

ISLAMIC CONCEPT
OF
PROPHETHOOD

by

S. ABUL HASAN ALI NADWI

Rendered into English

by

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Academy of Islamic Research and Publications
Lucknow (India)

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**The Academy of Islamic Research and
Publications**

**P. O. Box No. 119, Tagore Marg,
Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow (India)**

Series No. 100

Editions :

Arabic 8th Edition (Cairo, 1976)
Urdu 2nd Edition (Lucknow, 1978)
English 2nd Edition (Lucknow, 1979)

Price Rs. 27.00

PRINTED AT THE LUCKNOW PUBLISHING HOUSE
LUCKNOW • PHONE 44883

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P R E F A C E

I had received a cable from Sheikh ‘Abdul ‘Azīz bin ‘Abdullah bin Bāz,¹ Vice-Chancellor of the Madīna University, some time in Sh‘abān 1382 February, 1962, asking me to deliver some lectures as a visiting Professor in the Madīna University which has on its rolls students from almost every Muslim country. I gratefully accepted the invitation, for, in my view, it offered a good opportunity to express my views before such a select gathering of Muslim students hailing from every part of the Muslim world. The objective I had in view was to expound the healthy and immutable principles I have held as an article of faith before our young men in that holy city. This was the only effort I could make, in my humble way, for rectifying the present mental confusion discernible everywhere, and contribute my mite towards character-building of our younger generation—an obligation I felt bound to discharge—in whatever modest way was it possible for me to do, especially, in that City of the greatest benefactor of humanity. I knew that it was the humblest presentation I could offer to the memory of the dearly beloved Prophet on such an occasion.

The topic I selected for my lectures was ‘Prophethood and the Prophets in the light of the Qur’ān.’ The subject matter had not occurred to me casually or on a sudden impulse; it had actually been engaging my attention for a

1. Now Chancellor of the Madina University and President of the Rabitatal ‘Ālam-e-Islāmi, Mecca.

long time. I sincerely believe that the issue involved some of those important points upon which it was necessary to shed fresh light for the benefit of our upcoming and future generations. I do not have the least doubt that our Western educated young men who constitute the literary, intellectual and political leadership of the Muslims everywhere, have been led to the present mental confusion and waywardness owing, chiefly, to their failure to comprehend the true significance of prophethood. Of a fact, the failure of this class to integrate itself fully with the spirit of Islam, its lack of faith in the revealed guidance, its preference of ephemeral, materialistic values over those eternal and absolute, its wholehearted acceptance of the Western patterns of thought, ideas and ideals and its intellectual endeavour, not unoften, to draw inferences straining the proper sense of Islamic creed and doctrines stem from its incomprehension of the true import, worth and significance of prophethood. The modern educated youth is hardly aware of the goodly favours conferred by the prophets of God on man, his life and intellect, culture and civilisation. He knows little what virtues and merits have accrued to humanity from the teachings of the prophets and how the present world, heading towards an abyss of total destruction, has taken a wrong direction simply by cutting itself adrift from the prophetic teachings.

This was a blessed invitation coming from a blessed direction; it set spurs to my imagination by dislodging the sluggishness which is apt to put off many an important assignment on one pretext or the other. The subject matter of discourse and the tender regard for the place where the lectures were to be delivered, both were associated with the revered personage touching the chord of every believer's heart. I have always felt that the best place for any talk on this important subject was the city of the Prophet where revelation from God was last vouchsafed for the guidance of humanity.

A major portion of these lectures was completed during;

Ramadhān 1382/January 1963 in my small village¹ where there exists no library far or near. I had, therefore, to depend largely on the holy Qurʾān which is a must for every Muslim habitation. The month of Ramadhān was the most propitious period for any work based on the Divine Scripture, since it was in this month that the revelation of the Qurʾān had commenced. I used to call for books, now and then, from the library of the Nadwatul 'Ulamā', Lucknow, for checking the references or refreshing my memory, and, in this manner, the first six lectures were compiled. Some minor additions were, of course, made subsequently, before I went to Madīna in Shawwāl, 1382/February 1963. The period during which these lectures were delivered, twice every week after 'iṣhā' prayers, in the Lecture Hall of the Jāmi'a Islamiā, extended up to Zil Q'adā, 1382/March, 1963. An introductory speech by 'Atia Muhammad Sālim, Dean of the Faculty of Education,² preceded every lecture which was followed by a concluding address by Sheikh 'Abdul 'Azīz bin Bāz. Besides the students of the Jāmi'a, a good number of scholars and elites of Madīna attended these lectures.

I do not pretend to have presented any original idea or elucidated a new view-point in these lectures, but, they nevertheless contain some food for thought. These lectures can better be described as a preliminary sketch of a more penetrating and thought-provoking study on the subject.

I have preferred a sober and simple mode of expression, avoiding scholastic euphuism and doctrinal subtleties, yet I have tried to allude certain facts and implications which call for some heavy thinking, especially, in the context of ideological conflicts and intellectual crisis through which Muslim society is currently passing everywhere.

This collection, in the Arabic version, had already seen

1. Da'irā Shāh 'Ālam Ullah in Rae Bareli district.

2. Now Chief Justice of Madīna.

six reprints, brought out from Lucknow, Cairo, Jidda and Damascus, when its first Urdu version was published with several additions and modifications. All those points which had in the meantime occurred to me or required further elucidation were added while revising the Urdu translation attempted by two of my friends. I have, in fact, made some major changes in the Urdu translation by incorporating the findings of certain eminent authors. The Urdu version has thus taken a new shape which can be called a revised version, more detailed and informative than the original Arabic one.

The last discourse in this series was entitled 'Achievements of Muhammad's Prophethood'. The subject matter, as well as the purpose for which these lectures were prepared, demanded that the discussion should be concluded with an examination of the problem relating to the 'finality of Prophethood', in which I had to sum up all the rational and scriptural arguments in its favour. An exhaustive treatment of the subject required more leisure, which, unfortunately, I had none, but now I deemed it proper to discuss the matter in whatever way it was possible than to put off its detailed examination for better times. It also appeared to me to be an opportune moment, or, if I can say so, a providential indication to take up the matter, for the declaration of Ahmadīs as a non-Muslim minority by the Government of Pakistan in September, 1974, had once again drawn the attention of the whole world towards the crucial issue at the bottom of Pakistan's decision. The question then discussed was why the belief in the finality of Muhammad's prophethood should be considered so essential for the Islamic creed and the *Shar'iah* as to expel a sect from the fold of Islam, although it claimed not only to be Muslim but also asserted its valuable service to the cause of that faith? The question so fastened itself to my mind that I could not turn to any other intellectual or literary pursuit for a long time. The fruit of my labour to find out an

answer to this question from the last two chapters of this collection which are, in fact, a befitting epilogue to this book.

I am grateful to Nūr 'Azeem Nadwī, a teacher of the Nadwatul 'Ulamā' for initiating the Urdu translation which was rendered by him for publication in the *Al-Hudā*, a journal brought out from Patna, but he could not complete the work owing to his academic preoccupations. Shams Tabrīz Khān deserves the thanks of all those who have read it in Urdu, since he subsequently sought for my permission to translate the remaining lectures with a view to bringing out the Urdu version from the Academy of Islamic Research and Publications. I was at first doubtful if the vigour and elegance of the Arabic text could be maintained in the Urdu translation, but both the translators have acquitted themselves creditably in maintaining the original tenor.

Now this English version is being presented to all English knowing Muslims who may like to do a bit of heart searching in the light of the contents of this work and see for themselves how far their thoughts and actions are consistent with the precepts and principles enunciated by the prophets of God, particularly by the last and greatest of them, Muhammad (on whom be peace). Verily, no other way than the one chalked out by the divine messengers and guides of humanity carries the guarantee of God's pleasure and ultimate success.

ABUL HASAN 'ALI

Da'ira Shāh 'Alam Ullah
Rae Bareli
June 12, 1976.

1

PROPHETHOOD

Its Need for Humanity and Civilisation

The most appropriate question at the place where we have assembled today would be to consider why prophethood is so essential for humanity and what are the contributions that it has made for the enrichment of human culture and civilisation. The talk here should pertain to those God-moved souls who were raised to the exalted position of prophethood, their propinquity to God, the favours they had bestowed on humanity and the indelible marks they have left on the life and intellectual development of man. It should also relate to the leader of prophets, the last one, who was favoured by God with the eternal and universal mantle of prophethood, was vouchsafed the perennial leadership of mankind and was given an interminable Law and imperishable Scripture for the guidance of the whole of humanity for all times to come, and an article of faith that was decreed as essential for the salvation of every man, to the end of time, irrespective of his colour, race or language. And, this was the city selected for the migration and lasting abode of that leader of all men; it was here that the revelations from the celestial

regions descended last to the surface of our earth.

Therefore, whosoever gets an opportunity to express himself in this sacred city, he must realise the great responsibility lying on his shoulders. He ought to be conscious of the 'Glorious Station' of this city and his talk must be seemly to this august place. Would it be right for him to select any other topic for discussion here? No, one ought to pay here one's homage to the greatest benefactor of humanity. Verily, this is what one's faith demands at this solemn spot and the sense of propriety directs one to do. An Arab poet had perhaps indited these couplets for a similar occasion.

When we came to a meadow flowery,
Abundant in flowers, nice, cool and palmy;
A longing came to my heart at a spot so lovely,
None, but you, were then the soul of my fancy.

A Primary Responsibility of the Jāmi'a

The paramount responsibility of every educational institution of the Islamic world, including the Jāmi'a in this city of the Prophet, is to appreciate the blessings of prophethood—the greatest boon conferred by God on humanity. It should not merely thank God for His greatest favour to mankind but also gratefully take its place beneath the banner of the noble Prophet; for, in a world torn by ignorance, apostasy and cataclysmic revolutions, it behoves every educational institution to dedicate itself to fight the forces of evil on all fronts—social and political, practical and conceptual—until Islam is victorious, supreme.

It should be the lifelong objective and constant effort of the alumni of every Islamic seminary to set the prophetic way of thought and action above every other notion, creed and philosophy formulated by men upholding a variant culture or having a different background, aspiration and temperament.

This is the primary obligation of every student, by far

more imperative and vital than all the educational and literary pursuits which are oftentimes given precedence by their institutions. For the real and interminable conflict is between Ignorance and Prophethood and the former has at its back the whole of the West; the Muslims alone are now the defenders of the Religion of God. Every other struggle save this conflict of ideas and ideals is merely a minor contest, no more than a squabble between the members of a family quarrelling for petty gains and interests.

Now these are some of the trenchant aspects of this crucial issue which ought to be considered in the discussions here, of which this is the first day, in this city of the Prophet, the birthplace of Islam, the stronghold of Faith, the centre of revelation and ultimate destination of the long journey of prophethood undertaken to unfold the will of God through the pages of history.

An Issue of the Widest Import

Every academic institute, be it a university in the East or West, or a cultural and educational organisation of the United Nations like the UNESCO, needs to give thought to this question of universal importance. Man enjoys today numerous facilities which have made his life easier and comfortable, but his greatest misfortune today is that the leadership of the world is not willing to pay heed to the teachings of the prophets of God. Heartlessly indifferent to the greatest divine favour, brought to perfection in the person of the unlettered Prophet, the present guides of humanity seem to declare once again, as if through their actions, the conceited dictum of the pagan past thus summed up by the Qur'ān.

"Shall mere mortals guide us?"¹

They seem to be astounded at the thought of an unlettered man imparting them knowledge and wisdom and

1. Q. LXIV : 6

making them civilised and progressive.

But, unfortunately, if the universities of Europe, America and Asia are not in a mood today to lend an ear to this talk, why can we not discuss the matter here, in this Islamic University of Madīna? Has not this city been always willing to receive the truth, in the manner of fertile ground described in the Qurʾān in these words :

“As for the good land, its vegetation cometh forth by permission of its Lord.”¹

Whatever maxim was preached in this city has resounded in the past all over the world.

Prophets and the Prophethood

I would dare say, with due apology to Muslim scholars, that the elucidation of prophethood in dialectical treatises and credal commentaries has been much too narrow and confined, putting forth a static interpretation which has had little to do with the unbounded possibilities of human life. But, this is perhaps due to limited sphere of dialectics, which is circumscribed by its conceptual and tuitional requirements. We should, therefore, take a look again at the prophets and prophethood in the light of the Qurʾān. This Book of Wisdom will help us to understand the underlying significance and implications of prophethood and will show us how the prophets refashion nations and civilisations by restoring the health of human soul, or, it will rather explain the manner in which prophethood builds up a civilisation different from the materialistic civilisations of ignorance.

The Most Engaging Topic

When we scan the verses of the Qurʾān, we find the portraits of the prophets drawn in such winning, attractive and bright colours that it would be difficult to conceive of

1. Q. VII : 58

more winsome personalities. The description of the prophets by the Qurʾān is vigorous and spirited, sparkling and sublime; it seems as if it were the tale of a dearly adored friend spoken of at length by a lovelorn admirer. A poet has aptly epitomised the impression in a verse which says:

"Sweet was the story, and I spun it long."

I am sure that every man who has a poetic imagination, tender heart and sensibility to appreciate love and beauty cannot fail to enjoy the unique manner of the Quranic expression describing the prophets. Now, see, how lovingly it speaks of the prophet Abraham.

"Lo! Abraham was a nation obedient to Allah, by nature upright, and he was not of the idolaters;

Thankful to His bounties; He chose him and He guided him unto a straight path,

And We gave him good in the world, and in the Hereafter he is among the righteous.

And afterwards We inspired thee (Muhammad, saying): Follow the religion of Abraham, as one by nature upright. He was not of the idolaters."¹

Also, look at these verses making a mention of the prophets.

"That is Our argument. We gave it unto Abraham against his folk. We raise unto degrees of wisdom whom We will. Lo! thy Lord is Wise, Aware.

"And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob; each of them We guided; and Noah did We abide aforetime; and of his seed (We guided) David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus We reward the good.

"And Zachariah and John and Jesus and Elias. Each one (of them) was of the righteous.

"And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot. Each one (of them) did We prefer above (Our) creatures.

1. Q. XVI : 120-23

"With some of their forefathers and their offspring and their brethren; and We chose them and guided them unto a straight path.

"Such is the guidance of Allah wherewith He guideth whom He will of His bondmen. But if they had set up (for worship) aught beside Him, (all) that they did would have been in vain.

"Those are they unto whom We gave the Scripture and command and prophethood. But if these disbelieve therein then indeed We shall entrust it to a people who will not be disbelievers therein."¹

Righteous Models for Humanity

The Qurʾān often describes the piety and devotion of the prophets and sometimes it praises them for their practical wisdom and moral rectitude. Thus, it wants to emphasise that the prophets are the chosen ones, the best of creatures and paragons of humanity, and, by virtue of their being the messengers of God, they are blest with the best of human capabilities and strength.

"Allah knoweth best with whom to place His message."²

About Abraham, says God :

"And We verily gave Abraham of old his proper course, and We were Aware of him."³

The Divine writ about Abraham declares :

"Allah (himself) chose Abraham for friend."⁴

And again :

"And We left for him among the later folk (the salutation) ;

"Peace be unto Abraham !

1. Q. VI : 83-89

2. Q. VI : 124

3. Q. XXI : 51

4. Q. IV : 125

"Thus do We reward the good.

"Lo ! he is one of Our believing slaves."¹

God again praises Abraham thus :

"Lo ! Abraham was mild, imploring, penitent."²

About Ishmael, God declares :

"Lo ! he was a keeper of his promise, and he was a messenger (of Allah), a Prophet."³

As for Moses, the declaration runs :

"And I have attached thee to Myself."⁴

And, also :

"And I endued thee with love from Me that thou mightest be trained according to My will."⁵

At another place, Moses was told that :

"O Moses ! I have preferred thee above mankind by My messages and by My speaking (unto thee)."⁶

Referring to David, it says that :

"And remember Our bondman David, lord of might. Lo ! he was ever turning in repentance (toward Allah). Solomon, the son of David, is praised thus :

"How excellent a slave ! Lo ! he was ever turning in repentance (toward Allah)."⁸

Similarly, the nice and excellent qualities of the prophets are lovingly described in another verse in this manner.

"And make mention of our bondmen, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, men of parts and vision.

"Lo ! We purified them with a pure thought, remembrance of the Home (of the Hereafter).

"Lo ! in Our sight they are verily of the elect, the

1. Q. XXXVII : 108-11

2. Q. XI : 75

3. Q. XIX : 54

4. Q. XX : 41

5. Q. XX : 39

6. Q. VII : 144

7. Q. XXXVIII : 17

8. Q. XXXVIII : 30

excellent."¹

All of you would have read these verses several times, but I have repeated them here in order to remind you of the virtuous qualities of the prophets and to show you how Qur'ān presents them as splendid specimen of humanity possessing goodness and moral rectitude.

A Pertinent Question

Now, in this world, where acquisition of knowledge and accomplishment of ends and desires depend on perception through our senses and our intellectual capabilities, let us see the status of the prophets and their position among other intellectuals and men of learning, how the prophets excel the masterminds of their age and what is the basis of their claim to talk about abstruse realities beyond the ken of human senses? How do they fathom the secrets of indescribable truths, not comprehended by the master spirits of their age, although both are born and brought up at the same place and under similar circumstances? The prophets not only know all about these impenetrable mysteries like a book but, also, strange though it may seem, their knowledge is always proved to be true by subsequent discoveries.

This is a pertinent question that arises in the minds of people around every prophet of God.

The Prophet of Islam had, naturally, to face this question after he was raised to prophethood and started preaching the message of God. The way he answered this question really constitutes one of his perennial miracles.

The Arabs, particularly the people living in the valley of Mecca, had been long cut off from the civilised centres of the ancient world accustomed to philosophical sophistry, yet they were known for their native acumen, sagacity and practical wisdom. The manner in which the Prophet

1. Q. XXXVIII : 45-47

demonstrated the exalted position occupied by the messengers of God amongst other people and their eligibility to expound the truths of mute reality as against those who do not possess any other source of knowledge save the normal senses of perception, was fully congruent with the mental attitude and understanding of the Arabs. The prudent and judicious method adopted by him was more effective than a thousand arguments that would have been given by the philosophers and thinkers, for, it was fully in keeping with the peculiar circumstances and the outlook and inclinations as well as the mental capacity of his people. In fact, this is the method normally adopted by the prophets of God who do not employ artificial or affected style of speech in expounding their eligibility to prophethood. They are wont to speak plainly and to draw weighty conclusions from simple instances of everyday occurrence.

In those days neither there were newspapers, nor the wireless, nor yet were there amplifiers to increase the loudness of sound. How could then the Prophet collect the inhabitants of Mecca at one place at a given time? How could he make the people leave their business and gather at a place to hear his call?

The Prophet was an Arab, and he was fully aware of the habits and customs of his people. He also knew what could make them inclined to a receptive frame of mind and, using that knowledge to his advantage, he gave an answer to the delicate yet difficult question posed to him.

It was a custom among the Arabs that as soon as anybody apprehended danger of a sudden attack by the enemy or found the enemy waiting for a surprise attack on his people, he immediately took to the heights of a hillock and called out *Yā Sabāh, Yā Sabāh* (danger, danger). Everyone who heard the call left his vocation forthwith, took up his arms and rushed to face the enemy. But, what was the danger that required the people to be on their toes, pass sleepless nights and put them in a flutter? This was the

danger of sneak attack by which the enemy put them to sword, looted their property or drove away their cattle. The Arabs were aware of this danger alone since their life in the desert wastes of Arabia was filled with fights and forays. This was the only sense of danger with which they were accustomed and for which the call of *Yā Sabāh* was given on critical occasions.

Although injury to life and property is always painful and distressing, it has little importance in the eyes of the prophets of God for they are aware of the Lord and Master of the world, His attributes and the obligations man owes to Him, as well as the terrible damage caused to human life by man's indifference and ignorance of these compelling realities. The Prophet knew how pernicious was the life of Meccan paganish ignorance which had given birth to many an evil and malignant wickedness. "The people in those days worshipped idols, ate carrion, indulged in licentious misconduct and cruelty, harassed their neighbours and the powerful trampled underfoot the rights of the weak and the helpless."¹

The Prophet had realised that the enemy was not anywhere outside the Arab society, it was within, in their hearts and minds and in their beliefs and morals. He knew that this was more dangerous and baneful than all the hostile forces outside, for this danger emanated from within, from their inmost self; it was more destructive than all the enemies the Arab pagans had to encounter. The animosity of their self was a deadlier foe than the hostile tribes, for, their way of life, conduct and behaviour were sure to invite the wrath of God who abhors apostasy and does not like evil to spread on His earth.

