

Understanding the Qur'an, Part 2

Author(s):

Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari [3]

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This text is comprised by the explanation of the first chapter of the Quran (the Opening) and the first 24 verses of chapter 2 (The cow).

The verses of the Quran are extensively explained both in meaning and grammar. A big section of this second book is dedicated to the thorough examinations of the concept of hypocrisy and the concept of miracle. The volume ends with the explanation of how and why the Quran is considered a miracle.

Translator(s):

Dr. Alaedin Pazargadi [5]

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Chapter 1, Praise (Hamd or the Opening)

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

- 1) *All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.*
- 2) *The Beneficent, the Merciful.*
- 3) *Master of the Day of Judgement.*
- 4) *Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.*
- 5) *Keep us on the right path.*
- 6) *The path of those upon whom Thou hath bestowed favours.*
- 7) *Not (the path) of those upon whom Thy wrath is brought down, nor of those who go astray .*

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

In the written Qur'an since it took a written form, the phrase "In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful", has been placed at the beginning of every chapter except the Chapter Al-Bara'at (Immunity). But for a long time great differences have arisen between the Shi'a and Sunni sects as to whether this verse is a part of every chapter or not. The Sunnis do not consider it as a part of any chapter and think that like every act which begins with the name of God and is not a part of that act, the case is the same with chapters without the need of beginning them with that verse. This applies to the opening chapter as well as others.

The Shi'as, following the way of the Imams, strongly oppose the Sunnis on this point, and quote the Imams as saying: "May God destroy those who have omitted the greatest verse of the Qur'an. If we omit it from every chapter, then it is not a part of the Qur'an except the chapter Naml which is a quotation from the Queen of Sheba who on reading Solomon's letter, said: "Surely it is from Solomon, and surely it is in the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful....and so on. In any case the Shi'as consider it as a necessary part of the Qur'an.¹

Beginning All Acts in the Name of God

You notice that the verse in question is a phrase and not a complete sentence, and different views are expressed concerning its form by various commentators.

In giving names to things, motives and goals differ. Sometimes an institution is given the name of a person for the sake of a material goal which he attains through that name. Or as it is usual, a baby is named after another person of whom they have been fond in the past, thus reviving his memory and name.

But what is the purpose in commanding mankind to begin his acts in the name of God? It is for the

purpose of giving that act a sacred touch and making it blessed.

When a man, who has a natural sentiment from God and considers Him a holy essence and source of charities, begins his act in His name, it means that owing to His sanctity, nobility and magnanimity, that action, too, becomes sacred.

As beginning with someone's name means that he is holy and free from all defects and a source of all perfections and by doing so one wishes to bring blessings on one's acts by means of this relationship, therefore no act can be undertaken in the name of anyone, even the Prophet, except of God, and that is the significance of praising God at the beginning of the Chapter A'la (The Most High).

The best view in this connection seems to be that of the author of Al-'Mizan', who says, "Significance of the phrase praising God is that since He is in the position of being respected and worshipped, the name of creatures should not be placed in line with the name of God, or when the name of God is uttered, no other name should be mentioned, for, it would otherwise be dualism."

Recently an act is commonly performed by those who speak of opposing dualism, which is, in itself, an evidence of dualism. Instead of beginning an act in the name of God, they use the phrase: "in the name of people". If placing the name of the Prophet alongside God's is dualism, obviously beginning something in the name of people is like finding a substitute for God; while the Qur'an commands that the name of God should always be uttered and human deeds be named in His name, and not in the name of another. In this way, human actions become sacred and are blessed by Him.

"Allah"

"Allah" is one of God's names. The names given to people or things are sometimes signs and sometimes description. In the former case, although names themselves have meanings, yet their meaning is not taken into consideration, and is only used for recognition, and thus these names are like a sign. Very often the sense of a name does not describe the character or peculiarity of the owner of the name, and may often have an opposite meaning, such as calling a black man 'snow'.

The latter type of name is indicative of a quality of the owner of the name.

God Almighty has no name which would be only a sign, and all His names represent a reality of His holy essence.

In the holy Qur'an, about a hundred names have been brought for God which are, in fact, attributes, as you see in the opening Chapter; namely, "Beneficent, Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment," but none of them possesses the comprehensiveness of "Allah". Each one shows one aspect of His perfection. The word "Allah" has originally been "Al-elah", and the letter "e" has gradually been omitted.

Concerning the root of the word "Allah", several views are expressed. Some say that it is derived from

"A-Lah", and others think it is taken from "Wa-Lah".

If it is derived from "A-Lah", it means 'worship', which is suggestive of an essence worthy of worship on account of His total perfection. For, a being which is a creation of another and has, therefore, imperfections, cannot be worthy of worship.

If it is derived from "Wa-Lah", it means 'amazement' and "Waleh" means 'distracted from love', and hence Allah is called so because all intellects are amazed at His holy essence, or distracted from His love and take refuge unto Him.

Sibwieh, who is a distinguished authority on Arabic grammar and syntax, living at the end of the second century and the beginning of the third century (After Hejira), was a genius in his own field and his book "Al-Ketab" is valued as highly as Aristotle's 'Logic' and Ptolemy's 'Astronomy'. His words on Arabic literature are considered authoritative. He affirms that "Wa-Lah", meaning 'amazement', is the root of the word Allah.

Mowlavi in his Mathnavi supports this view, and portrays a condition in which one feels so much pain that one involuntarily seeks a point of refuge, and that is "Allah". And he says it is not only human beings who turn to Him in their need, but also the fish in the waves, birds in the sky and even those lifeless waves groan before Allah.

There is also the probability that both "A-Lah" and "Wa-Lah" are two different pronunciations of the same word, changing from "Va-Lah" into a-Lah and thus assuming the meaning of 'worship'. Therefore, Allah means: 'that essence with whom all creatures are unconsciously in love with and who is a reality worthy of worship'.

In Persian language, we cannot find a word synonymous with "Allah" possessing all of its various meanings. If we use the word 'Khoda' it does not denote the sense of Allah, for, it means what philosophers call 'self-existent' which is probably closer to the word 'Ghani' in the Qur'an, meaning 'free from want'. The Persian word 'Khodavand', too, is not indicative of Allah, for, it means 'owner' which is only one aspect of Allah.

Again, we cannot find two words in the Persian language for the phrase 'the Beneficent, the Merciful', to denote its exact meaning. Sometimes, the words 'generous' and 'kind' are given as their translation, but they are inadequate, for, 'generous' is the equivalent of the Arabic word 'Jawad' and kind is 'Ra'oof', both of which are God's attributes mentioned in the Qur'an.

Jawad means 'having something and giving it freely to others', while the words 'rahman' (Beneficent) and 'rahim' (Merciful) are both derived from the word 'rahmat' (mercy or blessing).

When a person is in need, he stretches his hand and begs with his tongue, in order to be pitied and to be given something. This is mercy. But mercy is shown on the part of a human being when he is

affected by the condition of a needy person and feels pity for him. God, however, is free from this limitation.

Therefore, when we use the two words 'rahman' (Beneficent) and 'rahim' (Merciful), these two meanings appear in our mind: One is the great and extensive need of all creatures imploring God who is free from want for their needs, and the other is that He sends His infinite blessings to them to fulfil their needs.

What is the difference between 'Rahman' and 'Rahim'? In Arabic language, words which have the same rhythm as 'Rahman' indicate 'excess', and words of identical rhythm as 'Rahim' denote 'stability'. Therefore, 'Rahman' means that God's beneficence spreads everywhere and covers everything. Fundamentally, the existence of everything is the equivalent of God's blessing, for existence is a blessing in itself. This is mentioned in the Chapter A'raf (The Elevated Places) Verse 156:

"And My mercy encompasses all things,"

and a similar utterance in the prayer of Komeyl.

This mercy of God has no exception. It does not exclude non-human creatures; nor does it exclude non-believers. It comprises the whole world, and whatever exists is His blessing.

The lesson to be learnt from the Verse; 'In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful', is that what is granted by God is not two in kind, namely good or evil, but is wholly good and blessed, which is granted to inanimate objects and living beings including all kinds of plants, animals and human beings, for, all existence is God's blessing.

The word 'Rahim' denotes stability. The word 'Rahman' is the extension of blessing to all existence while they exist, but many things are perishable. The word 'Rahim', with its sense of stability and eternity, applies only to those who through their faith and good deeds have placed themselves in the path of God's particular blessing.

So God's blessing is both universal and specific. With His universal blessing He has created everything including human beings.

Man who is the only being with a duty and responsibility will receive God's particular mercy if he performs the duties given to him. This mercy is granted only to obedient creatures.

For the Phrase "All praise is due to Allah", we have no exact Persian word for the Arabic 'Hamd' (Praise). There exist two words close in meaning to the word 'Hamd' for which we have Persian equivalents. One of them is 'madh' (extolment) the Persian equivalent of which is 'setayesh' (adoration), and the other is 'Shokr' (thanks) the Persian equivalent of which is 'Sepas'. But neither of them can, by itself, have the full meaning of 'Hamd'.

The word 'Madh' is close to 'Hamd', and it is sometimes thought that both are different pronunciations of

the same word, as it is the case with several Arabic words.

'Madh' means 'adoration', which is a special human sentiment showing that it appears in a person when he faces perfection and majesty, beauty and elegance, and wishes to show adoration. This feeling is not found in animals. An animal can neither understand that perfection and majesty, nor can it adore such qualities.

Of course, this adoration sometimes takes a low form in a human being, and is called flattery which is a vice. This is when someone praises something untrue. It is very indecent to use a God-given power which should adore real perfection, beauty and greatness in praising a worthless creature for the sake of cupidity. This power is meant to be used to satisfy that noble and exalted sentiment of respecting perfection, and not to be placed at the service of covetousness which is meanness.

In true adoration, there is no greed at all; it is something natural and inherent in man in seeing beautiful art. For instance, one is carried away at the beauty of a leaf of the Qur'an handwritten many years ago by Baysonghor, and involuntarily praises it. If one is asked: "Why do you praise it? You receive nothing from it," Our answer is: "Is it necessary to receive something? I am a human being, and as such I must feel humble before perfection, beauty and greatness, and express that humbleness by means of adoration." This is the meaning of 'Madh' but 'Hamd' is not 'Madh' alone.

Man has another pure sentiment called 'gratitude', and it is the translation of the Arabic word 'Shokr'. It is used when one receives some kindness from someone, and humanity requires an expression of thankfulness of him. For example, if, while driving, we are passing by another car which has priority of the way but its driver makes a halt and lets us pass, our natural politeness demands us to express our gratitude by words or gestures. This quality does not exist to the same extent in animals, and it is a peculiarity specific to human beings, and as the Qur'an says the "reward of goodness is goodness", a response which is due to a pure conscience.

This statement is true that anyone who knows himself, knows God, too. The full understanding of oneself leads to the recognition of God. One of the ways of knowing a human being is to recognise his special human sentiments, one of which is this same feeling of gratitude that is directed by conscience, and is not related to environmental training or local customs, nor is it limited to a special zone. Customs change with time and place and sometimes take a contrary form, such as taking off one's hat or keeping it on, each of which is prevalent in a different society as a sign of respect. But in no society is badness the reward of goodness.

'Hamd' is neither pure 'Madh' (praise) nor pure gratitude. It is a mixture of both, that is, an essence worthy of praise on account of His greatness, goodness, majesty, beauty and perfection, and also worthy of gratitude by virtue of His kindness and benevolence. It is here that the word 'Hamd' is used.

"Hamd" is Peculiar to God

There may also be another meaning inherent in the word 'Hamd' and that is 'Worship'. In that case we have three elements in it, namely, praise, gratitude and worship. That is probably why 'Hamd' is limited to God, and not applied to anyone else.

Commentators are unanimous in this point that the meaning of the verse is that 'all Hamd belongs to God', If by 'Hamd' is meant only gratitude without the sense of worship and humility, why then should a human being not be thankful to human media that God has arranged for him? Other human beings who show benevolence should also be thanked, and it is said that he who is not thankful to creatures is not grateful to the creator.

A father, mother, teacher and all those who grant benefits to human beings are worthy of gratitude. No one can, on the excuse of being thankful to God, forget human beings and fail to appreciate their kindness. But it is not a question of thanking creatures in one case and God in another; it should be remembered that a creature is not independent of God, and in case of a benevolent deed of man, God deserves a greater gratitude.

As 'Hamd' is peculiar to God, this shows that its meaning is not only gratitude, but also praise and worship. We worship God because He is the only essence worthy of worship, and we praise Him and are grateful to Him because He is Beneficent and Merciful.

'Hamd', then, is a pure internal human feeling which has its source in the core of human spirit, and is meant to praise majesty and beauty and feel humble before greatness. That is why the Chapter of Praise requires an understanding of God, without which one cannot read and pronounce it correctly and in a reverent manner.

When you come across a human being who is noble and has fine qualities, and in your need he is ready to meet your requirement without any expectation, you feel humble before his greatness of spirit, and when his name is mentioned in a gathering, you begin praising him devotedly and sincerely. This praise has its source in the depth of your spirit and you feel relieved and pleased in your mind.

In prayer, one has such a feeling, and we have repeatedly said that devotion requires a recognition of God, and without a full recognition, devotion does not attain its height.

It is worthy to note here that after the phrase "All Praise be to Allah", four attributes are mentioned: the Lord of the Worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful and Master of the Day of Judgment, each of which is a key to the recognition of God, which will be explained in due course.

Before these attributes are mentioned, the word "Praise" is concentrated on God Himself as the highest essence worthy of praise and worship, irrespective of His deeds and His benevolence to me and without any regard to the beginning and end of my knowledge and the creation of myself and the vast-ranging

universe. He is worthy of praise and we must praise Him.

Not all people can claim having given this exalted degree of praise, but Imam Ali (as) says: "O God, I worship you neither for your Heaven, nor for fear of your Hell. Even if you had not created Heaven and Hell, I would have worshiped you because of your worthiness. My worship is not because you have created me and been benevolent to me, nor is it because in the next world you grant Heaven to devotees, but because of what you are, and that you are worthy of worship."²

Sa'di the poet says;

"If you look for benevolence from a friend,
You are thinking of yourself, not of a friend,
It is contrary to the right way for a saint
To beg anything from God but God."

"Lord of the Worlds"

In Persian language, again I must say, there is no word synonymous with 'Rab' (Lord).³ This word sometimes means educator, and sometimes it is used to mean 'Empowered', or 'having authority'.

Neither of these two words gives the full meaning of 'Rab' even though both of them are God's attributes. But both meanings seem to be included in the word 'Rab', meaning 'having authority over all the world', and 'educator and perfecter' of the whole world.

Of course, God has created worlds in which their creatures are, for special reasons, granted every kind of perfection from the very beginning. In other words, all the powers are given to them in their full form at the moment of their creation, and so their beginning and end are the same; and as they are His creatures, and inventions, He is their Lord and Inventor.

But the world in which we live, that is the material world, is the world of gradual occurrence on the system of beginning with defects and moving towards perfection. The creatures' beginning and end are not the same. In one sense they are His creatures and in another sense His pupils.

The world of nature, while being different from other worlds, is not created in a perfect form from the beginning, for, it is of different kinds and each kind has its own special system and a separate world such as the world of inanimate things, world of plants, world of animals, world of man, world of firmaments, all of which are moving from imperfection towards perfection. It is God who brings all these worlds to final perfection. He is the Lord of the worlds.

As the Qur'an says, this world is the world of growth, and human beings, both good and bad, are in a state of growth, as if the world is a farm land where every kind of seed can grow. Not only the good attain perfection, the bad ones, too, pass through various stages. The Qur'an says in the chapter "The

Israelites", verses 18–20:

"Whoever desires this present life, We hasten to him therein what We please for whomsoever We desire, then We assign to him the hell; he shall enter it despised, driven away. And whoever desires the hereafter and strives for it as he ought to strive and he is a believer; (as for) these, their striving shall surely be accepted. All do We aid – these as well as those – out of the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined."

In Verse 18, the reason why the product of the seed of seeking this world is not definite is because this world is full of pests and obstacles, and not because this world is unfavourable to such seeds.

In short, this world is created so that whatever seed is sown, it will grow, except that one kind of seed is wholly productive and that is the seed in the right place. Some seeds have possibilities of being fruitful, but not generally so. Thus, some people commit wrong deeds and attain their purpose through their schemes, but they cannot realise that attaining purpose is not an evidence of its rightfulness. It is the system of this world that whatever seed is sown, it will grow, and may even produce the desired result.

