'ah, the Zaydiyyah, the Hanafi, the Shafi'i, the Maliki and the Hanbali sects, each of them had a representative. The Isma'ilis tried hard to send a representative of their own; but it was not accepted by other Muslims. Contrary to the Khawarij, who did not create a system of thought, the Batinis, despite their serious deviations, do have a significant school of *kalam* and philosophy. There have emerged among them important thinkers who have left behind a considerable number of works. Lately, the Orientalists have been showering great attention on the Batini thought and works.

One of the prominent Isma'ili figures is Nasir Khusrow al-'Alawi (d. 841/1437–38), the well-known Persian poet and the author of such famous works as *Jami' al-hikmatayn*, *Kitab wajh al-Din*, and *Khuwan al-'ikwan*. Another is Abu Hatam al-Razi (d. 332/943–44), the author of *A'lam al-nubuwwah*. Others are: Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, the author of *Kashf al-mahjub* (its Persian translation has been recently published), who died during the second half of the 4th/10th century; Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, a pupil of Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, has written a large number of books about the Isma'ili faith; Abu Hanifah Nu'man ibn Thabit, well-known as Qadi Nu'man or "the Shi'ite Abu Hanifah" (i.e. Isma'ili); his knowledge of *fiqh* and *hadith* is good, and his well-known book *Da'a'im al-Islam* has been printed by lithotype several years ago.

1. Translator's Note: There are at least seventy-five places where the various derivatives of the root kalimah occur in the Qur'an. In three places the phrase kalam Allah is used in reference to the Qur'an (2:75, 9:6, 48:15).

The word kalimah (word, statement), or the plural kalimat, with reference to God occurs at least thirty times in the Qur'an, twice with reference to Jesus (A) who is called a "kalimah" of God. The Gospel of John designates Jesus Christ (A) as the "Eternal Word of God." The Qur'an also speaks of Jesus as a Word of God, while according to John's Gospel he is the

Word, eternal and uncreated: "Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God."

We are further told: "Through him God made all things, not one thing in all creation was made without him. The Word was the source of life the Word became a human being and, full of grace and truth, lived among us. We saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father's only Son."

Probably the Christian belief in Jesus as the uncreated kalimat Allah (Word of God), some kind of a demiurge – a belief which probably emerged as a result of Manichaeism on early Christianity – had prompted the early Muslims, engaged in polemics with Christians on the nature of Jesus Christ, to consider in their turn, the Qur'an, the Kalam Allah, as uncreated and eternal

[2.](#) 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *Usul al-falsafah wa rawishe riyalism* ("The Principles and Method of Realism"), vol. V (chapter XIV), the introduction by Murtadha Mutahhari, who has written very elaborate footnotes on the text of 'Allamah Tabataba'i's book

[3.](#) 'Abd al-Rahman al-Badawi, *Madhahib al-Islamiyyin*, vol. I, p. 34. Apparently, the author does not consider the Tahawiyyah, the Maturidiyyah and the Zahiriyyah as among the major schools of kalam, or not important enough to be included in this brief survey. (Translator)

Mu'tazilah

We shall begin our discussion – and we shall explain later why – with the Mu'tazilah. The emergence of this sect took place during the latter part of the first century or at the beginning of the second. Obviously *'ilm al-kalam*, like any other field of study, developed gradually and slowly attained maturity.

First we shall enumerate the principal Mu'tazilite beliefs, or what is better to say, the basic and salient points of their school of thought. Second, we shall point out the well-known Mu'tazilite figures and speak of their fate in history. Then we shall give an account of the main outlines of the transitions and changes in their thought and beliefs.

The opinions held by the Mu'tazilah are many, and are not confined to the religious matters, or which according to them form an essential part of the faith. They cover a number of physical, social, anthropological and philosophical issues, which are not directly related with the faith. However, there is a certain relevance of these problems to religion, and, in the belief of the Mu'tazilah, any inquiry about the matters of religion is not possible without studying them.

There are five principal doctrines which, according to the Mu'tazilah themselves, constitute their basic tenets:

- (i) *Tawhid*, i.e. absence of plurality and attributes.
- (ii) Justice (*'adl*), i.e. God is just and that He does not oppress His creatures.

(iii) Divine retribution (*at-wa'd wa al-wa'id*), i.e. God has determined a reward for the obedient and a punishment for the disobedient, and there can be no uncertainty about it. Therefore, Divine pardon is only possible if the sinner repents, for forgiveness without repentance (*tawbah*) is not possible.

(iv) *Manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn* (a position between the two positions). This means that a *fasiq* (i.e. one who commits one of the "greater sins," such as a wine imbiber, adulterer, or a liar etc.) is neither a believer (*mu'min*) nor an infidel (*kafir*); *fisq* is an intermediary state between belief and infidelity.

(v) *al-'amr bil ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* [bidding to do what is right and lawful, and forbidding what is wrong and unlawful]. The opinion of the Mu'tazilah about this Islamic duty is, firstly, that the Shari'ah is not the exclusive means of identifying the *ma'ruf* and the *munkar*; human reason can, at least partially, independently identify the various kinds of *ma'ruf* and *munkar*.

Secondly, the implementation of this duty does not necessitate the presence of the Imam, and is a universal obligation of all Muslims, whether the Imam or leader is present or not. Only some categories of it are the obligation of the Imam or ruler of Muslims, such as, implementation of the punishments (*hudud*) prescribed by the Shari'ah, guarding of the frontiers of Islamic countries, and other such matters relating to the Islamic government.

Occasionally, the Mu'tazilite *mutakallimun* have devoted independent volumes to discussion of their five doctrines, such as the famous *al-'Usul al-khamsah* of al-Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar al-'Astarabadi (d. 415/1025), a Mu'tazilite contemporary of al-Sayyid al-Murtadha 'Alam al-Huda and al-Sahib ibn 'Abbad (d. 385/995).

As can be noticed, only the principles of *tawhid* and Justice can be considered as parts of the essential doctrine. The other three principles are only significant because they characterize the Mu'tazilah. Even Divine Justice – although its notion is definitely supported by the Qur'an, and belief in it is a necessary part of the Islamic faith and doctrine – has been made one of the five major doctrines because it characterizes the Mu'tazilah. Or otherwise belief in Divine Knowledge and Power is as much an essential part of the Islamic faith and principal doctrine.

Also in the Shi'ite faith the principle of Divine Justice is considered one of the five essential doctrines. It is natural that the question should arise: what is particular about Divine Justice that it should be counted among the essential doctrines, though justice is only one of the Divine Attributes? Is not God Just in the same manner as He is the Omniscient, the Mighty, the Living, the Perceiver, the Hearer and the Seer? All those Divine Attributes are essential to the faith. Then why justice is given so much prominence among the Divine Attributes?

The answer is that Justice has no advantage over other Attributes. The Shi'ite *mutakallimun* have specially mentioned justice among the principal Shi'ite doctrines because the Ash'arites – who form the majority of the Ahl al-Sunnah – implicitly deny that it is an Attribute, whereas they do not reject the Attributes of Knowledge, Life, Will, etc. Accordingly, justice is counted among the specific doctrines of

the Shi'ah, as also of the Mu'tazilah.

The above-mentioned five doctrines constitute the basic position of the Mu'tazilah from the viewpoint of *kalam*, otherwise, as said before, the Mu'tazilite beliefs are not confined to these five and cover a broad scope ranging from theology, physics and sociology to anthropology, in all of which they hold specific beliefs, a discussion of which lies outside the scope of these lectures.

The Doctrine of al-Tawhid

Beginning with *tawhid* it has various kinds and levels: *al-tawhid al-dhati* (Unity of the Essence), *al-tawhid al-sifati* (Unity of the Attributes, i.e., with the Essence), *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* (Unity of the Acts), *al-tawhid al-'ibadi* (monotheism in worship).

Al-Tawhid al-dhati

It means that the Divine Essence is one and unique; it does not have a like or match. All other beings are God's creations and inferior to Him in station and in degree of perfection. In fact, they cannot be compared with Him. The idea of *al-tawhid al-dhati* is made clear by the following two [Qur'anic] verses:

Nothing is like Him. (42:11)

He does not have a match [whatsoever]. (112:4)

A-Tawhid al-sifati

It means that the Divine Attributes such as Knowledge, Power, Life, Will, Perception, Hearing, Vision, etc. are not realities separate from God's Essence. They are identical with the Essence, in the sense that the Divine Essence is such that the Attributes are true of It, or is such that It manifests these Attributes.

Al-Tawhid al-'af'ali

It means that all beings, or rather all acts [even human acts] exist by the Will of God, and are in some way willed by His sacred Essence.

Al-Tawhid al-'ibadi

It means that except God no other being deserves worship and devotion. Worship of anything besides God is *shirk* and puts the worshipper outside the limits of Islamic *tawhid* or monotheism.

In a sense *al-tawhid al-'ibadi* (*tawhid* in worship) is different from other kinds of *tawhid*, because the first three relate to God and this kind relates to the creatures. In other words, the Unity of Divine Essence, His Uniqueness and the identity of the Essence and Attributes, the unity of the origin of everything – all of them are matters which relate to God.

But *tawhid* in worship, i.e. the necessity of worshipping the One God, relates to the behaviour of the creatures. But in reality, *tawhid* in worship is also related to God, because it means Uniqueness of God as the only deserving object of worship, and that He is in truth the One Deity Worthy of Worship. The statement "*la ilaha illallah*" encompasses all aspects of *tawhid*, although its first signification is monotheism in worship.

Al-tawhid al-dhati and *al-tawhid al-'ibadi* are part of the basic doctrines of Islam. It means that if there is a shortcoming in one's belief in these two principles, it would put one outside the pale of Islam. No Muslim has opposed these two basic beliefs.