1. This graphic description of the pre-Islamic days of ignorance was given by Ja'far bin Abi Tālib in his speech in the court of Emperor Nagus of Ethiopia.

On Mount Safā

The Prophet repaired one morning to Mount Safā, a hillock near Mecca, and called out loudly *Yā Sabāh, Yā Sabāh*. The inhabitants of Mecca knew that the call was given only on occasions of imminent danger and nobody could dare summon them in that manner merely to play a joke on them. They heard the call being given by the young man whom they had known as *Sādiq* (the truthful) and *Amīn* (the trustworthy). Deep-seated in their heart was the past experience when they had to resist an enemy advancing stealthily soon after hearing that call. They lost no time in hastening towards the person calling them; some came running while the aged sent others to deputise for them.¹ When all the people had gathered round him, he addressed them saying: "O Banī² 'Abdul Muttalib, O Banī Fahr, O Banī K'ab, what would you think if I were to tell you that the enemy is lying in ambush behind this hillock to attack you? Would you believe me?"

The people whom the Prophet had addressed were illiterate and underdeveloped by modern standards, they had studied neither philosophy nor dialectics nor were they accustomed to hair-splitting deliberations but they were realistic and practical people whom God had endowed with enough prudence and common sense. They sized up the man addressing them and gave a quick look round the place where he was standing.

They knew that the man had on all occasions proved himself to be truthful and trustworthy, gracious and well-meaning. He was occupying the top of the mount gazing at them but he could also see on the other side of the hillock which was hidden from their view. They immediately reached the conclusion that anyone occupying such a vantage point was in a position to tell them about the

1. *Al-Bidāyah wan-Nihayah*, Vol. III, p. 38

2. Meaning progeny, a common way of addressing different families

enemy hiding on the other side of the hill. They also recognised that no one could deny the informant simply on the ground that he had not seen the enemy. They had no difficulty in discerning the fact that the hillock in between them and the yonder side of the mount had made all the difference between them and the informant. A man standing on the top could see on the other side and tell about it while they were not in a position to do so.

The Arabs were brave, just and truthful. They replied, "Yes. We cannot contradict you. We shall have to believe whatever you say."

A Meaningful Allegory of Prophethood

With the divine afflatus that goes with prophethood and gift of the gab granted to the Prophet of Islam, he illustrated the subtle and inexpressible significance of apostleship, the unique position occupied by the prophets of God. He explained how the prophets witness the realities of the other world imperceptible to the senses of other individuals. That is why the prophets can foretell events which cannot be predicted by other mortals howsoever learned and intelligent they may be. The messengers of God occupy the heights of prophethood; their instinctive goodness and sharp apprehension of the things perceptible allow them to comprehend the world like other sensible men; but, as prophets of God they also perceive the truths of mute reality.

"Say : I am only a mortal like you. My Lord inspireth in me that your God is only One God."¹

No man howsoever intelligent, learned or sapient he might be, can justifiably reject the teachings or visions of the prophets of God simply because he has not experienced the perceptions of unseen reality like the prophets. The people standing beneath the hillock could not dispute the news about what was happening on the other side, not seen by them ;

1. Q. XVIII : 110

likewise, no man can reasonably dispute the visions and perceptions of those occupying the elevated position of prophethood. And, this is why when the men placing too much reliance on their own limited sense-perception controvert the prophets, the latter are amazed at their ignorance and stupidity. The reply given by the prophets is thus expressed by the Qur'ān :

"Dispute ye with me concerning Allah when He hath guided me?"¹

If imperceptibility of a thing were to be deemed sufficient for the rejection of its existence, the unlettered Arabs of pre-Islamic era could not be regarded as less astute and prudent than the latter-day wiseheads and philosophers who cannot think of any other reason for denying the unseen realities. The pagans of Arabia had rejected the Prophet for they had themselves not perceived the realities spoken of by him. As the Qur'ān says :

"Nay, but they denied that, the knowledge whereof they could not compass, and whereof the interpretation (in events) hath not yet come unto them."²

The question asked by the Prophet from the top of Mount Safā really constituted a natural as well as intelligible premise for cognizance of the status and nature of prophethood. After obtaining affirmation of a *priori* principle of apostleship, the Prophet took the next step. He said to them, "I warn you of terrible doom that awaits you." This was the real and constant danger hovering over their heads, arising out of their own way of life, their beliefs, habits and behaviour. It was a life of the negation of God, of faith, of justice, of kindness and of good manners which had given birth to dissension, cruelty, frustration and mental disquietude.

"Corruption doth appear on land and sea because

1. Q. VI : 80

2. Q. X : 39

of (the evil) which man's hands have done, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return."¹

"And verily We make them taste the lower punishment before the greater, that haply they may return."²

Then, there was the never ending punishment of Hereafter—a torment much more severe and terrible than any castigation of this earth.

"And verily the doom of the Hereafter is more painful."³

"And verily the doom of the Hereafter will be sterner and more lasting."⁴

"And verily the doom of the Hereafter will be more shameful."⁵

Our scientists and researchers have discovered the properties of different substances, found out their uses and latent powers ; they have thereby bequeathed a store of knowledge and power to humanity, for which the whole of human race is grateful to them ; nevertheless, only the prophets are competent to reveal the nature and attributes of God, His commandments and injunctions, relative qualities of faith and action ; good and bad consequences of virtues and vices, merits of heavenly kingdom and the doom of infernal regions.

"(He is) the Knower of the Unseen, and He revealeth unto none His secret, save unto every messenger whom He had chosen."⁶

Standing on the summit of apostleship the prophets can see this world as well as the invisible world and apprise humanity of the impending dangers and gathering clouds.

1. Q. XXX : 41
2. Q. XXXII : 21
3. Q. XIII : 34
4. Q. XX : 127
5. Q. XLI : 16
6. Q. LXXII : 26-27

They are the divine warners unto their people for they put mankind on its guard through exhortation and admonition like a guardian, kind and loving ; but when people reject their advice or question their authority and competence to sound the alarm, they give tongue to their heart-felt sorrow in these words :

"Say (unto them, O Muhammad) : I exhort you unto one thing only ; that ye awake, for Allah's sake, by twos and singly, and then reflect : There is no madness in your comrade. He is naught else than a warner unto you in face of a terrific doom."¹

The Only Way to Guidance

The holy Qur'an repeatedly warns that only the messengers of God are qualified to expound the nature and attributes of God, for the knowledge vouchsafed to them is free from every mistake, misconception and misinterpretation. Nothing else, neither the lambent flame of intellect, nor soundness of judgement, nor yet the brilliance of apprehension can discern the unfathomable cognition of God. Knowledge and experience do not help one to penetrate the mystery of Infinite Being. The dwellers of Paradise who have had an experience of the great Truth, and the validity of whose testimony cannot be questioned, thank God for showing them the right path.

"And they say: The praise to Allah, who hath guided us to this. We could not truly have been led aright if Allah had not guided us."²

They also admit that it were only the prophets who helped them to the awareness of the Ultimate Being.

"Verily the messengers of our Lord did bring the Truth."³

1. Q. XXXIV : 46

2. Q. VII : 43

3. *Ibid.*

These verses of the Qur'ān allude to the compelling necessity of prophethood which is the only means provided by God for leading man to His cognizance and ultimate success in the world to come.

It would not be out of place to examine in this context, how limited, weak and unreliable are intellect and intuition, the mental capacity and subconscious perception of man in apprehending metaphysical realities. Let us see what eminent gnostics known for their learning as well as spiritual enlightenment have to say on this subject.

Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi popularly known as Mujaddid Alf Thānī (d. 1034/1626) has repeatedly emphasised in his epistles that human intellect can affirm the existence of God and grasp the indispensability of the Absolute Being, but it cannot fathom the secrets of Divine nature and attributes nor can it attain the mystic stages of sanctity, purity and Unity in the cognition of Ultimate Being. He writes in one of his letters:

"In short, human intellect is incapable of finding its way to this treasure and, devoid of prophetic guidance, it cannot even reach the doorsteps of the Divine mansion."¹

The history of philosophy, mysticism and religion bears witness to the fact that all those who have placed reliance on human reason or intuition to attain cognition of God have always been misguided by the figments of their own imagination.² In his letters Mujaddid Alf Thānī clinches the point that prophethood surpasses intellect in the same way as intellect excels the senses. He also proves that there is a world of difference between something transcending the understanding of man and its being illogical or against reason. He has cited numerous examples of the stupidity

1. *Maktubāt Imām Rabbānī*, Vol. 3, letter No. 33

2. For a detailed discussion see another work of the author entitled 'Religion and Civilisation'.

of Greek philosophers and fantastic visions of the seekers of Ultimate Reality which, more often than not, pass under the name of spiritualism or mysticism.¹

In one of his letters to Khwāja ‘Abdullah and Khawāja ‘Ubaid Ullah, the sons of his spiritual mentor, Khwāja Bāqī Billāh, Mujaddid Alf Thānī explains why the prophets of God are the sole media for acquiring knowledge of God's nature and attributes and his commandments. He shows that both intellect and beatific visions try to develop harmony and concord with the Infinite but, dwelling, as they do, in the human body, they cannot cast off their concomitances absolutely, nor can they attain perfection. Oftentimes one feels that the enlightenment one has had was got mixed up with impure perceptions acquired through doubt or imagination, but the pity is that one fails to discover it at the time of these illuminations. The Mujaddid's letters throw light on several other matters which give insight into the inner dimensions of the spiritual realm seldom found in the treatises of other mystics.

The concluding verses of *Sūrah As-Saffāt* which contradict the erroneous beliefs of the polytheists, read :

"Glorified be thy Lord, the Lord of Majesty, from that which they attribute (unto Him).

And peace be unto those sent (to warn).

And praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds !"²

These three verses, it would be seen, refer to the essential privity between the undefiled concept of God's attributes and prophethood. Repudiating the blemished view of Godhood held by the polytheists, these Quranic verses immediately deal out peace and blessings to the prophets since they constitute the intermedium for transmitting correct knowledge about the Absolute and Infinite Being, the Lord of the worlds, Who alone deserves all the

1. See *Maktūbāt Imām Rabbāni*, Vol. 3, letter No. 266

2. Q. XXXVII : 180-82

praises.

Setting forth the sublime spirituality of the prophets of God, Sheikh Mujaddid Alf Thānī writes in a letter, "The prophets are the best of creation, possessing the most precious wealth of knowledge. The highest lap of the mystics ascent is the beginning of prophetic journey of spirit. The mystics can never reflect the prophetic qualities. 'Duteous proximity' is all that the mystics can achieve by following the prophets; for, the former cannot hope of attaining the least merit of the latter, not even as much as a drop in the ocean."¹

Another mystic possessing remarkable intuitive vision and spiritual integrity was Makhdūm Yahyā Manerī who had, even before Mujaddid Alf Thānī, thrown light on the higher reaches of prophethood and the prophets. In one of his letters he writes: "Not having the largeheartedness of the prophets, the saints cannot confer the same benefit on mankind as the prophets do. The prophets are really so greathearted that their absorption in the thought of God Almighty does not stand in the way of rendering service to humanity nor their altruistic zeal for human beings distracts their attention from God."² Comparing the saints and prophets in the same letter he says, "A breath of the prophets outweighs the entire life of the saints.... In clarity and purity of spirit and in virtue and sanctity the entire bodily frame of the prophets is like the head and heart of a saint intoxicated with the love of God. There is thus a great difference between the two, for the former find entrance to the place which, for the latter, remains the goal of their heart's ambition."³

Failure of the Greek Philosophers

This is the reason why the efforts of all those persons

1. *Maktubāt Imām Rabbāni*, Vol. I, Letters No. 87-88 and 123
2. *Maktubāt Seh Sadi*, letter No. 112
3. *Maktubāt Seh Sadi*, letter No. 112

are doomed to failure who try to attain cognizance of God's nature and attributes in any way different from that shown by the prophets. Everyone who depends on his own intellect, reason and wisdom to discover the relationship between this world and the Ultimate Being, power and knowledge and the will and pleasure of God, fails miserably in spite of his nimbleness and deep insight in other branches of learning. His ultimate achievement is nothing save untruth and misconception. Such a man really reciprocates the dictum of God—

“Lo ! ye are those who argue about that whereof ye have some knowledge : Why then argue ye concerning that whereof ye have no knowledge ? Allah knoweth. Ye know not !”¹

The ancient Greek metaphysical thought and its precursors, the great philosophers and thinkers of the ancient times, who had made their mark in the fields of poetry, mathematics, geometry, physics, astronomy and cosmology were deceived by their sharpness of intellect and fire of genius. They allowed themselves to be misled by the self-delusion that they would likewise succeed in unravelling the mystery of God's nature and attributes. But, what was the result of ransacking their brains on these questions ? Their thoughts and suppositions and metaphysics present a claptrap of fallacious, illogical and unwarranted quibbling which has been aptly described by Imām Ghazālī as follows :

“.....obscure reflections overcast with darkness. If a man were even to dream of such nonsensical things, he would be adjudged to have a loose screw.”²

Imam Ghazālī's another comment on the metaphysical thought of the Greek philosophers is that—

“I fail to understand how even a raving mad can be

1. Q. III ; 66

2. *Tahafat al-falāsafah*, p. 30

satisfied with this sort of thought, but what should one think of those wise men who keep themselves engaged in hair-splitting of each of these concepts."¹

Sheikh-ul-Islām Ibn Taimiyah was another critic of Greek philosophers. Referring to their crazy metaphysical ideas he says, "Let those endowed with understanding ponder over the speculations of these philosophers who, deluded by their self-conceit, discard the teachings of the prophets but talk like deranged persons in intellectualising their mental impressions. They reject known facts by lame and impotent conclusions but accept suppositions obviously illogical and unfounded through specious reasoning."²

At another place Ibn Taimiyah writes: "When an educated person closely studies Aristotelian metaphysics, he reaches the conclusion that there was none more ignorant of the gnosis of God than these philosophers. He is even more amazed to see certain persons trying to compare Greek metaphysics with the teachings and knowledge obtained through the prophets. Such comparisons are no better than an effort to establish analogy between a blacksmith and an angel or between a petty landlord and an Emperor."³

Mujaddid Alf Thānī also expresses similar views about the incompetence of human intellect to apprehend the Absolute Reality. He writes in a letter to Sheikh Ahmad Farooqī, "If human intelligence had the capacity to solve this problem, the Greek philosophers placing trust in it would not have been misled to the dark alleys of ignorance. They would have been even more cognizant of the Supreme Being, but the fact is that they are the most blockheaded people who had taken God as a Being impotent and

1. *Ibid*, p., 32

2. *Muāfiqah Sarāyah al-M'aqool*

3. *Ar-Radd 'Alal-Muntaqiyin*, p. 395

inoperative."¹ He proceeds further to say in the same letter that "it is strange that there are certain people who call these dolts wisemen and consider them to be the precursors of philosophy. The greater portion of their reasoning in regard to metaphysics is patently wrong and opposed to that contained in the Scripture and the *Sunnah*. How can such persons be called intellectuals and philosophers when the sum total of their researches is nothing but vacuous ignorantness. Of course, they can be humorously called wisemen as a blind is sometimes jocularly given the name of sharp-eyed."²

Verily, such are those who have been thus specified in the Qur^ʿān:

"Did they witness their creation? Their testimony will be recorded and they will be questioned."³

"I made them not witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor their own creation: nor choose I misleaders for (My) helpers."⁴

Mistake of Muslim Scholastics

Islamic scholasticism, also known as dialectics, was deduced from Islamic dogma with a view to defending it against the heretical subtleties of Greek logic and philosophy, but it adopted the approach and method of its rivals. The Muslim dialecticians entered into detailed discussions of eschatological and metaphysical problems completely oblivious of the fact that their fundamental premises were beyond the ken of human perception. The dialectics assimilated the spirit of philosophy which is always apt to disregard its limitations. Here, too, we find discussions in regard to the nature and attributes of God

1. *Maktūbāt Imām Rabbānī*, Letter 2, p. 33

2. *Ibid.*

3. Q. XLIII : 19

4. Q. XVIII : 51

taken up with the same diligence as if it were a chemical analysis conducted in a laboratory where every ingredient could be examined and tested.

A Distinctive Characteristic of the Prophets

The prophets of God are marvellously unique among all men for nobody else shares the life-giving knowledge they possess, which is the fount of all blessings and salvation. Theirs is the light which illuminates the relationship between man and God, divine attributes which have brought the world and man into existence and subsist them, the beginning and end of man, the position of man in the universe and the attitude he should bear to his Lord and Creator. The prophets enlighten us about good and bad behaviours which invite the wrath of God or meet His good pleasure, or which make us successful or doomed in the Hereafter, and the creeds and beliefs, manners and actions, their consequences and the retribution they are likely to produce ultimately. The knowledge acquired through the prophets of God is, precisely, the knowledge of Salvation.

The prophets of God are endowed with innermost recesses of heart, sound understanding, intellectual talents and refined sensitivity but they never meddle with the arts and sciences of their time nor they ever claim mastery over them. Keeping themselves aloof from every other business, they wholeheartedly pursue the course for which they are commissioned by God. They always engage themselves with the transmission of divine message on which depends the salvation and doom of man's earthly existence.

Consequences of Ignoring Prophetic Teachings

Civilised nations of every age, surpassing others in culture, refinement, literacy and skill stand in the need of prophetic teachings almost in the same way as a drowning man needs a life-belt or a man at the verge of death needs

elixir of life. History of bygone peoples bears a testimony to the fact that howsoever advanced and developed a nation may be in the hey-day of its glory, it is no better than undiscerning children in the matter of divine guidance. Whenever it rejected or derided prophetic teachings, it invariably invited death and destruction for itself. Many a developed and cultured nation, known for its intellectual refinement and elegant taste, lost its head in self-conceit but whenever it pointed a finger of scorn at the prophetic teachings and turned its back upon the guidance provided by the prophets, it found its doom sealed by its own vanity and overweening pride. It found to its utter dismay that what it had considered to be intellectual refinement and farsightedness was nothing but stupidity and shallow-mindedness.

Knowledge, Perfect and Imperfect

The difference between the perfect knowledge vouchsafed to the prophets of God and imperfect sciences and skills developed through human endeavour and intelligence is aptly brought out in metaphorical terms by a story I will relate presently. You might have heard it earlier, but I crave your indulgence to repeat it again for it relates to students like you.

Once upon a time a few students went out for boating. It was a fine weather, breeze moved along in a lively manner and the witty boys were in a prankish mood. They found the boatman an agreeable rattle to make merry with him. A boy, more smart than others, soon demanded of the boatman, "Uncle, which of the arts and sciences have you studied?"

"I have not learnt anything," was the reply given coolly by the boatman.

Expressing pity at his ignorance, the boy rejoined, "Oh, you have studied no sciences!"

The boatman said again, "I have not heard even their

names."

Another boy who did not want to lag behind in pulling legs, insisted, "But, you must be knowing something of algebra and geometry?"

The poor boatman humbly replied, "Sir all these things were never heard by me."

"But, you must have learnt", came out the third boy, "geography and history."

"What are these", enquired the boatman, "men or cities?"

Shaking with laughter, one of the boys again asked, "What is your age, Sir?"

The boatman told that he was about forty years of age. On this one of the boys commented, "Then, you have surely wasted half of your life."

The boatman felt slighted, but he kept quiet. The Providence, it seems, wanted to pay the boys in the same coin. The boat had not gone far away when it was overwhelmed by maelstrom. The boat began to shake and swing dangerously. This being the first experience of the boys at rough waters, they were all frightened out of their wits. Now it was the turn of the boatman who, in all seriousness, enquired from the boys, "What are the sciences you have studied, my son?"

The youths and immature students were easily taken in and they began enumerating the subjects they had studied so far. When they had finished, the old boatman again asked with a smile, "It is all right. But, have you learnt swimming? If the boat overturns how would you save your lives?"

None of the boys knew how to swim. They replied with gloomy looks on their faces, "Alas, we never thought of learning it too."

The boatman laughed and said, "As you have just said, I wasted half of my life, but you have ruined the whole of yours. None of your arts and sciences can save your

lives now, for you do not know the only art that could have saved you today !"

This story accurately depicts the pitfalls of all the advanced and cultured but unwary nations. They normally apply themselves to acquire and develop all the branches of learning, discover secrets of nature and treasures of earth and evolve new devices to increase their power, but they ignore the very lustrous knowledge that opens the gate of divine gnosis, tells them how to win the pleasure of God, leads them to salvation and success, teaches the unerring manner of behaviour and conduct, curbs evil nature and carnal instincts, encourages virtuousness and seemliness and creates the awe of the Lord and Master in the heart of man. For these are the qualities indispensable for keeping any society on the right path and guarding it from iniquity, degeneration and wickedness, they alone can help man to find out the importance of Hereafter and being just to others, to hold down his vainglory and self-conceit which deliver him from lust and greed, to take up the path of temperance and self-discipline and to desist from efforts, vain and hurtful, to his own self.