"The Beneficent, the Merciful"

We discussed these two words before, and now we add that attributing these two qualities to God requires a perfect understanding. For, "beneficent" means abundance of blessing, not limited merely to what we understand the word 'abundant', but that the whole existence is from Him, and whatever He gives is good and blessed; and "merciful" means that His bounty is always granted to human beings.

The first attribute is thus related to the whole existence and the second one is the special privilege of human beings. In attributing the first quality to God, a very profound knowledge is necessary to see the whole universe as full of blessing, to remove the idea of dualism from oneself, and not to divide the world's happening into good and evil, but rather to consider the whole existence, which emanates from Him, as absolute goodness and blessing. This is what is propounded by divine justice.

This is a point that a servant of God must always repeat to himself, as recommended in the descended prayers, when a devotee thinks of himself as someone summoned by God, and he says: "I am coming with all my heart."

Knowing God with the attribute of "beneficent" means knowing the world as a perfect manifestation of God's wisdom and His system, and in praising God one should regard existence as a system of goodness, blessing and light. Evil and darkness are relative and unreal things. Obviously, an unrefined thought cannot claim to have such a view of the world, and no force and compulsion can create such a belief, either.

When the Qur'an wants us to praise God with these attributes, the purpose is to enable us to know the world in this way, and this is subject to understanding the exalted matters through the proper use of

intellect and reasoning. This implies pondering into divine questions and confirming the possibility of such enlightenment.

Concerning the second attribute, namely "merciful", I must say that recognition of God by this attribute depends on the full knowledge of one's place among all the creatures.

The privilege that man has among other creatures is that he is the mature offspring of this world. He is not an immature child that must be placed under the compulsory guardianship of a father and mother. He has attained such a degree of intellectual growth that he is told to choose his own way. While other creatures are under the obligatory care of various factors of this world, it is man alone who is given the alternative in the choice of his course.

Both the right and wrong paths are before man. If he chooses the direct path of God, then he will receive the special favour of God, as if the world has been created in a way that going on divine path will provide His aid and guidance, illuminating and strengthening one's heart. God will supply him with his needs for this journey and will grant him livelihood. Such a being reaches a stage where he feels he has a deal with his Providence, for, the more sincere his conduct, the greater is God's favour to him. At this time, this being has reached the stage of submission and surrender.

"Master of the Day of Judgment"

This word 'Malek' in this verse is read in two ways: with a long 'a' (Maalek) and a short 'a' (Malek) to carry two different meanings. The first one has an economic significance meaning 'owner', and the second has a political significance meaning 'Lord' or 'King'.

But neither case has a reality; it is only a convention. When we speak of the owner of a house, we are giving it a credibility, and the same applies to 'Lord' or 'King', and if the credibility is removed, then ownership and lordship too are removed, and may be transferred to someone else.

In the case when these two depend on credibility, they have two distinct and separate meanings, and neither of them performs the function of the other.

But in some cases, these relationships are real. For example, if someone says: "I am the owner of my physical powers", it means that he has the authority to use them, or not as he wishes. In this sense 'owner' and 'lord' are the same in significance since they depend on genesis, not convention.

In the case of God who is the creator of all universe and His will dominates everything, the unity of both 'owner' and 'lord' is quite clear. It is here that a true relationship exists between the lord and the subject. The Qur'an says in chapter "The Believer", verse 16:

"To whom belongs the kingdom this day? To Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all)".

And another Verse is:

"Say: O God, the Owner of the Kingdom".

These two Verses show that the two words are not separate or with two distinct domains.

Is God the owner and lord of the Day of Judgment alone, and not of this world? No, He is the true owner and lord of both worlds, with this difference that as man in this world cannot discern truth, he makes owners and lords credible and figurative, but when he discovers the truth of the world, he will see that all lordship and ownership is artificial, and God is the true owner and lord. This is also supported by narration.⁴

"Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help"

Though it is believed that monotheism is one of the many issues in Islam, yet when we make a careful scrutiny, we realise that Islam is wholly monotheism, and all the questions whether they are related to beliefs, or to moral and educational matters, or daily injunctions, are all monotheistic in nature.

The terms "analysis" and "composition" are used in logic, derived from natural sciences, meaning that as matter is subject to analysis and composition, thoughts and ideas, too, are subject to the same processes. Philosophers say that all thoughts and ideas come back to the law of the lack of contradiction after these are duly analysed and composed,

In Islam, this principle is called monotheism, that is, if we analyse Islamic foundations, we come back to monotheism. If we analyse Prophethood, Resurrection or Imamate which are basic beliefs, we see them as monotheism, and if we investigate moral or social injunctions in Islam, again they will prove to be monotheistic. This subject has been discussed at length in *Al-Mizan* which can be consulted by the reader.

Theoretical Monotheism and Practical Monotheism

In Islam, there exist two types of monotheism: theoretical and practical. Theoretical monotheism is related to the field of thought and understanding, that is, knowing God as being unique. Practical monotheism means making oneself move in the direction of the unique essence.

What I wish to point out is that the Chapter of Praise, up to the part that has been discussed, is related to theoretical monotheism, and from the Phrase "Thee do we serve" onward is linked with practical monotheism. It is here that one realises the great significance of this small Chapter. It is amazing that such words were uttered by an unlettered man living in an ignorant and illiterate environment, the depth of which makes the greatest divine sages ponder over it, and the sweetness and fluency of which are so great that one never tires of their repetition.

The words and sentences used in this Chapter up to 'Master of the Day of Judgment' are related to understanding God and His attributes as an essence to Whom all praise and gratitude are due. All divine matters are condensed in these few words.

Islamic theologians rightfully deduced this fact from the Qur'an that man is called upon to ponder over their depth and not merely to utter them without paying attention to their meanings. He, who when praying calls God with these attributes, is in a position to recognise God, and to understand that He is a perfect essence worthy of worship to Whom all creatures in the world naturally turn. It is an admission of absolute perfection in which there is no deficiency, annihilation or need, and for this reason everything is from Him and all attention is towards Him.

One should have a fine and precise thought to understand His beneficence, and that the whole existence is the manifestation of that attribute, and whatever emanates from Him is nothing but goodness and blessing, and no creature is, on account of being related to Him, anything but a blessing. Evil and wickedness are the negative, relative and additional aspects of things, and not a part of their existence.⁵

A creature who calls upon God by understanding His Mercifulness shows that he has reached a stage where he does not only understand the system of creation as God's manifestation, but also that return to Him is also a system of blessing. This is an evidence of the priority of blessing over wrath, and, in other words, connotes that punishment, if properly recognised, is a blessing in the form of pain.

In another sense, God Almighty has two types of attributes, those of beauty such as knowledge and beneficence, and those of majesty such as power and vengeance.

God Almighty in His essence does not have dualism, meaning half goodness and blessing, and the other half power and vengeance. Moreover, these attributes are not on the same level, but there is a priority of some over others.

Men of learning have studied this issue deeply and got valuable results, and only those gifted with talents, keen intellect and untiring efforts have been able to fathom these truths.

There is a priority of attributes in connection with God, and some are the products of others. Generally speaking, attributes of beauty are prior to attributes of majesty which are produced by the former. It is Jehovah, God of the Jews, in whom power and vengeance have priority over other attributes, and not Allah who is presented by the Qur'an as the true God of universe.

That is why in the Qur'an the phrase "In the name of God" is followed by "the Beneficent and Merciful," and not by 'Powerful' and 'Avenging', for, the presentation of existence from the viewpoint of the Qur'an is to show God as Beneficent and Merciful, and even power and vengeance are another form of beneficence and mercy.

It is clear that the blessing of mercy, namely a blessing that is granted upon creatures' return to God, is, in the first place for believers, a blessing which is absolute, not relative, and wholly a blessing. This is what was explained before that beneficence is related to this world and is granted to all creatures whether believer or infidel, while mercy is related to the next world and granted only to believers.

This does not mean that the world of existence has such divisions. From the viewpoint of blessing, there is an 'arrival' and a 'return'. Both are blessings in different directions, namely, 'from Him' and 'towards Him'. Even hell and divine punishment, which are manifestations of His power and vengeance, are the product of His blessing.

Concerning the phrase 'Master of the Day of Judgment', another understanding is under consideration. A servant of God understands the ultimate end of creation to mean a day of judgment when it will be revealed that nothing is genuine except that God is the true Owner and Lord.

All these are included in the domain of theoretical monotheism, which depends on an understanding that is essential. It should not be said that this is a subjective stage and that there is no necessity for it. In Islam, recognition is genuine in its own right, and without it no advance can be made towards the poetical stage.

Is the first stage, namely understanding, sufficient for a believer to be considered as monotheist? No, this is a preliminary step for the practical stage. When we say 'Thee do we serve' we are beginning a practical monotheism and becoming a believer in uniqueness.

The Root of the Word 'Service' or 'Worship'

In Arabic when something becomes submissive and soft and obedient so that it shows no resistance, aggression or rebellion, this state is called 'Ta'abod' or 'devotion'.

In the past, roads were not made as today by machines and then trodden, but they were made by walking on rough ground with the result that sands became softer and pebbles and thorns were broken under the feet and showed no more resistance, as if these obstacles were tamed; and such roads were called 'devoted ways' (Ma'ebad).

Thus a devoted man is he who is tame and obedient, shows submission; and resorts to no mutiny. This state must exist only towards God. A servant of God attends to God and His commands. But monotheism in service and devotion means lacking this state before any creature but the creator, and to show disobedience and rebellion to what is not related to God. Thus a man should have two contrary states, namely, absolute submission to God, and absolute rebellion to non-god. This is the meaning of "Thee do we serve", meaning "we worship You and none else".

It must be remembered that obedience to those commanded by God, such as father, mother, Imam and fully qualified leaders, is in fact obedience to God; what is parallel with the line of God is worship, but

what crosses that line is dualism or polytheism.

Dualism and Monotheism

In the Qur'an, various examples are given of dualism, some of which will be mentioned that will incidentally clarify the meaning of practical monotheism.

1. ***"Have you seen him who takes his low desires for his god?" (Chapter "Forqan", Verse 43)***

In this verse a lustful person is considered a polytheist, Mowlavi says in his Mathnavi:

The mother of idols is the idol of yourself.

For, they are serpents, but this is a dragon.

Thus when we say: "Thee do we serve" and negate the god of non-god, we are declaring our obedience to God, and not to our desires, whims and lusts.

2. ***"They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for Lords besides Allah." (Chapter "Immunity", Verse 31)***

While the Qur'an reproaches the Jews and Christians, it says that they worship their learned men and monks. We know that the worship by these two groups was different from the worship by idolaters. They did not prostrate themselves, but showed devotion and submission to them (learned men & monks) without being allowed by God, and in fact they obeyed the desires and fancies of their masters. God says that obedience belongs to God, and these creatures have no leave to demand obedience.

Thus when we say: "Thee do we serve", it means we do not worship any group in the name of priesthood, or holiness or any other name, and do not obey blindly. We obey those You have commanded to be obeyed and none else. If we obey the Prophet it is by Your explicit command as something obligatory. If we obey the Imams as leaders, it is by Your command. And if we obey fully-qualified, virtuous, just and well-informed priests, it is by the order of the Prophet and Imams to whom You have given authority.

3. ***"Say: O followers of the Book! Come to an equitable proposition between us and you that we shall not serve any but Allah and (that) we shall not associate aught with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah." (Chapter "Al-Emran", verse 64)***

This is the same verse that the Prophet sent as a circular to all the leaders of the world in year 5 or 6 (after Hejira).

This is another manifestation of practical monotheism in the Qur'an, saying that no human being must make another his god, or his servant. So the phrase "Thee do we serve" means that we have only God as our Lord, and no social lord, and accept no human being or his orders worthy of obedience.

4. ***"And is it a favour of which you remind me that you have enslaved the children of Israel?"***
(Chapter "The Poets", verse 22)

When Moses-bin-Emran faced the Pharaoh and invited him to his religion, the Pharaoh said rudely: "You are the one who were brought up in our house and committed that wicked act (meaning: killing an Egyptian)". Moses answered: "Do you hold me under obligation while you enslave the Israelites?"

You see that Moses has called Pharaoh's tyranny as enslavement. The Israelites never prostrated themselves before Pharaoh, but he had made them abject and forced them to compulsory labour, exploiting them, and depriving them of all choice and freedom.

These are examples cited by the Qur'an which may clarify the meaning of practical monotheism, which is called monotheism in worship by Islamic theologians.

In Islam, it is not enough to be a monotheist only in the stage of thought and to recognise God as being unique in His essence, attributes and acts. He is a true monotheist who after such a recognition, is also devoted in obedience and submission. Here, we realise the significance of the Chapter of Praise which summarises both theoretical and practical monotheisms in a few brief sentences. And this is done by someone who is unlettered and has never met a philosopher or a man of learning.

Monopoly of Worship

According to Arabic grammarians as in the phrase "Thee do we serve", the word "Thee" as an object has been placed first instead of at the end, it gives the sense of monopoly, and in fact the sentence meaning "We worship only you, and naught but you." This is similar in meaning to the sentence "There is no god but God", which shows belief and unbelief at the same time.

Another verse says;

"There is no compulsion in religion; truly, the right way has become clearly distinct from error; therefore, whoever disbelieves in Satan and believes in Allah, he indeed has laid hold on the firmest handle." (Chapter "The Cow", verse 256).

In Islam, belief is always faced with disbelief, and while submitting to God, one should deny the manifestation of rebellion in order to make faith complete.

Plural Pronoun

The interesting point in this phase of practical monotheism is that the pronoun 'We' is used before 'serve', and not the singular pronoun 'I'. This means that as man is built up by his knowledge of God and by attention to Him and not by his negligence of Him, and as he is built up by action and not only by reflection, he is also built up by his social acts which are in harmony with monotheistic society, and not

apart from it . Man is a thinking, divine, practical and social being, and without these qualities he is not human, and having only a few of these qualities also shows imperfection. Thus "Thee do we serve" is the evidence of a collective and harmonious passage towards God in a monotheistic society.

"Thee do we beseech for help"

This phrase is monotheism in asking for assistance, and only from Him. Here, a question arises about what educators and moralists call self-confidence, by which they mean that relying on others produces weakness and dependence, while self-confidence awakens and revives one's powers.

Thus, one should not rely on either God or non-god. That is why some modern men of learning negate reliance on God as unethical, and as a way of depriving oneself of confidence.

This question may be asked in another way, that is, why should one not seek help from anyone other than God? It is logical to worship none but God, but why should one abstain from seeking help from other than God? God has created means and has made human beings dependent on these means and on other human beings. Hence, we have no-choice but to rely on these for assistance.

In answer to this question it must be pointed out that asking for help and relying on others is not abominable. God has made man dependent on one another in society, and Islam has recommended co-operation and help. The Qur'an says:

"Help each other in goodness and piety." (Chapter "The Food," Verse 2)

If asking others for help had not been allowed, God would not have recommended it.

A man in the presence of Imam Ali cited this prayer: "O God, do not make me needy of your people". The Imam told him not to say so, but to say: "O God, do not make me needy of your bad people". This means that the previous sentence is impracticable since in creation man has been made dependent. Then in the phrase "Thee do we beseech for help", the purpose is not to forbid asking for help. What is the conclusion?

What this verse means is that the ultimate reliance of man should be on God, and he should consider all other things in the world only as means. He must remember that his powers, strength and brain are all means granted to him by God, and his destiny is in God's hand. How often one relies on various means, and finds that contrary to his expectation, they fail to offer help. This is true also of one's own powers. The only power that can be relied on without any anxiety is God's.

It has been brought in a writing that in one of the battles the Prophet withdrew from the army to rest and sleep on a hill near the camp. A brave and armed enemy soldier happened to pass by, and on recognising the Prophet felt happy to have found the chance to kill him. He stood by the Prophet who was asleep and shouted: "Is it you, Muhammad?" Muhammad opened his eyes and said: "Yes, it is I".

The man said: "Who can now save you from me?" The Prophet answered at once: "God". The man who did not expect such an answer, said: "Now I will show you." He stepped back to deal a severe blow, but his foot caught a stone and he fell headlong on the ground. The Prophet rose and stood at his head and said: "Now, who can save you from me?" The man cleverly answered: "Your generosity". And the Prophet pardoned him.

This shows that one is not forbidden to rely on other means, but in making use of them he should recognise the creator of these means who is supreme to them all.

"Keep us on the right path"

To show what is meant by the right path, several points must be mentioned.