Lately, the Wahhabis, who are the followers of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, who was a follower of Ibn Taymiyyah, a Hanbali from Syria, have claimed that some common beliefs of the Muslims such as one in intercession (*shafa'ah*) and some of their practices such as invoking the assistance of the prophets (A) and holy saints (R) are opposed to the doctrine of *al-tawhid al-'ibadi*. But these are not considered by other Muslims to conflict with *al-tawhid al-'ibadi*.

The point of difference between the Wahhabis and other Muslims is not whether any one besides God – such as the prophets or saints – is worthy of worship. There is no debate that anyone except God cannot be worshipped. The debate is about whether invoking of intercession and assistance can be considered a form of worship or not. Therefore, the difference is only secondary, not a primary one. Islamic scholars have rejected the viewpoint of the Wahhabis in elaborate, well-reasoned answers.

Al-tawhid al-sifati (the Unity of Divine Essence and Attributes) is a point of debate between the Mu'tazilah and the Asha'irah. The latter deny it while the former affirm it. *Al-tawhid al-'af'ali* is also another point of difference between them, with the difference, however, that the matter is reverse; i.e. the Asha'irah affirm it and the Mu'tazilah deny it.

When the Mu'tazilah call themselves "*ahl al-tawhid*", and count it among their doctrines, thereby they mean by it *al-tawhid al-sifati*, not *al-tawhid al-dhati*, nor *al-tawhid al-'ibadi* (which are not disputed), nor *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*. Because, firstly, *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* is negated by them, and, secondly, they expound their own viewpoint about it under the doctrine of justice, their second article.

The Asha'irah and the Mu'tazilah formed two radically opposed camps on the issues of *al-tawhid al-sifati* and *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*. To repeat, the Mu'tazilah affirm *al-tawhid al-sifati* and reject *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*, while the Ash'arite position is the reverse. Each of them have advanced arguments in support of their positions. We shall discuss the Shi'ite position regarding these two aspects of *tawhid* in the related chapter.

[The Doctrine of Divine Justice](#)

In the preceding lecture I have mentioned the five fundamental Mu'tazilite principles, and explained the

first issue, i.e. their doctrine of *tawhid*. Here we shall take up their doctrine of Divine Justice.

Of course, it is evident that none of the Islamic sects denied justice as one of the Divine Attributes. No one has ever claimed that God is not just. The difference between the Mu'tazilah and their opponents is about the interpretation of Justice. The Asha'irah interpret it in such a way that it is equivalent, in the view of the Mu'tazilah, to a denial of the Attribute of Justice. Otherwise, the Asha'irah are not at all willing to be considered the opponents of justice.

The Mu'tazilah believe that some acts are essentially 'just' and some intrinsically 'unjust.' For instance, rewarding the obedient and punishing the sinners is justice; and that God is Just, i.e. He rewards the obedient and punishes the sinners, and it is impossible for Him to act otherwise. Rewarding the sinners and punishing the obedient is essentially and intrinsically unjust, and it is impossible for God to do such a thing.

Similarly, compelling His creatures to commit sin, or creating them without any power of free will, then creating the sinful acts at their hands, and then punishing them on account of those sins – this is injustice, an ugly thing for God to do; it is unjustifiable and unGodly. But the Asha'irah believe that no act is intrinsically or essentially just or unjust.

Justice is essentially whatever God does. If, supposedly, God were to punish the obedient and reward the sinners, it would be as just. Similarly, if God creates His creatures without any will, power or freedom of action, then if He causes them to commit sins and then punishes them for that – it is not essential injustice. If we suppose that God acts in this manner, it is justice:

Whatever that Khusrow does is sweet (shirin).

For the same reason that the Mu'tazilah emphasize justice, they deny *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*. They say that *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* implies that God, not the human beings, is the maker of human deeds. Since it is known that man attains reward and punishment in the Hereafter, if God is the creator of human actions and yet punishes them for their evil deeds – which not they, but God Himself has brought about – that would be injustice (*zulm*) and contrary to Divine Justice. Accordingly, the Mu'tazilah consider *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* to be contrary to the doctrine of justice.

Also, thereby, the Mu'tazilah believe in human freedom and free will and are its staunch defenders, contrary to the Asha'irah who deny human freedom and free will.

Under the doctrine of justice – in the sense that some deeds are inherently just and some inherently unjust, and that human reason dictates that justice is good and must be practised, whereas injustice is evil and must be abstained from – they advance another general doctrine, which is more comprehensive, that is the principle that "beauty" (*husn*) and "ugliness" (*qubh*), (good and evil), are inherent properties of acts. For instance, truthfulness, trustworthiness, chastity and God-fearing are intrinsically good qualities, and falsehood, treachery, indecency, neglectfulness, etc. are intrinsically evil. Therefore, deeds in

essence, before God may judge them, possess inherent goodness or evil (*husn* or *qubh*).

Hereupon, they arrive at another doctrine about reason: human reason can independently judge (or perceive) the good or evil in things. It means that the good or evil of some deeds can be judged by human reason independently of the commands of the Shari'ah. The Asha'irah are against this view too.

The belief in the inherent good or evil of acts and the capacity of reason to judge them, upheld by the Mu'tazilah and rejected by the Asha'irah, brought many other problems in its wake, some of which are related to theology, some to human predicament; such as, whether the Divine Acts, or rather, the creation of things is with a purpose or not. The Mu'tazilah claimed that absence of a purpose in the creation is "*qabih*" (an ugly thing) and so rationally impossible. How about a duty which is beyond one's power to fulfil? Is it possible that God may saddle someone with a duty which is over and above his capacity? The Mu'tazilah considered this, too, as "*qabih*", and so impossible.

Is it within the power of a believer (*mu'min*) to turn apostate? Does the infidel (*kafir*) have any power over his own infidelity (*kufr*)? The answer of the Mu'tazilah is in the affirmative; for if the believer and the infidel had no power over their belief and infidelity, it would be wrong (*qabih*) to award and punish them. The Asha'irah rejected all these Mu'tazilite doctrines and held opposite views.

Retribution (al-wa'd wa al-wa'id)

"*Wa'd*" means promising award and "*wa'id*" means threat of punishment. The Mu'tazilah believe that God does not break His own promises (all Muslims unanimously accept this) or forego His threats, as stated by the Qur'anic verse regarding Divine promise:

Indeed God does not break the promise. (13:31)

Accordingly (the Mu'tazilah say), all threats addressed to the sinners and the wicked such as the punishments declared for an oppressor, a liar or a wine imbibor, will all be carried out without fail, except when the sinner repents before death. Therefore, pardon without repentance is not possible.

From the viewpoint of the Mu'tazilah, pardon without repentance implies failure to carry out the threats (*wa'id*), and such an act, like breaking of promise (*khulf al-wa'd*), is "*qabih*", and so impossible. Thus the Mu'tazilite beliefs regarding Divine retribution and Divine forgiveness are interrelated, and both arise from their belief in inherent good and evil of deeds determinable by reason.

Manzilah Bayna al-Manzilatayn

The Mu'tazilite belief in this matter emerged in the wake of two opposite beliefs in the Muslim world about the faith (*'iman*) or infidelity (*kufr*) of the *fasiq*. For the first time the Khawarij maintained that committing of any of the capital sins (*kaba'ir*) was contrary to faith (*'iman*) and equal to infidelity.

Therefore, the perpetrator of a major sin is a *kafir*.

As we know, the Khawarij emerged after the incident of arbitration (*tahkim*) during the Battle of Siffin about the year 37/657–58 during the caliphate of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (A). As the *Nahj al-Balaghah* tells us, Amir al-Mu'minin (A) argued with them on this issue and refuted their viewpoint by numerous arguments.

The Khawarij, even after 'Ali (A), were against the caliphs of the period, and staunchly espoused the cause of *al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, denouncing others for their evil and calling them apostates and infidels. Since most of the caliphs indulged in the capital sins, they were naturally regarded as infidels by the Khawarij. Accordingly, they were adversaries of the current politics.

Another group which emerged (or was produced by the hands of vested political interests) was that of the Murji'ah, whose position with regard to the effect of capital sins was precisely opposite to that of the Khawarij. They held that faith and belief is a matter of the heart. One should remain a Muslim if one's faith – which is an inner affair of the heart – were intact, evil deeds cannot do any harm. Faith compensates all wickedness.

The opinions of the Murji'ah were to the benefit of the rulers, and tended to cause the people to regard their wickedness and indecencies as unimportant, or to consider them, despite their destructive character, as men worthy of paradise. The Murji'ah stated in unequivocal terms, "The respectability of the station of the ruler is secure, no matter how much he may sin. Obedience to him is obligatory and prayers performed in his leadership are correct." The tyrannical caliphs, therefore, backed them. For the Murji'ah, sin and wickedness, no matter how serious, do not harm one's faith; the perpetrator of the major sins is a *mu'min*, not a *kafir*.

The Mu'tazilah took a middle path in this matter. They maintained that the perpetrator of a major sin is neither a *mu'min*, nor he is a *kafir*, but occupies a position between those two extremes. This middle state was termed by the Mu'tazilah "*manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*."

It is said that the first to express this belief was Wasil ibn 'Ata', a pupil of al-Hasan al-Basri. One day Wasil was sitting with his teacher, who was asked his opinion about the difference between the Khawarij and the Murji'ah on this issue. Before al-Hasan could say anything, Wasil declared: "In my opinion the perpetrator of the major sins is a *fasiq*, not a *kafir*."

After this, he left the company, or as is also said, was expelled by al-Hasan al-Basri – and parting his way started propagating his own views. His pupil and brother-in-law 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd also joined him. At this point Hasan declared, "*'Itazala 'anna*", i.e. "He [Wasil] has departed from us." According to another version, the people began to say of Wasil and 'Amr "*'Itazala qawl al-'ummah*", i.e. "they have departed from the doctrines held by the ummah," inventing a third path.