A vivid description of the nations giving themselves airs and showing contempt to the prophets of their age not well-versed in the academic pursuits of their time has been given by God in the holy Qurʾān.

" And when their messengers brought them clear proofs (of Allah's Sovereignty) they exulted in the knowledge they themselves possessed. And that which they are wont to mock befell them."

Acceptance of the Prophets

The world has not changed a bit since the days of yore. Even after the advent of the last Prophet, almost every nation which has made any appreciable progress in culture

and learning, industry and useful arts, has turned its back on the prophets out of sheer arrogance and undue reliance on its intellectuals and experts. Every such nation has been loath to follow the example of the holy Prophet of Islam.

We find the progressive and developed nations of today treading exactly the same path although they can illuminate their darkened souls by the effulgent teachings of the Prophet. They shall soon reap the fruits of their overweening vanity and haughtiness. The time is not far away when their crumbling civilisation shall fall to pieces like a castle built on sand.

A Great danger to Muslim Countries

But the attitude of the Arab and Muslim countries is rather more queer for they have imbibed an unbounded enthusiasm for western civilisation, materialistic values and national or marxist ideals, all of which are nothing but the workings of the mind of Ignorance. They are callously indifferent to the precious and vitalising teachings of Islam. These developments pose a serious threat to them from which nothing can save them, and which is the cause of their internal conflicts and instability, frequent revolutions and jealousies and the bitter temper of their leaders. All this has made them weak and despicable in the eyes of their enemies.

The difference between Scholars and Prophets

How very dissimilar are the prophets from other scholars and sapients can best be illustrated in metaphorical terms of an allegory describing the entry of the experts in different branches of learning in a flourishing city.

Now, the scholars of history going to a city would try to find out the past of that city, who founded it, when and how it progressed and the dynasties that ruled over it.

Another group of men trained in archaeology will look round for the antiquities of pre-historic period, dig out the ruins of the city to find out the primitive remains and fossils, decipher old writings and try to ascertain their age and reconstruct the missing links of its foggy past.

If a group of geographers goes to the town, their interest would, naturally, be limited to the natural and artificial features of the district, its area, the rivers and hills in the vicinity, its climate, produce, etc.

The poets and penmen entering the city would look forward to enjoy the natural surroundings, its refreshing climate and cool breeze for giving expression to their rhythmical creations of beauty.

Another group of men learned in philology and lexicography coming to this city would employ themselves to find out the dialects and idioms of the people there, discuss their origin and development, find out the roots common to the local and other regional vernaculars, study the script and phonology of that language and thus make valuable addition to the knowledge existing heretofore on the subject.

All these endeavours of the men learned in different branches of arts and sciences are undoubtedly valuable and extremely necessary for the furtherance of human culture. None of these need be paid attention less than it deserves, for everyone of them enriches human understanding in its own way and in a particular manner; but, despite the important work these learned men would be performing, they are likely to find themselves in difficulty if they do not care to be well-informed about something more about the town. They would have to find out who rules the city, what sort of government is there, what are the local rules and regulations for the foreigners and the customs and habits of the people. They would need to be thoughtful of the taxes to be paid by them. If any scholar or expert is unmindful of these or other similar matters he is sure

to land himself in difficulty.

Yeoman's service performed by the Prophets

Now, suppose another group of persons, capable, virtuous and well-meaning, comes to this city but its aim is entirely different from the purpose with which all the other groups of learned men had come there earlier. These people come to guide the inhabitants of the city in the rights and duties of citizenship or are rather charged by the absolute monarch of the city to teach the people in behaviours proper to citizenship. They obtain orders direct from the monarch and disseminate these among the populace. They would, no doubt, be recognised before long as the essential link between the supreme power ruling over the city and the people living there.

There can be no doubt that all the experts and learned men engaged in different intellectual pursuits in that city would feel grateful to these new-comers. It is because of them that peace and amity prevails in the city which enables the people in every walk of life to pursue their trades and callings. It is they who expound the edicts of the ruler to all and tell them how to develop their talents. They lay down the guiding principles for the development of different arts and disciplines. Thus, without their benign help and guidance no artisan or man of letter will know how to live and carry on his work in that city ; everyone will break the law and go to prison instead of devoting himself wholeheartedly to the trade of his choice. No learning, no art, no trade and none of the discoveries in any field shall be of any use to the people without peace and amity reigning over the city which depends on the knowledge of regulations and commands of the ruler. This is the great axiom round which every other branch of knowledge, arts and expertise must align itself, and that is why the prophets are sent to expound the Ultimate Truth or gnosis of God.

"Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth that he might be of those possessing certainty."¹

The Most Sacred Duty

This allegory would become more meaningful if one were to remember that the monarch ruling over the city is not merely a ruler or administrator but also the Master and Creator of the city and all that belongs to it; He has brought everything into existence, given life to every sentient being, provided for all their needs and is the Sustainer, the Benevolent, the Merciful and the Compassionate Sovereign. He has more tender regard for His creation than the attachment of a mother to her children. The affectionate love and benevolence bestowed by God on His creations is described by the Qur'an in these verses of lasting beauty.

"He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the Knower of the Invisible and the Visible He is the Beneficent, the Merciful.

"He is Allah, than Whom there is no other God, the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, Peace, the Keeper of Faith, the Guardian, the Majestic, the Compeller, the Superb, glorified be Allah from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him).

"He is Allah, the Creator, the Shaper out of naught, the Fashioner. His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifieth Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise"²

A lively sense of the Living, Dominant God acquired through one's intellect, His love filling the inmost recesses of one's heart, dutiful submission of one's whole being to Him and an ardent desire to gain proximity to Him

1. Q VI, 75

2. Q LIX, 22-24

constitute, in reality, the most sacred duty and the greatest honour one can look forward to or, rather, the compelling demand of human nature. And, this being the great purpose for which the prophets are sent by God, one can very well see what an exalted place these heavenly beings and their mission occupy in comparison to the aims and aspirations of other human beings. They are as much necessary for the existence of man as soul is for the body or intellect and the eyes are for man. Notwithstanding all the arts and literature, culture and civilisation, trade and industry, the world would have remained in obscure darkness without the prophets of God.

"Or, as darkness on a vast, abysmal sea. There covereth him a wave, above which is a wave, above which is a cloud. When he holdeth out his hand he scarce can see it. And he for whom Allah hath not appointed light, for him there is no light ""

Excellence and Virtue of Humanity

The prophets do not merely impart certitude and gnosis of the Supreme Being, but they also furnish another handsome fortune to the humanity on which depends the value and merit of human civilisation. This precious gift is the love for virtuousness and hatred for viciousness, the determination to sacrifice one's all for a just cause and to fight iniquity and wickedness. For all the means man possesses, the endeavours and efforts he makes signify nothing but an expression of his will and determination; his earnestness in making effort for a righteous cause lies at the root of every advancement, every noble achievement. Nothing man brings to pass, but that he first aspires to achieve; and, no accomplishment, nice and goodly, has he to his credit but that the prophetic teachings had been its fount and origin. The prophets had in every time and clime, promoted

1. Q. XXIV : 40

the health of human soul and curbed the machinations of the devil; they have awakened the inborn instinct of man to fight for justice and oppose iniquity, or, roused the moral consciousness of the people among whom they were born. And, whenever this salubrious spirit of man has weakened, he has deteriorated to the level of wild beasts. As we see from the stories of different nations narrated in the Qur'ān, the prophets have cured the people of their misanthropy, made them to assimilate feelings of goodness and charity and taught them to put curb on the instincts of malevolence and bestiality. They have always worked untiringly, put their honour and lives at stake and, at times, sacrificed whatever they had for the propagation of their noble teachings. And, always, through their ceaseless endeavour, they have succeeded in bringing up a band of good-natured men out of ungenial and fiendish people around them, and then their sweet temper, benevolence and warmth of heart have shone through the ages like God's own handwriting. These saintly souls have left the angels far behind them in goodness and virtue, given a new life to the decadent humanity, promoted fair play and justice, inspired the weak and downtrodden to wrest their rights from the mighty despots and taught the rules of courtesy and mercy to the heartless brutes. It was through their efforts that man has learnt the benefits of the kingdom of God on earth, his soul was lit up with the light of faith and his heart, swept clean of selfishness and greed, began to be attracted by virtue and piety.

No other group or class of human species has a greater claim to the enrichment of culture and refinement of civilisation than the blessed apostles of God. Their graciousness and loving care has ever thrown its arms around the entire gamut of human existence; the charm and grace, the modesty and restraint and the dignity and nobility of human beings are the gifts made by them, and all these can be preserved only by following in their footsteps. Had there

not been these angelic souls, the humanity would have gone to rack and ruin with all the treasures of its learning, wisdom and philosophies ; only savage brutes, ignorant of their Creator, faith and morals would have been stalking along the earth today without any trace of charity and compassion; and man would not have had any ambition save to satisfy the wolf in his stomach.

All the nobler values and finer instincts, moral concepts and worthwhile knowledge and zeal to fight the evil emanate from the teachings and endeavours of the prophets and their worthy followers. From the day this world came into existence to the end of time man can find refuge under the protective care of the prophets and can chart out his course of action in the light of their guidance. Peace and blessings be to all of them.

The world in bloom you see this day,
Is the harvest of garden they have grown.

Distinctive Characteristics of Prophethood

In the earlier discourse I had set forth the necessity and the worth and dignity of prophethood to show how genuinely the world stands in need of the prophets of God ; how they have benefited the human culture and civilisation ; what function they perform ; and, finally, what is the nature of their message to the world. Now I want to indicate the distinctive characteristics of prophethood to show how and in what manner the prophets of God stand apart from other thinkers and reformers of the world.

The Misleading Terminology

It cannot be gainsaid that the artificial and imitative style of modern writers, undue zeal for politics as well as political parties and their leadership and the modern concepts and methods of education have done a great harm to the comprehension of the nature and purpose of prophethood. I do not deprecate the modern categories of thought which are responsible for spreading the light of education to a sizable segment of humanity, raising the standard of living, fighting the evils of injustice and liberating the countries from thralldom. These are all to be recognised and praised but the concepts originating from these sources have so captured the hearts and minds of the people, become such

an inalienable part and parcel of their thought and action, character and behaviour and have been so intimately bound up with the positive values moving the people to action that one seldom thinks of prophethood as something different from the conceptual framework of the vocabulary employed to express political or social reform.

We find today even the leaders, thinkers and writers preaching Islamic revivalism displaying these inspirations in their writings and speeches wherein they seem to be developing the character and message of the prophets in the modern political or economic jargons which simply act as a barrier in the appreciation of true features, characteristics and the intent and purpose of prophethood. These terminologies stand in the way of recognising the exceptional eminence of the prophets and hence fail to move the people in taking them as the greatest exemplars of humanity. These dialects and their attached concepts, in fact, give such a twist to the mind that it becomes incapable of realising the worth and significance of prophethood.

The political vocabulary, now in common usage owing to the strong influence exerted by the current political thoughts and concepts of national sovereign states and the political means to establish and sustain them, has a definite thought content and mental image which is derived from its peculiar historical genesis. The mental impressions these terms convey having been developed in a particular background, and, limited by the definite import they have come to acquire, not only fail to impart the correct sense and spirit of prophetic teachings but more often cause a misunderstanding. The words like 'revolution', 'revolt', 'democracy', 'socialism' and 'social order' reflect particular conceptual images which have taken shape through the passage of time in definite locales and circumstances, peculiar to each, and are thus associated with certain events and experiences from which they cannot be detached. The expression and locution of the Qur^ʿān are, thus, best suited for

delineation of the message of Islam and the prophets, depicting the imagery of revelation and communicating the sanctity of divine guidance. The Quranic mode of expression is, in truth and reality, free from all the pitfalls of misunderstanding and impediments of artificial articulation, and it alone reflects the essence and spirit of the true religion of God.

The Need for the Study of the Qur'an

It is thus absolutely essential, for gaining an understanding of the important matter we seek to discern, that the Qur'an should be studied closely, in depth and free from all pre-conceived ideas and extraneous impressions. Our predilections and likings would need to be kept aloof in our search for the truth. May be our intentions and desires are above reproof, or even laudable, or they may genuinely represent our natural instincts, but it is not at all necessary that the Qur'an should be a witness to everything we consider desirable. Nor is it necessary that the lives and characters of the prophets should conform to the model held by us as the matrix of the desirable. The aim in studying the Qur'an should never be to make its teachings come to terms with the limitations of time and age; for, the present always becomes past, patterns of thought undergo a change, values alter and viewpoints turn and shift with the changes and chances of the mortal life, but the eternal, immutable Book of God has an abiding character. The entire fund of human knowledge and all the theories and speculations of man are like sand dune hills which go on rising and sinking, expanding and shrinking. How can one expect the Qur'an to descend from its celestial heights and keep company with the shifting sands?

The Difference between Prophets and other leaders

The first and foremost difference between the prophets and other leaders, which also marks them distinctly above

all others, is that the knowledge, mission and message of the prophets are neither formulations of their incisive intelligence, intuition or wisdom nor are they reactions to the horrible conditions in which the prophets are born and spend their lives. Their preachings are always divine revelations, the messages communicated from On High for which they are specially selected. Therefore, as the history of religions and reformations tells us, other reformers, thinkers and leaders cannot be brought into comparison with the messengers of God. The former, unlike the prophets, are almost always either products of their circumstances, rebels against the decadent society of their time or exceptionally brilliant men who want to reform the society.

This basic but subtle difference is very often overlooked by those writers and scholars of the Muslim world who try to present an Islamic view of the life and social order with an eye to fight the cultural and political ascendancy of the West. Anyone who has made a deep study of the Qurʾān and the *Sunnah* and is also aware of the forceful impact of modern thought and culture, but has had the moral and intellectual grit to steer clear of the contaminating influences of modernism, can easily detect the traces of Western ideology and thought in the writings of such Muslim reformers.

Attention may be invited to a marked difference between the thought and message of modern Muslim leaders working for renaissance of the Islamic world and revivalists of the old who had imbibed the true faith and spirit of Islam under the guidance of some God-moved soul. This consists of the objectives and the means the two groups adopt for achieving their ends. The former have, as their greatest objective, establishment of an Islamic state or capturing political power to that end while the primary aim of the latter was to win the pleasure of God, to achieve salvation in the Hereafter, to bring about reparation of faith and conscience and to disseminate truth among the people. It is for such

persons that the Qurʾān declares :

"As for the abode of the Hereafter We assign it unto those who seek not oppression in the earth, nor yet corruption. The sequel is for those who ward off (evil)."¹

The fundamental aim and purpose for which the prophets are sent by God is also described by the Qurʾān. God asks the Prophet of Islam to tell the people that :

"Say: If Allah had so willed I should not have recited it to you nor would He have made it known to you. I dwelt among you a whole lifetime before it (came to me). Have you then no sense?"²

Again, God tells us in the Qurʾān :

"And thus have We inspired in thee (Muhammad) a Spirit of Our command. Thou knewest not what the Scripture was, nor what the Faith. But We have made it a light whereby We guide whom We will of Our bondmen. And lo! thou verily dost guide unto a right path."³

God invites the attention of the Prophet to the same fact in another verse which reads :

"Thou hadst no hope that the Scripture would be inspired in thee; but it is a mercy from the Lord, so never be a helper to the disbelievers."⁴

In yet another verse, the Prophet is told that he was not a witness to the happenings told to him with oracular certainty.

"And thou wast not beside the Mount when We did call; but (the knowledge of it is) a mercy from thy Lord that thou mayst warn a folk unto whom no warner came before thee, that haply they may give heed."⁵

1. Q. XXVIII : 83
2. Q. X : 17
3. Q. XLII : 52
4. Q. XXVIII : 86
5. Q. XXVIII : 46

The divine sources of prophetic revelations and the purpose for which the prophets are raised is thus explained.

"He sendeth down the angels with the Spirit of His command unto whom He will of His bondmen, (saying) : Warn mankind that there is no God save Me, so keep your duty unto Me."¹

This verse also brings out the reason why the prophets are not willing to turn to their inclinations nor are they guided by the environs and the climate of their society. Another verse of the Qurʾān says about the Prophet of Islam :

"Nor doth he speak of (his own) desires. It is naught save an inspiration that is inspired."²

Actually, no prophet is capable of changing the messages received by him or altering the commandments of God Almighty.

"Say (O Muhammad) : It is not for me to change it of my own accord. I only follow that which is inspired in me. Lo! if I disobey my Lord I fear the retribution of an awful Day."³

God does not want His prophets to be complaisant in their mission. He puts this tendency under constraint and guards the prophets against toleration of falsehood.

"Therefore obey not thou the rejecters, who would have had the compromise, that they may compromise."⁴

The prophets are even threatened with dreadful punishment in case they commit the mistake of ascribing anything wrongfully to God or adding or concealing anything of the message vouchsafed to them.

"It is a revelation from the Lord of the Worlds. And if he had invented false sayings concerning Us, We assuredly had taken him by the right hand

1. Q. XVI : 2
2. Q. LIII : 3-4
3. Q. X : 15
4. Q. LXVIII : 8-9

And then severed his life-artery,
And not one of you could have held Us off from Him."¹

The prophets are charged to propagate faithfully, both in letter and in spirit, the divine revelations received by them.

"O Messenger ! Make known that which hath been revealed unto thee from thy Lord, for if thou do it not, thou wilt not have conveyed His message. Allah will protect thee from mankind. Lo ! Allah guideth not the disbelieving folk."²

Now, this is the fundamental distinctive mark setting the prophets apart from other teachers whose call represents the response of their own consciousness to the surrounding conditions, cultural debasement or social plight, or it is an outcome of the vexation of spirit prevailing among the thoughtful class at that time. The latter always take cognizance of the needs of their time and often reconcile to the situation even if it means giving up some of their principles. They sometimes strike a bargain with their opponents and are not averse to a give-and-take. Most of them have faith in the maxim : Make hay while the sun shines.

Prophetic Wisdom

This does not mean that the prophets are indifferent to prudence or they are unmindful of the needs of time, inclinations of the people or of the suitable methods for achieving their objectives. They are sagacious *par excellence* and their methods are the surest and easiest, for wisdom, insight and soundness of judgement are the inherent qualities of prophetic design. The endeavours of the prophets, particularly, the life and character of the last of them, Muhammad, bespeak of innumerable examples of their profound insight and sober mindedness. The following verses of the Qur'an

1. Q. LXIX : 43-47

2. Q. V : 67

allude to the sagacity of the prophets.

"And (it is) a Qur'ān that We have divided, that thou mayst recite it unto mankind at intervals, and We have revealed it by (successive) revelation."¹

"Allah desireth for you ease; He desireth not hardship for you."²

"And those who disbelieve say: Why is the Qur'ān not revealed unto him all at once? (It is revealed) thus that We may strengthen thy heart therewith; and We have arranged it in right order."³

"And hath not laid upon you in religion any hardship."⁴

The Prophet of Islam always instructed his disciples to be lenient to the people and to encourage them. While sending Ma'āz bin Jabal and Abū Mūsa Ash'arī to Yamen the Prophet directed them saying: "Present (the teachings of) Islam leniently; do not make them rigid; give glad tidings to the people; and do not make them shrink from it."⁵

On another occasion, he told his companions: "You have been sent to smooth the way and not to create difficulties."⁶

Sometimes the Prophet postponed certain matters in view of things which were of greater importance, as, for example, once he told 'Āysha: "If your people had not parted with paganism only recently, I would have demolished the Ka'aba to raise it again on the foundations laid by Abraham."⁷

Ibn Mas'ūd relates that "the Prophet used to drop his discourses on certain days so that we might not get tired of

1. Q. XVII : 106

2. Q. II : 185

3. Q. XXV : 32

4. Q. XXII : 78

5. *Bukhārī*.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

them."¹ Another companion of the Prophet, Jābir, relates that "Ma'āz bin Jabal used to offer prayers with the Prophet, and then, returning to his home, he used to lead the congregational prayers in a mosque in that locality. Once he recited the *Sūrah Baqar* during the '*Ishā'* prayers with the result that a man moved away from the prayer. Ma'āz took a dislike to that man. When the Prophet came to know of the incident, he exclaimed "mischief-monger! mischief-monger! mischief-monger!" What the Prophet meant was that undue prolongation of the prayers was likely to make people weary of devotional exercises and cause dissension among them. It is also related by Ibn Mas'ūd that "Once a man said to the Prophet 'I have always to fall behind in the *Fajr* prayers because the Imām recites very lengthy *Surahs*.'" The Prophet became so angry that none had seen him in such a temper earlier during the sermons. He said, "Hark O people! Some of you tire the people and drive them away from religion. Whoever amongst you leads the prayer, he ought to shorten it for there are people behind him who may be weak or old or in a hurry."²

There are many more similar instances reported by almost all the biographers of the holy Prophet. The earlier prophets, too, were endowed with sagacity and prudence as God tells us in the Qur'ān.