1. All creatures move in an involuntary course which is the requisite of existence towards God, and man is one of these creatures.
2. Among the ways there is a straight highway leading to happiness which should be chosen.
3. As a man chooses his way, he should opt in favour of a kind of movement towards his destination which is perfection. Thus, man can find perfection.
4. The way to perfection is to be discovered rather than invented. Contrary to the theory on existentialism which claims that there is neither a way nor destination, and man only creates a destination, value and way for himself, and ultimately a form of perfection, the Qur'an places the way, destination, perfection and values in the creation of existence, and they are to be discovered to be able to find the way and the destination.
5. The direct path has a direction from the very beginning, unlike indirect ways which are curved or crooked and may possibly lead one to destination but with many changes in the route. Thus, the direct path is not through conflicts or oscillation between opposites, as claimed by dialecticians.
6. The point that the way of perfection is to be discovered rather than invented does not mean that like space ways, a road is made for a walker as something external to him. It means that a way is inherent in man's existence and nature which leads him to true perfection that is proximity to God, in the same way that the stone of a date has the potentiality of becoming a tree.
7. As man is equipped with natural aptitude, he needs a guide, for he has a fundamental difference with other creatures in their natural talents for attaining perfection. That difference lies in the fact that the way of all other creatures has been preordained, each having only one definite way, while man is not so, and as modern philosophers say: Every creature has a nature, but man has not.

Existentialists insist that man lacks nature, and I have proved elsewhere that this does not hold good in

the way they claim.

Man possesses a variety of conflicting natures, and he must choose his way from among high and low natures. Animals have no option. A horse, a dog, a cat, a sheep etc., each is created with certain instincts which determine the way of each one, and we see that all of them have the same temper, behaviour and action all over the world. The bees and ants follow a uniform mode in gathering food, and building a home.

But man has hundreds of ways to choose from. The Qur'an says:

"Your striving is most surely various." (Chapter "The Night," Verse 4.)

This is a sign of human perfection, not of his weakness. Can we thus say that man totally lacks a path?

If materialists, especially existentialists, suppose so, the Qur'an does not admit it. It says that a route is drawn to lead man to God which is the way of his perfection. There are a thousand ways open to him, but only one leads to God. Man is free to choose any way, and if he chooses the right one, all is well; otherwise all the other ways are wrong.

There is a narration about the Prophet saying that he was sitting somewhere surrounded by a number of people. The Prophet began drawing lines on the ground, one of which was straight and the others crooked. He then said: This one is my way, and the others are not."

The reason why the word 'darkness' is always used in the Qur'an in a plural form is that the ways of deviation are many, while the way of God is only one.

It is here that the need for guidance by prophets becomes evident, for the direct path which leads to perfection cannot be distinguished by man without their aid, and these and the messengers that can show the way.

A point has been explained in "Al-Mizan", saying that the word 'sabeel' (meaning ways) used in the Qur'an is different from 'serat' (meaning way), the former being plural and the latter singular; the former means subsidiary ways, whereas the latter means highway. There may be many subsidiary ways to reach a destination, but only one main road.

All of us human beings are like a caravan travelling towards perfection for which a highway should be taken, while each one of us may choose a branch road to reach that highway. If anyone, in any rank and position, acts according to his human, moral and religious duty, he will find the main road through any path that he has chosen, no matter how different these paths may be at first. Doctors, workers or merchants choose different paths, but they can all ultimately join the highway.

"The path of those upon whom Thou hath bestowed favours, not (the path) of those upon whom Thy wrath is brought down, nor of those who go astray".

Human beings are divided into three groups according to what they gain by their worship and in the choice of their way.

One group consists of those who, by their worship, receive God's special grace and are constantly bestowed rewards as if an invisible hand pulls them. These are the beings who are esteemed by God such as prophets and saints in the first place and then other perfect beings. They are to be followed and their way to be emulated.

The second group is the one opposed to the first. Its individuals worship anything but God, and are rebellious. The consequence of their deeds appears in their natures, as if a hand deviates them perpetually from the right path. Instead of being elevated towards God and granted many rewards, they are treated with the wrath of God, lose the way to perfection altogether, and fall into the ravine of wickedness. Instead of following the way of humanity, they go the animal way, and move backward.

The third group comprise those who waver, and have no definite way. They are perplexed and irresolute, and choose a different way every moment, and get to nowhere.

The meaning of the last verse of this Chapter is: "O God, show us your right way, the way of your saints, and virtuous, those who benefit always from your favours, not the way of those who are changed so that they have deviated from humanity and have brought your wrath on themselves, not the way of those who wander about and are perplexed, and assume a different shape every moment and mingle with a different group".

End of Chapter of Praise

1. The Shi'as are unanimous about this point, but there is a difference of opinion among the Sunnis: some agree with the Shi'as, others are opposed to it, and a third group believes in their separation., IbnAbbass, Ibn-Mobarak, Assem, Kasa 'i, Ibn-Omar, Ibn-Zobeyr, Ibn-Horayra Atta, Tavous, Imam Fakhr Razi, and Jalal-e-din Soyuti belong to the first group.

Some others like Malek, Abu-Amr and Yaghub believe that it is not a part of each chapter, but is used to separate the chapters. Some of the followers of the Shafa'i sect, and Hamza believe that it is a part of the opening chapter, but not the others. But concerning its use in prayer, different verdicts are given by jurists, though the Shi'a, on the basis of the narrations quoted from the Prophet's household, think that it is an inseparable part of the chapters.

2. In Nahjul-Balagha the mode of devotion is divided into three kinds: Those who worship God for His benevolence are merchants; those who worship Him out of fear are slaves; and those who worship Him for gratitude are free-born.

3. Sa'di's Boustan

4. Al-Mizan Vol, 20. P, 229

5. For further discussion, refer to the author's Divine Justice.

Surah Al-Baqarah, no 2

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Verses 1-7

A.L.M. (1)

That Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who guard (against evil). (2)

Those who believe in the occult and keep up prayer and spend out of what we have given them.

(3)

And who believe in that which has been revealed to you and that which was revealed before you and they are sure of the hereafter. (4)

These are on a right course from their Lord and these it is that shall be successful. (5)

Surely those who disbelieve it being alike to them whether you warn them, or do not warn them, will not believe. (6)

Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing and there is a covering over their eyes, and there is a great punishment for them. (7)

The Etymology of the Chapter 'The Cow'

This Chapter, which is the longest in the Qur'an and comprises two and a half sections of it, is called the Cow because the story of Israelite Calf has been mentioned in it.

Abbreviations

This Chapter, which was revealed in Medina, together with thirteen other chapters of the Qur'an, begins with abbreviations.

Some chapters begin with one letter such as the Chapters the Pen with N and Qaf with Q; some with two letters like YS, TH, TS; some with three letters like TSM, ALM; or four letters like ALMR, and some with five letters like HMASQ or KHIAS.

This is peculiar to the Qur'an, and no other book, either divine or non-divine begins a chapter with abbreviations. What is the purpose of these abbreviations? This question has been asked since early days of Islam, but no definite answer has been given to it. Some of the views expressed thus far will be mentioned here.

Some believe that these are secret symbols between the speaker and listener, namely, God and the Prophet, as something beyond the comprehension of common people. The example of it can be seen in codes arranged between two persons who do not desire others to know what the subject of their talk

is.

Another view is that these abbreviations are the names of the chapters concerned.

A third opinion is that they are oaths, uttered in the name of the letters of alphabet as they are uttered in the Qur'an in the name of other manifestations of creation such as the sun, the moon, the stars, night, day, and human self.

When one swears to something it is in support of what he respects and the listener is aware of this respect. Therefore, literary men say that the oath affirms the truth of a true word, But sometimes, one swears to inform the listener of his own respect for someone or something.

The oaths of the Qur'an are of the second type, and swearing to the sun and moon, or olive, or fig is intended to show to human beings the importance of the subject in question.

One of the most important things that has played a basic role in human culture and civilisation are the alphabets. The sounds which take the form of letters play a significant part in human social life. Animals, too, have sounds, but they cannot make letters out of them. If man were unable to turn the sounds into letters (like the dumb) he could not speak and communicate his ideas to another, and as a result, no knowledge, technique or civilisation would have appeared. Even the act of writing which is a blessing and has been sworn to in the Qur'an, has appeared after speech. If we can write the letters separately, it is because we can pronounce them separately. Without letters, we would have had to depend upon drawing, but we know that it is not possible to draw the shape of everything.

Still another view is that these abbreviations point to the miracle of the Qur'an in the sense that Arabic language with 28 letters, as against many other languages with numerous letters even numbering up to three hundred, has been able to produce such a fine Book. The alphabets are like warps and woofs, but can all weavers produce something artistic with them? The answer is no.

Written skills such as books, essays, odes and lyrics are all the woven products of these letters, but they vary in terms of beauty and excellence.

We will later come across verses in the Qur'an that challenge all men of letters to produce something like the Qur'an.

The Qur'an, by mentioning these letters of the alphabet as an example, wants to introduce the raw materials of its verses, challenging the people to offer something similar if they can. Here you have the tools and raw materials at your disposal, but the miracle of the Qur'an is that something is produced by an unlettered and unschooled man which is unrivalled.

Another matter which figured and was published a few years ago concerning these abbreviations of the Qur'an was that an Egyptian computer expert had made an exact calculation about the fourteen chapters which begin with these abbreviations, and concluded that the letters of abbreviation in the case of each

chapter have a greater predominance in proportion to other letters, an accurate calculation that is only possible with the aid of a computer.

There is also another probability about this topic which is explained below. An issue which has been the subject of discussion since olden times is: What has enjoyed priority in the system of existence? Some say that words have appeared first, by which they mean thought and comprehension, since words represent thought. The next view is that matter and nature have appeared first, and gradually there have surfaced ideas and understanding, and lastly words have come on the scene.

Between these two views, the Qur'an has accepted the first one, as illustrated by the following verse in connection with creation:

"His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it, 'Be', so it is". (Chapter Yasin, Verse 82.)

This means that there is speech first, and then creatures.

Here the word speech is not only a sound or word, but something more perfect and comprehensive. It seems then that with these abbreviations, God describes His method of beginning action, namely: speech, thought, matter, and nature.

In any case, these abbreviations belong to the analogous matters of the Qur'an, especially if we agree with the first view that they are secret symbols between God and the Prophet.

'That Book, there is no doubt in it.'

You see that it says 'That Book' and not 'This Book', which in Arabic language indicates greatness by using the pronoun 'that' instead of 'this'.

What does 'there is no doubt in it' mean? What doubt? We know, of course that there are people who are doubtful about the genuineness of the Qur'an as illustrated by the following verse in the same Chapter:

"And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a Chapter like it" (Chapter "The Cow", Verse 23).

In answer, I must say that while reading a book you wonder whether the contents of it are true or not, and in order to make sure of them you must trace out and enquire into the sources mentioned in it.

But sometimes it is proved in a tangible way that there is no need for any evidence and reason.

For example, if someone that you do not know is declared to be just, you feel doubtful about it and seek further evidence, and if two witnesses, whose fairness is known to you, affirm it, you accept the verdict.

But if you are completely familiar with someone, have studied his character under different conditions, and are sure of his chastity and fairness, you do not require any further evidence.

This is also true of theoretical and scientific matters. Sometimes, questions need proof and evidence, whereas others, being explicit, have no such need, and their presentation is equivalent to proof.

The Qur'an has an identical case. If a person is not familiar with it, he may have doubts about it, but an acquaintance with it removes all doubts.

It must, however, be kept in mind that there are two ways of familiarity with the Qur'an: One is reading and understanding it, and referring to its interpretations; and the second is to act upon it,

As the Qur'an is not only a theoretical book, but also a combination of theory and practice, therefore this verse tells those who doubt the Qur'an that they have a right to do so, for, they have neither studied it, not tried it in practice. But if they become familiar with it and feel its tangibility, they will have no doubt about its genuineness.

'It is a guide to those who guard (against evil)'

The first thing in understanding and familiarity with the Qur'an is to know as to why it has been sent and what its nature is, so that we may not doubt its genuineness. For, without knowing the object of a book, we cannot express an opinion about it.

What is the Qur'an, and what is it for? Is it a book of medicine, philosophy, history or mathematics? It is none of these. What is it, then? It is a book of guidance. Whom does it guide? Everyone? Is no one to go astray after the descent of the Qur'an, and are all forcefully guided? No, not only does the Qur'an not guide all beings, but some are even misled by it, as shown by Verse 26 of the same Chapter which says:

"He causes many to err by it and many He leads aright by it!"

Of course, He does not by means of the Qur'an mislead any but the sinful who have deviated from the path of human nature

Mowlavi says in his Mathnavi that fine points exalt competent men, but mislead incompetent ones, and says of the Qur'an that many were misled and went down a pit by its rope. He continues by saying that the rope has no fault, for, they had no wish to climb up by it.

The phrase "a guide to those who guard (against evil)" points to those who are chaste and have kept their original virtuous nature.

The Qur'an believes that every being is born clean and chaste in origin, but he may gradually be contaminated by the environment and deviated and completely metamorphosed.

So, here the Qur'an says that if anyone has preserved his original nature, he will be guided to his

destination by this Book, and attain perfection in all his potential talents.

'Those who believe in the occult'

The first guidance of the Qur'an is to grant faith in the occult. This word and testimony are two frequently used words in the Qur'an.

In the Qur'an's view of universe, the world of existence is not limited to what is perceptible to us; the tangibles form only a thin layer of the greater universe beyond it. What is perceptible is called testimony and what is not is called the occult.

What the philosophers call nature are flowers, trees, fields, oceans, the galaxies, stars and, in short, everything that one sees, hears, smells and touches, all of which are related to testimony.

If existence had been limited to this, man's view of the world would have been a special one, and seeing the birth and death of a being, he would have concluded that this is the human life and he then would have had nothing to do with his beginning and end, or as to where he has come from and where he will go from here.

But the mission of the Qur'an is to bring man out of this narrow view and make him believe that what he witnesses is only a thin layer of existence and beyond it is a wide ocean of the infinite.

The best example of the occult for man is man's own existence. Our body is tangible for us and we are also aware of our own spirit. These two are testimony for us; but the spirit of others is not tangible for us and it is, therefore, occult. If you live life-long with someone, you only hear his voice, see his figure and touch his body, but his spirit is latent to you always, and if you learn of what passes through his mind, it is through his talk, and you can never know it directly.

In modern psychology, interestingly enough man is attributed to another occult hidden to himself which is called the unconscious. They say we have a conscious mind which shows thought and feelings, and an unconscious one which forms the bulk of our existence. Thus, most part of the man is occult with only a small part of it being overt.

The Qur'an says the same thing about this whole universe, and gives man a fresh view of universe. Angels, the eternal tablet, the Empyrean, and the heavens are all related to the occult, which cannot be negated simply because they are hidden from our eyes. We should rather believe that universe possesses an occult which our senses are unable to fathom, and we can only witness what is evident to us.

"And keep up prayer"

The second principle after a faith in occult, as enunciated by the Qur'an, is to keep up prayer. The first principle is related to the mental aspect and belief of a Muslim, the second one is connected with

building up oneself, and the third one which is the principle of spending is related to society as will be explained later on.

Hence, we realise the importance of prayer, for it is one of the pillars of religion. If every school of thought has a particular scheme of its own for building up its followers, devotion is placed in Islam at the top of its educational program, and prayer at the top of devotion.

However, it should be remembered that the Qur'an does not say 'who recite prayer'; but it says 'who keep up prayer'. There is a difference between these two, and if 'reciting prayer' is sometimes interpreted from the Qur'an, it is intended as a reproach for being late in performing it.

What is 'to keep up prayer'?

It means doing justice to prayer, not performing it without spirit, but rather in such a way as to turn the attention of the worshipper to his God and Creator. This is the meaning of the Verse 14 in the Chapter Taha:

"Keep up prayer for My remembrance."

Remembering God is the equivalent of forgetting other things. If someone tells his secrets to God, begs for His aid, praises Him and gives Him His attributes of "He begets not, nor is He begotten, and none is like Him, and He is Unique, Beneficent, Merciful and Eternal", impressions of the highest degree are left on his mind, and his spirit is built up in the way Islam requires, which, without such a program, is impossible.

"And spend out of what We have given them."

What is "spending"? It does not mean making oneself indigent, but to use what is stored up in order to eliminate poverty.

Spending establishes the individual's contact with society.

Is 'spending' only a financial matter?

In above verse, the Qur'an says: They "spend out of what We have given them". Livelihood has a general meaning including both material and spiritual sustenance. Knowledge is also like a sustenance given by providence, and those who possess it, should let others benefit from it, too.

The Philosophy of 'Spending'

Some people may suppose the purpose of "spending" is to fill a vacuum in society, and so they declare that this task should be undertaken by the government, or by some organization to solve the problems of indigence and poverty, without any need for individual efforts.