Al-'Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahy 'an al-Munkar

Al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar is an essential Islamic duty, unanimously accepted by all Muslims. The difference occurs only in the limits and conditions related to it.

For instance, the Khawarij believed in it without any limits and conditions whatsoever. They believed that this twofold duty must be performed in all circumstances. For example, when others believed in the conditions of probability of effectiveness (of *al-ma'ruf*) and absence of any dangerous consequences as necessary for this obligation to be applicable, the Khawarij did not believe in any such restrictions.

Some believed that it is sufficient to fulfil the duty of *al-'amr wa al-nahy* by the heart and the tongue i.e. one should support *al-ma'ruf* and oppose *al-munkar* in his heart and use his tongue to speak out for *al-ma'ruf* and against *al-munkar*. But the Khawarij considered it incumbent to take up arms and to unsheathe one's sword for the sake of fulfilling this duty.

As against them there was a group which considered *al-'amr wa al-nahy* to be subject to the above conditions, and, moreover, did not go beyond the confines of the heart and the tongue for its sake. Ahmad ibn Hanbal is counted among them. According to this group, a bloody uprising for the sake of struggling against unlawful activities is not permissible.

The Mu'tazilah accepted the conditions for *al-'amr wa al-nahy*, but, not limiting it to the heart and the tongue, maintained that if the unlawful practices become common, or if the state is oppressive and unjust, it is obligatory for Muslims to rise in armed revolt.

Thus the belief special to the Mu'tazilah in regard to *al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* – contrary to the stand of the Ahl al-Hadith and the Ahl al-Sunnah – is belief in the necessity to rise up in arms to confront corruption. The Khawarij too shared this view, with the difference pointed out above.

Other mu'tazilite notions and beliefs

Whatever we said in the last two lectures was related to the basic doctrines of the Mu'tazilah. But as we mentioned before, the Mu'tazilah raised many an issue and defended their opinions about them. Some of them were related with theology some with physics, some with sociology, and some with the human situation.

Of the theological issues, some are related to general metaphysics (*umur 'ammah*) and some with theology proper (*ilahiyat bi al-ma'na al-'akhass*)¹. Like all other *mutakallimun*, the intended purpose of the Mu'tazilah by raising metaphysical questions is to use them as preparatory ground for the discussion of theological issues, which are their ultimate objectives. So also the discussions in the natural sciences, too, serve an introductory purpose for them. That is, the discussions in the natural sciences are used to prove some religious doctrines, or to find an answer to some objections. Here we shall enumerate some

of these beliefs, beginning with theology:

Theology

- (i) *Al-tawhid al-sifati* (i.e. unity of the Divine Attributes)
- (ii) *'Adl* (Divine Justice).
- (iii) The Holy Qur'an (*Kalam Allah*) is created (*kalam*, or speech, is an attribute of Act, not of the Essence).
- (iv) The Divine Acts are caused and controlled by purposes (i.e. every Divine Act is for the sake of some beneficial outcome).
- (v) Forgiveness without repentance is not possible (the doctrine of retribution – *wa'd wa wa'id*).
- (vi) Pre al-ternity (*qidam*) is limited to God (in this belief, they are challenged only by the philosophers).
- (vii) Delegation of a duty beyond the powers of the *mukallaf* (*al-taklif bima la yutaq*) is impossible.
- (viii) The acts of the creatures are not created by God for five reasons²; the exercise of Divine Will does not apply to the acts of men.
- (ix) The world is created, and is not pre al-ternal (only the philosophers are against this view).
- (x) God cannot be seen with the eyes, either in this world or in the Hereafter.

Physics

- (i) Physical bodies are made up of indivisible particles.
- (ii) Smell relates to particles scattered in air.
- (iii) Taste is nothing but the effect of particles.
- (iv) Light is made up of particles scattered in space.
- (v) Interpenetration of bodies is not impossible (this belief is attributed to some Mu'tazilah).
- (vi) Leap (of particles) (i.e. *tafrah*)³ is not impossible (this belief, too, is attributed to some Mu'tazilah).

Human Problems

- (i) Man is free, endowed with free will; not predetermined (this problem, the problem of the nature of human acts whether [created by God or man], and the problem of Divine Justice, all the three are interrelated).

- (ii) Ability (*istita'ah*); that is, man has power over his own acts, before he performs them or desists from them.
- (iii) The believer (*mu'min*) has the power to become an infidel and the infidel (*kafir*) is able to become a believer.
- (iv) A *fasiq* is neither a *mu'min*, nor a *kafir*.
- (v) Human reason can understand and judge some matters independently (without the prior need of guidance from the Shari'ah).
- (vi) In case of conflict between reason and Hadith, reason is to be preferred.
- (vii) It is possible to interpret the Qur'an with the help of reason.

Political and Social Problems

- (i) The obligatory nature of *al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, even if it necessitates taking up of arms.
- (ii) The leadership (*imamah*) of the Rashidun Caliphs, was correct in the order it occurred.
- (iii) 'Ali (A) was superior to the Caliphs who preceded him (this is the view of some of the Mu'tazilah, not of all. The earlier Mu'tazilah – with the exception of Wasil ibn 'Ata' considered Abu Bakr as the best, but the majority of the latter Mu'tazilah considered 'Ali (A) as superior).
- (iv) Evaluation and criticism of the Companions of the Prophet (S) and their deeds is permissible.
- (v) A comparative study and analysis of the state policies of 'Umar and 'Ali (A).

These represent a sample of the issues touched by the Mu'tazilah, which are far more numerous than what we have referred to. In some of these problems, they were contradicted by the Asha'irah, in some by the philosophers, in some by the Khawarij, and in some by the Murji'ah.

The Mu'tazilah never submitted to Greek thought and did not accept Greek philosophy indiscriminately, which entered the Islamic world contemporaneous with the emergence and rise of the Mu'tazilah.

On the other hand, with great courage, they wrote books against philosophy and philosophers, boldly expressing their own opinions. The controversy between the *mutakallimun* and the philosophers benefited both *kalam* and philosophy. Both of them made progress, and in the course of time came so close to each other that there did not remain any disagreement except on few issues. An elaborate discussion of the reciprocal services of *kalam* and philosophy, and an exposition of the essential differences between the two, are outside the scope of these lectures.

Transitions in the history of the mu'tazilah

Obviously, all the above-mentioned problems were not posed at one time and by any single individual. Rather, they were raised gradually by several individuals, expanding the scope of *'ilm al-kalam*.

Among these mentioned, apparently the oldest problem was that of free will and determinism, in which the Mu'tazilah, of course, sided with free will. This is a problem which is posed in the Qur'an. That is, the Qur'an refers to this issue in a manner which stimulates thought on the subject. Because some verses clearly indicate that man is free, not coerced in any of his acts. On the other hand, there are verses which, with equal clarity, indicate that all things depend on the Divine Will.

Here the doubt arises that these two types of verses contradict each other. Accordingly, some explained away the verses upholding free will and supported determinism and predestination, while others explained away the verses which refer to the role of Divine Will and Intention, and sided with human freedom and free will. Of course, there is a third group which sees no contradiction between those two sets of verses⁴.

Moreover, this controversy between freedom and fate is frequently taken up in the utterances of 'Ali (A). Therefore, it is almost contemporaneous with Islam itself. However, the division of Muslims into two opposite camps, one siding with free will and the other with fate, took place in the second half of the 1st/7th century.

It is said that the idea of free will was first put into circulation by Ghaylan al-Dimashqi and Ma'bad al-Juhani. The Banu Umayyah were inclined to propagate the belief in fate and predestination among the people, because it served their political interests.

Under the cover of this belief that "everything is by the Will of God" – "*amanna bi al-qadri khayrihi wa sharrihi*" – "We believe in fate, bring as it may good or evil" – they justified their oppressive and illegitimate rule. As a result, they repressed any notions of free will or human freedom, and Ghaylan al-Dimashqi and Ma'bad al-Juhani were both killed. During that period the supporters of the belief in free will were called "*Qadariyyah*".

However, the problem of the infidelity or otherwise of the evildoer (*kufr al-fasiq*) had become a subject of controversy even before the issue of freedom and fate, because it was raised by the Khawarij during the first half of the first century about the time of the caliphate of 'Ali (A). But the Khawarij did not defend this view in the fashion of the *mutakallimun*. Only when the problem was raised among the Mu'tazilah, with the emergence of their doctrine of *manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*, it took on the colour of a problem of *kalam*.

The problem of fate and freedom (*jabr wa ikhtiyar*) automatically brought in its wake such other problems as these: the problem of Divine Justice; the rational and essential goodness or badness (*husn aw qubh*

dhati wa 'aqli) of things and acts; dependence of Divine Acts on purposes; impossibility of saddling a person with a duty exceeding his capacities, and the like.

During the first half of the 2nd/8th century one Jahm ibn Sakfwan (d. 128/745) voiced certain beliefs regarding the Divine Attributes. The writers of intellectual and religious history of Islam (*milal wa nihal*), claim that the problem of *al-tawhid al-sifati* (that the Divine Attributes are not separate from the Divine Essence – which the Mu'tazilah call their "doctrine of *tawhid*") and the problem of *nafy al-tashbih*, also called *asl al-tanzih*, (which means that nothing can be likened to God) was expressed for the first time by Jahm ibn Safwan, whose followers came to be called the "Jahmiyyah."

The Mu'tazilah followed the Jahmiyyah in their doctrines of *tawhid* and *tanzih*, in the same way as they followed the Qadariyyah on the issue of free will. Jahm ibn Safwan himself was a Jabrite (i.e. a supporter of fate or predestination). The Mu'tazilah rejected his view of fate but accepted his view of *tawhid*.