"And gave him (David) wisdom and decisive speech."³

"Those are they unto whom We gave the Scripture and command and prophethood."⁴

But, the latitude allowed by the prophets in gradual acceptance of their teachings is really meant to make things easy for the people of different temperaments and

1. *Bukhārī*

2. *Ibid.*

3. Q. XXXVIII : 20

4. Q. VI : 90

capabilities. The step by step introduction of religious observances is just a means but they are always vigilant and sternly rigid in matters, such as, articles of belief, faith versus infidelity, Oneness of God versus plurality of deities, acceptance versus rejection of the Divine commands, and similar other matters of fundamental importance. The prophets are never lenient in these matters; nor do they ever compromise with the forces of evil.

An Essential Aspect of Prophetic Teachings

The prophets always come to invite mankind to accept the Oneness of God. The fundamental aim of the prophets being to establish proper communion between man and God: they have always, in all circumstances and in all times, preached that God alone had the power to do good or harm, and that only He could be the object of worship, prayer and oblations. Speaking conversely, the prophets have to battle against the worshipful homage paid by man to idols, saints and sacred spirits. The Arabs of the pagan past believed that these idols and spirits were revered beings which enjoyed divine powers bestowed by God in certain specific matters. They held the view that these intercessors could intercede with God on behalf of their votaries in the same way as the administrators appointed by an Emperor for different parts of his realm are charged with the responsibility of governing their respective areas.

All those persons who have studied the Qur^ʿān, which encompasses all the previous scriptures, know that the fundamental aim of prophethood has always been to fight against idol worship which represents the tendency of man to create gods for himself. The prophets thus deliver mankind from the slavery of his own creation. This, verily, constitutes the sum and substance of their message and the aim of their endeavours. They begin their prophetic career with this message and it remains the focus of their attention throughout their lives.

The Qur'ān, as we can see, sometimes refers briefly to the purpose for which prophets are sent.

"And We sent no prophet before thee but We inspired him, (saying) : There is no God save Me (Allah), so worship Me."¹

Another time, it mentions the names of the prophets and cites their word of advice.

"And We sent Noah unto his folk (and he said) : Lo ! I am a plain warner unto you. That ye serve none, save Allah. Lo ! I fear for you the retribution of a painful Day."²

"And unto (the tribe of) A'ad (We sent) their brother, Hūd. He said : O my people ! Serve Allah ! Ye have no other God save Him. Lo ! Ye do not but invent."³

"And unto (the tribe of) Thamūd (We sent) their brother Sālih. He said, O my people ! serve Allah. Ye have no other God save Him. He brought you forth from the earth and hath made you husband it. So ask forgiveness of Him and turn unto Him repentant. Lo ! my Lord is Nigh, Responsive."⁴

"And unto Midian (We sent) their brother Shu'eyb. He said : O my people ! Serve Allah. Ye have no other God save Him ! And give not short measure and short weight. Lo ! I see you well-to-do, and lo ! I fear for you the doom of the besetting Day."⁵

The preachings of Abraham, calling upon his people to desist from the worship of idols and to pay homage to God alone, has been mentioned in greater detail.

"And We verily gave Abraham of old his proper course, and We were Aware of him.

1. Q. XXI : 25

2. Q. XI : 25-26

3. Q. XI : 50

4. Q. XI : 61

5. Q. XI : 84

"When he said unto his father and his folk : What are these images unto which ye pay devotion ?

"They said : We found our fathers worshippers of them.

"He said : Verily ye and your fathers were in plain error."¹

"Recite unto them the story of Abraham : When he said unto his father and his folk : What worship ye ?

"They said : We worship idols, and are ever devoted unto them.

"He said : Do they hear you when ye cry ?

"They said : Nay, but we found our fathers acting on this wise.

"He said : See now that which ye worship, ye and your fathers ! Lo ! they are (all) an enemy unto me, save the Lord of the Worlds, Who created me, and He doth guide me. And Who feedeth me, and watereth me.

"And when I sicken, then He healeth me, and Who causeth me to die, then giveth me life (again), and Who, I ardently hope, will forgive me my sin on the Day of Judgement."²

"And make mention (O Muhammad) in the Scripture of Abraham. Lo ! he was a saint, a Prophet.

"When he said unto his father : O my father ! Why worshippeth thou that which heareth not nor seeth, nor can in aught avail thee ?"³

"And Abraham ! (Remember) when he said unto his folk : Serve Allah, and keep your duty unto Him ; that is better for you if ye did know.

"Ye serve instead of Allah only idols, and ye only invent a lie. Lo ! those whom ye serve instead of

1. Q. XXI : 51-54

2. Q. XXVI : 69-82

3. Q. XIX : 41-42

Allah own no provision for you. So seek your provision from Allah, and serve Him, and give thanks unto Him, (for) unto Him ye will be brought back."¹

He said: Ye have chosen idols instead of Allah. The love between you is *only* in the life of the world. Then on the Day of Resurrection ye will deny each other and curse each other, and your abode will be the Fire, and ye will have no helpers."²

Overlordship of the One and only God occupies the central place in the teaching of another prophet, Joseph. Quoting the sermon administered by him to his fellow prisoners, the Qur^ʿān says:

"He said: The food which ye are given (daily) shall not come unto you but I shall tell you the interpretation ere it cometh unto you. This is of that which my Lord hath taught me. Lo! I have forsaken the religion of folk who believe not in Allah and are disbelievers in the Hereafter.

"And I have followed the religion of my father, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It never was for us to attribute aught as partner to Allah. This is of the bounty of Allah unto us (the seed of Abraham) and unto mankind: but most men give not thanks."

"O my two fellow-prisoners! Are divers lords better, or Allah the One, the Alm^ʿghty?

"These whom ye worship beside Him are but names which ye have named, ye and your fathers. Allah hath revealed no sanction for them. The decision rests with Allah only, Who hath commanded you that ye worship none save Him. This is the right religion, but most men know not."³

Moses invited Pharaoh to submit to Allah although the

1. Q. XXIX : 16-17

2. Q. XIX : 25

3. Q. XII : 37-40

latter claimed to be the veritable Incarnate Deity of Egyptians—the physical son of the Sun-god—and used to tell his subjects: "I am your Lord, Most High"¹ and "O Chiefs! I know not of a god for you except me."² Pharaoh also threatened Moses, saying: "If thou chooseth a god other than me, I assuredly shall place thee among the prisoners."³

The Qur'^{ān} designates idol worship as the greatest blasphemy and filth and severely denounces it. The *Sūrah Al-Hajj* reads:

"That (is the command): And whoso magnifieth the sacred things of Allah, it will be well for him in the sight of his Lord. The cattle are lawful unto you save that which hath been told you. So shun the filth of idols, and shun lying speech.

"Turning unto Allah (only), not ascribing partners unto Him; for whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah, it is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had snatched him or the wind had blown him to a far-off place."⁴

Idolatry and associating partners to God (paying divine honours, supplicating or prostrating before beings other than God or offering up an oblation to them) is the universal and eternal ignorance which has always been the greatest falling of man—a wickedness which has always stirred within him. But, this is the sacrilege which provokes the indignation of God, bars the way of spiritual, moral and cultural progress of man and brings about his fall from the exalted place he occupies to the bottomless chasm of ungodliness. It is because of this that the Qur'^{ān} says:

"Surely We created man of the best stature
Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low."⁵

1. Q. LXXI: 24
2. Q. XXVIII: 38
3. Q. XXVI: 29
4. Q. XXII: 30-31
5. Q. XCV: 4-5

And this is the ignorance or insensibility of man that makes God's noblest creation, who was once venerated by the angels, bow his head before despicable objects ; it deals a death blow to his vigour and competence ; it wipes out man's faith in the Ultimate Being ; it causes man to spurn the boundless love, charity and beneficence of the Almighty God ; and man is obliged to take shelter under the shadow of lifeless, impotent and lowly creatures which have nothing to offer him.

"He maketh the night to pass into the day and He maketh the day to pass into the night. He hath subdued the sun and moon to service. Each runneth unto an appointed term. Such is Allah, your Lord ; His is the Sovereignty ; and those unto whom ye pray instead of Him own not so much as the white spot on a date-stone.

"If ye pray unto them they hear not your prayer, and if they heard they could not grant it to you. On the Day of Resurrection they will disown association with you. None can inform you like Him Who is Aware.

"O mankind ! Ye are the poor in your relation to Allah. And Allah ! He is the Absolute, the Owner of Praise."¹

Quranic Terminology

In every time and clime the prophets of God had to wage war against these very concepts of idol worship and plurality of God—appearing in different metaphysical fantasies—for they corrupt and degrade man.

"And they marvel that a warner from among themselves hath come unto them, and the disbelievers say : This is a wizard, a charlatan.

"Maketh the gods One God ? Lo ! that is an astounding thing.

1. Q. XXXV : 13-15

"The chiefs among them go about, exhorting : Go and be staunch to your gods ! Lo ! this a thing designed."¹

Every sensible man who goes through the literature and history of the times of the holy Prophet or the biographies of his companions cannot fail to discern that the naked idolatry or ascribing of partners to God, mentioned in some of the verses of the Qur'an cited here, was then understood by the people as adverting to idol worship, plurality of the divine being, prostration before idols, paying homage to saints, living or dead, humbling oneself before them, and having faith in celestial beings who were believed to intercede for them with God, wipe off their sins or confer grace and goodness on their votaries. Likewise, the people had then deduced only the theological sense of the words like *Ilāh* (God), *Rabb* (Lord and Nourisher of the world), *ibādāt* (worship) and *dīn* (religion). The context in which these words were then used in the sayings and writings leave no doubt about the meaning of these words. Nor had anyone raised any doubt about the sense and import of such words.

Cornerstone of Religious Movements

Overlordship of God is, then, the cardinal point of every religion and religious reformatory movement, the legacy of the prophets, and so shall it remain to the end of time. Speaking of the bequest of Abraham, the Qur'an says :

"And he made it a word enduring among his seed, that haply they might return."²

And, this marks the direction of the call of all the preachers of religion, reformers and crescentaders. There are, undoubtedly, varied presentments of the pagan ignorance as, for example, obedience to the powers defying God, or

1. Q. XXXVIII : 4-6

2. Q. XLIII : 28

acknowledgment of the authority, directives and laws of an un-godly regime ; but these evince merely subservience to the values, principles and spirit of idolatry, and cannot be equated with the stark infidelity displayed in adoring idols or deifying beings other than God. For all these acts occupy a secondary place to the matrix of paganism, it would be improper to strike a balance between the substance and the accidents, the essential and the accessories. It would be equally erroneous to view pre-Islamic paganism as dated or inadequate in scope to cover the credos of modern ignorance. This would, in fact, amount to harbouring suspicions about the adequacy of the teachings and endeavours of the apostles of God, challenging the perenniality of the Qur^ʾān and refusing to believe that the method adopted by the chosen guides of humanity for its reform and betterment was most suitable and efficacious or that their method was in accordance with the divine will and purpose.

A Word of Advice

Many of you would come out of your educational institutions as preachers and reformers, teachers and writers and leaders and intellectuals. I want to give you a piece of advice which is the result of my life-long study and experience. I may also tell you that you would be able to appreciate full import of my counsel when you have grown wise in the ways of the world.

I warn you against presenting Islam in a way that may give an impression that the earlier generations had not been able to fathom the true spirit of faith or that they had failed to comprehend the fundamental precepts of the Qur^ʾān or its phraseology. Islam contains plain and distinct truth, intelligible to all ages and circumstances, but any presumption of this nature simply goes to prove that the Book of God has remained an impenetrable mystery during the times gone-by. It would mean that shortly after its revelation the Qur^ʾān became incomprehensible. But

this is against the Quranic dictum: "Lo! We, even We, reveal the Reminder, and lo! We verily are its Guardian."¹ In this verse the promise of God to safeguard His message includes cognizability of the Quranic text and its meanings, translating its teachings into practice and a congruence between its doctrines and the ever changing life of man. How can any scripture command the respect of man if it remains dead for ages, unknowable and unacted for a long, long time? God tells His Prophet in the Qur'²ān:

"Lo I upon Us (resteth) the putting together thereof and the reading thereof.

"And when We read it, follow thou the reading;

"Then lo! upon Us (resteth) the explanation thereof."²

The new slant adopted by certain thinkers and writers of the modern age implies that the Muslim peoples who had exhibited wonderful qualities of head and heart were in fact a dormant people suffering from intellectual languor. How can you expect to get the harvest from a grove which remains without leaves and stems for such a long time? One would certainly lose every hope of the capability and future unfoldment of such people.³

1. Q. XV : 9

2. Q. LXXV : 17-19

3. We may give here, as an example, few quotations from a well known book "*Qur'²ān ki Chār Bunyādi Istalahāt*" (The four basic terminologies of the Qur'²ān), by Maulānā Saiyid Abul 'Alī Maudūdī, the founder of Jama'at Islāmi, in which the learned author seeks to prove that the four Quranic terms *Ilāh* (God), *Rābb* (Lord and Nourisher), *dīn* (religion) and *'ibādāt* (worship), comprehensible to the people when the Qur'²ān was revealed, lost their meanings to the succeeding generations. He writes:

"But in the centuries following that in which the Qur'²ān was revealed, the meanings of these words as understood during the time of the Qur'²ān's revelation gradually suffered a change; and ultimately the wide connotation of these terms became extremely limited or rather ambiguous" (p. 4).

This assumption may not appear to be outrageously damaging at the first glance, but it is bound to make a deep impression on one's mental attitude and way of thinking; for, it throws doubt upon the capability of the people charged to keep guard and disseminate the message of Islam. Since this raises doubts about the soundness of past efforts made for the furtherance of Islam and renders undefendable all the great achievements of Muslim preachers and reformers, it becomes doubtful whether similar endeavours in future would be in the right direction. It bears a helping hand to the enigmatic imagery of the Bātinities who sought to promote their interests by introducing the obscure concepts of esoteric or underlying reality and the extrinsic or supervenient form of religion. For Islam was not passed on by one generation to another merely through written pages, such a presumption is not only against the universal belief of the Muslims but also against the historical evidence. The forebears had continued to teach and train the

After giving the reasons for the alteration of their sense, the author concludes that :

"The result was that it became difficult for the people to understand the original import of the Qur'ān" (p. 5).

Explaining the consequences of this perversion, he says :

"The fact is that owing to the twist in the original purport of these four basic terms, the substance of the three-fourth or even more of the Qur'ān became incomprehensible. This is the reason why we find errancy in the beliefs and behaviours of the people who now-a-days acknowledge Islam as their faith" (p. 6).

Anybody who has not studied the Qur'ān deeply or is not aware of the fact that God has mercifully saved the followers of Islam from any general or widespread aberration would, naturally, arrive at the conclusion that the pith and substance of the Qur'ān has, for ages, remained out of sight of all the Muslims, or at least a great majority of them. He would be led to believe that the Muslims, having lost the true sense of the basic terminologies of the Qur'ān, round which revolve its thought content, message and teachings, have been able to penetrate its meaning only by the middle of the present century.

succeeding generations in the recitation of the Qurʾān, its contents and meanings and the observance of its commandments. And, this is the reason why the Qurʾān is spoken of by God as 'a Lecture in Arabic,'¹ 'that maketh plain'² and 'a Scripture the revelations whereof are perfected and then expounded.'³ These characteristics and distinguishing marks of the Qurʾān give a lie to the theory that its expressions and implications have remained lying under the surface for any length of time.

Another inference drawn from this way of thinking is that since the followers of Islam had been, for a long time, oblivious of the true content and import of the basic glossary of the Qurʾān on which rested the perfection of their faith and behaviour, they had gone astray from the right path, or, to be more exact, drifted to the path of impious nonconformity. But, the Book of God as well as the sayings of the Prophet are explicit on the point that the votaries of Islam shall never fall a prey to any extensive undutifulness, unlike the followers of earlier prophets. Eminent doctors of religion and reputed Traditionists are all agreed in holding this view. Although the Tradition: "My followers shall not be united in waywardness" is not considered unimpeachable by virtue of its transmitting links, it is nevertheless correct in its sense and content. Abū Mohammad 'Alī Ibn Hazm (d.1063), the noted Andalusian Traditionist and Critic writes in *Al-Ahkām fi Usūl il-Ahkām* :

"Traditionists hold the view that the followers of Islam can never unite in unvirtuousness because the Prophet has predicted that they shall be the standard-bearers of Truth in every age. The Prophet is reported to have said: 'My followers shall never be united in waywardness.' Although the language of the Tradition and its transmission is not regarded as

1. Q. XII : 2

2. Q. XII : 1

3. Q. XI : 1

unimpeachable,¹ the prophecy made in it is confirmed by other Traditions which promise Muslims to walk the straight path in every age."²

Hafiz Ibn Qayyim says : "Thanks God that the Muslims have never come round to give up even one precept or practice of the Prophet save in a case where it was proved to have been abrogated by another precept."³

In his commentary on *Sūrah Nisā*⁴, Hāfiz Ibn Kathīr explains the verse : "And whoso opposeth the messenger after the guidance (of Allah) hath been manifested unto him, and followeth other than the believer's way⁴.....", as adverting to the divine guarantee that the Muslims shall never lend themselves to an erroneous view in religion.⁵

Ibn Taimiyah also agrees to the above view. Discussing the doctrine of *'Ijmā'* or consensus of learned doctors, he writes :

"Unanimous consent of the followers of Islam shall always be right and proper, since, the Muslims will never be of one accord on anything indecorous. For the Qur'ān and the Traditions announce : "Whom they will find described in the Torah and the Gospel (which are) with them, he will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong,"⁶ and "the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another ; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong ;"⁷ concurrence of the Muslims with wrongfulness would mean their failure to perform the duty of

1. This is, in fact, the personal view of Ibn Hazm. Another reputed Traditionist, Sakkāwi, has expressed the view that the Tradition in question is well known and confirmed by several authentic transmitting links *Almaqāsīd-ul-Hasanah*.
2. *Al-Ahkām fi Usul il-Ahkām* Vol. IV, p. 131
3. *Al'ilām-ul-Mauqaen*
4. Q. IV : 115
5. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol II, p. 393 Vol. II, p. 320
6. Q. VII : 157
7. Q. IX : 71

enjoining that which is right and forbidding that which is wrong. In a like manner, reads another verse of the Qurʾān: "Thus We have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witnesses against mankind"¹

It can hardly be denied that the fanciful ideas giving a new interpretation to the Qurʾān arise from attachment of the people to the prevailing political philosophies and parties. There can also be no two opinions about the importance and justification of re-introducing Islamic political system for which, indeed, every Muslim thinker and writer should work ceaselessly. Nevertheless, it is not at all necessary to strain the meaning of Quranic terms nor to give a false colouring to its accepted teachings for proving one's pet notions. The Qurʾān and the *Sunnah* contain enough intrinsic evidence in support of organising the Muslim community on the basis of its own political thought, and the Muslim reformers and preachers of the past have, indeed, successfully invoked them for similar ends. They have enough of clear directions on the subject to require beating about the bush.³

Significance of the Hereafter

Paramount importance attached to the Hereafter is another prophetic mark of distinction: the prophets place

1. Q. II : 143

2. *Fatāwah Ibn Taimiyah*, Vol. 19, p. 176

3. The writer of these lines has recently had an occasion to listen to a paper read out by a Muslim scholar. He tried to prove that the word *Salāt* (prayer) occurring in the Qurʾān meant Islamic state and its sovereignty. He had explained that where the word '*Salāt*' was used without any adjective, it meant local or provincial government but where the Qurʾān mentions '*As-Salāt-ul-Wusta*', it refers to the Central government. This typifies the exegesis of the Qurʾān attempted with the set purpose of bringing forward proof from the Qurʾān in support of one's pre-conceived notions.

so much emphasis on afterlife, give it so much weight and expound it so ardently that it becomes the cardinal point of their message. Those who have studied the lives and teachings of the prophets would have realised the paramount concern of the apostles of God with the life after death. The prophets, it seems, hold their gaze on the Day of Reckoning; they appear to make out the blessings and calamities, comforts and disasters of the Last Day so vividly that they appear to be pining for its boons as well as terrified of its perdition. This is not unexpected of them for their clear perception of the life to come makes it such a living reality to them that their consciousness, feelings and intellect are overflowing with it. Let us see the thrilling description of the after-life, quoted by the Qur'ān from prophet Abraham, wherein his trembling heart, agitated with the rush of emotions, draws a graphic picture of his hopes and fears.