But that is not true. The purpose of "spending" is "to be built up into real human beings", not to fill vacuums.

If a man, possessing something, can separate himself from it and become a symbol of God's generosity, this plays an important part in building him up. Kindness and attention towards others and becoming one with them, in itself, constitutes an important goal, without which a society will be like a family devoid of affection, replaced by an educational institution.

Bertrand Russell and his followers say: "Is the reason for a family life anything but bringing up children and protecting them against accidents and sickness? This mode of bringing up children was common in olden times. But now that societies have attained evolution, such duties should be transferred from families to big governmental organizations. The child should be sent from a maternity home direct to an infant school to grow up with other children. So these institutions should take the place of parents, and children have to take the form of relations between the people and government!"

But the major defect of this system is in its diversion from a natural human course. A father and mother are endowed with fatherly and motherly affection, and a child with filial love. A mother wants to nourish her baby in her arms and this is quite natural, and happens so unconsciously that she is often unaware of it.

On the other hand, when she gives the child a motherly kiss and presses it to her breast, she is training it with affection, so that when it grows up, it is full of love and regards people differently. But the children who are brought up in nursing homes and have had no experience of parental affection, sometimes turn into dangerous criminals.

"Spending" is similar to affection and should not be regarded only from the point of view of helping the hungry. The basis of it is to build up human beings, for, it is through indulgence and generosity that the spirit becomes humane.

In this way, no one can declare that he is contented with little and claim to be perfect. He who can gain something, should do so, and by giving away his assets gain perfection. Not having anything and not giving away do not lead the way to perfection. It is by gaining away and being willing to part with one's belongings that one moves towards self-building.

This point is made clear in the Qur'an in Chapter "Immunity", Verse 104 addressed to the Prophet:

"Take alms of their property, you would cleanse them and purify them thereby."

This verse refers to the constructive effect of charity rather than to its social philosophy of satisfying the needy's stomach. It means that in this way you make them grow up morally as a plant grows by weeding. This is true of every living thing that removal of pests helps growth.

"And who believe in that which has been revealed to you and that which was revealed before you"

Another of the qualities of the chaste is faith in revelation. A person may accept and not accept it at the same time. He may consider the Qur'an as a great book in the world and as a saviour on account of its teachings, but not believe it as a revelation from God.

Many non-Muslims have such a belief, and introduce the Qur'an as one of the educational books. The writer of "In the Arms of Happiness" in a chapter on book reading recommends the Qur'an as an educational book.

Shebli Shamil, a Lebanese Arab who is a materialist, has written an interesting poem about the Qur'an and Prophet in which he says:

"Though I have no belief in his religion,
How can I deny the strong Verses of the Qur'an?"

But this way of accepting the Qur'an is not a faith in it. Having faith in it means believing it as a revelation from God. As the Qur'an says in Chapter "the Poets", Verse 194:

"The Faithful spirit¹ has descended with it upon your heart that you may be of the warners"

meaning that the believer should consider it as messages which have descended from the occult to the world of testimony.

"And they are sure of the hereafter."

The word 'hereafter' is used as an opposite of 'this world'. The root of the latter may mean what is near, in which case 'hereafter' would mean a remote world. But sometimes 'hereafter' is used as the opposite of 'the first one' meaning 'this world' in which case 'hereafter' would mean 'the last' as in the Qur'anic Chapter "the Early Hours", verse 4:

"And surely, what comes after is better for you than that which has gone before",

and as a consolation to the Prophet that the interruption of God's revelation does not mean His saying farewell to the Prophet, it continues:

"And soon will your Lord give you so that you shall be well-pleased". (Chapter "The Early Hours", verse 4)

In the Phrase "they are sure of the hereafter", the Qur'an says that those who are guided by the Qur'an are sure of another world beyond this one which is the world of reward and punishment.

Belief in the next world is belief in eternity, for, one difference between the two worlds is that this one is transient and the other is everlasting. Man may desire happiness or misfortune. Of course those who seek misfortune, may be temporarily so, and then they find eternal happiness, while some others will always be in perpetual unhappiness.

Belief in eternity is one of the privileges of divine schools of thought, and only such a thought can account for the existence of the world, for, the requisite for materialistic schools, which do not believe in eternity and consider man a bubble which bursts and disappears altogether, is futility of and cynicism towards existence. This conclusion of theirs has caused them so much uneasiness that some materialists have resorted to a trick in order to save them from that futility and nothingness.

They say: It is true that an individual perishes, but as society moves towards perfection, the way of the individual continues, and thus he is eternal.

Such an argument is only a struggle in defense of their philosophy, but the misfortune is that some people intend to bring about conformity between the ideas of the Qur'an and such utterances. For instance, they interpret "they are sure of the hereafter" to mean that they believe in the superior and evolutionary system of the world, that is, the individual is not eternal, but species are.

But it must be said that if we do not believe in the eternal nature of the individual, the same is true of species, for, according to the estimates made by physicists, the earth is millions of years old, and a day will come when there would survive neither the earth nor man. If so, what is the meaning of eternity?

"These are on a right course from their Lord."

God guides all living beings, and as He is the educator of the world, He guides them towards perfection. Some of them are guided by developmental guidance, and human beings by divine guidance, namely through His Prophets and messengers. It is only the latter who attain perfection.

"These it is that shall be successful"

Only this group receives salvation and none else. With this Verse, the section on faith ends, and the section on infidelity begins.

"Surely those who disbelieve it being alike to them whether you warn them, or do not warn them, will not believe."

To begin with, two words must be explained before discussing the verse.

The word 'infidelity' (Arabic word 'Kofr') has a root meaning 'to cover'. The Qur'an calls infidels so because they cover up the truth of religion which has become clear to them and do not submit to it.

The Arabic word "anzar" means 'to warn' which is different from 'to frighten'. The word means "informing

someone of a future danger", something that Prophets do. What, then, is the meaning of the phrase? Should the people have belief in order to be invited by Prophets? If so, then this is already an accomplished fact.

The Prophet has come to turn infidels into believers, not to make believers out of those who already believe!

This point is used by some as a pretext who say that the Qur'an accounts for society in a materialistic way. They contend that there are two groups of people: the exploited and the exploiters. The exploited are ready to accept the call and the Prophet has actually been ordained for them, and they are addressed by him, while exploiters are not invited by the Prophet.

This statement, however, is irrelevant, for the Qur'an addresses all people and so does the Prophet, as shown by the following Verse 158, Chapter "the Elevated Places" (Araf-7):

"O people! Surely I am the Apostle of Allah to you all."

The Arabic word "Nas" used in the above verse means "all people" and not "deprived masses". The Prophet is ordained to invite the black and white, the exploited and exploiters, and rich and poor alike. Then, what is the meaning of the Verse? ·

In the Qur'an, if not in all cases but in most cases, the word "infidel" is not used for every non-Muslim. The Qur'an calls those people as infidel who, after the Prophet was ordained and he invited them and the truth became clear to them, stood against him and negated him. Thus, prior to the Prophet's invitation, they were neither believers nor infidels nor hypocrites, but only "people".

After the ordainment of the Prophet and his call, the people are divided into three groups: believers, deniers, and overt believers but covert opposers. In this Verse, infidels are not those who have not been converted to Islam, but those who negated the Prophet in spite of their awareness of truth and because of their conflict with their own intelligence and discernment. The Qur'an says:

"And they denied them unjustly and proudly while their soul had been convinced of them."
(Chapter "The Naml", verse 14)

In general, if a man spiritually accepts truth, he submits to it no sooner than it is presented to him. What causes his destruction is his hostility towards the truth, and some people belong to this group.

The Qur'an writes about such people in the Chapter "Spoils of War" (Anfal), Verse 32:

"And when they said: O Allah! if this is the truth from Thee, then rain upon us stones from heaven."

Thus, instead of begging God to give them the privilege of accepting the truth, they asked for their own

annihilation if the claim was true.

This conveys the meaning of opposing the truth. Warning such people is of no use, for as jurists say, they are guilty, not negligent.

So it does not mean that whoever is not a Muslim is an infidel. Infidelity, as we already said, means covering up, and this is applied to those who opposed God's apostles and bringers of His faith.

It may be asked: what are those to be called who have neither been offered Islam nor any other religion, and have not shown any opposition or agreement? The answer is that they are not believers and the injunctions of belief do not apply to them, but it is only the Prophets' call that creates the three groups of believers, infidels and hypocrites.

Holy Infidelity

The word "infidelity" sometimes takes the form of sanctity, that is, it carries the sense of "standing against wrong", as is shown in Verse 255, Chapter "the Cow":

"There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error; therefore whoever disbelieves in the Devil and believes in Allah, he indeed has laid hold on the firmest handle."

This means that every believer must also be an infidel, that is, he must oppose wrong and deny it, and that is holy infidelity.

The Shi'a believe that the secondary canons of religion are ten in number, the ninth being belief in the guardianship of Imam Ali, and the tenth is the negation and denial of everything anti-Ali and against his way.

"Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing and there is a covering over their eyes."

When a letter is finished, it is usually signed and sealed to show that there is no more to add. The Qur'an compares the heart to a letter in which some lines are gradually written, either good or bad. But when there comes the time to seal it, the call of the Prophet is of no avail, and the Qur'an suggests abstaining from further call, not that the call has been futile at first, but as the individuals have been warned earlier and rejected the call, their hearts are covered up.

The Qur'an considers man as a constantly changing creature and his heart, in its capacity as his spirit, undergoes transformation like a feather hanging on a tree and blown about by the wind, as described in a poem by Mowlavi quoting the words of the Prophet.

No two moments of a man are alike, and he is mostly affected by his own deeds. A good deed

illuminates him, and a wicked act changes that light into darkness. A good deed softens the heart and prepares it to accept counsel and truth, and sometimes contrary to his nature, a man becomes cruel and so hard-hearted that according to the Qur'an his heart gets sealed. He looks at things but it appears as if he has not seen them due to a veil covering his eyes. These are the results of infidelity and not the cause of it, and with this explanation the problem is solved.

Verses 8 to 16

"And there are some people who say: we believe in Allah and the last day; and they are not at all believers."(8)

"They desire to deceive Allah and those who believe, and they deceive only themselves and they do not perceive." (9)

"There is a disease in their hearts, so Allah added to their disease and they shall have a painful chastisement because they lied."(10)

"And when it is said to them, 'Do not make mischief in the land', they say: We are but peace makers" (11)

"Now, surely they themselves are the mischief makers, but they do not perceive."(12)

"And when it is said to them: Believe as the people believe, they say: 'Shall we believe as the fools believe?' Now surely they themselves are the fools, but they do not know."(13)

"And when they meet those who believe, they say 'We believe'; and when they are alone with their devils, they say 'Surely we are with you, we were only mocking". (14)

"Allah shall pay them back their mockery, and He leaves them alone in their inordinacy, blindly wandering on." (15)

These are they who buy error for the right' direction so their bargain shall bring no gain, nor are they the followers of the right direction." (16)

"And there are some people who say: We believe in Allah and the last day; and they are not at all believers.

As the danger of hypocrisy is greater than infidelity, so the Qur'an here speaks of infidelity in no more than two verses, whereas there are many verses about hypocrisy. In 13 chapters, too, hypocrites are mentioned in different ways, while chapter 63 called "the Hypocrites" is devoted to them.

What is hypocrisy?

It means being double-faced, and showing oneself to be different from what one really is. Though it is a mean quality, it denotes man's evolution, that is, as man is more developed than animals, his power of simulation and affection has developed whereas animals do not usually possess this quality. Only those animals which are more intelligent can show affectation. Chickens and quadrupeds, like the ass and horse, are not able to pretend while a mouse or sparrow can secure their sustenance by hiding

themselves. The fox has won a reputation for cunning and a wolf sometimes shows itself to be sly.

But no animal can rival man in this respect, and this quality is the reason for the coining of many phrases about his hypocrisy. The reason why we said that this is the result of his evolution is that in primitive men hypocrisy is not often seen. A child shows no hypocrisy, and he is quite frank about eating and other desires even in unfamiliar surroundings, while an adult shows simulation and affectation. A child does not pretend.

The more man moves towards civilisation, the greater becomes his degree of hypocrisy. Men of a thousand years ago did not have even one percent of modern man's simulation. Many of the phrases used to-day are hypocritical. Take the word 'colonisation'. In the Qur'an, it is used in a good sense meaning 'to dwell' or 'to render habitable' as in Verse 61 of Chapter Hud which says:

"He brought you into being from the earth and made you dwell in it, therefore ask forgiveness of Him."

Colonialists, on going to other lands, did not say that they had come to plunder and take away underground resources. They said: "We have come to make your land prosperous." They built one or two roads to prove their claim, but seized, for themselves, a thousand fold of what they invested for the people of that country, and eventually enslaved them. Thus, colonisation is a hypocritical term which has a good meaning, but used wrongly in real practice.

Christian missionaries, or the so-called evangelists, were the advance guards of colonisation, for, they opened the way of entry of colonialism into the countries they visited. They came first to propagate religion and occupy the people's minds with descriptions of the qualities of Jesus and Mary, but the people realised after some time that, under this religious cover, all their material resources were plundered.

An African national has said: "When the Europeans came to our country, we possessed land and they carried the Bible, but after forty or fifty years, the Bible is in our hand, and they have usurped the lands." This is the meaning of hypocrisy.

When the Qur'an speaks of hypocrites, it is, in fact, a warning to the Muslims to be always on the alert against hypocrites, for hypocrites did not live only in the time of early Islam but have existed at all times, and penetrated the ranks of Muslims, pretending to be Muslims and stabbing in the back.

You may have heard the expression 'Fifth column'. It seems that in the First World War, one of the armies had four overt columns which attacked the enemy with weapons, but a group was also sent secretly to penetrate the enemy forces to mislead them. They were the fifth columnists who pretended affection for the enemy but really worked for their own interests. That is why the Qur'an gives a warning against such fifth columnists by saying of them: "We believe in Allah and the last day, and they are not at all believers". The Qur'an also terms them as liars.

"They desire to deceive all and those who believe"

The verse does not say that they deceive God, for, it is impossible to deceive God. They intend to do so.

"And they deceive only themselves and they do not perceive."

Why is it said that man deceives himself when he tries to deceive God? Truth and reality can never be deceived, and trying to do so, is deceiving oneself. A physician may be deceived, but medicine is undeceivable. You can lie to a doctor about your usage of drugs and adherence of his prescription, but in doing so you are deceiving yourself, for, the doctor writes his prescription on the basis of the patient's statements and the result is the intensification of the untruthful patient's illness.

The Muslims may be deceived, but God cannot.

Another meaning may be mentioned for the first part of the Verse and that is: hypocrites never thought of deceiving God, for, if they did not believe in God, they would not have thought in such terms; and if they believed in Him, they would think it impossible to deceive Him. Therefore, the sentence may refer to deceiving men of truth, and here God attributes this to Himself as in Verse 10 of Chapter "The Victory" (Al-Fat'h):

"Surely, those who swear allegiance to you do but swear allegiance to Allah."

Here, then, it refers to men of truth who are on the path of God, and are the target of deceit. Even if such men are deceived by those who consider themselves clever, it is the clever ones who are the eventually losers by their own deceitful schemes.

"There is a disease in their hearts, so Allah added to their disease and they shall have a painful chastisement because they lied."

Here, God describes the root of the matter which is heart sickness, meaning spiritual disease. Such a disease is often referred to in the Qur'an as arrogance, prejudice about old beliefs, and following ancestors or great men. There are spiritual diseases which do not allow a man to bear truth, in the same way that debauchery, wickedness and contamination lead to some sort of unwillingness to face truth.

God constantly adds to the sickness of such diseased ones, in the same way that lying to a doctor aggravates a patient's illness.

God has made this world apt for any kind of cultivation, depending on the seed sown; a good seed brings forth a bad crop. As the Qur'an says in Verse 20 of Chapter "the Israelites":

"All do We aid - these as well as those."

God helps all, both good and bad, each in his own course towards perfection.

"And when it is said to them, 'Do not make mischief in the land', they say: 'We are but peace-makers.'"

This Verse clearly shows that hypocrites only deceive themselves. It is often said that excess of falsehood by a liar results in his own lies appearing as truth to himself, as well. He forgets that he has himself forged such lies.

A story is told about a fool who was being annoyed by children. In order to get rid of them, he told them that pudding was being given freely to children on the other side of the town. The children, believing this, dispersed running in the direction he had mentioned. When the fool saw this, he too, started going in the same direction, saying to himself: "This may be true!"