The foremost among the Mu'tazilah, who established Mu'tazilism (*al-'itizal*) as a school of thought is Wasil ibn 'Ata', who, as mentioned earlier, was a pupil of al-Hasan al-Basri, and who parted company with his teacher in the course of a difference, to establish his own school. Two different versions of the cause why the Mu'tazilah came to be called by this name were mentioned earlier. Some others say that, in the beginning the term "*mu'tazilah*" was used to refer to a group of persons who remained neutral during the events of the Battle of al-Jamal and the Battle of Siffin, such as Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, Zayd ibn Thabit, and 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar.

Later when the issue of the faith or infidelity of *fasiq* was raised by the Khawarij, Muslims divided into two camps. One group of them took the third path, dissociating itself from the rest, being indifferent to their debates. They adopted the same kind of neutral attitude with regard to a theoretical problem as those like Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas had adopted in the midst of the heated social political climate of their time. This attitude caused them to be called "*mu'tazilah*" the "indifferent," a name which permanently stuck to them.

Wasil was born in the year 80/699 and died in 141/758–59. His views were limited to those on the negation of the Attributes [as distinct from the Essence of God], free will, *manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*, *al-wa'd wa al-wa'id*, and opinions on some differences among the Companions.

After Wasil came 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, who extended and gave final shape to the views of Wasil. After him came 'Amr ibn Abi al-Hudhayl al-'Allaf and Ibrahim ibn Sayyar al-Nazzam. Abu al-Hudhayl and al-Nazzim, both, are considered eminent Mu'tazilites. *Kalam* got its philosophical colour at their hands. Abu al-Hudhayl studied philosophical works and wrote books in their refutation. Al-Nazzam presented certain views in the sphere of physics, and it was he who offered the view that bodies are constituted of atoms. Abu al-Hudhayl died, most probably, in the year 255/869, and al-Nazzim in 231/845–46.

Al-Jahiz (159/775–254/868), the famous author of the *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*, is another eminent

Mu'tazilite of the 3rd/9th century.

During the rule of the Banu Umayyah, the Mu'tazilah did not have good relations with the ruling authorities. During the early days of the Banu al-'Abbas, they took on a neutral stand⁵. But during the rule of al-Ma'mun, who was himself learned in literature, sciences and philosophy, they attracted the ruler's patronage. Al-Ma'mun, and after him al-Mu'tasim and al-Wathiq, were staunch patrons of the Mu'tazilah. All the three caliphs called themselves Mu'tazilites.

It was during this period that a heated controversy began extending to all corners of the vast Islamic dominions of the period. The issue under debate was whether Speech is an attribute of the Divine Act or an attribute of the Essence. Whether it is created and temporal (*hadith*) or uncreated and eternal (*qadim*) like Divine Knowledge, Power, and Life. The Mu'tazilah believed that the Qur'an is created (in time) and, therefore, is a creation of God (*makhluq*) and so temporal. They also maintained that belief in the pre-ternity of the Qur'an amounted to infidelity (*kufr*).

The opponents of the Mu'tazilah, on the contrary, believed in the pre-ternity and uncreatedness of the Qur'an. Al-Ma'mun (r. 198/813 to 218/833) sent out a circular that any believer in the pre-ternity of the Qur'an would be liable to punishment. Many persons were thrown into prison and subjected to torture.

Al-Mu'tasim (r. 218/833 to 227/842) and al-Wathiq (r. 227/842 to 232/847) also followed al-Ma'mun's practice. Of those who went to the prison during that time was Ahmad ibn Hanbal. This policy remained in force until al-Mutawakkil assumed power (r. 232/847 to 247/861). Al-Mutawakkil was not inclined in favour of the Mu'tazilah, and also most of the people were opposed to them. As a result the Mu'tazilah and their admirers suffered a reverse, nay, a reprisal. In the purges that followed, much blood was shed and homes were ruined. The period is remembered by Muslims as the times of "*mihnah*" – times of adversity and trial.

The Mu'tazilah never recuperated after this, and the field was left open forever for their opponents: the Ahl al-Sunnah and the Ahl al-Hadith. Nevertheless, there appeared some prominent personalities even during the following periods of their decline, like, 'Abd Allah ibn Ahmad Abu al-Qasim al-Balkhi, well-known as al-Ka'bi (d. 319/931); Abu 'Ali al-Jubba'i (d. 303/915–6); Abu al-Hashim al-Jubba'i (d. 321/933) the son of Abu 'Ali al-Jubba'i; Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 415/1024); Abu al-Hasan al-Khayyat; al-Sahib ibn 'Abbad, al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144); and Abu Ja'far al-'Iskafi.

¹. Translator's Note: Both theology and metaphysics are referred to by the common term al-'ilahiyat (lit. theology). Whenever only theology proper is meant, the phrase "bil-ma'na al-'akhas" (lit. in its special sense) is added. Metaphysics, which deals with general problems, is termed "al-'umur al-'ammah" (lit. the general issues).

². Translator's Note: Some of these reasons are following: (1) Every human being is aware that his daily acts, such as going to the market or having a walk, for instance, depend on his will; he is free to do them if, he likes, and to abstain if he wills. (2) If all our acts are imposed upon us, there would be no difference between a virtuous act and a wicked one; whereas even a child makes a difference between a kind and a cruel act. He likes the first and detests the second. If all our acts are determined by God, they would be all alike; that is, there would be no difference between good and evil, between virtue and vice. (3) If God creates all our acts, it is pointless for Him to command some things and forbid others, and

consequently to reward and punish accordingly. (4) If we are not free in our acts, it is unjust of God to create sins in creatures and then punish them on their account

3. Translator's Note: The notion of motion in leaps (tafrah) was first suggested by al-Nazzam. It means that a body undergoes discrete leaps during motion. The modern parallel of this idea of motion is one employed by quantum mechanics. Max Planck, in 1900, put forward the hypothesis that the charged particle – usually called the oscillator, or vibrator – which is the source of monochromatic light, absorbs and emits energy only in discrete quanta. It changes its energy not continuously, as supposed in the classical theory of radiation, but by sudden jumps (tafrah). In 1913 Niels Bohr, applying the quantum theory to subatomic phenomena, published the quantum theory of the atom. Since then quantum mechanics has become an important part of atomic physics

4. Translator's Note: The verses 57:22 and 4:78 seem to convey a meaning contradictory to that of 4:79 and 18:29. While the former imply total predestination, the latter explicitly support the idea of freedom. The Asha'irah attach basic importance to the former and the Mu'tazilah to the latter kind. The Shi'ah reconcile the two sets of verses and take an intermediary position. The following traditions from al-Shaykh al-Saduq's al-Tawhid, pp.360–362 (Jami'at al-mudarrisin fi al-Hawzat al-'Ilmiyyah, Qum), explain the Shi'ah position:

...Al-Imam al-Baqir (A) and al-Imam al-Sadiq (A) said: "Indeed God is of greater mercy than that He should coerce His creatures into sin and then punish them for that; and God is of greater might than that He should will something and it should fail to happen." They were asked, "Is there any third position between absolute predestination (jabr) and absolute freedom (qadar)?" They said: "Yes, vaster than the space between the heaven and the earth."

...Muhammad ibn 'Ajun says: "I asked Abu 'Abd Allah (A), 'Has God left men free [to do what they may like]?' He replied, 'God is nobler than that He should leave it upto them [to do whatever they may like].' I said, 'Then God has imposed their deeds upon them?' He said, 'God is more just than that He should coerce a creature into committing some act and then punish him on its account.'

Al-Hasan ibn 'Ali al-Washsha' says, "I asked al-Imam al-Rida (A) whether God has given men total freedom in their acts. He said, 'God is mightier than that.' I said, 'Then, has He coerced them into sins?' He replied, 'God is more just and wiser than that He should do such a thing.' Then he added, 'God, the Almighty, has said, "O son of Adam! I deserve more credit in your virtues than yourself, and you deserve more discredit for your sins than I; you commit sins with the power I have given you.'"

...Al-Mufaddal ibn 'Umar reports that al-Imam Abu 'Abd Allah (al-Sadiq) (A) said, "Neither total predetermination (jabr), nor total freedom (tafwid), but a position intermediate between the two (amr bayna amrayn)." I said, "What is amr bayna amrayn?" He replied, "It is as if you see someone committing a sin. You stop him, but he does not desist. So you leave him alone. Then if he commits that sin, it does not mean that since he did not heed you and you left him alone, you asked him to commit it."

See also Murtadha Mutahhari, *Insan wa sarnewisht (Man and Destiny)*, for an elaborate discussion of this point.

5. Translator's Note: Some historians have advanced the theory of a connection between Mu'tazilite theology and the 'Abbasid movement. H.S. Nyberg, in his article on the Mu'tazilah in the Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, after remarking that "Wasil adopted a somewhat ambiguous attitude regarding 'Uthman and his murderers and that he left undecided the question of knowing who had the superior claim to caliphate, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, or 'Ali," says that, "All these apparently dissimilar lines converge on a common centre: the 'Abbasid movement. It is precisely Wasil's attitude which we must regard as characteristic of the partisans of the 'Abbasids...Every thing leads us to believe that the theology of Wasil and the early Mu'tazilah represents the official theology of the 'Abbasid movement. This gives us an unforced explanation of the fact that it was the official doctrine of the 'Abbasid court for at least a century. It seems even probable that Wasil and his disciples took part in the 'Abbasid propaganda...." Although Nyberg's conjecture is not sufficient to establish this hypothesis, further research may bring into light some conclusive evidence in the matter.

Asha'irah

From the preceding lecture it became clear that the ideas and notions which led to the emergence of the Mu'tazilite school took birth during the latter half of the first century of Hijrah. The approach of the Mu'tazilah, in fact, consisted of the use of a kind of logical and rational method for understanding the basic doctrines of the Islamic faith. Obviously, the first condition for such an approach is belief in the freedom, independence, and validity of reason.