"And Who, I ardently hope, will forgive my sin on the Day of Judgement.

"My Lord! Vouchsafe me wisdom and unite me to the righteous.

"And give unto me a good report in later generations.

"And place me among the inheritors of the Garden of Delight.

"And forgive my father. Lo! he is of those who err.

"And abase me not on the Day when they are raised,

"The Day when wealth and sons avail not (any man),

"Save him who bringeth unto Allah a whole heart.

"And the Garden will be brought nigh for those who ward off (evil),

"And Hell will appear plainly to the erring."¹

1. Q. XXVI : 82-91

Joseph was also a prophet who occupied the exalted position of the ruler of Egypt, then a developed and prosperous country, but he viewed Hereafter in the way characteristic of all the other prophets. God bestowed upon him power and authority and then he was reunited with his family after a long period of separation. This was a befitting occasion to carry away any ambitious man in raptures of delight, but we find Joseph, even on this occasion, burdened with the care of life after death. This canker worm of anxiety had so overtaken Joseph, made him so uneasy and worried that all the worldly gifts and favours enjoyed by him could not set his heart at ease. The supplication Joseph made on such a joyous occasion breathes of his thanksgiving as well as devotion, his hopes as well as fears.

"O my Lord! Thou hast given me (something) of sovereignty and hast taught me (something) of the interpretation of events—Creator of the heavens and the earth! Thou art my Protecting Friend in the world and the Hereafter. Make me to die submissive (unto Thee) and join me to the righteous."¹

The unflinching belief of the Prophets in the Hereafter, hope of heavenly glory promised to the righteous and the fear of everlasting fire made ready for the insolent wrongdoers keep them always on pins and needles; they are ever solicitous, troubled and grieved for the sinners and transgressors; and their anxiety to save the erring humanity from Divine wrath moves them to work ceaselessly for their noble mission. Noah is the first Prophet we came across in the Qur'ān, who calls his people to the way of God. It is related of him that:

"And We sent Noah unto his folk (and he said): Lo! I am a plain warner unto you.

"That ye serve none, save Allah. Ló! I fear for you the retribution of a painful Day."²

1. Q. XII : 101

2. Q. XI : 25-26

The Prophet Hūd was sent to a prosperous people who enjoyed the bounties of the Lord in abundant measure. Hūd said to them :

"Keep your duty toward Him Who hath aided you with (the good things) that ye know,
"Hath aided you with cattle and sons,
"And gardens and water-springs,
"Lo ! I fear for you the retribution of an awful Day."¹

The people among whom the Prophet Shu'eyb was sent were also well-placed and leading a life of comfort. Their land was fertile and produce abundant. Shu'eyb addressed his nation saying :

"Lo! I see you well-to-do, and lo! I fear for you the doom of a besetting Day."²

Influence of Hereafter on Prophets' followers

This outlook does not remain confined to prophets alone. The way prophets look at things fastens itself to the minds of their followers also who begin to realise the illusive, unreal nature of the worldly life and the grim reality of enduring life to come after death. They come to know how very veritable and precious is afterlife for which one ought to strive and struggle and fight one's way even if it means putting one's life on stake. The Qur²ān has preserved the exhortation of some pure-hearted persons accepting the message of Moses, who say to one another :

"O my people ! Lo ! this life of the world is but a passing comfort, and lo ! the Hereafter, that is the enduring home.

"Whoso doeth an ill-deed, he will be repaid the like thereof, while whoso doeth right, whether male or female, and is a believer, (all) such will enter the Garden, where they will be nourished without stint."³

1. Q. XXVI : 132-135
2. Q. XI : 84
3. Q. XL : 39-40

Soon after the magicians of Pharaoh had accepted the truth at the hands of Moses, Pharaoh threatened them with the most horrible punishment. They were told that their hands and their feet would be cut off on the opposite sides—the right hand of each with their left foot—and then they would be crucified. But those believers replied fearlessly :

"They said : We choose thee not above the clear proofs that have come unto us, and above Him Who created us. So decree what thou wilt decree. Thou wilt end for us only this life of the world.

"Lo ! we believe in our Lord, that He may forgive us our sins and the magic unto which thou didst force us. Allah is better and more lasting.

"Lo ! whoso cometh guilty unto his Lord, verily for him is hell. There he will neither die nor live.

"But whoso cometh unto Him a believer, having done good works, for such are the high stations ;

"Gardens of Eden underneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide for ever. That is the reward for him who groweth."¹

Requital for every Act

It is unbecoming of or rather impossible for a prophet of God to allure his followers with the fascination of power and pelf or to proffer material gains as the reward of their faith. On the contrary, he denounces self-esteem and arrogance, individual and national paramountcy, tyranny and injustice in any shape or form. Quran announces with the flourish of trumpets :

"As for the Abode of the Hereafter, We assign it unto those who seek not oppression in the earth, nor yet corruption. The sequel is for those who ward off (evil)."²

1. Q. XX : 72-76

2. Q. XXVIII : 83

The prophets of God evoke a longing for Divine mercy and blessings in the hearts of their followers ; warn them against the chastisement after death ; expound the interconnection between man's behaviour and its requital in the Hereafter ; and sharpen the wits of the people to understand how faith, prayer and atonement invite the mercy of God, increase the means of sustenance, bring rains and save the people from the scourge of famine and rigours of poverty. Prophet Noah laments over the hard-heartedness and misfortune of his people in these words :

"And I have said : Seek pardon of your Lord. Lo ! He is ever Forgiving.

"He will let loose the sky for you in plentiful rain,

"And will help you with wealth and sons, and will assign unto you Gardens and assign unto you rivers."¹

Prophet Hūd points a moral to his nation in seeking forgiveness of the Lord.

"And, O my people ! Ask forgiveness of your Lord, then turn unto Him repentant ; He will cause the sky to rain abundance on you and will add unto you strength to your strength. Turn not away, guilty !"²

Prosperity is, in the eyes of prophets, the fruit of true faith in God and of seeking His forgiveness. True to its forms, it is as inseparable from these as properties are inherent in different materials. It cannot be changed or destroyed like the medicinal properties of drugs or the laws of nature governing this universe.

Role of Hereafter in Character-building

The prophets do not make a show of piety in laying emphasis upon the Hereafter or asking their people to give preference to afterlife over the life of the world which they consider to be transitory and unreal, nor do they prescribe

1. Q. LXXI 10-12

2. Q. XI : 52

this norm of conduct for their followers alone ; they themselves believe and act on this maxim and make it a rule of their life. The prophets mould their own lives and endeavour hard to shape the lives of their near and dear ones according to this principle so that it should serve as a living example for others. Prophet Shu'ayb enunciated the validity of this axiom when he said to his people :

"I desire not to do behind your backs that which I ask you not to do."¹

All the prophets were always vigilant of the Hereafter and indifferent to the world ; they never cared for loaves and fishes. They always parted with ease and comfort for the sake of their mission. They chose the life of self-denial and frugality although each of them had a bright future by virtue of his intelligence and talent, blue-blood, rank and distinction. It was this self-abnegation of Prophet Sāleh which called forth this comment from people around him.

"They said 'O Sāleh ! Thou hast been amongst us hitherto as that wherein our hope was placed.'"²

This was also the way of the family members of the last Prophet.

"O Prophet ! Say unto thy wives : If ye desire the world's life and its adornment, come ! I will content you and will release you with a fair release.

"But if ye desire Allah and His messenger and the Abode of the Hereafter, then lo ! Allah hath prepared for the good among you an immense reward."³

And, it was this magnetism of the prophetic character that the wives of the Prophet Muhammad decided to have rather Allah and His messenger than material comforts ; all of them preferred to lead a life of privation in his company rather than be well afforded but forsaken by him.

1. Q. XI : 88

2. Q. XI : 62

3. Q. XXXIII : 28-29

Who is not aware of the life and living of the Prophet? His household was of the most frugal; modesty and humility were apparent in his manners. His life constitutes the most shining chapter of history, amazing as well as captivating: a life so sacred, so unspeakably pious that makes one spellbound. His life is a continuous lighthouse of righteousness which still illuminates the path of his followers and seekers of truth. The settled principle of his life is best expressed by his own dictum: "O Allah! There is no life save the life of Hereafter,"¹ and by his fervent prayer: "O Allah! Bestow upon the dependants of Muhammad only as much of provision as is necessary to sustain them."²

Difference between Prophetic and other Reformatory Missions

A healthy morality is indispensable for the establishment of an Islamic society, or, for that matter, any just and ethical order; nevertheless, the prophetic call for unquestioning acceptance of the Hereafter is not given exclusively for upholding moral principles. There is no denying the usefulness of moral reforms, but the life-long endeavours of the prophets and their followers show that their assignment differs from the concern of other reformers. The faith of the prophets is an inborn, heartfelt spiritual apprehension of divine truth which runs through their thoughts and feelings, character and conduct while the belief in certain principles by the reformers is no more than mere acceptance or acknowledgement of a doctrine. Consequently, when the former talk about the Last-Day they set forth their message in a language which speaks volumes of their self-conviction and fervidness, and relish of the inspired call, while others talk about requital, if they have to, only as a moral

1. *Bukhārī*

2. *Ibid*

imperative and a requisite for social amelioration. However, there is a world of difference between the sparkling thoughts that breathe and burn and something talked about as a social or logical necessity.

Reliance on the Unseen

Absolute reliance on the Unseen is yet another keynote of the prophetic message and a revealed scripture. The prophets hold it to be a pre-requisite for reaping the benefits of religion and Divine guidance. Declaring it to be the distinguishing mark of all pious and godly souls, they demand its acceptance in glowing terms.

"Alif, Lām, Mīm.

"This is the Scripture whereof there is no doubt, a guidance unto those who ward off (evil).

"Who believe in the Unseen, and establish worship, and spend of that We have bestowed upon them ;

"And who believe in that which is revealed unto thee (Muhammad) and that which was revealed before thee, and are certain of the Hereafter.

"These depend on guidance from their Lord, These are the successful."¹

The apostles of God, thus, require all those who acknowledge faith in God and His chosen way, which they call Islam or the religion of all the earlier prophets, to accept implicitly the limitless dominion and excellence of the Supreme Being and His superexcellent works and attributes although these may not be easily imposed upon their unripe intellect, limited knowledge and faulty experience. The prophets demand that one should repose trust in each and everything mentioned in the Divine scriptures irrespective of one having ever experienced it or the human intellect or senses having ever perceived them. Every monition given unto a prophet and all the tidings revealed to him about

1. Q. II: 1-5

God are asked to be relied upon since the Divine announcers are truthful and God is omnipotent to do whatever He pleases. God creates whatever He likes and to Him belongs the kingdom, and the power, and the might. His excellence consists in His creating and producing; He is wise in His works; He does what He wills and whatever He wills comes to pass; He is obliged not to follow the laws of causation nor is He dependent on the forces of nature created by Him; He is the eternal Master, Creator and Restorer of all things, and nothing escapes His grasp nor can the vicissitudes of things elude His power. The effects of His power are immeasurable and the objects of His knowledge infinite.

"But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that He saith unto it: Be and it is."¹

The Qurʾān and all the earlier scriptures speak of things, astounding and staggering, about God and the marvellous events wrought through His supernatural powers which can be given credence only on the strength of faith in the Unseen, the immeasurable and eternally exalted power and competence of God and the truthfulness of His scriptures and messengers. But, anyone who places reliance solely on human experience and perceptions, known facts and logical conclusions will either not admit them or entertain doubts, or yet he will garble their import in a way that accords with his own apprehensions and cognitions. This is why God says about such persons:

"Nay, but doth their knowledge reach the Hereafter? Nay, for they are in doubt concerning it. Nay, for they cannot see it."²

The Qurʾān clarifies the position of both; one, who is bestowed faith and whose heart is made a repository of Islam; and the other, whose mind and heart are sealed for

1. Q. XXXVI : 82

2. Q. XXVII : 66

everything revealed by God. Portraying the difference between the two, the Qur'ān says :

"And whomsoever it is Allah's Will to guide, He expandeth his bosom unto the Surrender, and whomsoever it is His Will to send astray, He maketh his bosom close and narrow as if he were engaged in sheer ascent. Thus Allah layeth ignominy upon those who believe not."¹

The Qur'ān mentions acts and attributes of God which can never be accepted without a firm belief in the Unseen. Similar is the case with those bewildering events, rewards and punishments of the Hereafter, remarkable achievements and miracles worked by the prophets and divine portents appearing to succour the apostles of God, for, none of these can be admitted save on the basis of one's faith in the Unseen realities. No terminological inexactitude, no twisting of the meanings or misconstruction of the rules of Arabic syntax and grammar, nor any length of cavilling and quibbling about the power and potency of God is capable of furnishing cogent arguments in regard to these for making them acceptable to an intellect guided by materialistic patterns of thought or proving their compliance with the causative laws of nature. Of a fact, only the steadfast faith in the Unseen can make one admit the events like cleaving of the sea for Moses and his followers, gushing forth of twelve streams by a stroke of the Moses' staff, lifting up of the mountain over Bani Israel, resurrection of a party among them after death, transformation of Jewish transgressors into apes, coming to life of a slain person by touching the flesh of a sacrificed cow, cooling down of the fire for Abraham, birds tamed by Solomon talking to him and his coming to know the chatter of the ants, Solomon covering the distance of a month in a night and a day and procuring the throne of Saba in the twinkling of an eye,

1. Q. VI: 125

Jonah being swallowed by a fish and being delivered safely, miraculous birth of Jesus, destruction of the army of Abrahā by the swarms of flying creatures which pelted them with stones of baked clay and the journey of the holy Prophet from Ka'aba to Aqsa and thence to heaven. These are some of the events mentioned in the Qur'ān as well as earlier Scriptures which cannot be accepted unless one holds the belief that the will and power of God encompasses everything known and unknown.

Belief or Unbelief

For the faith based on perceptions and experiences marches with the things, known and familiar, it throws itself into the arms of Beldame Nature and its laws and becomes limited and contingent. It then becomes a faith which can neither be relied upon nor can it stand by any religion. It cannot vouch for the prophets and their mission, nor bring one to obey and fight and sacrifice one's life for the noble cause of the prophets of God. No, it is not a faith at all. It should rather be called cognizance and experience; it is acquiescence in the doctrines of inference or thralldom to senses and perceptions. No glory or distinction can be attached to a faith like that. It is also of no use to any religion for every sane person, whether subscribing to any faith or not, reckons on his own senses and perceptions, experiences and intellect, while faith demands spiritual apprehension of divine truth apart from the proofs furnished by reflective acts of mind.

And a man having confidence in such a naturalistic or rationalistical faith will have to face hurdles at every step in a Divine or revealed religion. He will ever be doubting and disbelieving the inmost spirit of faith and its realities as a gnostic poet¹ has aptly poetized the truth in this

1. Jalīluddīn Rūmī.

verse :

The leg of syllogisers is of wood :
And a wooden leg is too infirm.

That the wooden legs cannot allow a man to walk freely and to go fast, a discursive mind cannot bridge the gap between the scriptural realities revealed by the prophets and his own knowledge culled from facts known to his senses or perceptions or inferred by his limited intellect, and, thus, he is forced to misconstrue, stretch or strain the sense of recondite realities or he refuses to believe in them altogether.

"Nay, but they denied that, the knowledge whereof they could not compass, and whereof the interpretation (in events) hath not yet come unto them."¹

But a man who has faith in the Unseen realities, is convinced of the majestic glory and unlimited power of God ; he reposes confidence in the gospel preached by the prophets, and does not have to float in the sea of doubt and uncertainty. He is assured and confident, for his innermost self lends itself to the spirit of religion. He ransacks his brains but once about the faith in God, soundness of the Divine commands and the truthfulness and impeccability of the messengers of God.

"Nor doth he speak of (his own) desire. It is naught save an inspiration that is inspired."²

Then he gives faith to whatever the prophets preach and rests in confidence about everything that reaches him untempered from the preachers of Divine message. No misgiving assails his mind for he accepts their teachings as the promptings of his own conscience.

God has described in the Qur^ʿān, the divergent mental attitudes of the two—one who submits his intellect to everything committed by a prophet and the other who

1. Q. X : 39

2. Q. LIII : 3-4

endeavours to harmonize the prophetic teachings with his own imperfect knowledge and limited intellect, even if he has to blow hot and cold at the same time. Says the Qur^ʿān :

"He it is Who hath revealed unto thee (Muhammad) the Scripture wherein are clear revelations—. They are the substance of the Book—and others (which are) allegorical. But those in whose hearts is doubt pursue, forsooth, that which is allegorical seeking (to cause) dissension by seeking to explain it. None knoweth its explanation save Allah. And those who are of sound instruction say: We believe therein; the whole is from our Lord; but only men of understanding really heed.

"Our Lord! cause not our hearts to stray after Thou hast guided us, and bestow upon us mercy from Thy Presence. Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Bestower."¹

There is yet another man, so to speak, who can only endure a way of life fully in accord with his own desires and superficial thinking. Speaking of the outlook of such a man, the Qur^ʿān says :

"And among mankind is he who worshippeth Allah upon a narrow margin so that if good befalleth him he is content therewith, but if a trial befalleth him, he falleth away utterly. He loseth both the world and the Hereafter. That is the sheer loss."²

It is regrettable that our present day Islamic literature as well as the curricula of religious education and the mode of preaching Islam have woefully lagged behind in calling the people back, with vigour and conviction, to the faith in the Unseen; both have failed to provide the intellectual food required to sustain reliance on it. Some

1. Q. III : 7-8

2. Q. XXII : 11

of our contemporary writers who have distinguished themselves in presenting Islam in a modern rational strain, lay stress on its charming features and expound its teachings in a way which shows its congruence with the modern thought and educational pattern; nevertheless, they have damaged, even if unconsciously, the spirit of conviction in the Unseen realities. Our modern educated Muslim young men are growing accustomed to this way of thinking. They esteem ideas and opinions which are fairly well-known, blended with the settled principles and confirmed by experience. The result is that all those things which discredit their accepted notions or which need a heart-felt credence in the truthfulness of the informant for fostering the belief, make them skeptical or they take them with a grain of salt. In fact, they do not relish beliefs in such unwonted opinions and events because they run counter to their notions gained through recurrent assurance dinned into their ears that Islam is a rational faith. True, and it is perfectly correct, as Ibn Taimiyah holds, that there is no contradiction between the rational and scriptural canons, but there are different grades and standards of human intellect. The ultramodern contrivances and conveniences commonly found in a big city or the capital of any country are beyond the imagination of a villager who finds it difficult to swallow the latest inventions like the marvels of atomic energy and landing on the moon. Thus, howsoever penetrating a compass of mind we may assume one to possess, it would necessarily be limited in a comparative sense. The very fact that it would be bound by certain limits, would also circumscribe its comprehension and restrict the responsibilities emanating from it.

The golden rule to be followed in these matters has been precisely enunciated by Ibn Khaldun, the great Arab philosopher who can justly be called precursor of the philosophy of history and social sciences.

"Do not trust the claims of thought to be able to comprehend beings and their causes and to follow out the ramifications of existence—this is sheer nonsense.

"For every percipient imagines the world to be restricted to his range of perceptions, which is far from being true. Notice the deaf, for whom the world is confined to four senses and reflection, and for whom no sounds exist. In the same way the blind lacks knowledge of visible things. It is only the traditions they take over from their parents, teachers and acquaintances that make them admit the existence of what they do not perceive. In other words, their belief is founded on the general opinion around them, not on their instincts or sense perception. Similarly animals, if they could answer our questions, would be found to deny the possibility of intellectual, reflective acts of mind.

"This point being established, it is probable that there is a kind of perception, superior to our own; the vast range of beings. God's creation being vaster than man's range of comprehension, He alone comprehends all

"This does not impugn the validity of the mind or its apprehensions. The mind is an accurate scale, whose recordings are certain and reliable; but to use it to weigh questions relating to the Unity of God, or the afterlife, or the nature of prophecy, or the divine qualities, or other such subjects falling outside its range, is like trying to use a goldsmith's scale to weigh mountains. This does not mean that the scale itself is inaccurate.

"The truth of the matter is that mind has limits within which it is rigidly confined; it cannot therefore hope to comprehend God and His qualities, itself

being only one of the many atoms created by God."¹

Reliance on Common Sense

The prophets always rely on the natural wit of man—and this is another singular trait of their teachings—for they never build upon shrewd and artful paralogism. They keep away from sophisticated mode of thought and living. The Prophet of Islam is bidden to announce that :

"I ask of you no fee for this, and I am no imposter.