The Qur'an, referring to these fifth columnists who pretended to be friends but in reality were causing damage and disorder, says that when they were told not to create so much mischief, they answered: "We are reformers, not mischief-makers." These are real mischief-makers, but they are unaware of it, and believe their own views in actuality.

"And when it is said to them: 'Believe as the people believe', they say: 'Shall we believe as fools believe!'"

When they are told in private to put aside hypocrisy and have faith like others, they say: 'Belief and being religious belong to the stupid, not to them who are enlightened'.

"Now surely they themselves are the fools, but they do not know."

The Verse begins with the word 'beware'. There are two kinds of ignorance: simple and gross. Simple ignorance means being aware of one's ignorance. This is easily remedied for, one tries to get rid of it by learning or at least by listening to others for discerning the truth. This kind of ignorance is not very dangerous.

But gross ignorance is 'to be ignorant without being aware of it'. There is no remedy for it since pride prevents its elimination. Those who claim to possess enlightenment are often like this, and as Avicenna says: Fear imperfect cleverness".

Simple people are often aware of their own simplicity, but the half-clever think themselves very clever and wise whereas they are the most foolish and entangled. Ghazali, the poet-philosopher says: "Everything, even in its imperfect condition, is better than its non-existence except knowledge. " He means, for example, that having a little wealth is better than having none, but in the case of knowledge having little of it is worse than having none, or as it is often said: "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing". Sana'i the poet says:

Each one is vexed at something

My vexation is at a half-mad.

For him, intellect is like knowledge; one should either be wholly mad or wholly sound; being half-intelligent or half-stupid causes more damage than total madness. Deceitful people in society are usually these half and half persons, being half clever rather than wholly clever. Those wholly clever, even if they have no belief, realise that success lies in truth and honesty. But the half-clever people I have met in my life, think it best not to be honest with others. Such persons cannot gain even one friend in life, and no one believes them, for everyone knows them to be smart.

The Qur'an, too, considers these hypocrites as grossly ignorant.

"And when they meet those who believe, they say: 'We believe'; and when they are alone with their devils, they say: 'surely we are with you, we were only mocking.'"

This verse shows the double-facedness of such people and the next verse says:

"Allah shall pay them back their mockery."

They wrongly suppose that they can mock truth, but in fact it is they who are mocked.

"And He leaves them alone in their inordinacy, blindly wandering on."

They are rebellious, and God makes them so perplexed in their rebellion that they do not know what they are doing.

Up to this point the Qur'an has ascribed several qualities to hypocrites.

Firstly, they love pretense. Secondly, they are deceitful.

Thirdly, they suffer from a mental and spiritual disease which they want to cure by such deeds whereas it gets intensified by these complexes.

Fourthly, things have become so obscure for them that they suppose themselves to be social reformers.

Fifthly, they are foolish and stupid people who consider others as such.

Sixthly, they are double-faced, speaking in one way at a gathering, and in an opposite manner at another.

These are the qualities of hypocrites as described by the Qur'an in these Verses,

Several points must be mentioned here. In Verse 8, the word 'people' is used meaning all kinds of people, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, black and white, oppressor and oppressed and so on. If we disregard all these differences, then 'people' encompasses all human beings.

Commentators have, for long, given it this meaning, but some others have mistaken it for 'those who have nothing' namely the deprived and helpless class, and not all people.

This is wrong, and the Qur'an means all beings by it irrespective of their differences. For example, in Verse 97, Chapter "Al-e-Imran" which says

"And pilgrimage to the House is incumbent upon people for the sake of Allah (upon) everyone who is able to undertake the journey to it,"

it speaks of all people and not some people.

Sometimes, the word "people" is used for infidels, such as in Verse 173, Chapter "Al-e-Imran":

"Surely, people have gathered against you, Therefore, fear them,"

which is related to a story when infidels wanted to attack Medina, and they had spread the rumour that people had gathered against the Muslims, and this was done by them to frighten the Muslims. In the above Verse the word 'people' means hypocrites.

Those who interpret 'people' to mean "the deprived masses" have been compelled to also include the hypocrite may belong to any class, and as it happened, the hypocrites of early Islam were mostly the aristocrats of Medina. Their chief in the time of the Prophet was the richest man of that city, named Abdollah-bin-Abi. Before the arrival of the Prophet, the people of Medina intended to choose him as king in order to put an end to the differences between the two tribes of Owss and Khazraj.

This juncture of his expected kingship coincided with the advent of Islam in Mecca. A number of people of Medina who were in touch with Mecca, met the Prophet and embraced Islam. They asked the Prophet to send missionaries to Medina, and the Prophet dispatched Mas'ab-bin-Omeyr who converted many people to Islam there. Thus, the whole plan of Bin-Abi was ruined, and he bore a deep hatred for Islam. However, he pretended to accept Islam, though he never became a true Muslim.

Another point is related to the number of verses about hypocrites in this Chapter, namely 13 verses as against two on infidels, and three or four on believers. What is the purpose of the Qur'an by this insistence on exposing the hypocrites?

The answer given by commentators is that though a hypocrite is a kind of infidel, yet he poses greater danger. For, an infidel is one who does not accept God and the Prophet, but is honest in his creed and so the people know where he stands. But he, who covers up his true belief, and his acts differs from his words, is more dangerous because he deceives people. That is why the Qur'an says in Chapter "the Women" (Nisa), Verse 145:

"Surely, the hypocrites are in the lowest stage of the fire,"

The reason why the prophet was victorious in battles was that he fought the infidels, but Ali was not so successful because he fought the hypocrites. So, the Prophet was fighting those who were frank and outspoken in their own way. Abu-Sofyan was a man who refused to follow the Prophet.

Ali was confronting men who were obstinate but their slogan was Islam. If Mu'avieh had, like his father, openly rejected Islam he would certainly have been defeated by Ali, but he (Mu'avieh) pretended to wear the garment of Islam and shed crocodile tears for Othman, the supposedly oppressed Caliph of the Prophet, and thus incited people against Ali "As a leader of those who murdered Othman"! But, in fact, the murderer of Othman was Mu'avieh himself, as is explained by Ali in Nahjul-Balagha, saying "Why did you not help Othman when he asked for it? Because you were waiting for him to be killed so that you could benefit from his death." Mu'avieh had sent spies to Medina to have a watch over Othman's house, so that when he was killed they would carry his blood-drenched shirt to Damascus. The spies performed their duty speedily, and this shirt hung for a long time in the Mosque of Damascus, and Mu'avieh went there from time to time to shed a few tears beside it mourning for the Caliph! Thus, simple people were incited to fight in the name of God and to be killed in the process.

And at last when Mu'avieh saw defeat at hand, he exploited a deceitful scheme by placing the Qur'an atop a spear as a pretext to depict his surrender to the Qur'an. Ali who knew what lay behind this trick shouted to his men to go on fighting, but the ignorant devout who were unaware of the plot, cried "We will not fight the Qur'an". In this way, the Umayyad party managed to rescue itself.

The third point is that the danger of hypocrisy has always threatened Islam, but in a different form each time.

I have been reading a book which was published recently. It seems to me that some people are deliberately or unknowingly propagating materialism under the cover of the Qur'an. The book begins in the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful, and it is all about God, the Prophet and the Qur'an. But when we look at the contents we realise that materialism is hidden there under the mask of the Qur'an.

It is the same materialism which until a few years ago imagined that it could combat religion in Iran, and subsequently started a serious combat. It said that God, Prophet and revelation are all lies, but it was seriously defeated by the strong power of religion. Now that it is despaired of that method, it offers the same ideas under the guise of Islam, negates God and Resurrection in another way, and speaks of a higher and lower order governing existence, meaning thereby that when an oppressive system in this world is changed, its name will be 'hereafter'!

Of course, there exist low orders in the world which must be fought against and replaced by a higher order, as has been stated in the Qur'an. But these two orders do not connote this world. They are two completely different issues.

You see that they do not declare that 'hereafter' is false. They do not deny man's eternity in the next world. But they explain it in this way (as materialists declare) that individuals die and are succeeded by

others, and this is the meaning of eternity!

This is similar to placing the Qur'an on spear-heads in a different form. Ignorant Muslims have been deceived for full fourteen centuries by this pretense, and whenever anti-religious groups have appeared, they have played their hostile role under the guise of religion. But if the Muslims are alert, that sinister scheme is nullified. The Qur'an says in pity for them:

"These are they who buy error for the right direction, so their bargain shall bring no gain, nor are they the followers of the right direction."

The Imam is asked what wisdom is, and he answers: "It is what leads man to the worship and service of God, and brings him eternal happiness." Then he is asked: "What, then, did Mu'avieh have in himself?" He answered: 'Devilry and deceit. And devilry and deceit are different from wisdom which lead man to humanity and spirituality.

Verses 17-24

"Their parable is like the parable of one who kindled a fire, but when it had illumined all around him, Allah took away their light, and left them in utter darkness - they do not see." (17)

"Deaf, dumb (and) blind, so they will not turn back," (18)

"Or like the abundant rain from the cloud in which is utter darkness and thunder and lightning; they put their fingers into their ears because of the thunder peal, for fear of death, and Allah encompasses the unbelievers." (19)

"The lightning almost takes away their sight; whenever it shines on them they walk in it, and when it becomes dark to them they stand still; and if Allah had pleased He would certainly have taken away their hearing and their sight; surely Allah has the power over all things." (20)

After the Qur'an called the hypocrites' deceits and frauds as futile acts and defeated plans, and named them 'self-deception', it gives two examples of such trickery which lead us to a very important point in the philosophy of history in terms of Qur'an. It is an important principle of the Qur'anic thought and the monotheistic world view as presented by Islam. This topic is so important that we must discuss it at a greater length.

Different views have been expressed about Universe, in general, and about man and human society since their appearance and their future from the viewpoint of good and bad, right and wrong, and whether existence is right and good, or futile, wrong and bad, and whether human life is dominated by good or evil, right or wrong, or by half good and half bad, and if we believe in both, which is genuine: right or wrong.

We will first describe the views of philosophers, thinkers and sociologists, and then explain the Qur'an's monotheistic view of Universe.

There is no doubt that human life is somewhat a mixed one, that is, in individual and social life there exist both good and bad, justice and injustice, and honesty and deceit. So, human life has two sides: the bright and dark.

This mixture of light and darkness and justice and injustice is so deep that we see that prior to his creation, man's existence had been the subject of discussion in the high celestial world.

When God declared to angels: "I want to create a successor on the earth", the angels clamoured: "O God, what is the purpose of creating a mischievous and blood-thirsty creature?" The angels considered man as an absolute evil, and saw only this side of him, and so they posed this question.

This is note-worthy that even the angels could not know all the secrets of man's existence and only God is aware of them all.

But God did not accept this verdict of the angels and said: "I know what you do not." Then He created man, and in a trial and display, proved them to be wrong.

Most materialistic philosophers who have always been cynical about nature have no belief in the origin of creation, and consider man's existence to be the result of accidents, say that man possesses evil as a part of his nature, and has acted wickedly from the very beginning and will continue to be so in future, and there is no hope for his prosperity. They reject every plan of reform for human society, and despair of man's rectitude, for they consider him wholly incorrigible. They are pessimistic about everything that is presented in the name of reform, either religion or philosophy, and consider all these to be artificial, for, according to them, the innovators of these reforms have been human beings possessing human instincts which produce nothing but wickedness. Therefore, every ethical and reformatory thesis and every social proposal is considered to be futile.

When they are asked: "What hope is there to be had in life?" They answer that one should not live at all! If a man attains the final stage of perfection, he should commit suicide! To them, this is the height of man's advancement who is nothing but evil and will continue to be so, constantly adding to his wickedness until he attains what they call 'mental maturity' and commits suicide.

Many books have been written in this connection, showing that there have been philosophers in the world who have committed suicide, all of whom have been materialists known as cynics.

This bitter poison was poured in Iran into the writings of some of the contemporary writers. Sadeqh Hedayat was one of them who, in spite of his youth, committed suicide in 1941 under the influence of this idea. In his writings, he showed pride in having attained that stage of mental genius in which no way is left but suicide. He believed that other people too should follow his example.

What is more, such individuals say that the best service to mankind is to destroy all human beings, for instance by means of a bomb. This shows how foolish and wrong such an idea is.

Another type of idea of materialists shows its pessimism in another way. They say man has no natural inclination, and is governed by the role assigned to him. These believe in a materialistic nature for history and society and say what has absolute domination over human life is constituted by material-social, economic, and productive relations, and human life depends, for its goodness and badness, on the form of these relations. One should be neither optimistic nor pessimistic about human life. Productive relations may forcedly make man good or bad.

They say: there was a day when men, because of the extremely low level of production and tools, could not cater to their necessities in excess of their daily consumption needs. Human life was akin to animal life. They lived like pigeons leaving their nests hungry in the morning and returning satiated at night, and this was repeated every day. Early men lived in that way, and had no reserve of provisions or wealth.

In a society, men lived a communal life and probably secured food in a cooperative way. No one could hunt by himself, for he lacked the necessary tools; so they got together, and hunted a big animal and divided the flesh among themselves.

Under such conditions, men were forced to live in a brotherly way, and there was neither strife nor bloodshed.

Gradually, man gained experience and discovered cultivation, animal husbandry, use of animal milk, and their reproduction. In this way, one man could produce enough for ten people.

As soon as this became possible, all the former calculations were upset. Before that, if someone did not use his hands, he could get nothing to fill his belly. But under new conditions, those who were stronger were able to put others to work like their slaves, so that they would themselves live in comfort. Hence, ownership came into existence, ownership of land and that of human beings by their likes.

In this way, there came an upheaval in society, and the communal system changed into a competitive one full of hostility. The first good light waned, and darkness covered the whole of human life. Since that day in the history of man, darkness has dominated light, and wickedness prevailed over goodness, justice over oppression, and deceit over honesty. Meanwhile, there were occasional and exceptional sparks, and there often appeared a philosopher or a leader of a movement, who under the exigencies of circumstances, took a step, and consequently justice and goodness prevailed for a short time. But as the system, ruling over history, was that of wealth and ownership, this state of affairs could not last long and was soon brought to an end like a light which leaps in the dark and is lost soon. Then the same plan of reform was used again as a tool by men of wealth against oppressed people. Every religion, philosophy or moral theory has met with the same fate.

They say this state will continue and there is no remedy for it unless one day the foundation, which is productive relationship, automatically changes, and human beings are forced to return to communal life whether they like it or not, for the growth of the means of production will necessarily create socialism or communism.

Thus, this group of materialists do not base their theory on the evil nature of man, but on a total lack of nature, and he is the victim of his own tools. At first, the tools were such that he had to be good, but with the appearance of wealth and proprietorship, he became bad, and as long as these two exist, there is no remedy. He is mistaken in speaking of reform which is only an idea called 'imaginary socialism'. When ownership is abolished one day as a result of the growth of tools of production, then equality and justice may be witnessed in society.

The View of the Qur'an

Now let us see what the Qur'an has to say about this subject, which is one of its most important questions in the interpretation of history. Does the Qur'an regard man and life optimistically and say there does not and will not exist any evil? It is clearly not so, and there is no need for discussion. The Qur'an believes that during all history, there has been a conflict between right and wrong, and so it assumes an identity for wrong. It places light and darkness against each other. God, in answer to the verdict of the angels about Adam that he is an absolute evil, answered that they were mistaken and not wholly wrong. He meant to say what they saw was correct, but He also saw something beyond that which they could not observe.

Does the Qur'an think that man is an absolute evil and agree with the discouraging view of man like Nietzsche and Schopenhauer that man is incorrigible and should be left alone?

This is not true, for, the mission of the Prophets has generally been to reform human society, and had they been cynical of human nature, they would not have offered a thesis of reform. Moreover, such a view does not agree with the principle of monotheism which is the most fundamental in the Qur'an. A view of the world cannot be divine and monotheistic if it regards existence as futile and evil.

It is clear that the Qur'an regards existence as a system of goodness in which there is also evil, but goodness has priority over evil, and right over wrong. The view of the Qur'an is diametrically opposite to Marxism. It says right and wrong have always existed during history and this conflict is due to the nature of man, since he has two sides to his nature which is composed of passion and intelligence. But goodness is predominant in him. Justice and light are permanent, but darkness and evil are transient. The Qur'an does not take ownership as criterion in the manner Marx does; rather it believes in the genuineness of faith, and natural and spiritual essence. It never says that religion and morals are the playthings of wealth, and vehemently rejects this view. Power and wealth may have had some effect on religion and in creating innovations, but religion, too, in its turn, has been a powerful factor in human destiny.

Genuineness Belongs to Right

The Qur'an thinks that evil and wrong possess no genuineness, but are like an appendix for right, like shadow in relation to light or darkness as the absence of light, not the opposite of it since it has no

identity of its own.