It is also evident that the common people at large are not used to ratiocination and intellectual analysis, and always tend to equate "religiosity" with "credulity" and intellectual submission to the apparent meanings of the Qur'anic verses and in particular of the *ahadith*.

They tend to consider every attempt at independent and original interpretation as a kind of rebellion against religion, specially if the dominant politics deem it in their interests to support this attitude, and more specially if some religious scholars propagate such an outlook, and particularly so when such scholars really believe in their literalist outlook and are inflexible and fanatical in practice.

The attacks of the Akhbaris on the *Usuliyyun* and the *mujtahidun*, and the attacks of some *fuqaha'* and *muhaddithun* against philosophers in the Islamic world had their roots in such an approach¹.

The Mu'tazilah had a deep-rooted interest in understanding Islam and its propagation and defence against the atheists, the Jews, the Christians, the Magians, the Sabaeans, the Manichaeans, and others. They even trained missionaries and dispatched them to various regions. Nevertheless, their existence was threatened by the literalists, who called themselves "Ahl al-Hadith" or "Ahl al-Sunnah." They were ultimately stabbed in the back, weakened and gradually became extinct.

Despite it all, in the beginning, that is until the end of the 3rd/9th century and the beginning of the 4th/10th, there existed no rival school of *kalam* – as was later to emerge – that could challenge the Mu'tazilah. All opposition occurred under the claim that the views of the Mu'tazilah were against the externals of the *hadith* and the *Sunnah*. The leaders of the Ahl al-Hadith, such as Malik ibn Anas and Ahmad ibn Hanbal, basically considered any debate, inquiry or argument connected with the matters of faith as unlawful (*haram*). Therefore, the Ahl al-Sunnah not only did not have any system of *kalam* challenging the Mu'tazilah, but also they were opposed to *kalam* itself.

About the late 3rd/9th century and the early 4th/10th, a new phenomenon took place. That was the appearance of a distinguished thinker who had received instruction in Mu'tazilite teachings under Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, and had mastered them. He rejected Mu'tazilite tenets and inclined towards the doctrines of the Ahl al-Sunnah.

Since, on the one hand, he was not a man devoid of genius, and on the other was equipped with the

tools used by the Mu'tazilah, he established all the doctrines of the Ahl al-Sunnah on a rational basis, and gave them the form of a relatively closely-knit intellectual system. That distinguished person was Abu al-Hasan al-'Ash'ari (d. *circa* 330/941–42). Al-'Ash'ari – as against the view of his predecessors among Ahl al-Hadith, like Ahmad ibn Hanbal – considered debate and argument, and use of the tools of logic in the matter of the doctrines of the faith as permissible, citing evidence from the Qur'an and the Sunnah to support his claim. He wrote a treatise entitled "*Risalah fi istihsan al-khawd fi 'ilm al-kalam*" ("A Treatise on Appropriateness of Inquiry in 'Ilm al-Kalam")². . .

It was at this point that the Ahl al-Hadith were divided into two groups: the Asha'irah, or the followers of Abu al-Hasan al-'Ash'ari, who considered *kalam* as permissible; and the Hanbalis, or the followers of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who considered it unlawful. In our lectures on logic we have already mentioned that Ibn Taymiyyah, a Hanbali, wrote a book on unlawfulness of logic and *kalam*³.

There was another reason why the Mu'tazilah became detestable in the eyes of the people. It was the period of calamity or "*mihnah*," and the Mu'tazilah under the patronage of the caliph al-Ma'mun, wanted to coerce the people into accepting their belief in the createdness of the Qur'an. This regimentation brought in its wake bloodshed, imprisonment, torture and exile, which shook the Muslim society. The common people considered the Mu'tazilah responsible for that havoc, and this earned them greater disfavour with the public.

These two causes contributed to the public welcome at the emergence of the school of Ash'arism. After Abu al-Hasan al-'Ash'ari, other distinguished personalities appeared in this school, who strengthened its foundations. Among them following can be mentioned: Qadi Abu Bakr al-Baqillani (a contemporary of al-Shaykh al-Mufid), who died in the year 403/1012–13; Abu Ishaq al-'Asfara'ini (who is considered as belonging to the generation after al-Baqillani and al-Sayyid al-Murtadha 'Alam al-Huda); Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni, the teacher of al-Ghazali; Imam Muhammad al-Ghazali, the author of *Ihya' 'ulum al-Din* himself (d. 505/1111–12); and Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi.

Of course, the Ash'arite school underwent gradual changes, and particularly in the hands of al-Ghazali *kalam* somewhat lost its characteristic colour and took on the hue of *'irfan* (Sufism). Imam al-Razi brought it close to philosophy. After Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi wrote his book *Tajrid al-'itiqad* more than ninety per cent of *kalam* assumed the colour of philosophy. After the publication of the *Tajrid*, all *mutakallimun* – including the Mu'tazilah and the Asha'irah – followed the same road which was trodden by that great philosopher and Shi'ah *mutakallim*.

For instance, the latter works of *kalam* such as *al-Mawaqif* and *Maqasid* and the commentaries written upon them – all took on the colour of the *Tajrid*. It may be said that, in fact, the more time has elapsed since Abu al-Hasan al-'Ash'ari, the more the leading Ash'arites have moved away from him, bringing his doctrines closer to the views of the Mu'tazilah or those of the philosophers.

Now we shall list the main doctrines of al-'Ash'ari, which are aimed at defending the basic principles of

the Ahl al-Sunnah, or attempting a rational justification of their beliefs.

- (i) The Divine Attributes, contrary to the belief of the Mu'tazilah and the philosophers, are not identical with the Divine Essence.
- (ii) The Divine Will is all-embracing. The Divine providence and predestination encompass all events (this belief, too, is contrary to the view held by the Mu'tazilah, though in agreement with those of the philosophers).
- (iii) All evil, like good, is from God (of course, this view is a logical corollary, in al-Ash'ari's view of the above belief).
- (iv) Man is not free in his acts, which are created by God (this belief, too, in al-Ash'ari's view, necessarily follows from the doctrine of all-embracing nature of the Divine Will).
- (v) Acts are not intrinsically good or evil, i.e. *husn* or *qubh* of deeds is not intrinsic, but determined by the *Shari'ah*. The same is true of justice. What is 'just', is determined by the *Shari'ah* not by reason (contrary to the belief of the Mu'tazilah).
- (vi) Grace (*lutf*) and selection of the best for creation (*al-'aslah*) are not incumbent upon God (contrary to the belief of the Mu'tazilah).
- (vii) Man's power over his actions does not precede them [there is no *istita'ah qabl al-fi'l*], but is commensurate and concurrent with the acts themselves (contrary to the belief of the Muslim philosophers and the Mu'tazilah).
- (viii) Absolute deanthropomorphism (*tanzih mutlaq*), or absolute absence of similarity between God and others, does not hold (contrary to the Mu'tazilite view).
- (ix) Doctrine of acquisition: Man does not 'create' his own acts; rather he 'acquires' or 'earns' them (this is in justification of the Ahl al-Sunnah's belief in the creation of human acts by God).
- (x) Possibility of the beatific vision: God shall be visible to the eyes on the Day of Resurrection (contrary to the view of the Mu'tazilah and the philosophers).
- (xi) The *fasiq* is a believer (*mu'min*) (contrary to the view of the Khawarij, who consider him *kafir*, and contrary to the Mu'tazilite doctrine of *manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*).
- (xii) There is nothing wrong about God's pardoning someone without repentance. Similarly, nothing is wrong about God's subjecting a believer to chastisement (contrary to the Mu'tazilite position).
- (xiii) Intercession (*shafa'ah*) is justifiable (contrary to the Mu'tazilite position).
- (xiv) To tell a lie or break a promise is not possible for God.

(xv) The world is created in time (*hadith*) (contrary to the view of the philosophers).

(xvi) The Qur'an is pre al-ternal (*qadim*); however, this is true of *al-kalam al-nafsi* (meaning of the Qur'an), not *al-kalam al-lafzi* – the spoken word (this is in justification of the Ahl al-Sunnah's belief in the pre al-ternity of the Qur'an).

(xvii) The Divine Acts do not follow any purpose or aim (contrary to the view of the philosophers and the Mu'tazilah)

(xviii) It is possible that God may saddle a person with a duty beyond his power (contrary to the belief of the philosophers and the Mu'tazilah).

Abu al-Hasan al-'Ash'ari was a prolific writer, and as reported had compiled more than two hundred books. As many as a hundred are mentioned in his biographical accounts, though, apparently, most of those works have perished. The most famous of his works is *Maqalat al-'Islamiyyin*, which has been published. It is a very disorderly and confused work. Another one printed is *al-Luma'*, and perhaps other of his works may have also appeared in print.

Abu al-Hasan al-'Ash'ari is one of those individuals whose ideas, regrettably, exercised a great influence on the Islamic world. Nevertheless, later, his works have been put to severe criticism by philosophers and the Mu'tazilah. Ibn Sina, in *al-Shifa*; has refuted many of his ideas without mentioning his name. Even some of his followers, such as Qadi Abu Bakr al-Baqillani and Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni revised and modified his views about predestination and createdness of (human) acts.

Imam Muhammad al-Ghazali, although an Ash'arite who has to a great extent established and strengthened the Ash'arite doctrines, has put them on a different foundation. Through al-Ghazali, *kalam* was brought closer to *'irfan* and Sufism. Mawlana Muhammad al-Rumi, the author of the *Mathnawi*, is, in his own way, an Ash'arite; but his deep Sufi inclinations gave a different colour to all the issues of *kalam*. Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, who was familiar with philosophic thought, transformed al-'Ash'ari's *kalam*, further strengthening it.

The triumph of the Ash'arite school cost the Muslim world dearly. Its triumph was the victory of the forces of stagnation over freedom of thought. Despite the fact that the battle between Ash'arism and Mu'tazilism is related to the Sunni world, even the Shi'ite world could not remain unaffected from some of the stultifying effects of Ash'arism. This triumph has particular historical and social reasons behind it, and certain political events effectively contributed to it.