"Lo ! it is naught else than a reminder for all peoples."²

This is a maxim that truly applies to all the earlier prophets. They all address their messages to the humanity in a simple and straightforward manner, free from all subtleties. One need not be sharpwitted, or a scholar, or an expert in any branch of learning, or a glossator, or learned in philosophy or logic, cosmology or physical sciences to understand their discourses. They are equally intelligible to all, the elect and the laity, the academic and the untaught.

The teachings of the prophets answer the purpose of civilised nations having an elegant urban culture exactly in the same manner as they can be availed of by a simple, unsophisticated people. For the apostles of God never raise abstruse and complicated questions, their guidance is like potable water needed by every man. Shāh Walīullah has admirably set forth this characteristic impress of prophetic teachings in his famous treatise "*Hujjatullah-il-Bālighā*" in these words :

"The biographical accounts of the prophets bear witness to the fact that they always keep in view the level of understanding and store of knowledge possessed

1. *An Arab Philosophy of History* : Charles Issawi. London, 1950. (pp. 165-86).

2. Q. XXXVIII : 86-87

by the people with whom they have to confer. This is because man, in whatever stage he may be, must have attained a certain level of comprehension higher than all the animals, unless he were completely empty-headed, which must also be higher to that of his initial stage or to the level of understanding possessed by others in a lower stage of development. There are undoubtedly certain accomplishments which are unattainable save by the shining light favoured with divine afflatus, such as, the enlightenment of the prophets and saints; or the cognition to be had through meditation, that is, intuitive knowledge in a particular discipline which enables one to gain acquaintance of the light beyond one's soul; or the knowledge in certain branches of learning, such as, medicine, jurisprudence, etc. which can be learnt through intensive study and mental labour.

"The prophets, therefore, converse with the people in a language understood by them. They do not refer to things obscure or abstruse nor do they call upon the people to attain cognizance of God through beatific visions and illuminations. They do not also ask the people to apprehend God through syllogistic logic or to conceive Him as devoid of all forms and substances. For it is not possible for anyone to conceive of a negative quality unless he has come to understand the subtleties of logical reasoning.

"These men of God are wont to avoid all those issues which do not have a bearing on the regulation of man's conduct or life of the community as, for example, atmospheric accidents, such as, the rains, eclipses, halo, pre-historic animals, vegetation, the motion of sun and moon, or the stories of bygone kings and cities. They do speak about some of these which are fairly well-known to the people, but the reference made by them is illustrative of the rewards and punishments

by God and these are normally spoken of metaphorically through similies and allegories.

"This is why when certain persons asked the Prophet (on whom be peace and blessings) about the reason for waxing and waning of the moon, God avoided giving a reply to the question and explained its benefits like reckoning of time through the motion of celestial bodies.

"They ask thee (O Muhammad) of new moons. Say: They are fixed seasons for mankind and for pilgrimage.¹

"You see a number of people who have ceased to appreciate the true content of prophetic teachings on account of their preoccupation with other branches of learning, and they have no qualm to use their pronouncements out of all context."²

At another place, in the same book, Shāh Waliullah explains how religious precepts and observances have been made easy for the people. He writes :

"And one of these is that the Promulgator of Divine Laws has spoken to the people in accordance with their own native intelligence and knowledge for they were then unacquainted with the scholastic sciences and their principles. This being so, God speaks in similitudes and says: 'The Beneficent one, Who is established on the Throne.'³ When the Prophet asked a negress where God was and she pointed to the sky, the Prophet remarked: 'She is a believer.' Similarly, it is not necessary to learn the rules of astronomy and arithmetic in order to find out the direction of prayer and the time of daily and 'Id prayers. The Prophet has given simple directions in these

1. Q. II : 189

2. *Hujjatullah-il-Balighā*, Vol. I, p. 86

3. Q. XX : 5

matters, such as, 'The direction of prayer is midway between east and west,' and 'Haj is the day when you come together and *'Id-ul-fitr* is the day when you break fast. — God alone knows what is correct."¹

Imām Ghazālī (d. 1111) had, even before Shāh Walīullah, drawn a distinction between the reasoning of the Qurʾān and dialectical syllogism in order to show the superiority of the former. He wrote in *Iljām ul-ʿAwām ʿan-ʿIlm il-Kalām* that :

"The Quranic arguments are like food which provide nourishment to everyone while the logical system built up by the dialecticians is similar to a medicine which can be administered profitably to a few only, and which may even have harmful effects on others not requiring it. Or, else, the Quranic reasoning resembles water which can be taken both by a weak child and a robust youth while dialectical argumentation is like a rich food which provides nourishment to the latter but is indigestible and even harmful for children."²

Another eminent giant of learning, Imām Fakhruddīn Rāzī (d. 1209), who reached a conclusion analogous to Ibn Taimiyah in regard to logic, says :

"I have given much thought to the syllogistic logic and dialectical principles but I have never seen them restoring health to the sick or quenching thirst of the parched. I have found the Quranic reasoning nearest to the human intellect and whoever shall apply his mind to the question like me, shall arrive at the same conclusion."

I have had to deliberate in some detail on the basic characteristics of prophethood since there is little proximity of ideas left, nowadays, owing to the distance of time and changed patterns of thought, and the people being generally

1. *Hujjatullāh-il-Bālighā*, Vol. I, P. 122

2. *Iljām-ul-ʿAwām*, p. 20

unfamiliar with the lives, characters, manner of preaching and social behaviour of the prophets. I have tried to place before you the harmful effects of the present artificial and unwarranted way of reasoning and preaching which has made people indifferent to the characteristic traits of prophetic teachings. The people these days not only look coldly upon these matters but are also unable to appreciate the Quranic pronouncements, or, they have rather lost the capacity to derive pleasure from its unique but unaffected mode of expression. The result is that they are forced to take recourse to expatiation or dubious amplification of the scriptural writings. Nevertheless, the prophetic method of preaching religion is still the exemplary way just as the elegant style of the Qur^ʿān is capable of satisfying people in all climes and times. It can still open the doors of minds and hearts and impart conviction to people belonging to every group and class. Verily, it is a revelation from the Wise, the Owner of all Praises.

3

The Guides and Leaders of Humanity

The Havoc Wrought by Self-appointed Leaders

Throughout the course of its long history, mankind has been cruelly subjected to gruelling tests and trials by its self-appointed leaders, tyrants and despots, guides and legislators. These 'patrons' of humanity have ever played the devil with their own species almost in the same way as a child does with a piece of paper. He folds and unfolds, twists and turns the paper and tears it into pieces when he takes a fancy to it.

These leaders have seldom set store by the human life, the vast possibilities of its advancement and the far-reaching significance of its betterment. Their fellow beings yielded obedience to them for God had created the inclination for dutifulness and fidelity in man, but they were neither gracious nor God-fearing enough to be rightful and just to their followers. Nor were they mindful of their obligations and responsibilities to their friends and kinsmen: they only attended to their fancies and desires and made their leadership a means to fulfil their own ambitions. The caprice and conceit, perversity and pettiness of these leaders moved by their racial and national prejudices have sown the seeds of an unending

catastrophe for the humanity. They have, indeed, created doubts about their sagacity and trustworthiness, civility and benignity. Now, there is little reason to believe that they will ever succeed in ushering mankind in an era of peace and prosperity. History of the human race is an unrolled scroll of tragedies and misfortunes which makes one shed tears as well as smile at its luck. There is even today many a nation in the east and the west which is at the mercy of a wolf in sheep's clothing who trifles with the people and brings them to a new test ever and anon and, then, innocently declares that he has not succeeded in his efforts. Oftentimes, the crimes and misdeeds of such leaders are brought to light by their successors after they are dead and gone. It is then that a succeeding generation comes to know of the guilts of their leaders but then it is merely an obituary in the life story of that nation.

Prophets Needed to Lead the World

This blundering leadership has not spared even the creeds and beliefs of the people on which depend man's success in this world and salvation in the world beyond, which form the fundamental bases of true morality and healthy civilisation and the nexus between man and God; but once these links are severed it becomes well-nigh impossible to restore them again. The world, therefore, needs leaders and guides who are trustworthy, faultless, self-denying and beyond reproach, who are not devoured by their greed or passion, who do not base their decisions on their own imperfect knowledge, faulty experience or personal gains, and if they ever commit a mistake they are willing to undo the wrong in the light of divine commandments.

Sincerity and Trustworthiness

This is the reason that you see every prophet assuring

his followers about his sincerity, trustworthiness and selflessness.

See how the prophets affirm their selflessness and assure their nations about their trustworthiness.

- (1) "Noah's folk denied the messengers (of Allah),
When their brother Noah said unto them :
Will ye not ward off (evil) ?
Lo ! I am a faithful messenger unto you,
So keep your duty to Allah, and obey me.
And I ask of you no wage therefor ;
My wage is the concern only of the Lord of the
Worlds."¹
- (2) "(The tribe of) A'ad denied the messengers (of Allah),
When their brother Hūd said unto them : Will ye not
ward off (evil) ?
Lo ! I am a faithful messenger unto you,
So keep your duty to Allah and obey me.
And I ask of you no wage therefor; my
wage is the concern only of the Lord of the worlds."²
- (3) "The (tribe of) Thamūd denied the messengers (of
Allah),
When their brother Sālih said unto them : Will ye
not ward off (evil) ?
Lo ! I am a faithful messenger unto you,
So keep your duty to Allah and obey me.
And I ask of you no wage therefor ; my wage is the
concern only of the Lord of the Worlds."³
- (4) "The folk of Lot denied the messengers (of Allah),
When their brother Lot said unto them :
Will ye not ward off (evil) ?
Lo ! I am a faithful messenger unto you,
So keep your duty to Allah and obey me.

1. Q. XVI : 105-9

2. Q. XXVI : 123-27

3. Q. XXVI : 141-45

And I ask of you no wage therefor ; my wage is the concern of the Lord of the worlds."¹¹

- (5) "The dwellers in the wood (of Midian) denied the messengers (of Allah),
When Shu'eyb said unto them, Will ye not ward off (evil) ?
Lo ! I am a faithful messenger unto you,
So keep your duty to Allah and obey me.
And I ask of you no wage therefor ;
My wage is the concern of the Lord of the worlds."¹²

The unity of purpose or common objective of the prophets sent to different nations at different times is eloquently meaningful. The word *Amīnun* or truthful used by every prophet to asseverate his dependability fully, encompasses the function of apostleship and covers the responsibility of receiving divine messages as well as his capability to transmit it truthfully to others. No other word so comprehensive, so meaningful is there in the Arabic language which embodies all the different obligations and compulsions lying on a prophet of God.

Muhammad, the Prophet, was known by the pagans of Mecca, as if by the pre-ordained will of God, by the name of '*Amīn*' even before he was invested with the mantle of prophethood.

The prophets are, thus, sincere, selfless and indifferent to personal gain or partisanship. It is but natural for man to give his love and respect to such self-sacrificing well-wishers of humanity. But, when they are rejected by the people they sorrowfully express their surprise, as Prophet Sālih had said to his tribe :

"O my people ! I delivered my Lord's message unto you and gave you good advice, but ye love not good advisers."¹³

1. Q. XXVI : 160-64
2. Q. XXVI : 176-80
3. Q. VII : 79

And the man who then came from the uttermost part of the city, advised his brethren thus—

"O my people! Follow those who have been sent! Follow those who ask of you no fee, and who are rightly guided."¹

Moses, too, presented the same message explicitly before Pharaoh when he told him :

"Moses said : O Pharaoh ! Lo ! I am a messenger from the Lord of the Worlds,

"Approved upon condition that I speak concerning Allah nothing but the truth. I come unto you with a clear proof from your Lord. So let the Children of Israel go with me."²

A Tower of Strength

This sterling quality—the truthfulness, faultlessness and selflessness of the prophets is a godsend blessing for the people. It helps their followers to maintain the uncompromising fidelity to an ideal ; it is a passionate attachment to truth in the hour of stress and strain unleashed by the contending idealism of an alien people. Their conviction in the truthfulness of their prophet saves them from suspicion and disbelief.

Impeccability of the Prophets

Shāh Walīullāh has shed light on the vital characteristics of the prophets in his immortal book, *Hujjatullāh-il-Bālighā*, wherein he writes :

"It is essential for a prophet to demonstrate that he has been assigned a Divine charge and that his teaching is free from every fault and blemish. He has also to make plain that he is not a complaisant reformer willing to compromise on principles, that is, taking

1. Q. XXXVI : 20-21
2. Q. VII : 104-5

his reform to a certain extent and giving up a portion of it. If he has been sent to uphold the mission of an earlier prophet whose truthfulness is acknowledged by all and whose teachings have been preserved uncorrupted, then he can bring the beliefs and attitudes of his people into question and summon them up to accept the directions of the bygone prophet, whose mission he has come to propagate and complete.

"Anyway, the people need an impeccable guide who is accepted by all and who is either present among them or whose trustworthy teachings and traditions have been preserved. The doctrines of religious beliefs and their rewards or the sins and their punishments cannot be fathomed by the intellect which is otherwise adequate for worldly affairs, for these are not disclosed save to intuitive reason. Just as hunger, or thirst, or effects of medicines are felt by the instinct, the things seemly or unseemly to the soul are known only through an evolved sense.

"Impeccability of the prophets is the outcome of divine knowledge and conviction which impart assurance to them that the message vouchsafed from the divine source is God's truth: they feel as if they are beholding the facts of mute reality and are also certain that their eyes are not deceiving them. The certitude of a prophet resembles the accepted connotation of a word as understood by the people speaking that language. It is like the sense of the words *Māun* or *Ardhun* which always signify water and the earth for an Arab, even though he may have no argument to clinch his point, nor any testimony to prove the relationship between these terms and their significations. But, he is still confident of his comprehension of these terms. A prophet has, similarly, an inborn sense which always leads him, intuitively, to the truth of the matter and thus he is persuaded of the correctness of his

Inspired knowledge.

"The people are brought over to admit the faultlessness of a prophet through the rational and verbal arguments advanced by him. The call he gives is always correct and his character so unblemished that it leaves no contingency of his being a liar. The people round a prophet often find credence in his fellowship with God through the miracles worked by him or the answering of his prayers. These are also to assure the people that a man with such a pious and angelic soul could never speak lies about God nor commit a sin. The confidence so produced brings the people nearer to the prophet and makes him dearer to his nation—as water is sought by the thirsty or the goods and children are adorned by the people. These are the imperatives without which no nation can be imbued with the touch and feelings of a prophet nor can it establish a concord with the soul ever engrossed in the remembrance of God."¹

Obedience to the Prophets

These men of God, so pure of heart, holding the ring of truth, sincere and honest, who always keep themselves within bounds and are the best amongst all men in thought and action, intellect and inclination, deserve that every man should submit himself in obedience to them. Following the divine command: "that thou mightest be trained according to My Will"² heavenly hosts stand over the prophets to rear and raise them as teachers and guides of humanity. "Lo! We purified them with pure thought, remembrance of the Home; Lo! in Our sight they verily are the elect, the excellent,"³ is the dictum of God about

1. *Hujjatullah-il-Balighā*, Vol. I, pp. 83-84

2. Q. XX : 39

3. Q. XXXVIII : 46-47

them. For they are preferred over the rest of mankind by virtue of their wisdom and prudence, talent and genius, God favours them with the Book and the direction and the prophethood, and tells mankind that :

"Those are they whom Allah guideth, so follow their guidance."¹

Approved and Admirable

The prophets are accepted and approved by God. They enjoy such a divine favour that their way of life, habit and behaviour become the shining example to be observed by all observers.

There may be many paths leading to the same destination, but the one trodden by the prophets gets the approval of God. It is then preferred to every other way for it is the way of God's devoted friends ; everything liked by the prophets becomes a model and a standard in the eyes of God. It is for this reason that to follow the example of the prophets, to take after their habits and behaviours and to act in accordance with the precedents set by them helps one to gain propinquity to God. The love of prophets makes one beloved of God and divine wrath is invited by ill-will to them—this is the Law of God that undergoes no change with the change of time and space. This is the ordinance of God proclaimed by the Prophet of Islam.

"Say (O Muhammad, to mankind) : If ye love Allah, follow me ; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."²

Just the opposite are the leanings towards the way of tyrants and misbelievers, the acceptance of their modes and patterns, which puts man away from God and invites His displeasure.

1. Q. VI : 90

2. Q. III : 31

"And incline not toward those who do wrong lest the Fire touch you, and ye have no protecting friends against Allah, and afterward ye would not be helped."¹

Ways of Guidance

The ways and manners of the Prophet are recognised by the *Sharī'ah* as *Khasā-i-Fitrat* or natural dispositions and *Sunan-ul-Hudā*, that is, the ways of guidance. Divine law upholds prophetic practices as favoured observances and asks the believers to follow them. The usages and practices of the prophets exalt and elevate the character of man, for they have the approval of God.

"(This is the) colour from Allah, and who is better than Allah at colouring! We are His worshippers."²

And this is the reason why God prefers a certain mode, behaviour and practice over another style, manner or usage. The modes and behaviours acceptable to God are, thus, recommended by the *Sharī'ah* as the traits of believers and natural dispositions of man. Any habit that is at variance with the prophetic practices is looked down upon by the Law as an impress of the ignorant, a custom of the stupid and a way of the unbeliever. One is the praxis of the prophets and the elects of God and the other is the old way of the pagan past, the beaten path of the devil and his followers.

This is the principle regulating customs and conventions, manners of eating and drinking, modes of dressing and living, in short, everything that goes by the name of prophetic culture.

Why is the right hand preferred over the left; why is every good act, eating and drinking and giving of a thing or taking it commendable by the right hand; and why is the

1. Q. XI : 113

2. Q. II : 138

left hand used for washing after passing the urinal or for similar other purposes? Both the hands have been created by God and both seem to have an equal claim for respect. The people not conversant with the ways of the prophets do use both the hands for the same purpose for they have nothing to guide them in this regard.

There is no other reason except that the prophets, in general, and the last Prophet, in particular, got in the habit of using their right hand either by their own inclination towards cleanliness or through divine inspiration. As a matter of fact, the settled dispositions of the prophets are always in accord with the will and pleasure of God. The use of right hand for performing every act, dignified and decent, thus, became commendable practice or a set form of Islamic way of living. 'Ayesha relates that the Prophet of Islam used to begin every wholesome act with his right hand.

"The Prophet (on whom be peace and blessings) preferred to begin, as far as possible, every work from the right hand side even if it were mere purification, or combing or putting on shoes."¹

Now, one can visualise from it the inclinations and habits of the great patriarch, Abraham, whose ways have been described in the Traditions as commendable.

Prophets—The Founders of Culture

The prophets do not summon the people to accept only a creed and a law—Islam, but they also lay the foundation of a new way of life which carries the seed of a new culture, a new civilisation. This prophetic culture has its own particular rules, signs and characteristics which distinguish it from all other paganish cultures; it differs from the essence of others in the same way as the manifestations and outer forms of each conflict with one another.

1. *Sahih Bukhārī*

Abrahamic-Muhammadian Civilisation

Abraham, the originator of this prophetic civilisation, raised its edifice on the foundation of God's Unity, His awe and an undying trust in Him, natural instincts and geniality of human nature and common weal of the human species.

Abraham's moral sense and his way of life percolate through the fibre of this civilisation.

"Lo ! Abraham was mild, imploring, penitent."¹

"Lo ! Abraham was soft of heart, long suffering."²

Abraham was the author of this civilisation while the genius of Muhammad, who was a successor to the great patriarch, completed and perfected it. He gave a new life to it, imparted it the widest, unbounded prospect of perfection, refined its shape and content and made it a civilisation fit to become universal, perpetual.

Some Conspicuous Traits

That the Abrahamic-Muhammadian civilisation detests heathenism and association of partakers with the One, Supreme God, it lifts man from the reproach of idolatry in every shape or form. The ardent supplication made by Abraham to God was :

"My Lord ! Make safe this territory, and preserve me and my sons from serving idols."³

And, his testament to his followers was :

"So shun the filth of idols, and shun lying speech : turning unto Allah (only) ; not ascribing partners unto Him."⁴

This civilisation does not permit anyone to indulge in vices, immodesty or vulgarity, nor does it prize filthy

1. Q. XI : 75

2. Q. IX : 114

3. Q. XIV : 35

4. Q. XXII : 30-31

lucre of the world. It never appeals to arms for winning position and prestige for it is essentially a mission whose slogan is—

"As for the Abode of the Hereafter We assign it unto those who seek not oppression in the earth, nor yet corruption. The sequel is for those who ward off (evil)."¹

It does not differentiate between man and man: the colour, race or country makes no difference for it.