This is similar to health and sickness. If the body is to remain sound, there must exist equilibrium in the elements which compose blood, blood pressure etc. Sickness is nothing but the absence of health. What is genuine with regard to the body is equilibrium and the consequent health, and if this equilibrium is disturbed, the result is sickness until that equilibrium is re-established and health regained.

As the body needs equilibrium and health society, too, requires truthfulness, honesty, faith and chastity. And if these are lacking, society cannot last even one day, and if injustice, insecurity and unchastity prevail for a time, as goodness and light are the basic things, the society soon returns to its original state.

The view of the Qur'an, is briefly as follows:

1. Wrong has no entity of its own, but it is only an appendix of right.
2. As it is devoid of entity, it has no permanence while right is lasting.
3. As it has no continuity, it has a noticeable expansion which may not be evident to nondiscerning eyes that may take right to be something trifling.

Wrong vanishes like foam, and because of its expansion overshadows right, so that to the undiscerning it would seem as if wrong is ruling over the world.

The Qur'an has explained in many verses the combat between right and wrong, and has given several examples some of which will be mentioned below.

1. Verse 17 in Chapter "Thunder" (Ra'd) says:

"He sends down water from the cloud , then water-courses flow (with water) according to their measure, and the torrent bears along the swelling foam, and from what they melt in the fire for the sake of making ornaments or apparatus arises a scum like it; thus does Allah compare truth and falsehood; then as for the scum; it passes away as a worthless thing; and as for that which profits the people, it tarries in the earth; thus does Allah set forth parables. "

In the words of commentators the essence of right is like clear and clean water and like that precious metal, and wrong is like foam which vanishes, and what remains is beneficial to man, meaning water for irrigation and gold for ornaments.

2. Verses 24–26 in Chapter "Ibrahim" say:

"Have you not considered how Allah sets forth a parable of a good word (being) like a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are in heaven? Yielding its fruit in every season by the permission of its Lord? And Allah sets forth parables for men that they may be mindful. And the

parable of an evil world is as an evil tree pulled up from the earth's surface; it has no stability."

Thus, belief in right is a richly fruitful and firm tree and belief in wrong is a useless bush or plant that can be uprooted so easily.

The poet Nasser Khosrow has a poem depicting a dialogue between a plane tree and a marrow-plant which had grown by it and crept up the trunk of the plane tree. The tree was thirty years old, while the marrow-plant had grown so much in just twenty days and was mocking the tree for its slow growth. The tree answered that when the autumn wind begins to blow, then it will be found which one of them is manly enough to withstand the pressure and show resistance.

What the Qur'an means is that one should not judge wrong only by appearance, or be deceived by it, but should look deeply. A school of thought which is twenty or thirty years old may expand so rapidly that it may dwarf a true school which is fourteen centuries old. One should wait and see how each stands against calamities. The Islamic revolution has withstood firmly in the face of hostile currents for fourteen centuries, but those other schools soon disappear in the ups and downs of history.

3. Verse 18 in Chapter "the Prophets" (Anbiya) says:

"Nay! We cast the truth against the falsehood, so that it breaks its head, and lo! It banishes; and woe to you for what you describe."

The Verses prior this one are related to creation in which materialistic views that consider the world futile are rejected. The life of man and society depend on the principle of creation, and if the basis of creation had been worldly amusements and futility, then man, as a manifestation of creation, would have been useless and his society futile. But the Qur'an says in Verse 16 of the above Chapter 1:

"And we did not create the heaven and the earth and what is between them for sport."

This is an answer to anyone who may ask "If the basis of the world is not futility, what, then, are all these wrongs and falsehoods that exist in human society? Are there no falsehood or treason, or oppression, bloodshed, mischief, and all the false views and vain schools of thought in the world?"

The Qur'an says these are all parasitical elements. When truth appears, these things too, necessarily emerge but only temporarily to disappear soon.

4. Verse 81 in Chapter "the Israelites" says:

"And say: The truth has come and the falsehood has vanished; surely falsehood is a vanishing (thing)."

Thus from the viewpoint of the Qur'an, the combat between truth and falsehood is not a fight between two entities, but a fight between existences and non-existences, a war of perfections against

imperfections, for all falsehoods are imperfections, and if a tyrant acts tyrannically, it is because of his imperfection and not of his perfection, and it is his ignorance or inferiority complex that he wants to make amends for.

Materialists, unlike the Qur'an, consider man wicked by nature, or lacking nature altogether. They have no utopia and cannot have one, for, if they claim so, then they would be speaking contrary to their school. A Utopia as proposed by Islam, can only be claimed by one who considers man corrigible.

The Qur'an describes the destiny of peoples and the history of civilisations to show that every society, which is ruled over by evil or falsehood, is doomed to annihilation, and only a society ruled over by truth survives. There have existed many communities which were chastised by God because of their deviation towards wrong and falsehood.

One may look at the pages of history and observe the coming across of wicked individuals on the scene. Suppose that history is all absolute darkness. But this judgment is wrong and is due to the fact that some people suppose history to be made by personalities. The Qur'an calls them "foams afloat on water which vanish soon".

When we look at the history of Islam and see Harun-e-Rashid, the hero of Arabian Nights, with his prisons, his drinking bouts and oppression, we call him a typical example of history. The Qur'an, however, says Harun is transitory, and you are forgetting those who run life in real terms such as farmers and other workers. All Haruns are parasites living by virtue of the masses, and your duty is to fight Haruns without losing hope. Mussa-bin-Jafar, who is lodged in Harun's prison close to the palace from which brawls of drunkenness could be heard, is the Imam who lasts. Even though no one is allowed to visit him, he is ruler over people's hearts. His ideas and thoughts become everlasting, whereas Harun vanishes with all his pomp and glory.

Now let us look at the Verses 17-20 of the Chapter "the Cow":

"Their parable is like the parable of one who kindled a fire, but when it had illumined all around him, Allah took away their light, and left them in utter darkness - they do not see."

By the words "fire" and "light" are meant fraudulent schemes of the followers of falsehood. Man is guided in several ways: by instinct which is weak in human beings but strong in animals; by senses which provide understanding; by intelligence, and by revelation which are granted to the followers of Prophets.

Thus man's thought is his light, which is sometimes used in harmony with the system of creation and in the path ordained by God, in which case God says in the Qur'an, Chapter "Muhammad", Verse 17:

"And those who follow the right direction, He increases them in guidance."

But sometimes a person abandons this path and lives in aberration, using his thought and intellect contrary to divine course. He may succeed for a while, but it is temporary, and all his plans end up in

ruin.

Contrary to some people's verdict that right and truth have been short-lived sparks, the Qur'an calls falsehood and wrong so, and thereafter, their followers are left in utter darkness.

"Deaf, dumb (and) blind, so they will not turn back."

Such people are deprived of all their senses, so they cannot return and are buried there. You see that the Qur'an views history optimistically, and assures us that if truth rises to fight, it will come out victorious and defeat falsehood.

This was a parable for the kind of light kindled by themselves with their plans and interpretations. But sometimes, they want to make use of other accidental lights which are not kindled by them, but the very moment they begin using them, these are extinguished.

"Or like the abundant rain from the cloud in which is utter darkness and thunder and lightning; they put their fingers into their ears because of the thunder peal, for fear of death; and Allah encompasses the unbelievers."

The Qur'an says that in such a situation, they are deeply frightened.

"...The lightning almost takes away their sight; whenever it shines on them, they walk in it, and when it becomes dark to them, they stand still; and if Allah had pleased He would certainly have taken away their hearing and sight; surely Allah has the power over all things."

This is the fate of all deceitful people in history, and the Qur'an does not consider them genuine, and says we should not get frightened of them, for they are sure to be destroyed, and truth will last forever.

It is not right to wait for ownership to vanish and give way to communal life. Wherever such a system has come into existence, there is more darkness, showing that the evolution of tools of production, too, is of no avail. It is human beings who bring light and justice by which they may lead a prosperous life.

God is mighty in everything.

Verses 21-22

"O men! Serve your Lord Who created you and those before you so that you may guard (against evil)." (21)

"Who made the earth a resting place for you and the heaven s canopy and (Who) sends down rain from the cloud, then brings forth with it subsistence for you of the fruits; therefore, do not set up rivals to Allah while you know." (22)

"O men! Serve your Lord...."

These two verses are inter-linked, and the second one is a complement to the first one, and both invite men to monotheism which is the most fundamental Islamic principle and basic belief in divine teachings.

As you see, it is addressed to people, a word that is frequently used in the Qur'an and is almost synonymous with 'man', except that 'people' is a collective noun, and 'man' is a material noun.

In every school of thought, there are four inter-related things:

1. Who are those addressed by the school, and for whom is it intended? Is it for all people or a particular group, and if it is for the latter, who is it?
2. What is the goal of that school?
3. How does it view the world, man and life?
4. What are its contents, namely, its injunctions and guiding principles.

In the above verse in connection with the first point, it is a message on monotheism, the most basic factor in Islam and the Qur'an.

The Persons Addressed by the Qur'an

All schools of thought, whether divine creeds or invented schools, address groups which are different from one another. For example, one of them may have a national hue such as parties whose goals (as they claim frequently) are the liberation and happiness of their nation, in which case their own nation is addressed while other nations are ignored. For example, in England the Labour or Conservative parties address the British nation.

Or a school may have a racial hue, its goal being the liberation of that race, and that race is, therefore, addressed, such as the movements of the blacks against the whites in which the former are addressed.

Sometimes, a school is set up with the object of uniting the hungry to create a force to regain their rights from aggressors, and so this school addresses the hungry. For example, Marxism claims it has come to liberate the proletariat and bring them happiness. It addresses workers and does not enrol capitalists as members.

Who is addressed in the call made by Islam?

Are the Arabs addressed since it has appeared among them? Or are the people of Mecca invited since it began in Mecca?

When we refer to the Qur'an, we never see any addresses being made to Arabs, or the Meccans or the

Ghoreysh, or the people of Medina or of Damascus. The Qur'an has two forms of address: the people meaning all human beings, and the believers.

A question may be asked here: Whether is it proper and practical to address all human beings? Some claim that as man, in philosophical terms, is a detached being, he cannot be addressed. They also say that man in general has no conscience, and, therefore, addressing him produces no motion. If Iranians or Arabs were addressed, their national conscience might put them into motion. Or racial pride may be relied upon for such a movement, such as calling upon the blacks or red Indians. Or a special social class which has a conscience may be addressed such as the indigents, or workers or farmers. When the worker is addressed, he is asked: "Why should you have little wealth?" The motive for his movement would be profit, of which he does not wish to be deprived, and this idea is employed for making him move.

Islam does not say that the conscience of man lies in his nationality or race or social class, but in his innate nature. According to this principle, God Almighty in creation has granted him a noble conscience and an angelic spirit ("I breathed My spirit unto him"), and therefore, in every human being, no matter from what parents, on being born, there is this noble conscience. National, racial, guild or class consciences are all acquired, and it is only that noble innate conscience which is called upon by Islam.

It invites beings on the basis of their humanity, and not because they are the deprived, or the colored people and so on. It invites people on the basis of human honour, not on national or racial pride, or for material benefits. In other words, man who desires justice is addressed, not because his interests lie in justice but because justice is a human value.

The Qur'an explicitly says that one of the objectives of Islam is the establishment of justice, and if this is attained, then aggressors and tyrants will be the losers and the oppressed will gain. But there is a difference between saying that the goal of Islam is to make the oppressed indebted to itself by liberating them and saying that the Qur'an addresses the oppressed alone. Islam liberates the oppressed but it addresses all human beings. Even men like the Pharaoh are addressed by it, for, it finds a real human side even in a Pharaoh. It says; "This Pharaoh who rules over you is a tyrant who has deviated from humanity, but he possesses a God-given nature as a human being". That is why the Prophets, in combatting a Pharaoh, try first to arouse the human side of him. The Qur'an says, "O Moses, go and see if you can liberate that inner humanity which is captive there and rouse it. If you cannot, then attack it from outside."

Message of Monotheism

The second point in the two foregoing Verses is the most fundamental message of the Qur'an. The message of monotheism is not confined to the seal of Prophets but is the frontispiece of the mission of all prophets.

This issue is presented in the following way in the Qur'an: it never says that firstly you should worship someone, and secondly that it should be God. Man cannot live without worship, and each and every being shows this devotion in one way or the other, for, it is a part of his inner nature and instinct. This inclination is inherent in all human beings including materialists. Even Karl Marx who says: "I want to liberate man from worshipping non-human, so that he may worship himself", is, in fact, implying the point that man must worship something; and by his word he wants to show who is to be worshipped.

The message of the Qur'an is; Worship your God and Lord, on Whom depends the whole existence, and without Whose care, all things will collapse.

"Who created you and those before you"

While discussing devotion in the Chapter "Hamd", we said that devotion has a wide meaning, the highest stage of which is to prostrate oneself. Every kind of obedience is devotion, and he who obeys his own desires is showing self-devotion. The Qur'an says in Chapter "the Kneeling" (Jasiah) Verse 23:

"Have you then considered him who takes his low desire for his god?"

Self-devotion, of course, does not mean prostrating before oneself, but obedience to oneself.

Polytheism and Monotheism

The word "polytheism" in Arabic is derived from another word meaning partnership. Is it possible to make a being partner to God? And if someone does not believe in God and worships someone or something, is that not considered to be polytheism?

In the story of the "Saba Tribe" in the Qur'an, it is stated that the hoopoe said to Solomon: "I have brought you sure news. I saw some people ruled over by a woman on a high throne, and they worshipped the sun."

Are such people who worship none but the sun, not polytheists? In the Qur'an, the Arabic word 'Sherk' need not necessarily mean believing in two or more gods. It means replacing God by something else, and as all creatures are expected to worship God, therefore, replacing God by something or someone means believing in a partner for God. Thus, Sun-worshippers are dualists.

"So that you may guard (against evil)"

By guarding against evil is meant chastity. In this verse, chastity is the consequence of mono theism. Chastity in Arabic is derived from a word meaning 'to guard' which involves purity and chastity, and like faith, it has several degrees. Every pure thought requires a clean atmosphere, in the same way that a seed needs a soil free from pests and pollution for its growth. Proper and right thoughts, too, require a clean and sound spirit, and if clean thoughts enter an evil spirit, the result is a conflict between them in which either the spirit must submit and get purified, or the spirit is victorious and the thoughts are

abandoned.

The first verse of the chapter "the Cow" says:

"The Book is sent for the guidance of those who are chaste".

This chastity is inherent in man's nature with which he is born, and those who have guarded it are qualified to receive guidance by the Qur'an, while those who are polluted, will not accept the words of God.

"Who made the earth a resting place for you ..."

How can one not worship God, while he sees all the manifestations of His Godship? Is this earth, which has been turned into a resting-place for you, the result of an accident or Godship? How has this heaven above you, that is like a canopy with twinkling stars, appeared? Do these clouds which bring rain and produce plants and fruits appear on their own or by a creator who arranges all things?

If so, then the Creator Who is the Source of all blessings and goodness must be worshipped, and not a stone which offers neither profit nor loss and its worshipping is equivalent to captivity. And this is Allah whose worship is all freedom and salvation.

Verses 23–24

"And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter like it, and call on your witnesses besides Allah if you are truthful." (23)

"But if you do (it) not and never shall you do (it), then be on your guard against the fire of which men and stones are the fuel; it is prepared for the unbelievers." (24)

"And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant....."

In these verses, the Qur'an speaks of miracle, and of this divine Book as a miracle, challenging people to produce something like it if they consider it to be at the level of the books produced by man.

In this verse, only those addressed are offered the challenge, but in the Chapter "the Israelites", it is not only the Arabs of the Prophet's time or even non-Arabs or all people of the world of that time, but also the people of all ages are challenged, and it has even gone beyond human beings to include the genii. Verse 88, Chapter "the Israelites" says:

"Say: If men and Jinn should combine together to bring the like of this Qur'an, they could not bring the like of it, though some of them were aiders of others."

Such verses illustrate two facts: firstly that miracles exist in the world, and secondly that the Qur'an is a miracle. Neither of these two facts can be doubted.

Denial of the Qur'an as a Miracle is to Negate it

Some people who are numerous in our time cannot understand the secret of a miracle, and though they wish to somehow accept the Qur'an, they deny its being a miracle, or even deny all miracles in the world, or offer frigid explanations or natural interpretations for all the miracles which are mentioned in the Qur'an such as the gaping of the sea for Moses or Moses's stick turning into a serpent. This is nothing but denying the Qur'an

The Qur'an describes in numerous verses the miracles of former prophets, thus proving the existence of miracles and showing that the Qur'an is one of these miracles. It is our duty to accept the invitation of the Qur'an as conscientious servants to ponder over this matter and discover its secret which is one of the great mysteries of Islamic teachings.