As mentioned earlier, during the 3rd/9th century, the caliph al-Ma'mun, himself an intellectual and a man of learning, rose to the support of the Mu'tazilah. After him al-Mu'tasim and al-Wathiq also followed him – until al-Mutawakkil assumed caliphate. Al-Mutawakkil played a basic role in the victory of the Ahl al-Sunnah's doctrines, which acquired dialectic foundations after one hundred years at the hands of al-'Ash'ari. To be sure, had al-Mutawakkil's way of thinking been similar to that of his predecessors,

Mu'tazilism would have had a different fate.

The rise of the Seljuq Turks to power in Iran was another effective factor in the triumph and propagation of the Ash'arite ideas. The Seljuqs did not believe in the freedom of thought. They were the antithesis of the Buyids, some of whom were men of scholarship and literary merit. Shi'ism and Mu'tazilism flourished in the Buyid court. Ibn al-'Amid and al-Sahib ibn 'Abbad, the two learned ministers of the Buyids, were both anti-Ash'arites.

Here we do not intend to support Mu'tazilite doctrines, and later we shall expose the feebleness of many of their beliefs. However, that which deserves appreciation in the Mu'tazilah is their rational approach – something which also became extinct with them. As we know, a religion so rich and resourceful as Islam needs a *kalam* which has an unshakeable faith in the freedom of reason.

1. Translator's Note: Akhbarism is a movement which started within the Shi'i world about four hundred years ago. Its originator was Mulla Muhammad Amin ibn Muhammad Sharif al-'Astarabadi (d. 1033/1623–24). He openly attacked the Shi'ah mujtahidun in his work al-Fawa'id al-madaniyyah, vehemently contesting the Usuliyyun's claim that reason is one of the sources of fiqh. The Uuliyyun hold the Qur'an, the Sunnah, reason, and ijma' (consensus) as valid sources for deduction of the rules of the Shari'ah. The Akhbaris accepted the validity only of the Sunnah and rejected the rest. Understanding the Qur'an, they claimed, is beyond the capacity of a commoner, being restricted exclusively to the Ahl al-Bayt (A)

Regarding ijma', they said that it was an innovation (bid'ah) of the Ahl al-Sunnah. Reason, they held, is only valid in empirical sciences. Its applicability cannot be extended to the realm of the Shari'ah. Accordingly, they rejected ijihad, considering the taqlid (following the authority, imitation in legal matters) of a non-Ma'sum as forbidden. However, they considered the reliability of all the ahadith of the four books, viz. al-Kafi, al-Tahdhib, al-'Istibsar, and Man la yahduruhu al-faqih as being authentic and undisputable. They held that it was the duty of the people to directly refer to the hadith texts in order to discover the commands of the Shari'ah. There was no need of the mujtahid as an intermediary. The Usuliyyun, and in particular such scholars as Aqa Muhammad Baqir al-Bahbahani (1118/1706–1205/1788) and Shaykh Murtadha al-Ansari (d. 1281/1865–66) refuted the Akhbari position and effectively repulsed the threat posed by them to the Shi'i institution of ijihad. Some prominent Akhbaris among Shi'ah scholars were Sayyid Ni'mat Allah al-Jaza'iri (d. 1050/1640) Muhammad ibn Murtadha Mulla Muhsin Fayd al-Kashani (d. 1091/1680) Shaykh Yusuf ibn Ahmad al Bahrani al Ha'iri (1107/1695–1186/1772) and Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad Baqir al-Hamadani (d. after 1151/1738–39)

2. This treatise has been published as an appendix to his al-Lum'ah, and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Badawi has included it in the first volume of Madhahib al-Islamiyyin, pp. 15–26.

3. See Muhammad Abu Zuhrah, Ibn Taymiyyah

The shi'ite kalam

Now it is time to take up Shi'ite *kalam*, if only briefly.

Kalam, in the sense of logical and rational argument about the principal doctrines of Islam, has a special and distinguished place in the Shi'ah tradition. The Shi'ite *kalam*, on the one hand, emerges from the core of Shi'ite *hadith*, and, on the other, is mixed with Shi'ite philosophy. We have seen how, in the early

centuries, *kalam* was considered to be inimical to the *Sunnah* and the *hadith* by the Ahl al-Sunnah. But the Shi'ite *kalam* not only does not come into conflict with the *Sunnah* and the *hadith*, it is firmly rooted in the *Sunnah* and the *hadith*.

The reason is that the Shi'ite *hadith*, contrary to the Sunni corpus on *hadith*, consists of numerous traditions in which profound metaphysical or social problems have been dealt with logically and analysed rationally. But in the Sunni corpus such analytic treatment of these subjects is missing. For instance, if there is any mention of such problems as that of Divine providence and preordination, the all-embracing Will of the Almighty, the Divine Names, Attributes, or such topics as the soul, the life after death, the final reckoning, the *Sirat*, the Balance, or such issues as *Imamah*, *khilafah*, and the like, there is no argument or rational explanation of the topics mentioned.

But in the Shi'ah corpus on *hadith*, all such issues have been dealt with in a rational and discursive manner. A comparison between the list of the chapters of the six Sihah and that of al-Kulayni's *al-Kafi* will make this quite clear.

Accordingly, "*kalam*", in the sense of rational and analytical treatment of problems, is found in the Shi'ah *hadith*. This is the reason why the Shi'ah were not divided into two groups like the Sunnis were into "Ahl al-Hadith" and "Ahl al-Kalam."

It was on the basis of the Sunni textual sources that we stated, in the former lectures, that the first doctrinal issue to become a subject of controversy was the issue of the *kufr* of a *fasiq*, brought up by the Khawarij during the first half of the first century. Then emerged the problem of freedom and fate, which was raised and argued by two individuals by the names of Ma'bad al-Juhani and Ghaylan al-Dimashqi.

The belief they professed in this matter was contrary to the one held and propagated by the Umayyad rulers. Thereafter, during the first half of the second century, the notion of the unity of Divine Attributes and Essence was posed by Jahm ibn Safwan. Thereupon, Wasil ibn 'Ata' and 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, the founders of the Mu'tazilite school, adopting the belief in free will from Ma'bad and Ghaylan and the doctrine of the unity of Divine Essence and Attributes from Jahm ibn Safwan, and themselves innovating the doctrine of *manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn* in the issue of the faith or infidelity of *fasiq*, initiated debates in some other issues, thus founding the first school in Islamic *kalam*.

This is how the Orientalists and the scholars of Islamic studies in the West and the East explain and interpret the origins of rational speculation and debates in the Islamic world. This group, advertently or mistakenly, ignores the profound rational and demonstrative arguments advanced for the first time by Amir al-Muminin 'Ali (A). The truth is that the rational approach in Islamic teachings was first initiated by 'Ali (A) in his sermons and discussions.

It was he who for the first time initiated profound discussion on the subjects of Divine Essence and Attributes, temporality (*huduth*) and pre-eternity (*qidam*), simplicity (*basatah*) and compositeness (*tarkib*), unity (*wahdah*) and plurality (*kathrah*), etc. These are recorded in the *Nahj al-balaghah* and

other authentic texts of Shi'ah *hadith*. These discussions have a colour, perfume and spirit which are totally distinct from the approaches of the Mu'tazilah and the Ash'arite to the controversies of *kalam*, or even from that of the Shi'ah scholars, who were influenced by their contemporary *kalam*.

In our *Sayr dar Nahj al-balaghah* ("A Journey Through the Nahj al-balaghah"), and in our preface to the Vol. V of *Usul al-falsafeh wa rawish al-riyalism*, we have discussed this matter.

Sunni historians confess that from the earliest days the Shi'ite thinking was philosophical in approach. The Shi'ite intellectual and theoretical approach is opposed not only to the Hanbali thinking – which fundamentally rejects the idea of using discursive reasoning in religious belief – and the Ash'arite approach – which denies the independence of reason and subordinates it to literalist appearance – but also to the Mu'tazilite thinking with all its predilection for reason. Because, although the Mu'tazilite thought is rational, it is dialectical or polemical (*jadali*), not discursive or demonstrative (*burhani*).

In our lectures on the basics of Islamic philosophy, where we have clarified the difference between peripatetic (*hikmat al-mashsha'*) and illuminationist (*hikmat al-ishraq*) philosophies, we have also explained the difference between dialectical (Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite) *kalam* and mystical or intuitive approaches to philosophical issues¹. That is the reason why the majority of Islamic philosophers have been Shi'ah. Only the Shi'ah have preserved and kept Islamic philosophy alive, since they acquired this spirit from their Imams (A), particularly from the first Imam, Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (A).

The Shi'ah philosophers, without having to mould philosophy into *kalam* and without transforming rational philosophy into dialectical philosophization, consolidated the doctrinal basis of Islam under the inspiration of the Qur'anic Revelation and the guiding principles of their spiritual leaders. If we wish to enumerate the Shi'ah *mutakallimun*, that is those who have applied rational thought to the doctrines of the Faith, we shall have to include a group of *muhaddithun* as well as a group of Shi'ah philosophers among them. Because, as said earlier, both the Shi'ite *hadith* and the Shi'ite philosophy have accomplished the function of *'ilm al-kalam* to a greater extent than *kalam* itself.

But if by "*mutakallimun*" we mean only that group which under the Mu'tazilite or Ash'arite influence had resorted to the tools of dialectical reasoning, we are forced to select only a particular group of them. However, we see no reason to concentrate our attention on this particular group only.