"All men are progeny of Adam and Adam was made of clay. No Arab has any preference over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab, save by virtue of his piety. O mankind, We have given birth to all of you from a man and a woman and have made you different groups and tribes so that you may know one another. He is worthiest unto God amongst you who wards off evil."²

For this was the guiding principle of this civilisation, the last Prophet and teacher of humanity directed that :

"He is not one of us who gave a call for partisanship and who fought for partisanship and who died for partisanship."³

Once, when some Muhājirs and Ansārs had called out their tribes for help, the Prophet admonished them saying :—

"Give up this factionalism, it is dirty and dead."⁴

This is a civilisation which glorifies Unity of God as a creed, dignity and equality of man as a social principle, humbleness and fear of God as a norm of behaviour, effort for the Hereafter and fighting in the way of God as human endeavour and charity and justice as the rule

1. Q. XXVIII : 83

2. *Sirat Ibn Hishām*

3. *Abū Daūd*

4. *Sahih Bukhārī*

of war. Its norm for the conduct of government prescribes that spiritual well-being should take precedence over financial interests, dissemination of truth over collection of revenues, conferment over recipience and service of the people over wielding of the sceptre. It is the only civilisation which has the distinction of serving humanity with a selfless zeal, liberating mankind from the tyranny of superstition and ignorance and investing humanity with the spirit of altruism and charity.

For the name of God is the essence of this civilisation, His remembrance its sustenance, the divine hue its colour and trust in God its fibre, it can never be unfastened from its indwelling divine mood and disposition.

The Quranic Dictum

The Qur^ʿān lays stress on following the way of the prophets and asks the believers, time and again, to pattern their lives and conduct after the example set by the messengers of God.

"Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much."¹

It directs the Muslims to beseech God always to show them the right path.

"Show us the right path,
The path of those whom Thou hast favoured ;
Not (the Path) of those who earn Thine anger
nor of those who go astray."²

This prayer which forms part of the service repeated several times a day, teaches man to seek the companionship of the prophets, their leaders and guides and God-loved souls. Whoever shall live up to this supplication by

1. Q. XXXIII : 21

2. Q. I : 6-7

coming close to the appearance and behaviour of these pious souls shall undoubtedly be sanctified and redeemed by divine grace.

Love and Respect of Prophets

The Qurʾān demands reverential regard and affectionate devotion to the apostles of God; a tender feeling of admiration that arises from the core of one's heart; for, it places no value on an obedience which lacks spiritual coupling of the two souls. People yield obedience to their kings, political leaders and military commanders but the submissiveness of this sort is more often a passive subservience. Islam wants more than that; it does not demand mere payment of *Zakāt* and charity or observance of religious obligations; it wants willing and dutiful acquiescence in its commandments.

"That ye may believe in Allah and His messenger and may honour him."¹

"Those who believe in him, and honour him, and help him."²

The divine Scripture, therefore, calls upon the believers to keep watch over everything that upholds the honour of the prophets and avoid whatever shows a lack of respect for them. An express injunction of the Qurʾān is that :

"O ye who believe ! Lift not up your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor shout when speaking to him as ye shout one to another, lest your works be rendered vain while ye perceive not.

"Lo ! they who subdue their voices in the presence of the messenger of Allah, those are they whose hearts Allah hath proven unto righteousness. Theirs will be forgiveness and immense reward."³

"Make not the calling of the messenger among you

1. Q. XLVIII : 9

2. Q. VII : 157

3. Q. XLIX : 2-3

as your calling one of another."¹

And, it was to safeguard the honour and dignity of the Prophet that his widows were denied wedlock again after his death.

"And it is not for you to cause annoyance to the messenger of Allah, nor that ye should ever marry his wives after him."²

Many more commandments exist which require the believers to love and prefer the Prophet over their own lives, goods and children. An authentic Tradition of the Prophet declares that :

"None of you shall be a believer unless I am held dearer by you than your own father and your sons and all other men."³

Another version of this Tradition, related in Al-Tabrānī's *Al-M'ujam Al-Kabīr* and *Al-Awsat* adds "than your own lives too" to this saying of the Prophet.

Similarly, it is related from the blessed Prophet that :

"One, who has three things shall savour the sweetness of faith ; first, who holds Allah and His messenger dearer than all others."⁴

The companions of the Prophet of Islam had understood the significance of all-consuming love for God and His Apostle. They were, on this account, always extremely zealous in carrying out the orders of the Prophet ; they took pleasure in following his lead and patiently endured every hardship at his call. They shall, therefore, always occupy the pride of place among all the believers till the end of time. Abū Bakr loved the Prophet more than his own life. Once, he was so mercilessly beaten by 'Utba bin Rabī'ā that his swollen face made the cheeks indistinct from his

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1. Q. XXIV : 63
 2. Q. XXXIII : 53
 3. *Sahihain*
 4. Q. IX : 24

nose. Banū Tamīm ultimately carried him away taking him to be dead. But when he regained consciousness, the first question he asked was whether the Prophet was alright? His anxious mind was set at ease only when he was assured that the Prophet was hale and hearty. But when he was asked to take some food, his reply was:

"Honest to God, I will touch no food or drink until I have seen the Prophet."¹

Similar was the love of that Ansār lady—a love born of faith—who lost her father, husband and son in the battle of Ohad. She was told about the irreparable losses she had suffered, but unmindful of her bereavements she continued to enquire about the welfare of the Prophet, and when she saw him she came out spontaneously, "No suffering matters so long as you are safe."²

The same was the love felt all too deeply by 'Abdullah, son of the hypocrites' leader, 'Abdullah bin Ubayy. He heard his father having remarked that the highest in dignity shall drive out the most debased when they returned to Madinā. The worthy son of the unworthy father unsheathed his sword at the gate of the city and demanded from his father: "Were it you to say that? So help me God, you shall just know to whom belongs the dignity—to you or to the Prophet of God." He added, "You shall not enter Madinā until you are granted permission by the Apostle of God."³

And, it was this volcanic emotion which had made the Prophet's companions to put their lives at stake for Islam; they left their hearths and homes but not the way of God; death had become so dear to them that when, before the battle of Badr, the Ansārs were asked by the Prophet to express their opinion about taking the field, they replied with one voice:

1. *Al-Bidāyah Wan-Nihāyah*, Vol. III, p. 30

2. *Ibn Is'hāq*, p. 435, and *Baihaqi*

3. *Tafsīr Tabrī*, Vol. XXVIII

"As for our affairs, they are at your command. By God, if you go to Bark ai-Ghimād, we shall accompany you to the end; and by God, if you demand of us, we shall jump into the sea with you."¹

Lifeblood of Islamic World

Islamic world of today lacks this lifeblood of love. If people do not act on the *Sharī'ah*, if religious observances appear bothersome to them or if the modern educated youth has difficulty in following the precepts of the Prophet, it is because the Muslims are not inspired by the love and respect for the Prophet as demanded by the Qur'ān. It is, of a fact, the same vital spark which has done wonders in the past and has still not lost its miraculous power. To lose this spark is a great loss—a loss which cannot be made good by intellectual gifts, determination or organisation.

Key to Success

Success of the communities following a prophet depends on their unquestioning submission to that prophet. No such community or nation can ever succeed, whatever be its talents, or means, or cultural attainments, if it does not love and follow and strive for the mission of its prophet. The nations which give up the track of their prophet and lean on their own political manoeuvrings or on the help of any big power for gaining strength and importance ultimately end up in collapse, internal disorder and ignominious ruin.

Misfortune of the Muslim World

The whole world of Islam, nowadays, in general, and the Arab countries, in particular, furnish a pathetic example of what happens when the followers of a prophet deviate from the path chalked out for them. The people of these countries have no success to their credit, nor have they

1. Sa'ad ibn Mu'ad had uttered these words.

been able to solve any problem facing them since the day they began giving preference to various 'isms' and the leaders upholding such cults, over the precepts of their unflinching guide. They have not even won the esteem of other nations by their readiness to accept the values and concepts of nationalism, socialism or modernism or by giving up the Islamic beliefs and observances to emulate the example of other God-less nations. I need no apology to cite the example of our Arab brethren for they have already lost their unity and the freedom of Palestine, and failed to obtain even an honourable position for themselves in the comity of nations. Every day that dawns brings a new problem, a new difficulty for them. The present condition of the Arabs calls to my mind the wisdom of what Caliph 'Umar had remarked when he was asked by someone to flaunt himself as the ruler of the biggest empire of the day. He had replied indignantly: "You were the most despicable people, then God bestowed honour on you through Islam. Hence, whenever you would try to gain recognition *sans* Islam, Allah will bring disgrace on you."¹

1. *Al Bid'ayah Wan-Nihayah*, Vol. VII, p. 60

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Will of God and the Material Resources

Material Assets possessed by the Prophets

Anyone who reads the Qur'ān, the only Scripture which has preserved a truthful account of the lives and doings of the messengers of God, would find vivid and recurrent description of the hard times and sea of troubles surging round almost every prophet. Without any material means and assets, they had, at least in the initial stages, neither wealth, nor property, nor friends which are the sources of pride and joy to others. On the other hand, their adversaries were always blest with estate and effects. Their reserves on the other hand, were unflinching faith beyond every doubt and suspicion, unfeigned sincerity, which never played false, unfailing trust in divine succour, moral fibre, rectitude and the cardinal virtues like prudence, justice, temperance and charity. And, above all these, was their call to Truth which was assured of ultimate success by divine dispensation.

"Lo! We verily do help Our messengers, and those who believe, in the life of the world and on the day when the witnesses arise."¹

1. Q. XL : 51

Allah hath` decreed : Lo ! I verily shall conquer,
 I and My messengers. Lo! Allah is Strong, Almighty."¹
 "And verily Our word went forth of old unto Our
 bondmen sent (to warn)
 That they verily would be helped,
 And that Our host, they verily would be victori-
 ous."²

The Set Purpose

Another striking point that would be noticed by the person reading the Qur'ān is that in all the confrontations and conflicts, between the right and the wrong, the powerless and poor prophets of God hurled defiance at powerful emperors and the whole society combined against them, but the message of truth given by those weak and lonely prophets ultimately prevailed against the tyrannical forces armed to the teeth. Arrogant despots were ultimately forced to acknowledge the call of truth given by the apostles of God. One would also notice that the success achieved by the prophets did not come by fickle chance, but was well-founded or rather a settled outcome according to the pre-ordained will of God. For the reason that the prophets did not come out successful owing to any blind chance or favourable prospect their success has little to inspire hope in the indolent or weak of intellect who would not strive and struggle for a virtuous cause.

The Qur'ān repeats these happenings over and over again for it wants to invite its readers to place reliance in the omnipotence of God who is the Creator of causes and effects, rules over them and moulds them according to His will and purpose. As we have explained elsewhere, God has neither become ineffective nor inoperative after

1. Q. LVIII : 21

2. Q. XXXVII : 171-73

creating the causative forces, nor has He handed over His power and competence to the natural forces or laws. He has not rendered himself incapacitated and helpless. He is also not dependent on causation for new inventions and creations or for achieving success and victory over the forces created by Him.

The stories of prophets cited in the Qur'ān illustrate that truth alone is strong and abiding; falsehood is weak and transient; and that one ought to pin one's faith in the eternal, everlasting power of the Ultimate Being.

"Say: The Truth hath come, and falsehood showeth not its face and will not return."¹

"Nay, but We hurl the true against the false, and it doth break its head and lo! it vanisheth. And yours will be woe for that which ye ascribe (unto Him)."²

"Then, as for the foam, it passeth away as scum upon the banks, while, as for that which is of use to mankind, it remaineth in the earth. Thus Allah coineth the similitudes."³

Reliance on God

All the stories related in the Qur'ān strengthen the faith of man in God for they are meant to convince him that the call to Truth accompanied by cardinal virtues and ethical behaviour can overcome all difficulties, even in the most unfavourable circumstances. The Qur'ān recounts how God helps His messengers through marvellous signs and miracles, answers their prayers and makes them victorious over their enemies. At the same time, it also summons up the companions and followers of the prophets to follow in their footsteps and experience the divine grace for themselves. It, thus, raises their spirits and inspires

1. Q. XXXIV : 49

2. Q. XXI : 18

3. Q. XIII : 17

hope in them.

In *Surah Al-Anbiya*, the Qur'³ān says after narrating the favours of God on Prophet Job.

"A mercy from Our store, and a remembrance for the worshippers."¹

At other places too, the divine favours are accompanied by a message of hope for the believers :

"Then We heard his (Jonah's) prayer and saved him from the anguish. Thus We save believers."²

"Praise be unto Moses and Aron ! Lo ! thus do We reward the good."³

"Peace be unto Elias ! Lo ! thus do We reward the good."⁴

"Lo ! We sent a storm of stones upon them (all) save the family of Lot, whom We rescued in the last watch of the night, as grace from Us. Thus We reward him who giveth thanks."⁵

The stories related in the Qur'³ān are neither anecdotes of history nor works of fiction but reminders for recollection of God ; they are meant for recalling man back to his **Master**, communicating the message of Truth and showing him the path of virtue and divine guidance. The purpose of recounting these stories has been made clear in these verses.

"In their history verily there is a lesson for men of understanding. It is no invented story but a confirmation of the existing (Scripture) and a detailed explanation of everything and a guidance and a mercy for folk who believe."⁶

"And all that We relate unto thee of the story

1. Q. XXI : 84

2. Q. XXI : 88

3. Q. XXXVII : 120-21

4. *Ibid* : 130-31

5. Q. LIV : 34-35

6. Q. XII : 111

of the messengers is in order that thereby We may make firm thy heart. And therein hath come unto thee the truth and an exhortation and a reminder for believers."¹

Support Given to Every Prophet

¹ Divine succour is always available, as a rule, to every messenger of God. When Prophet Noah, for example, was rejected by his people, they said to him :

"Shall we put faith in thee, when the lowest (of the people) follow thee?"²

Noah was distressed at their rejection. He turned to God lamenting :

"I am vanquished, so give help."³

When Prophet Hūd found himself helpless before the erring folk of his tribe, he cried out :

"Would that I had strength to resist you or had some strong support."⁴

The people of Prophet Shu'ayb said to him :

"We understand not much of that thou tellest, and lo ! we do behold thee weak amongst us. But for thy family, we should have stoned thee, for thou art not strong amongst us."⁵

Pharaoh rejected Moses simply because he saw Moses without strength and power.

"And Pharaoh caused a proclamation to be made among his people saying : O my people ! Is not mine the sovereignty of Egypt and these rivers flowing under me ? Can you not then discern ?

"I am surely better than this fellow, who is despicable and can hardly make (his meaning) plain !

1. Q. XI : 120
2. Q. XXVI : 111
3. Q. LIV : 10
4. Q. XI : 80
5. *Ibid*, 91

"Why, then, have armlets of gold not been set before him, or angels sent along with him."¹

The nations to whom the prophets were sent were, on the other hand, clothed with power and prosperity. Hūd had referred to the easy circumstances of his people in these words :

"Keep your duty toward Him Who hath aided you with (the good things) that ye know.

Hath aided you with cattle and sons.

And gardens and water-springs."²

Prophet Sālih also reminded his people of their good fortune when he told them :

"So keep your duty to Allah and obey me.

And I ask of you no wage therefor: my wage is the concern only of the Lord of the Worlds.

Will ye be left secure in that which is here before us. In gardens and water-springs.

And tilled fields and heavy-sheathed palm trees,

Though ye hew out dwellings in the mountain, being skilful?"³

Similarly, Prophet Shu'ayb said to his tribe: "Lo! I see you well-to-do."⁴

But, what ultimately happened to all these fleshpots of Egypt and the stroke of luck enjoyed by the enemies of the prophets. You will have to turn to the Qur'ān to find the answer.

"See they not how many a generation We destroyed before them, whom We had established in the earth more firmly than We have established you, and We shed on them abundant showers from the sky and made the rivers flow beneath them. Yet We destroyed

1. Q. XLIII : 51-53

2. Q. XXVI : 132-34

3. Q. XXVI : 144-149

4. Q. XI : 84

them for their sins, and created after them another generation."¹

Greatest Challenge to Materialism

The life-story of Abraham rehearsed in the Qur'³ān, time and again, is like a voice announcing across the centuries the unsubstantiality of material causes and effects, scoffing at those who set store by estate and effects, and furnishes a testimony to their being weak, ineffectual and helpless. The Quranic description of his life shows as if Abraham was sent as a standing reproach to the worldly-minded materialists and the people of their way of thinking. Abraham's faith in God, it would be seen, demanded humiliation and contempt of those who valued resources and capital and ways and means as the springhead of success; he warmed the cockles of his heart by defying and overcoming them with the help of his Lord. He trampled the ungodly reliance on material assets, wealth and power, on every step of his long journey of faith, perhaps, to inspire a new confidence in the certainty of belief in God.

Abraham continued to hurl defiance, throughout his life, at all the powers-that-were, the despotism of his age, lordliness of false gods and idols and immodesty of human desire that takes the shape of earthly longings and itching of the stomach. The reason for it was that in the age in which he was born, man had fallen for the world, banked upon the ways and means and had come to regard the causative forces as the headspring of every eventuality, as if, these were on even terms with the Ultimate Being.

The blind faith in materialistic way of thought had made man servile to another credulity apart from the vileness of idol-worship in which he had already sunk himself. This was the belief in the potency of natural forces. Both of these were deification of false gods against which Abraham

1. Q. VI : 6

had declared war. His summons for the worship of One True God to whom belongs the dominion, and the command, and the excellency amounted to a declaration that it is God alone who brings everything into existence from nothingness; He is the Creator of causes which are couched in His grasp; He can dislodge the sequence from the causes and properties from the elements or make them to come out with contrary results. To God belongs the power to make all creations serve in whatever way He desires.

Abraham had thus rebelled against the authority of gods who then ruled over the minds of all men, and to punish him for his insubordination a pile of fire was made ready.

"They cried: Burn him and stand by your gods, if ye will be doing."¹

But Abraham was of perfect faith. He knew that the fire was subservient to the will of God; to burn was an attribute of fire but it was a property committed to its care which could also be taken away by the Creator of all causes and effects; if the fire could burn by the command of God, it could also become cold and refreshing at His behest. He, therefore, jumped into the fire with complete confidence in his God, and the result was not contrary to his expectations.

"We said: O fire, be coolness and peace for Abraham.

"And they wished to set a snare for him, but We made them the greater losers."²

It was a common belief that one could not live in a barren waste where there was no water and vegetation. People, therefore, preferred a fertile land flowing with milk and honey, or a flourishing market place. Breaking this common practice Abraham chose for his family, consisting of his wife and baby, a howling wilderness where neither

1. Q. XXI: 68

2. *Ibid*, 69-70

cultivation was possible nor was it on any trade route of the then civilised and developed regions of the world.

Abraham reposed confidence in God alone. He beseeched God to turn the hearts of the people towards that desolation and keep them well-stocked with fruits of every kind through His ways, unique and uncommon.

"Our Lord ! Lo ! I have settled some of my posterity in an uncultivable valley near unto Thy Holy House, our Lord ! that they may establish proper worship ; so incline some hearts of men that they may yearn toward them, and provide Thou them with fruits in order that they may be thankful."¹

God answered the prayer of Abraham by providing sustenance and peace to the place and keeping it well-provided with fruits and His blessings.

"Have We not established for them a sure sanctuary, whereunto the produce of all things is brought (in trade), a provision from Our presence ? But most of them know not."²

"So let them worship the Lord of this House,
"Who hath fed them against hunger."³

Abraham had brought them to a place where not a drop of water was available to quench the thirst, but a spring gushed forth in copious stream which is drunk to this day by men of all nations. Abraham had taken his progeny to an inhospitable waste but it became a centre of pilgrimage for the people belonging to every part and nation of the world.

In such wise was the life of Abraham a challenge to the surrounding materialism or the servitude of ways and means ; it was the very picture of a living faith in God and His omnipotence and an absolute trust in His will and pleasure.

1. Q. XIV : 37

2. Q. XXVIII : 57

3. Q. CVI : 3-4

And God, too, responded to Abraham in a like manner. The causative forces of nature were made subservient to Abraham on whom divine favours descended as wonders of the Lord.¹

Life of Moses—Challenge to Materialistic Outlook

The life-story of Moses is also, like that of Abraham, a bold and audacious challenge to the materialistic turn of mind which considers causes and effects to be abiding and self-existent, the immutable law—a law not subservient to the Lord of the World but ruling the universe by itself.

The story of Moses puts those at their wit's end who cannot see beyond the causative forces. I would give here an extract from another article by me which brings out the moral of the story as narrated in the Qur'ān.