The Word 'Miracle'

The root of this word in Arabic means 'inability' and 'miracle' means an act which others are unable to do. Sometimes, instead of the word 'miracle' the word 'supernatural' is used. But neither of these two words has been used in the Qur'an. They are used by Islamic men of learning. Of course, the word 'miracle' is commonly used by Muslims, and may have also been used in the times of the Imams, but the word 'supernatural' was used only by the Ash'ari sect to mean 'miracle'. The Qur'an uses the word 'ayat' meaning 'sign' which is clearer than the other two.

Why has the Qur'an used 'Sign' for 'Miracle'?

'Ayat' means 'Sign' or 'a strong proof'. Why has the Qur'an used 'Sign' for 'Miracle'? The reason is: A man may claim that he is an apostle of God to whom revelation is sent and therefore the people should accept him as he is quoting the words of God. Should the people believe him unquestionably or not?

There are three probabilities here: first: he may really be a messenger of God; second: he may be lying and is aware of his falsehood himself; third: he may have been misled by some mental and spiritual reaction in his own mind that made him believe about those revelations.

The third case often happens for the people who never lie or wish to lie, but are misled by some fancies.

When the Ghoreysh infidels called the Prophet a mad man, it was because he had such a fine record with people that they could not call him a liar. So in order to nullify his call, they said that he was suffering from mental illusions.

Thus, a man who claims to be a prophet must offer a strong proof in favour of his claim, and it is logical of people to demand such a proof, otherwise acceptance without proof is something foolish.

A miracle then is that sign or proof which confirms the claim of Prophethood. To clarify this, the following

points will be discussed:

1. What is a miracle?
2. Is a miracle possible?
3. Has a miracle really happened?
4. How does a miracle attest to the veracity of a claimant?
5. The Prophet of Islam and Miracles
6. The Miracle of the Qur'an

What is a miracle?

Some people suppose that miracle is not a problem, but the important thing is to accept or reject God. They say if we believe in God, then miracles do not matter, for, we know that God has absolute power to do anything, to bring the dead back to life, turn a stick into a serpent, or take the Prophet within the space of a single moment from the temple of Mecca to the mosque of Jerusalem and to all the heavens.

But this matter is not so simple to suppose that by accepting God, all problems are solved. The reasons are as follows:

a) Some may define a miracle as something which may happen without a cause. But this is quite wrong, and it may have been coined by materialists or those who are in favour of a miracle, want to know the reason, and if it lacks a reason, it proves nothing.

Moreover , if (as an impossible hypothesis) something happens without a cause , then nothing in the world can be proved, and hence no scientific natural, or philosophical principle remains steadfast and even the proof of God is shaken up. Why? Because we know God as the cause of Universe. If we suppose that there is no order in existence and things may appear without a cause, we cannot reject this probability that Universe has appeared without a cause. Thus, this definition of "miracle" is quite incorrect.²

b) Another group may say that a miracle is not the appearance of something without a cause. There is no exception to the Law of Causation, but another cause may take the place of the real cause. So, a miracle is the substitution of one cause for another.

For example, the true cause of the appearance of a human being is the intercourse between two other human beings. But if another cause replaces this one, it is a miracle.

Such a view shows ignorance of intellectual knowledge, for, if we admit that a system of cause and effect rules over Universe, this system is not a conventional one which could be changed at will.

Rather, it is a true, real and inviolable relationship. In other words, if in nature A is the cause of B, a real relationship exists between A and B, which neither A nor B can have with anything else other than themselves and hence none of them can exist without the other. Thus, nothing can have a cause and effect relationship with two things.³

c) There is a third definition for "miracle" to which the above intellectual objections do not apply, and that is: A miracle is neither the negation of the Law of Causation, nor a violation of and exception to it. It is beyond the principle of nature. There is a difference between "beyond the Law of Causation" and "beyond the principle of nature". A miracle is not the appearance of something out of the course of original cause, but in a way different from ordinary and natural course, so that supernatural interference is evident in it.

Thus, no cause replaces another to bring about a miracle, but the fact that a real and unalterable relationship exists between cause and effect is, in this way accepted and the issue of miracle is explained as follows:

The real causes of things for a man who wants to discover them through science and experiment are always unknown, and only God knows about them. Man can only have access to some conjunctions and relationships through science and experiment, which he must not take for causation.

Thus, a miracle is a phenomenon which occurs through a non-ordinary course which man has thought of as the only course.

Is a miracle possible?

The answer to this question was made explicit, to some extent, in the previous section, depending on our definition of a miracle. If we say a miracle is something which happens without a cause, then it is something impossible. And if we say that a miracle is the violation of the Law of Causation, and substitution of one cause for another, then again it is impossible.

But if we accept the third definition which is the exit of nature from the normal course of events, then a miracle is possible.

Hegel, the well-known European philosopher, has a statement on which he has laid the basis of many issues in his philosophy. He says there are a series of things which are indispensable for the intellect, the contrary of which is not possible, such as mathematical propositions, which he calls "analytical theorems". When in geometry you say the three angles of a triangle are equal to 180 degrees or two right angles, this is an intellectual requisite which admits of no other answer.

In philosophy and logic, the essential propositions belong to this kind. But there are a series of experimental issues with there being no indispensability about them. For instance, he says we have found by experience that water evaporates at 100 degrees of temperature. We call it as causation and consider

heat to be the cause of evaporation. Similarly, when water freezes into ice at sub-zero temperature, we say cold is the cause of freezing. He says: These are not the requisites for intellect, and we give that verdict on the basis of experience, and had we since our birth experienced the contrary, namely heat for freezing and cold for evaporation, it would have made no difference to our intellect, since none of these two cases is indispensable to our intellect.

So far so good, and even Avicenna and others have paid attention to this matter and asked as to what should be done about natural sciences which are based on experience but it creates no necessity. Can experimental laws be brought under the criterion of philosophical causation? They say in cases where experience shows a relationship, such as heat causing evaporation, and cold causing freezing, there exists a real causation which cannot be replaced by another. But it is doubtful whether that cause is what we have discovered through our senses. Therefore, experimental sciences constantly change; one law is nullified and replaced by another.

For example, one day when they saw a stone, dropped from a height, falling down, they said the gravity is in the stone itself which tends to move towards the centre of the earth. They were unanimous about this verdict until Newton emerged and said the gravitational power lies in the earth which pulls the stone towards itself. This theory was followed by the theory of relativity which necessitated a reappraisal of former laws and principles.

Therefore, it is an acknowledged truth that happenings are not without a cause, but it is not evident whether science can discover causes, and we should not call a relationship a cause. Neither heat nor cold, nor gravity are respectively the real causes of evaporation, freezing and fall of a stone. Such relationships are often subject to change.

Here, the difference between the principle of nature and Law of Causation becomes clear. For example, according to the principle of nature, a male and female must intercourse to produce an offspring. Is the authentic Law of Causation applicable here? Is it not possible for a cell in a womb to have the properties of the cells of both a male and a female?

Intellect does not negate this, but it says: Hitherto we have seen it occur only in one way, but there may be also another way, the secret of which is unknown to us, that by blowing into the female's ovum, it may obtain the property of a male's sperm. Thus, the Law of Causation has not been violated, but the principle of nature has, and that is the meaning of a miracle. In this sense, then, a miracle is possible.

Going back to Hegel's words, if someone claims to be a prophet and says his miracle is to draw a triangle of 190 degrees, he must, at once, be refuted, for, this is intellectually impossible, and a miracle does not make an intellectual impossibility feasible. Such a claim, in itself, is the reason for its falsehood. And again if someone claims Prophethood and says he can do something without a cause, it is false because it violates intellectual necessity.

But if someone claims to be able to perform something contrary to the principle of nature, the kind of

thing for which, as Hegel says, "we have no reason to show its validity except that we have not experienced it before", we might accept it.

In other words, intellectual laws are absolute, and not conditional, while natural laws are conditional. In the case of a triangle, there exists no "if" about the total measure of its angles, but in natural laws there are conditions. For example, with regard to the Law of Gravity, we could say it is applicable if there is no obstacle in the way of objects.

In short, man has no power to discover real causes which are known only to God. He can only deduce relationships. The Qur'an says in Chapter "Divorce" (Talaq), Verse 31:

"And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him; surely Allah attains His purpose."

Thus, there is no need of any apparent cause. But to prevent this supposition among the people that there is no cause and effect and predestination in the affairs of Universe, it says in the next part of the Verse:

"Allah indeed has appointed a measure for everything."

God can at His will do things in which there are not involved such means, that are known to man. These means act only as covers, and only God knows what the real cause is.

God can at His will acquaint human beings with the mysteries of cause and effect, and if anyone is allowed by God to know them, he can intervene in the affairs of the world, without acting contrary to the order of cause and effect. This is the meaning of what is stated in a narration saying that God's servant can be so close to Him that God becomes his eye to see, his ear to hear, and his hand to work with.

Can a Miracle really happen?

It is easy to answer this question, for, when a miracle is not above the Law of Causation, matters contrary to normal and natural processes, happen and have taken place frequently in the world.

Avicenna is quoted as saying: If you hear that a mystic has survived despite having eaten nothing for a month, do not get surprised, for this act, though contrary to the law of nature, does not go against the general law of existence. Ordinary people may die if they go without food for forty–eight hours, for their body is habitual to receiving food during this period. But a human being can, by strengthening his will power, check his body so much that even his heart–beat, breathing or digestion can be brought under his control.

Such examples are seen in ascetics who can control their breathing for a long time, and not breathe, while an ordinary person cannot do so even for a minute. This shows that the spirit is so strengthened as to dominate the body.

It is narrated that when Soviet leaders went on a visit to India, they were amazed at such things, and when they returned home they declared that such actions should be investigated at universities, as if this were a science by itself!

They had seen a man in a closed coffin being buried in a grave without any hole to let air in. When he was taken out after some time, he began to breathe. He seemed to have stopped breathing upon interment and resumed it upon coming out. There are many such examples, and strengthening willpower by practice accounts for them. ·

Thus, as a miracle is an act which is only contrary to natural laws, and considering the fact that prophets are, by God's grace, the most perfect human beings possessing the strongest spirits and the firmest willpower, it would be an easy task for them to perform miracles.

How does a miracle attest to the veracity of the claimant?

Logicians say that there are three kinds of indication;

- 1) Conventional,
- 2) Natural, and
- 3) Intellectual.

Conventional indication means treating something as the sign of another by agreement. For example, words indicate meaning: the word "bread" connotes something edible, and the word "water" something drinkable, while interchanging the place of these two by conventional would alter nothing. This is because there is no inherent relationship between a word and its meaning.

In the same way, traffic signs are conventional, and instead of 'green light' to indicate 'free passage', any other sign could have done.

Does a miracle denote the truth of Prophethood? Is there an agreement between God and his creatures that when they see someone performing miracles, they would know that he is sent by God and is telling the truth? Obviously not, for, God can send to the people whatever He wants through the Prophets, whose position we are going to prove.

Natural indication means experience, such as coughing as an indication of bronchitis, and quick beating of the pulse an index of fever, which are signs obtained through experience. A miracle does not belong to this category since it relates to experience.

Intellectual indication is based on reasoning and is like effect indicating the cause, which requires neither convention nor experience. A miracle belongs to this category.

The indication of a miracle may be described in two ways. It is said by a group that a miracle is a practical way of intellectual indication, such as deducing the satisfaction of a person from his action or from his silence. In jurisprudence, utterance of an impeccable person is considered as an acceptable

reason, in the same way that the description of ablution by an impeccable person is an evidence for us. So is the absence of objection by the same person to our manner of ablution considered as an evidence of its correctness. And if we say: "Why should an impeccable person find fault with our ablution?" The answer is that if he did not do so, he would be encouraging ignorance, and such an innocent man abstains from a mean act.

These people say that a miracle attests to the veracity of Prophethood. So, if someone claims that he is sent by God, as God is aware of all actions of human beings, then his claim is made before God. And if he performed an extraordinary deed to prove his claim and attributed it either to himself or to God, it would be an evidence of his veracity. For, if he lied, God would not allow his deed to take place, since otherwise He would be encouraging ignorance.

But a number of scholars say that the above group has not understood the truth of a miracle, for, they have taken a miracle to be an act which God performs directly through a prophet without the latter's interference. It is God who brings a dead man back to life not Jesus who just sits by the dead.

But the issue goes beyond this. There is a relationship between a miracle and the performer of a miracle, so that this action would not be possible without him. A miracle indicates the spiritual perfection of a saint, and in performing a miracle his human power is connected to divine force, that is, God has granted him ability and will–power above that of a human being.

The aforementioned points show that a divine saint attains a position by his perfect obedience to God and by his practical asceticism, so that he gains a strong will by which he can dominate nature, and act as God's manifestation on earth. In this way, when saints perform a supernatural deed, they themselves are doing so with an ability above that a human being.

It is well–known that when Imam Ali with a single hand tore away the gate of the Kheibar Fort which fifty men could hardly lift, and threw it aside, he said: "I swear to God that I did not pluck off the gate of Kheibar by virtue of physical force, but a divine power supported me".

So Ali is saying that he performed the deed, but with a God–given strength. So Jesus' act of reviving a dead man is done by him with God's help. Thus, a miracle as an indication of the truthfulness of Prophethood and an intellectual indication is one hundred percent logical.

The Prophet of Islam and Miracles

Some Orientalists and Christian priests have expressed certain views as objections to the Qur'an and to our Prophet, which have been accepted, in a different form, by some Islamic writers, too. These relate to the miracles of the Prophet of Islam.

The Christian group has stated that according to the Qur'an, the Prophet himself abstained from miracles which he was asked to perform, and they have quoted certain verses in this connection which we will

refer to afterwards.

Some Islamic writers of recent times have said that a miracle belongs to the era of the childhood of man when he was still a savage, and had not yet reached the stage of knowledge, logic and reasoning. As it was not possible to convince the people through logic and knowledge, the Prophets resorted to miracles. They say that a miracle is a childish language specific to children. So, when human beings attained mental maturity and could be able to understand the language of logic and reasoning, there was no longer any need for miracles. When a prophet is ordained and he offers a plan of reforms and laws for man's evolutionary advance, men of intellect and logic immediately accept him and submit to him.

The distinction between the Prophet of Islam and other prophets is that his advent is concurrent historically with the process of transition from wildness to thoughtfulness.

Iqbal Lahuri says: "The Prophet of Islam exists at a historical juncture, the past of which belongs to the childhood and wildness of man, and its future is related to the era of science and logic. For this reason, the nature of his revelation is different from that of others, and fundamentally his advent was to lead people to thoughtfulness and reasoning. Iqbal goes on to say that the source of the Prophet's mission, which is revelation, belongs to the past, and the spirit of his mission, which calls upon intellect, logic, knowledge, experience, experiment and absorbing lessons of history, belong to the future".

From the viewpoint of Iqbal, this is the philosophy of his being the last Prophet. This illustrates two points:

- 1) End of Prophethood
- 2) Absence of necessity for miracles.

This is what Iqbal states, and some other Islamic writers have followed it. In this connection, we could say briefly that in their philosophy of the "end of prophethood" they have made a big mistake. Iqbal has accepted the question of the end of "prophethood", but his accounting for it is incorrect. His philosophy reaches a conclusion which is contrary to his own expectation. He intends by this means to prove the end of prophethood, but if what he says is true, then unfortunately it leads to the end of religion, not of prophethood.

The above writers mention two points: firstly that during the period of mental maturity of man, there is no need for a miracle; secondly, for this same reason Islam has, according to the verses of Qur'an, constantly refused to produce miracles.

Concerning the first point, it is not true that there is no need for miracles in the time of man's mental maturity, for, as we said before, the Qur'an refers to such an act as a 'sign' not a 'miracle'. Sign of what? A sign that this man's words are not his own, but God's. If a prophet spoke logically with people and proved his word by means of reasoning and experience, he would be a sage and a man of learning, and that is different from, a prophet.

Philosophers' words are at the level of human beings but prophets want to say much more than that. Their words are not only logical and intellectual, but they also observe that these are not their own words; they are commanded to say so, that is, they have received revelations. The Prophet says: "I have one tongue directed at you, but my spirit is connected elsewhere, and I communicate to you what I am told, I am a messenger of God, and as a prophet, I deliver His message".

