

Foreword

This book, written in a relatively simple language, presents a summary of the teachings of Islam to provide some information for those who are not able to examine Islamic matters deeply in a specialized manner.

One of the most valuable styles for the promotion of culture, sciences and religion is through simple writings. This method has evolved for general dissemination of human knowledge to unveil uncertainties and remove difficulties from some specialized branches of science and technology so as to make them easily understandable for the public.

No matter how technical a branch of science or subject is, it could be stated and written in such a way that everyone can utilize it and gain a relative knowledge in proportion to his educational status and in accordance with the depth and the extent of his thinking.

This style we see in the Qur'an in its best form. In the Qur'an, the most complicated human affairs, highly metaphysical and humanistic matters, *Ma'ad* (Resurrection), the ultimate point of man's life and his conditions after death, etc have been described in the simplest language possible.

Considerable space is needed to cite a few examples of such illuminating highlights of the Qur'an; therefore, we are quoting only one or two examples. Qur'an, although firm and rational in its reasoning for *Ma'ad* and the life in the world Hereafter, states simply, briefly, and in a way that is comprehensible to all.

"...Says he: 'Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten?' Say: 'He will give life to them Who brought them into existence at first, and He is Cognizant of all creation' (36:78-79)."

This is a very strong reasoning and a logical and rational remark. The Power that brought forth creations from nonexistence into the world of existence has the power to gather the components once more and give them life after their disintegration.

It is said that Abu Nasr al-Farabi¹, the Muslim philosopher, wished that had Aristotle been alive, he would have accepted this logical reasoning of Qur'an for physical resurrection. As you can see, although

rational, it has a very simple language that can be easily comprehended if one thinks a little about it. In like manner, many remarks and reasonings have been presented about the science of the origin, but the Qur'an states the subject in a simple and balanced manner.

"Does He not know who He created? And He is the Knower of the subtleties, the Aware (67:14)."

With this brief expression, the subject becomes completely clear. For experts, too, this verse has a strong argument in itself.

The prophets and Imams [Twelve infallible successors of Prophet Muhammad (S)] have also set forth advanced, sophisticated, and more complicated matters in a simple form but profoundly in accordance with Allah's Book. It is also stated in the Qur'an:

"And We did not send any messenger but with the language of his people so that he might explain to them clearly ... (14:4)."

This verse lucidly indicates that the prophets used the criteria of simple language carefully to clarify and express the truth.

This is due to the fact that the prophets were cognizant of the precise method of presentation, the mode of speech, and the insights of the people of their time. They were also well aware of their people's talents and feelings.

The prophets were familiar with the artistic and literary feelings of their people and presented their subjects and materials in customary forms acceptable to the public. Although the principles of the teachings of the prophets were similar and identical, the method of their presentation and expression has had considerable differences in various societies.

This principle existed in the prophets' commissions:

"We are commissioned to speak in accordance with people's thoughts. Islamic matters, therefore, should be presented in such a way that is understandable by everyone. One must adopt a simple and balanced language filled with artistic and literary aesthetics to acquire a striking success in its abundant and immediate influence."²

Based on this principle and in accordance with the Qur'an and the ahadith (Traditions), our religious leaders wrote simple and condensed books in a simple language. These books were firm and logical and had a correct, lucid, and condensed form and technique. They had very well found out that it is always the quality of presenting the subjects and the manner of expression, language, and writing that can propagate a subject in the society, a fact that is very much ignored nowadays.

There are two factors that play an essential and vital role in this cause and in the real fulfillment of this method. Firstly, full knowledge and information on the subject matter. Secondly, familiarity with the

principles of writing and the literary and artistic criteria for simple writing. If the author lacks in either of these two principles, they will not be able to present useful books to the people. Even if they make such an attempt, they will not succeed.

Thus to prepare small treatises on important, enlightening and valuable subjects related to human beings is a great, specialized and difficult task. He, who writes scientific matters for the public, performs a greater and more specialized task than one who writes for experts.

Therefore, it should not be assumed that simplicity in writing means that anyone with little knowledge and artistic talent in writing will be able to present some treatises; rather this task is more burdensome and difficult than scientific and technical writings. As mentioned earlier, to embark on such a task entails two kinds of proficiencies.

In relation to the dissemination of religious culture particularly that of Islam such books are of vital significance. As there is no such opportunity available to the people of our society to spend many years to gain knowledge about Islam, such treatises must be written to adequately orient and familiarize them with Islam. The grandeur, depth, and vastness of Islamic matters should not hinder people's understanding. A couplet states:

"If the sea's water cannot entirely be drawn, at least so much to quench the thirst must be taken".

Consequently, researchers, with expertise and skill in various Islamic matters, should also have expertise and experience in literary and artistic techniques and the forms and types of presentation, so that their material could be understood by the present generation which would then be familiarized with the Islamic culture.

This book is presented to serve the purpose of such a significant task. The late 'Allamah Tabataba'i, with his vast and deep knowledge on Islamic matters, both comprehensively and in relation with one another, coupled with his experience in presenting relatively simple and general books, aimed at pursuing such a mission. This book and a few others in this connection can prove advantageous to everyone and can fulfill the responsibility of theological centres and Islamic theologians.

Al-Hawzatul-'Ilmiyyah, Qum

1. Abu Nasr al-Farabi was a great Muslim philosopher, who was born in 259 AH at Farab, (one of areas of Turks) and died at Damascus in 339 A.H.

2. "Al-Haya", 3rd edition, vol. 1, p 146.