If we leave the utterances of the infallible Imams (A) about doctrines, delivered in the forms of sermons, narratives, or prayers, the first Shi'ah writer to compile a book on doctrines of faith was 'Ali ibn Isma'il ibn Mitham al-Tammar. Mitham al-Tammar himself was an orator, expert in debating, and was one of the closest companions of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (A). 'Ali ibn Isma'il was his grandson. He was a contemporary of 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd and Abu al-Hudhayl al-'Allaf, the famous figures of *kalam* during the first half of the second century, who were from the first generation of the founders of Mu'tazilite *kalam*.

Among the companions of al-Imam al-Sadiq (A), there is a group of individuals, referred to as "*mutakallim*" by the Imam (A) himself, such as Hisham ibn al-Hakam, Hisham ibn Salim, Humran ibn

A'yan, Abu Ja'far al-'Ahwali – known as "Mu'min al-Ta'q" – Qays ibn Masar, and others.

Al-Kafi relates the story of a debate between this group and an opponent in the presence of al-Imam al-Sadiq (A), which pleased him. This group lived during the first half of the second century, and was trained in the school of al-Imam al-Sadiq (A).

This shows that the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (A), not only themselves engaged in discussion and analysis of the problems of *kalam*, they also trained a group of their pupils for the sake of conducting such debates and arguments. Among them Hisham ibn al-Hakam distinguished himself only in *'ilm al-kalam*, not in *tafsir*, *fiqh*, or *hadith*. Al-Imam al-Sadiq (A) used to treat him with more respect than others even when he was a raw youth, and used to offer him a preferred seat. All are in agreement that the Imam paid him so much respect just because of his expertise in *kalam*.

By showing preference for Hisham the *mutakallim* over other pupils, experts in *hadith* and *fiqh*, al-Imam al-Sadiq (A), in fact, wanted to raise the status of *kalam* as against *hadith* and *fiqh*. Obviously, such an attitude of the Imams (A) played a decisive role in the promotion of *'ilm al-kalam*, and as a result, gave the Shi'i thought a dialectical and philosophical character.

Al-Imam al-Rida (A) personally participated in debates in which al-Ma'mun invited *mutakallimun* of various schools to take part. The records of such meetings are preserved in the Shi'i texts.

It is indeed very amazing that the Orientalists should be completely silent about all such events pertaining to the efforts of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (A) and ignore the role of the Infallible Imams (A) in the revival of rational inquiry in matters of religious doctrine.

Fadl ibn Shadhan al-Nishaburi, a companion of al-Imam al-Rida (A), al-Imam al-Jawad (A), and al-Imam al-Hadi (A), whose tomb is in Nishapur, apart from being a *faqih* and a *muhaddith*, was also a *mutakallim*. He is reported to have written a large number of books.

The Nawbakht family produced many illustrious personalities, most of whom were *mutakallimun*. Fadl ibn Abi Sahl ibn al-Nawbakht, a contemporary of Harun, was attached with the famous Bayt al-Hikmah library, and well-known as a translator from Persian into Arabic; Ishaq ibn Abi Sahl ibn al-Nawbakht; his son, Isma'il ibn Ishaq ibn Sahl ibn al-Nawbakht; his another son, 'Ali ibn Ishaq; his grandson, Abu Sahl Isma'il ibn 'Ali ibn Ishaq ibn Abi Sahl ibn al-Nawbakht, (called "shaykh al-mutakallimin" of the Shi'ah), Hasan ibn Musa al-Nawbakht, a nephew of Isma'il ibn 'Ali, and several others of this family – all are Shi'i *mutakallimun*.

Ibn Qubba al-Razi in the 3rd/9th century, and Abu 'Ali ibn Miskawayh, the famous doctor of medicine and the author of *Tahdhib al-'akhlaq wa tathir al-'araq*, during the early 5th/11th century, are also Shi'i *mutakallimun*.

The Shi'i *mutakallimun* are many. Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, the famous philosopher, mathematician,

and the author of the *Tajrid al-'Itiqad*, and al-'Allamah al-Hilli, the well-known *faqih* and commentator of the *Tajrid al-'Itiqad*, are well-known *mutakallimun* of the 7th/13th century.

Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, himself a learned philosopher, created the most solid work of *kalam* through his writing of the *Tajrid al-'Itiqad*. Since its compilation, the *Tajrid* has attracted the attention of all *mutakallimun*, whether Shi'ah or Sunni. Al-Tusi has, to a great extent, brought *kalam* out of dialectical labyrinth and made it closer to discursive (rational) philosophy. During the latter ages, *kalam* almost completely lost its dialectical form. All thinkers became followers of discursive (rational) philosophy, and, in fact, left the camp of dialectical philosophy to join philosophy proper.

The Shi'ite philosophers after al-Tusi brought the essential problems of *kalam* into philosophy, and applied the philosophical methods of enquiry to the study and analysis of these problems with greater success than attained by the *mutakallimun* who employed the older methods. For example, Mulla Sadra or Mulla Hadi Sabzawari, though they are not usually counted among *mutakallimun*, have been far more influential in Islamic thought than any of the *mutakallimun*.

It is a fact that if we compare their approach to that of the basic Islamic texts, such as the Qur'an, the *Nahj al-balaghah*, and the prayers and traditions transmitted from the Ahl al-Bayt (A), we shall find this approach and style of reasoning to be closer to that of the original teachers of the faith. Here we are compelled to be content with these brief references only.

[1.](#) Murtadha Mutahhari, *Ashna'i bi 'ulum al-Islami* (An Introduction to the Islamic Sciences), see the section on philosophy, the fourth lecture entitled "Rawishha-ye fikri-ye Islami".

The shi'i standpoint

In this lecture it is necessary to briefly explain the Shi'ite views on the issues current among the Muslim *mutakallimun*. Earlier, while explaining the Mu'tazilite viewpoint, we stated that the Mu'tazilah considered their five doctrines, viz., *tawhid*, *'adl*, *al-wa'd wa al-wa'id*, *manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*, and *al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, as being fundamental to their school of thought.

We have also said that the reason for giving prominence to these doctrines above all other Mu'tazilite beliefs lies in the fact that they characterize their school and distinguish it from the schools of their opponents. It should not be construed that these five principles constitute the basic doctrines of the faith (*usul al-Din*) in the eyes of the Mu'tazilah, and that all the remaining beliefs are regarded as subsidiary.

The Shi'ite scholars – not the Shi'ite Imams (A) – from the earliest days, have also introduced five doctrines as being characteristic of Shi'ism. They are: *tawhid*, *'adl*, *nubuwwah*, *imamah*, and *ma'ad* (Resurrection). It is generally said that these five are the basic tenets of the faith (*usul al-Din*) and the

rest have a subordinate significance, or are "*furu' al-Din*". Here, inevitably, the question arises that if by "*usul al-Din*" we mean the doctrines belief in which is essential for being a Muslim, they are not more than two: *tawhid* and *nubuwwah*.

Only these are the two beliefs contained in the *Shahadatayn* ("*ashhadu 'an la ilaha illallahu wa 'ashhadu 'anna Muhammadan rasulullah*") Moreover, the second testimony is related in particular to the prophethood of Muhammad (S), not to prophethood in general, and the prophethood of other prophets is not covered by it. However, belief in the prophethood of all the other prophets (A) is a part of the *usul al-Din*, and faith in it is compulsory for all believers.

If by *usul al-Din* we mean the doctrines faith in which is an essential part of the faith from the Islamic viewpoint, then belief in other matters, such as the existence of the angels – as explicitly stated by the Qur'an – is also essential for faith¹. Furthermore, what is special about the Attribute of *'adl* (justice) that only this Divine Attribute should be included in the essential doctrine, to the exclusion of all other attributes, such as Knowledge, Life, Power, Hearing or Vision? If the belief in the Divine Attributes is necessary, all of them should be believed in; if not, none ought to be made the basis of the faith.

Actually, the fivefold principles were selected in such a manner so as, on the one hand, to determine certain tenets essential to the Islamic faith, and on the other to specify the particular identity of the school. The doctrines of *tawhid*, *nubuwwah*, and *ma'ad* are the three which are essential for every Muslim to believe in. That is, these three are part of the objectives of Islam; the doctrine of *'adl* being the specific mark of the Shi'ite school.

The doctrine of *'adl*, although it is not a part of the main objectives of the Islamic faith – in the sense that it does not differ from the other articles of faith pertaining to Knowledge, Life, Power, etc –, but is one of those doctrines which represent the specific Shi'i outlook with regard to Islam.

The article on *imamah*, from the Shi'ite viewpoint, covers both these aspects, i.e. it is both a part of the essential doctrines and also characterizes the identity of the Shi'ite school.

If faith in the existence of the angels is also, on the authority of the Qur'an, essential and obligatory, then why was it not stated as a sixth article of the faith? The answer is that the above-mentioned articles are part of the objectives of Islam. That is, the Holy Prophet (S) called the people to believe in them. This means that the mission of the Prophet (S) prepared the ground for the establishment of these beliefs. But the belief in the angels or in the obligatory duties, such as prayer and fasting, is not a part of the objectives of the prophethood; it rather forms an essential accessory of it. In other words, such beliefs are essential accessories of faith in prophethood, but are not the objectives of prophethood.

The issue of *imamah*, if viewed from a socio-political standpoint or from the viewpoint of government and leadership, is similar to that of *'adl*. That is, in that case, it is not an essential part of the faith. However, if viewed from a spiritual viewpoint – that is from the viewpoint that the Imam, to use the terminology of *hadith*, is the *hujjah* (proof) of God and His *khalifah* (vicegerent), who in all periods of time

serves as a spiritual link between every individual Muslim and the perfect human being – then it is to be considered as one of the articles of faith.

Now we shall take separately each of the particular doctrines of Shi'ite *kalam*, including the above-mentioned fivefold doctrines:

(i) Tawhid

Tawhid is also one of the fivefold doctrines of the Mu'tazilah, as it is also one of the Asha'irah's, with the difference that in the case of the Mu'tazilah it specifically means *al-tawhid al-sifati*, which is denied by the Asha'irah. On the other hand, the specific sense of this term as affirmed by the Asha'irah is *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*, which is rejected by the Mu'tazilah.