Suppose Socrates says that he has a specific philosophy in ethics. If we find his words logical, we accept them. But if he says that his words are not his own but God's message which he announces to us, we require him to prove it, for then the guarantee of it, the reward for obeying it, and the punishment for rejecting it, are all related to God, and not to him.

Many people speak logically, and if we do not obey them it does not matter. But if someone said that his words were God's words, we would be disobedient for not accepting them, and we would be showing devotion to God if we are obedient.

Therefore, it is true that a prophet can, in an era of mental maturity, prove his words to the people by logic and reasoning, but the truth of his words, and their belonging to God are two separate matters.

The Prophet of God may say: "Do not drink wine because it is harmful and filthy". You ask for a reason, and he says, "Look at those addicts and note what has happened to their nerves, digestion and liver, and see how the drunkards have damaged the society. Statistics on the number of crimes committed as a consequence of drinking go to prove its evil.

Logical and intelligent people will agree that it is a very logical instruction and one should abstain from drinking. But if this is conveyed as a message of God, a miracle is necessary to affirm his being a divine messenger.

The second point was that some people claim that according to the testimony of the Qur'an, the Holy Prophet refused to perform miracles and this shows that he had no miracles. To prove this, they have quoted a number of verses, the most explicit of which are from Chapter "the Israelites", Verses 90–93:

"And they say: We will, by no means, believe in you until you cause a fountain to gush forth from the earth for us, or you should have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which you should cause rivers to flow forth, gushing out, Or you should cause the heavens to come down upon us in pieces as you think, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us.) Or you should have a house of gold, or you should ascend into heaven, and we will not believe in your ascending until you bring down to us a book which we may read, Say: Glory be to my Lord; am I aught but a mortal apostle?"

Mecca is a dry and grassless land. There was no flowing water at that time, and the water that is consumed now there and in Mena and Arafat comes mostly from the Ta'if stream. Ta'if is 72 Kilometres south of Mecca, and Zobeida, wife of Harun-e-Rashid, the powerful Caliph who controlled all the public

funds, ordered to carve a water-way through the mountains and let a stream flow from Ta'if to Mecca. But in the time of the Prophet, there was no water in Mecca except the Zamzam spring, which did not have as much water as it has now.

The Ghoreysh heathen, who were opposed to the Prophet, asked for the following miracles in order to believe him:

1. To make a spring gush out of the earth.
2. To have a garden of palms and grapes which Mecca lacked, with a stream flowing through it.
3. To make the heavens fall now as it is claimed that they will on Resurrection.
4. To bring down God and angels for them to see.
5. To have a house full of gold.
6. To ascend heaven and bring back a letter addressed to them so that they may believe him.

And God says to the Prophet: "Tell them that you are only a human being and a messenger of God".

On the basis of the last sentence, the above people and Christians claim that he had no miracles. But they are wrong in their claim for the following reasons:

We said before that a miracle is not an impossible thing. Impossible means something that intellectually cannot be done and is impracticable even with infinite power. When something is non-existent, it cannot exist in any way. But asking for a miracle is not asking for the impossible, for, a miracle is something out of the normal course of events, requiring only a supernatural power.

We also said that all prophets must have miracles, but only as a sign and evidence of the truth of their claim that they are sent by God. But are all prophets obliged to comply with whatever people demand? If so, they will sink to the level of magicians. People love to be amused, and each person desires something, and then all this turns into a joke.

A prophet confines his acts of miracle to the extent of proving that he is sent by God, and after that there is no necessity for him to perform miracles. There is no obligation for him to satisfy people's whims and wishes. It is enough for them to be sure of the truth.

Another point is that Prophets are not dealers to make a bargain with people to pay them something in return for their faith. The people are even encouraged by them to spend and fight in the way of God. Even so, the prophets are not willing to accept every kind of contribution. If they feel that a gift is for ostentation, it is refused. Or if a man offers his service as a soldier of Islam in order to have his name recorded in history, again he is rejected because he has shown no devotion in the way of God.

The demands of the Ghoreysh were in the form of a proposal for a bargain, to gain some benefits, and not a demand for a miracle to be converted. Asking for a spring, or a garden or orchard is to seek profit for oneself. Asking for the heavens to fall is meaningless since it would mean the death of all, and what is the use of such a miracle? Asking for the presence of God and angels is the demand for something impossible, and if God could be seen and heard by human beings, what need would there be for a prophet? The meaning of this demand is to turn God into a creature, and this is impossible. The same applies to angels, for they are not material beings, and such a demand is unreasonable. Asking for a house full of gold is again to seek profit, as if one understands nothing but money. The last demand, too, was only a pretext, and even if the Prophet could have produced such a letter, they would have said that he had written it himself.

These demands are, therefore, either profit seeking or stupid, and none of them is for the purpose of discovering truth. Therefore, the above writers have mistakenly supposed that such demands were similar to the demands of former peoples from their prophets. Had they made logical requests for the sake of discovering truth, the Prophet would not have refused them.

Another interesting point is that the Holy Qur'an has described many miracles of former prophets such as Noah, Lot, Saleh, Moses, Abraham, Jesus and many others, none of which can be doubted. It is reasonable to suppose that the Qur'an quotes so many miracles of prophets, yet the Prophet of Islam refuses to perform any on the excuse of being only a prophet? Or were those acts not miracles? Therefore, the meaning of the Prophet's answer is that what they demanded were not miracles, otherwise he would have complied accordingly.

Moreover, the Qur'an itself is a miracle as we will explain later. But did the Prophet have no other miracle? The Qur'an mentions some of them, such as the following: Chapter "the Israelites", Verse 1:

"Glory be to Him who made His servant to go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque of which We have blessed the precincts, so that We may show to him some of Our signs; surely He is the Hearing and Seeing."

This Verse describes an extraordinary physical journey of the Prophet in one night to places very far from each other (Mecca to Palestine) at a time when the fastest means of transport was a camel. Is this not a miracle? When this verse descended, the Ghoreysh infidels asked him: "What evidence have you for this journey?" The Prophet described a caravan which was on its way from Damascus to Mecca, its halting place and its acts. The Ghoreysh then realised that he had passed close by the caravan.

There is another story of a miracle by the Prophet in the Qur'an in Chapter "the Moon" (Qamar) Verses 1 and 2:

"The hour drew nigh and the moon did rend asunder. And if they see a miracle they turn aside and say "Transient magic."

The Miracle of the Qur'an

We know that Muhammad is the Seal of Prophets, and his religion is the last and eternal one, and other Prophets have come as a prologue to him. In fact, they passed the preliminary stages when mankind, too, was undergoing its early phases, preparing for the final stage, which was the advent of Muhammad.

What is the explanation of this finality? I have discussed this subject in a little pamphlet called "The Finality of Prophethood;" and here I will mention a few points about it.

The creed of Muhammad has many differences with other religions, one of which is its main miracle. The miracles of other Prophets have been connected with natural events, such as reviving a dead man, a stick turning into a serpent, the sea going asunder and such likes.

Each of these is a transient issue, taking place at a certain time without lasting. For instance, a man is brought back to life, lives for some time and dies, and that is the end of it. A stick may become a serpent temporarily and once again return to its original state. Even some of the miracles of Muhammad are of this type. His journey from one place to another occurs at a special time, and then it all ends.

·But, for a religion which is to last many centuries, such short-lived miracles are not enough as it requires an eternal miracle. Thus, his principal miracle takes the form of a book. Other prophets have had books as well as miracles, but their books were not miracles, nor their miracles books.

Moses had the Old Testament, but he said that the book was not his miracle, his miracle was something else. The Prophet of Islam, however, had his book as his special miracle beside other miracles.

Another point about the last religion, which is also a secret of its finality, is that its duration compared with those of other religions resembles a specialised course by which man has become a clear-sighted expert.

It is in this era that in religious matters we can get expert theologians. Such men did not exist in the time of other religions, because religious jurisprudence belongs to this era. What a religious jurist does today by his knowledge and reasoning was performed by the former prophets by means of revelation and prophethood. Moreover, the ground was not prepared for such expertness in those times, for, criteria and general principles are a pre-requisite for issuing a verdict on details, and the past religions lacked these criteria and general principles.

There are two terms commonly used for prophets: prophets with divine laws such as Abraham, Moses and Jesus, and prophets who followed their predecessors and had no divine laws of their own. What a religious jurist does today is similar to the acts of the second group of prophets. Of course, such a jurist in addition to this, also acts as a leader and spiritual magistrate, and directs people to do good deeds and forbids evil acts. He is a reformer who checks mischiefs.

In the religion of Islam, a prophet is not to be sent to do the work of experts, for, jurists perform

this duty. That explains the meaning of an utterance of the Prophet, saying: "The religious men of learning among my people are like the prophets of the Israelites". It refers to those prophets who only propagated the religion of Moses. In this sense then, jurists are successors to the prophets who do not have divine laws.

Reasons for the Qur'an Being a Miracle

There are two miraculous aspects of the Qur'an: literal and spiritual. By literal aspect is meant its artistic beauty, and by spiritual sense its intellectual and scientific aspect. Beauty is related to technique and knowledge is related to discovery of truth.

We can divide beauty into two kinds:

- 1) Sensual beauty.
- 2) Mental beauty.

Sensual beauty is also of two types: auditory and visual. The beauty of a garden and flowers is visual, and the beauty of music and song is auditory. The beauty of language is mental. A fine piece of poetry or prose is most attractive. The mixture of prose and poetry of Sa'di with which the poet begins his "Golestan" is of this kind. Sa'di died seven hundred years ago, but his Golestan has still preserved its beauty because it is fluent and eloquent.

Gha'ani, the Shirazi poet, is from the same town as Sa'di. He tried to write a book to rival Sa'di's "Golestan", but could not succeed. It is narrated that in a cheerful party, a minstrel began melodiously reciting a poem of Sa'di which perfectly fitted the occasion. When Gha'ani heard it, he was so amazed at the beauty of it that he said: "This man has left nothing unsaid for other poets", and threw his own book of poetry into the fire. Gha'ani was a good poet, but when he compared his own work with Sa'di's, he had to admit the latter's exalted position as a poet over himself.

What has preserved the position of Hafez and Mowlavi? Their eloquence, clarity, originality, and charm.

All those who have a mastery of language and words, and are familiar with the Qur'an, and even those Europeans who are acquainted with Arabic language, have admitted that the divine book is unrivalled in beauty, and eloquence. Firstly, the Qur'an has a particular style; it is neither prose nor poetry. Unlike poetry it has no rhyme or rhythm, and has made no use of extravagant imagery which is a peculiarity of a poem. Sometimes, it is said that the best poetry is the most untrue, but in spite of all exaggerations, it is attractive because of its imagery and arrangement of words. Moreover, beauty of language is attainable in special topics such as love, epic, eulogy or satire, and no poet can be very artistic in describing spiritual matters, for the sense cannot be interfered with, and so he resorts to metaphor to convey the meanings. For instance in speaking of knowledge he alludes to it as 'wine', and in referring to the glory of God, he uses the metaphor 'lock of hair'.

But the Qur'an presents spiritual issues in a most fluent way. The Chapter "Hamd" which was discussed

at the beginning of this book is a fine example of this. Every Muslim recites it lifelong and at least ten times a day while offering prayer, and yet it is so sweet and pleasant that it is never tiresome or boring.

The Qur'an is not prose either, for prose lacks melody, whereas the Qur'an is wonderfully melodious. Have you ever seen a prose book, either religious or non-religious, which would lend itself to tuneful readings in different styles?

The Qur'an is the only book which can be recited in that way, so that a systematic study of it is made in this respect, and various resonances can be used for it depending on the meaning of the verses concerned, illustrating fear, encouragement, consolation etc.

Have you heard the Old or New Testament being recited melodiously in Christian or Jewish lands? If they do, it would sound strange and become intolerable. Can Sa'di's prose be recited melodiously? This is a special quality of the Qur'an, which has had no precedent, and nothing like it afterwards in the Arabic language.

An interesting point about all those who retained the Qur'an by heart and adored it deeply, is that though they were masters of the language of their time, they could not produce even two lines which would resemble those in the Qur'an.

Imam Ali is admittedly the most eloquent man whose discourses in the "Nahjul-Balagha" have never been rivalled by any Arab writer or orator, and these have preserved their magnificence. He heard the first Verse of the Qur'an at the age of ten or eleven, possessed great talents and was thoroughly familiar with the Qur'an. But when we compare "Nahjul-Balagha" with the Qur'an, we find two quite different styles. Even when Imam Ali, in the middle of his fine discourse, quotes a verse of the Qur'an, you feel as if a brilliant star has suddenly shone in a dark sky.

This is Verse 30 from Chapter "Yunus":

"There shall every soul become acquainted with what is sent before, and they shall be brought back to Allah, their true Patron, and what they devised shall escape from them."

In this verse, Resurrection has been so clearly portrayed that one feels to be in the presence of his Lord after having seen so many false lords.

The era of the Qur'an is that of eloquence and rhetoric. It is well-known that there was a market named Akkaz where, in sacred months when fighting was forbidden, artistic skills in poetry were displayed, and the best poems selected and hung on the walls of the Kaaba. There were seven famous odes which had, for long, been placed there. When the Qur'an was revealed, these poems were removed and taken away. Lebeyd-bin-Ziad was a first-rate poet who after embracing Islam and becoming familiar with the Qur'an, abstained from composing poetry, and constantly recited the Qur'an instead. When he was asked why he did not apply his skill in the world of Islam, he said: "I can no longer do it. If this is the

word, all other words are nonsensical. I enjoy the Qur'an so much that no pleasure can be compared with it." The Qur'an challenges all people to produce even one verse similar to that of this Holy Book.

Yet so many enemies of the Qur'an, both when it descended and afterwards, have not been able to take up this challenge, and even if they have tried, it has been a failure.

Thus, one of the reasons for the miraculousness of the Qur'an is its artistic aspect in the form of fluency and eloquence, combined with a charm which penetrated the hearts and won them over. The fact that infidels called the Prophet a magician was an implied confession that they could not rival the words of the Qur'an. When they saw a man, devoid of faith, being so deeply attracted to the Qur'an after listening to its recitation once or twice, they called him a magician.

Strangers, who visited Mecca and attended the ceremony of circumambulation of the Kaaba, were told beforehand by heathens that if they went there they should put some cotton wool in their ears so as not to hear the magical words of a man who would charm them.

A Medina chief who had come to Mecca was given this recommendation, and he so filled his ears with cotton wool that he said he could not even hear the sound of a drum. On his ceremonial walk round the Kaaba, he noticed a man in prayer whose features attracted him. He noticed that the man's lips were moving but he could hear nothing. Suddenly he thought that the recommendation of those people was meaningless, so he took the wool out of his ears, went near and listened to him. He was quietly reading the verses of Qur'an, and this softened his heart so quickly that he felt devotion for him involuntarily.

This chief became a loyal believer of Islam and helped in the emigration of the Prophet to Medina, and it was this very meeting which culminated in the spread of Islam in Medina.⁴ This was the effect of the Qur'anic charm and beauty.

History of literature shows that with the passage of time, the Qur'an has had an increasing influence on the Muslim literature. In the first and second centuries of the Hejira, Arabic literature had its own place, but as time went on, it came more and more under the influence of the Qur'an. In Persian literature, too, we see this especially from the time of Ferdowsi onward, and when we come to the sixth and seventh centuries of Hejira, that is, to Mowlavi's time, this becomes very pronounced, so that Mathnavi is full of references to the Qur'an. The second aspect of the miraculousness of the Qur'an is in its contents and spiritual matter. If we study the divine subjects of the Qur'an, its logic about Resurrection and prophets, or its philosophy of history and ethics, we would realise how great it is.

These are matters in which the Qur'an has a mission, and that is to guide human beings.

The Qur'an has another miraculous aspect which is occult predictions, as well as its consistency and absence of contradiction, a subject which requires many sessions to discuss.

1. Gabriel

2. 7 This question has been discussed at length in my book "Divine Justice". It is wrong to suppose that our inability forces us to do things on the basis of cause and effect, or as God is absolute and mighty, cause and effect have no importance for Him. It has already been proved that God's sanctity and perfection necessitate that things should be based on cause and effect. In the Qur'an, there are many verses showing that God carries out His commands through various means, either natural, such as rainfall and growth of plants and their likes, or through supernatural means, such as angels and invisible armies.

3. The reason why no more than one effect can be produced from one cause, or vice versa, has been explained in my third volume of "Philosophical Principles".

4. 9 The story is about As'ad-bin-Zarara and Zakwan Khazavji, who had come to Mecca for a military pact to wage a war against the Owss tribe, but returned to Medina fully converted to Islam, and prepared the ground for the Prophet's emigration to Medina.

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