As mentioned above, *al-tawhid al-dhati* and *al-tawhid al-'ibadi*, since they are admitted by all, are outside the scope of our discussion. The conception of *tawhid* upheld by the Shi'ah, in addition to *al-tawhid al-dhati* and *al-tawhid al-'ibadi*, also includes *al-tawhid al-sifati* and *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*. That is, in the controversy regarding the Attributes, the Shi'ah are on the side of *al-tawhid al-sifati*, and in the debate on human acts, are on the side of *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*. Nevertheless, the conception of *al-tawhid al-sifati* held by the Shi'ah is different from the same held by the Mu'tazilah. Also, their notion of *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* differs from the notion of the same held by the Asha'irah.

The conception of *al-tawhid al-sifati* of the Mu'tazilah is synonymous with the idea of the absence of all Attributes from the Divine Essence, or is equivalent to the conception of the Divine Essence being devoid of all qualities. But the Shi'i notion of *al-tawhid al-sifati* means identity of the Attributes with the Divine Essence². For an elaborate discussion of this issue one should study works on Shi'ite *kalam* and philosophy.

The Shi'i conception of *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* differs from the one held by the Asha'irah. The Ash'arite notion of *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* means that no creature is of any consequence in the scheme of things, and everything is directly ordained by God. Accordingly, He is also the direct creator of the deeds of the human beings, and they are not creators of their own acts. Such a belief is similar to the idea of absolute predestination and has been refuted through many an argument. However, the notion of *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* upheld by the Shi'ah means that the system of causes and effects is real, and every effect, while being dependent on its proximate cause, is also dependent on God. These two modes of dependence do not operate in parallel but in series. For further clarification of this subject see my book *Insan wa sarnewisht* ("Man and Destiny").

(ii) 'Adl

The doctrine of *'adl* is common between the Shi'ah and the Mu'tazilah. *'Adl* means that God bestows His mercy and blessings and so also His trials and chastisement according to prior and intrinsic

deservedness of beings, and that Divine mercy and trial, reward and punishment are determined in accordance with a particular order or law (which is also of Divine origin).

The Asha'irah deny this notion of *'adl* and such an order. In their view, the belief in *'adl* in the sense of a just order, as outlined above, necessitates God's subjection and subordination to something else and thus contradicts His Absolute Power. *'Adl* in itself implies several corollaries which shall be referred to while explaining other doctrines.

(iii) Free Will and Freedom

The Shi'ah doctrine of free will is to some extent similar to that of Mu'tazilah. But the two differ with regard to its meaning. Human freedom or free will for the Mu'tazilah is equivalent to Divine resignation (*tafwid*), i.e. leaving man to himself and suspension of the Divine Will from any effective role. Of course, this, as proved in its proper place, is impossible.

Freedom and free will, as believed by the Shi'ah, mean that men are created as free beings. But they, like any other creature, are entirely dependent on the Divine Essence for their existence and all its multifarious modes, including the mode of action, all of which are derived from and are dependent on God's merciful care, and seek help from His Will.

Accordingly, free will and freedom in Shi'ism occupy an intermediate position between the Ash'arite (absolute) predestination (*jabr*) and the Mu'tazilite doctrine of freedom (*tafwid*). This is the meaning of the famous dictum of the Infallible Imams (A.): "*la jabra wa la tafwida bal 'amrun bayna 'amrayn*":

Neither *Jabr* nor *tafwid*; but something intermediate between the two (extreme) alternatives.

The doctrine of free will is a corollary to the doctrine of Divine Justice.

(iv) Inherent Morality or Immorality of Deeds (Husn wa Qubh Dhati)

The Mu'tazilah believe that all deeds are inherently and intrinsically either good or evil. For example, justice is intrinsically good and oppression is inherently evil. The wise man selects the good works and abstains from bad deeds. And since God the Almighty is Wise His Wisdom necessitates that He should do good and abstain from 'evil. Thus the inherent goodness or badness of acts on the one hand, and the Wisdom of God on the other, necessitate that some acts are "obligatory" for God and some "undesirable."

The Asha'irah are severely opposed to this belief. They deny both the inherent goodness or badness of acts and the applicability of such judgements as "obligatory" or "undesirable" to God.

Some Shi'ah thinkers, under the influence of the Mu'tazilite *kalam*, accepted the Mu'tazilite view in its above-mentioned form, but others, with greater insight, while accepting the doctrine of inherent morality or immorality of acts, rejected the view that the judgements of permissibility or undesirability are applicable to the Divine realm³.

(v) Grace (lutf) and Choice of the Best (intikhab al-'aslah)

There is a controversy between the Asha'irah and the Mu'tazilah whether or not Grace or 'choice of the best' for the good of human beings is a principle which governs the universe. The Mu'tazilah considered grace as a duty and obligation incumbent upon God. The Asha'irah denied Grace and 'Choice of the best.'

However, the principle of grace is a corollary to the doctrine of justice and the doctrine of the innate goodness or badness of deeds. Some Shi'ite *mutakallimun* have accepted the doctrine of grace in its Mu'tazilite form, but others who consider it absolutely wrong to apply the notion of "duty" and "obligation" to God, advance another version of the doctrine of the "choice of the best," which it is not possible to elaborate here.

(vi) Independence and Validity of Reason

Shi'ism affirms a greater independence, authority and validity for reason than the Mu'tazilah.

According to certain indisputable traditions of the Ma'sumun (A), reason is the internalized prophetic voice in the same way as a prophet is reason externalized. In the Shi'ite *fiqh*, reason (*'aql*) is considered as one of the four valid primary sources of the Law.

(v) 'Aim' and 'Purpose' of Divine Acts

The Asha'irah reject the notion that the Divine Acts may be for one or several purposes or aims. They state that possession of a purpose or goal is solely applicable to man and other similar creatures. But God is above such matters, since having a purpose and aim implies subjection of a doer to that purpose or aim. God is free from and above every kind of limit, restriction, and subordination be as it may the limit imposed by a purpose.

The Shi'ah affirm the Mu'tazilite belief with regard to purposiveness of Divine Acts. They believe that there is a difference between the purpose of the act and the purpose of the doer. That which is impossible is that God may seek to satisfy some purpose of His own through His Acts; however, a purpose or aim which is directed to the benefit of a creature is not at all incompatible with Divine perfection and the supremacy of His self-sufficing Essence.

(vi) The Possibility of Bada' (Divine abrogation of predestiny)

Bada' is possible in Divine Acts, in the same way as it occurs in the abrogation of the Divinely decreed laws. An elaborate and satisfactory study of the issue of *bada'* may be found in such profound philosophical books as *al-'Asfar*.

(ix) Vision (ru'yah) of God

The Mu'tazilah vehemently deny the possibility of seeing God with the eyes. They believe that one may only have faith in God, a faith which is rooted in the mind and the intellect. That is, one can acquire a firm conviction in the depth of one's soul and mind in the existence of God, and this is the highest kind of faith one may attain. God can by no means be seen or observed. This is testified by the Qur'an when it says:

The sights do not perceive Him, and He perceives the sights, and He is All-subtle (incapable of being perceived) and All-knowing (i.e. perceives the eyes and the rest of things). (6:103).

The Asha'irah, with equal vehemence, assert that God can be seen with the eyes, but only on the Day of Resurrection. They also cite as evidence certain Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions to support their claim. One of the verses they cite is:

(Some) faces on that Day shall be bright, looking towards their Lord. (75:22-23)

The Shi'ah believe that God can never be seen with the eyes, neither in this life nor in the Hereafter. Nevertheless, the highest kind of faith is not an intellectual one. The intellectual faith is *'ilm al-yaqin*. A higher level of faith than that of the intellect is *'ayn al-yaqin* – certitude of the heart. *'Ayn al-yaqin* (lit. certitude by sight) means witnessing God with the heart, not with the eyes.

Thus, though God cannot be seen with the eyes, He is 'visible' to the heart. 'Ali (A) was once asked, "Have you seen God?" He replied, "I have not worshipped a god whom I have not seen. But He is visible to the hearts, not to the eyes." The Imams (A) were asked whether the Prophet (S) saw God during his Ascension (*mi'raj*). Their reply was: "With the eyes? No. With the heart? Yes." In this matter only the Sufis have a viewpoint resembling the Shi'ah position.

(x) The Faith or Infidelity of the Fasiq

On this issue, which has often been referred to earlier, the Shi'ah position is in agreement with that of the Asha'irah, but is different from the views of the Khawarij (who believe that a *fasiq* is *kafir*) and the Mu'tazilah (who believe in *manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*).

(xi) The Infallibility ('ismah) of the Prophets and the Imams

This belief is characteristic of the Shi'ah who hold that the prophets (A) and the Imams (A) are infallible and do not commit any major or minor sin whatsoever.

(xii) Forgiveness (maghfirah) and Intercession (shafa'ah)

On this issue, also, the Shi'ah differ from the cut-and-dry Mu'tazilite position that anybody who dies without repentance cannot possibly get the benefit of Divine forgiveness or (the Prophet's) intercession. Similarly, their position is also at variance with the indulgent and extravagant notion of *shafa'ah* held by the Asha'irah⁴.

¹. Al-Qur'an, 2:285

². This is the stand on sifat which is usually attributed to the Mu'tazilah. Hajji Sabzawari (in Manzumah, his philosophical poem) says:

al-Ash'ari bizdiyadin qa'iluhu

wa qala binniyabati'lMu'tazilahu

However some Mu'tazilah, such as al-Hudhayl, have held a position exactly similar to the Shi'ah position.

³. Murtadha Mutahhari, 'Adle Ilahi (Divine Justice).

⁴. Ibid., the discussion on shafa'ah.

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