"Prophet Moses is born in sad times, dark and gloomy, which has enveloped Banī Israel completely leaving no escape or ray of hope; the present is dark and the future is bleak; the ranks of Banī Israel are getting thinner and the resources depleting; their people are outraged and treated with indignity by the rulers who take pleasure in tyranny; without any refuge or protection, the whole nation is languishing to fall to the ground.— These are the circumstances wherein Moses is born, and his birth is a slap on the face of the powers that be and their way of thinking. Pharaoh tries that Moses should not come into the world, yet he is born; Pharaoh wants that he should not remain alive, yet he lives in a wooden chest floating on the waters of the river Nile.

"Moses is brought up in the lap of his enemy and is protected by the same person who is thirsty of his blood.

"Moses then seeks safety in flight and sits under a

1. This portion has been taken from an article of the writer published in *Al-Muslimoon*, No. 7 and 8, 1381 AH.

tree dejected, down-hearted. He is received with open hands and honoured with a spouse. Now he sets off again with his family, loses the way in darkness when his wife gives birth to a baby. He goes in search of fire but finds the light that brightens the future of the entire Banī Israel. Moses wants some fire to help a woman but he is rewarded with the light which lits up the whole of humanity. He is raised to the exalted office of prophethood.

"Moses steps into the royal court of Pharaoh although he was a hunted fugitive chased erenow as a criminal charged with a felonious offence. He was a stammerer heretofore, hanging in suspense, but now he has courage to overmatch Pharaoh and his host by his call and graceful tongue. Pharaoh takes Moses as an enchanter and summons his magicians to compete with him, but they are brought to their knees and declare :

"We believe in the Lord of the Worlds,
The Lord of Moses and Aaron."¹

Moses is now called upon to take away his tribe in the darkness of night from the land of tyranny to the promised land ; Pharaoh and his troops pursue them with violence and hostility. Moses finds before him the surging sea and the enemy coming behind him. Moses and his people plunge into the sea which cleaves into two parts like two mountains standing face to face ; Moses and his tribesmen get across the sea but when Pharaoh goes into it with his troops, the waters come over them and they are all drowned. The people, weak and enslaved, thus inherit the rich lands of Pharaoh.²

"And We caused the folk who were despised to inherit the eastern parts of the land and the western parts

1. Q. ̤XXVI : 47-48

2. Taken from *Thurāt-ſit-Taſkir* published in *Al-Muslimoon*

thereof which We had blessed. And the fair word of the Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of their endurance; and We annihilated (all) that Pharaoh and his folk had done and that they had contrived."¹

Story of Joseph—an uncustomary event

The record of Joseph's life is again, owing to its uniqueness as well as supernormal content, a historical testimony against the natural causative principle. Because of the jealousy and plot contrived by his stepbrothers, Joseph had to remain for some time at the bottom of a well.

Thereafter, he was taken away to be made slave by the travellers who took him to Egypt. He escaped death and dishonour in this initial test.

Then he had to pass through another rigorous test involving his nobleness, prosperity and integrity when a pretty woman, who happened to be the wife of his master and to whom he was also obliged, was carried away by her carnal passion; he was charged with a criminal offence fastened upon him, and sent to a gaol where habitual criminals were detained. With the blame thus cast upon him, Joseph becomes the subject of malicious gossip by the people. He gets into trouble, far away from his home, among a people who look black upon the Israelites as their serfs and enemies, not entitled to any respectable place in their country. Joseph had thus touched the rock-bottom of infamy and disgrace, indignity and derogation, but he emerges as the ruler of Egypt beyond all expectations.

"Thus gave We power to Joseph in the land. He was the owner of it where he pleased. We reach with Our mercy whom We will. We lose not the reward of

1. Q. VII : 137

the good."¹

Similarity between Joseph and Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad and all the people of Quresh who had joined their faith with him, had to pass through a similar ordeal, equally hard and gloomy. Few in number, weak and helpless, scolded by the family members and opposed by the whole nation, unable even to worship their God in freedom, the Prophet and his companions were slighted, scoffed, segregated and crushed under the iron heel of Meccan infidels. Standing on a volcano, they lived in a precarious condition between the quicksands of treachery and violent death as picturesquely described by the holy Qur^ʿān.

"And remember, when ye were few and reckoned feeble in the land, and were in fear lest men should extirpate you."²

Promise of Divine Help to the Prophet

In those days of sombre hopelessness, when any glimmer of hope was a vain expectation, Allah narrated the story of Joseph to His Apostle Muhammad. The circumstances of the Prophet were then pretty much the same as that of Joseph in as much as his own tribe, the Quresh, and the brothers of Joseph looked like birds of the same feather. Both were stirred up by the jaundice of their souls, both had allowed their angry passions to rise in opposing and wreaking their vengeance upon the prophets of God and, what is more, both ended up by submitting and appealing to the kindheartedness of their persecuted brothers.

The bottom of the well where Joseph was thrown and the cave of Thūr, the refuge of the Prophet of Islam while on his way to Madina, bear as much resemblance as the

1. Q. XII : 56

2. Q. VIII : 26

anguish and misery of Jacob, separated from his beloved son, compares with the torment of the family of Abū Tālib during its isolation in Shu'eb Abū Tālib.

The former enemies of Joseph and Muhammad had, ultimately, to acknowledge the superiority of these prophets by paying compliments to them in words bearing striking resemblance.

"By Allah, verily Allah had preferred thee above us, and we were indeed sinful."¹

And both the messengers of God had given very much the same reply to their assailants.

"Have no fear this day! May Allah forgive you, and He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy."²

The Qur'ān introduces the story of Joseph with the words :

"We narrate unto thee (Muhammad) the best of narratives in that We have inspired in thee this Qur'ān, though aforetime thou wast of the heedless."³

And, finally, the story is drawn to a close by pointing out the moral in this manner.

"In their history verily there is a lesson for men of understanding. It is no invented story but a confirmation of the existing (Scripture) and a detailed explanation of everything, and a guidance and a mercy for folk who believe."⁴

The *Sūrah* 'Joseph' thus, proved to be a glad tiding for the Prophet of Islam who was then passing through the most difficult and gloomy period of his life in Mecca. The story of Joseph was, as though, his own story narrated in the guise of an allegory which has always the flourish of rhetoric in expounding some truth in unfavourable

1. Q. XII : 91

2. *Ibid*, 92

3. *Ibid*, 3

4. Q. XII : 111

circumstances.

Success of the Prophets

Thereafter, God relates in *Sūratul Qasas*, (the Story) the chronicle of Moses and Pharaoh which unfolds the tale how Moses is bestowed prophethood while he is on the look out for fire for his wife; how he is put on the alert against the contrivances of Pharaoh; and how he succeeds in destroying his enemy which results in the deliverance of Banī Israel. But for the addition of the last portion relating to the deliverance of Banī israel and their inheriting the lands of Pharaoh, this story also resembles that of Joseph in its essence and substance.

It is, however, significant that the *Sūratul Qasas* opens with a striking prelude about the bright future of the poor and helpless believers—something terrifying for the Meccan pagans who were then scheming to put out of existence the small community of Muslims.

"Tā. Sīn. Mīm

"These are revelations of the Scripture that maketh plain.

"We narrate unto thee (somewhat) of the story of Moses and Pharaoh with truth, for folk who believe.

"Lo! Pharaoh exalted himself in the earth and made its people castes. A tribe among them oppressed, killing their sons and sparing their women. Lo! he was of those who work corruption.

"And We desired to show favour unto those who were oppressed in the earth, and to make them examples and to make them inheritors.

"And to establish them in the earth, and to show Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts that which they feared from them."¹

1. Q. XXVIII: 1-6

A Source of Strength to the Believers

All these stories, told impressively for reassuring the Prophet, inspired hope and courage in his heart. The purpose of rehearsing these stories is thus explained in another *Sūrah*.

"And all that We relate unto thee of the story of the messengers is in order that thereby We may make firm thy heart. And herein hath come unto thee the Truth and an exhortation and a reminder for believers."¹

These genuinely efficacious stories of the prophets which hold the ring of truth have always given hope and courage and imparted conviction to all those who fear God, summoned the people to righteousness and patience and invited them to struggle in the way of God and His remembrance. They have always brought them over to have no misgiving about their success over the forces of tyranny and falsehood.

In the story of Moses, God reminds him that :

"And the fair word of thy Lord was fulfilled for the children of Israel because of their endurance; and We annihilated (all) that Pharaoh and his folk had done and that they had contrived."²

Again, expounding the reason for the remarkable success of Joseph, God says :

"Is it indeed thou who art Joseph ? He said : I am Joseph and this my brother. Allah hath shown us favour. Lo ! he who wardeth off (evil) and endureth (findeth favour) ; for lo ! Allah loseth not the wages of the kindly."³

A settled usage of God is this, in very truth, which knows no exception. To keep on the mission of the apostles of God on the pattern set by them and to lead a

1. Q. XI : 120

2. Q. VII : 137

3. Q. XII : 90

life bespeaking of true faith and righteousness, obedience and endurance and adherence in action to a blameless life is always rewarded by God with a goodly reward ; a life pure and godly has all the signs of an evergreen plant ; these qualities give strength and courage to the weak ; and the few in numbers so braced up with moral and spiritual vigour are always enabled to overcome the majority.

"How many a little company hath overcome a mighty host by Allah's leave ! Allah is with the steadfast."¹

"Faint not nor grieve, for ye will overcome them if ye are (indeed) believers."²

For these stories reinvigorate moral strength and lead to the belief in the Ultimate victory of the prophets and the success of those who are righteous and just over their enemies howsoever powerful, they have been the fount of vigour and vitality to the people in every age.

"There was a token for you in two hosts which met ; one army fighting in the way of Allah, and another disbelieving, whom they saw as twice their number, clearly, with their eyes. Thus Allah strengthens with His succour whom he will. Lo ! herein verily is a lesson for those who have eyes."³

Denial of Prophets leads to Destruction

The life-stories of the Prophets related in the Scripture, often briefly, often in detail, but repeated over and over again, lead to the same conclusion which is neither dubious nor changing ; and this is that they always emerge victorious against their enemies despite all hurdles and seemingly insurmountable difficulties. This happens in two ways : either the opponents are converted into faithful believers

1 Q. II : 249

2 Q. III : 139

3 *Ibid*, 13

and obedient followers of the prophet or they are defeated and destroyed.

"So of the people who did wrong the last remnant was cut off. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds!"¹

Worthlessness of Individual or National Interests

For the salvation of humanity depends on its submission to the prophetic biddings, the predetermined meed of these summons is ultimate success even if the laws of nature have to change their mode of operation. Causes and effects appear unexpectedly to crush the opposition to prophetic commands. But, apart from the great cause of the prophets, no other interest or issue, whether individual or national, and no movement for strengthening any political ideology or leadership, has the least importance in the eyes of God; for, none advances virtuousness or curbs the evil, none does any good to humanity or serves the way of God, none comes up against the forces of ungodliness, wickedness and corruption; on the contrary, each of these political manoeuvrings merely seeks to extend its own power and prestige with a view to patronising its own desires. God cares nothing about them; He takes no interest whether one is destroyed by the other or when one of them comes to its natural death.

All these ungodly movements give rise to revolts and revolutions which, in turn, bring up such problems to the fore that defy a solution by human efforts.

A Mistaken Belief

All the Muslim nations, nowadays, appear to share the misconception that material prowess and prosperity rather than moral grit are the most expedient means to success. This concept has become so popular today that the slogan 'material power first' is accepted unhesitatingly even by the

1. Q. VI : 45

people who are otherwise pious or stand for religious revival.

This way of thinking is, nevertheless, discredited by the lives and achievements of the prophets and the miraculous success of their endeavours through ways out of the ordinary which are quaintly unfolded by God for destruction of the evil.

I would like to quote here another passage from my article *Thuratūn fit Takkīr* to highlight the prevalent misconception of the Muslim world.

"We have been accustomed to estimate our position and prestige among the comity of nations in terms of our material assets, resources, military prowess, raw materials, industrial products, manpower and technical know-how. We find ourselves advanced or backward in some of these spheres and upon these we flatter ourselves or express concern.

"We never trouble our heads about the West's ability of leadership, and, if we ever do, ignoring our reasonings and findings, intelligence and quests, we soon begin to ponder over our own resources, fighting machines, production of armaments and atomic potentiality. This invariably leads us to despondency and cynicism. We come to the conclusion that we are born to play safe with the current of life, to be dependent on the West and to act as a protege of one of the two great powers."¹

But, the character and conduct of the prophets of God and the calamitous finale of their enemies, as we have been told in the Scriptures, give a lie to this way of looking at things. They make it quite clear that the secret of their victory and the weapons with which they successfully fought their enemies were faith, obedience to God and dissemination of His message. These were the munitions of war

1. *Thauratūn fit Takkīr*, pp. 2/3

with which they always succeeded in transferring leadership of the nations to a small group of feeble and frail but righteous persons.

"And when they became steadfast and believed firmly in Our revelations, We appointed from among them leaders who guided by Our command."¹

"And We inspired Moses and his brother, (saying): Appoint houses for your people in Egypt and make your houses oratories, and establish worship. And give good news to the believers."²

"O ye who believe! If ye help Allah, He will help you and will make your foothold firm."³

"So do not falter and cry out peace when ye (will be) the uppermost, and Allah is with you, and He will not grudge (the reward of) your actions."⁴

Future of Muslims linked with Prophetic Behaviour

This is the moral and the lesson we can derive from the life and character of the messengers of God and this is the straight way shown to us by each and every prophet through his actions and behaviours. The lesson to be drawn from the stories of the prophets preserved by the Qur'ān is that the weak and enfeebled nations of today have only this course open to them. It is, in fact, the only ray of hope for the nations bearing a divine message. Truth is with God and He alone shows the right path.

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1. Q. XXXII : 24
 2. X : 87
 3. XLVII : 7
 4. *Ibid*, 35

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Muhammad's Prophethood—Its Sublimity and Greatness

Tragedy of Ignorance

The great tragedy of the darkest age of human history—on which all historians are agreed—did not consist of ungodliness and wickedness alone, nor was it merely sinfulness and tyranny, nor could it be equated with thralldom of man whose dignity was trampled underfoot by despotic sovereigns. It was not, by the same token, scantiness or weakness of the pure-hearted souls. All these were there, and, unfortunate and regrettable too, but these have all been found to exist in several periods of the long history of mankind. Reformers have ever been busy fighting these evils with courage and determination.

A greater calamity which had then befallen man was the absence of any group of men, large or small, possessing true knowledge and good intentions, aware of the worth and dignity of human beings and willing to fight for truth and justice. The perversion of the age thus lay in not having an angelic group of men willing to give the battle cry against evil in order to refashion a brave new world of virtue and goodness.

Lack of True Knowledge

Man had long-lost, in the age of Ignorance, that knowledge of Truth which gives cognition of reality and credence of faith, and lifts him to the proximity of his Lord. It is this knowledge which teaches man how to pay homage to the Lord from the core of his heart. If there existed a few men here and there who even possessed the will and determination and a yearning for finding their way to God, their efforts were fruitless since the cognition of the Ultimate then available to the people around them was no better than an admixture of superstition and folklore. This more often misleads the travellers of spirit rather than proves of any help to them in their quest for the Truth.

Stinted Moral Fibre

If, in times like this, the true knowledge of God exists somewhere, as a mere pittance, in some scripture or the heart of a scribe, the moral fibre required to pick up and defend it with all one's might against the willfulness of one's own self or the wickedness of the society is normally found wanting in such ascetics and recluses.

That being the case, the desire to seek the Truth and fellowship of God was in those times at the lowest ebb; the will and determination to strive for it had been stinted; all efforts were directed to accumulation of wealth and gratification of carnal desires through meek servitude to the rulers and potentates; the lambent flame of love had been put out and the glowing cockles of the human heart were overlaid with slumbrous snow; and thus, the religion of man then consisted of a fantastic faith in gods and spirits and meaningless legends and folklores.

No Power to Uphold the Truth

And if, perchance, both the knowledge of Truth and the firmness of mind to act in its favour were to be found somewhere, there was nowhere any power or a group of

right-thinking men who could lend support to the just and righteous souls. Thus, the result was that the individual efforts made for reformation were being wasted and the reformers—mostly the clergymen, mystics and ascetics who had secluded themselves in far off monasteries on top of the hills—were like the lamps whose wick had been burnt out, or, they were like the glow-worms which fly in the dark drizzly nights emitting light but which can neither be helpful to a traveller in finding his way nor in warming up the poor chattering his teeth with cold.

A New Sun was Needed

The world was then clamouring for the knowledge which could make man cognizant of the nature and the attributes and the significance of the hallowed Names of the Lord; entwine humanity anew in a strong bond of fraternity; impart a new faith and conviction to the human beings; fill their hearts with glowing embers of love-divine; show them the light of truth by separating gross credulity from the fundamentals of faith; and, above all, clear the mist of doubt and disbelief through the light of reason and conviction. And, this was the light which the world got through the prophethood of Muhammad. Verily, his was the store of knowledge which could knock the bottom out of the heathenism and superstition to which ungodly people had joined their faith all over the world. The knowledge of truth imparted by him could alone have brought its verdict on the beliefs of the Jews and Christians. Would that the followers of these faiths had feared God and been truthful enough to acknowledge the fact that the flickering lights of the stars lose their lustre before the bright, luminous Sun that Islam was in relation to their own cults and creeds.

"Those who disbelieve among the people of the Scripture and the idolaters could not have left off (erring) till the clear proof came unto them.

A messenger from Allah, reading purified pages,

containing correct Scriptures."¹ •

Conspiracy of Philosophy and Polytheism

The determination to act for a righteous cause is always a product of the knowledge of Truth and an unflinching faith in it. When one accepts certain realities for truth, comprehends the virtues and evils arising out of one's conviction and these give rise to the feelings of hope and despair, longing and anxiety, then the determination is born to live up to one's deep-rooted beliefs with all one's heart and soul. But, unfortunately, man had then lost his faith in God, in the existence of Heaven and Hell, in the Day of Resurrection and in his own accountability for his actions. Polytheism and Philosophy had, in that age of Ignorance, capped the climax by joining hands in weakening this faith and severing the link between man and his Creator. Philosophy had overstressed the negation of divine attributes to which Polytheism had associated created beings, and thus both had jointly gone a long way to impair the relationship between man and his Creator. All those who had consorted with Philosophy saw no reason to turn towards or to fear or to be hopeful of a God bereft of the attributes of power and wisdom and love and compassion. Likewise, the persons associating partakers to divine attributes spent their lives in supplicating and propitiating such partners for they never felt the need to glorify or to entreat the Master hidden behind the curtain of secrecy, having no say in their affairs.

The world had thus been divided into two camps. One of these felt no urge or inducement to prepare for the Hereafter, and the other had no time to implore God of all gods. Both these concepts had severed the entire world of the pagan days from God for a long time and the heart of man had lost the glowing love and solicitude for his Master.

1: Q. XCVIII: 1-3

And, the result was that the inherent gifts and the genius of man had been rendered static and sulky; man was deceitfully inveigled into serving the claptrap of priests and the failings of his own desires, the prodigality of the kings and the cloven hoofs of the devil. The entire human race, from the east to the west, had thrown itself at the feet of gods coined by its own brain or elevated to the pedestal of divinity by the age-old customs; all the lofty ideas and ideals of mankind had yielded obedience to the figments of his own imagination as Abraham had poignantly chidden his tribesmen.

"Worship ye that which ye yourselves do carve?"¹

Prophetic Cail—the only Remedy

It was then not possible for any man, except for a divinely ordained messenger of God to carry conviction to the human heart which had been lost for ages, and to rekindle the flame of divine love once again; nor could anybody else divert the attention of man from his own deceitful longings and desires, pleasures of the world and servitude of mighty sovereigns to the absolute reliance on the invisible God, to the unquestioning acceptance of His commands and to the sacrifice of his life and belongings for the sake of his faith.

This is, of a fact, an uphill task which requires a faith as firm as mountains and as tenacious as to go through in the face of combined opposition of all the men and devils. This dauntless spirit of faith was exhibited by the Prophet of Islam when he declared—

"If the Quraish were to place the sun in my right hand and the moon in the left, I would still not give up to diffuse my message until God allows it to prevail or I die working for it."²

This was the strong faith required for the great job. If it

1. Q. XXXVII: 95

2. *Al-Bidāyah Wan-Nihāyah*, Vol. III, p. 43.

were to be spread over the whole world, it would have sufficed for all, good enough to satisfy the skeptics and to turn the weak in faith into staunch believers. This is the strong faith which speaks out when one is scared to death and stricken dumb. Has not the world seen a prophet assuring his companion in a cave when his enemies had found their way to the mouth of that cave?

"Grieve not. Lo! Allah is with us."¹

It was this faith which had made that Prophet see, despite the distance of time and space, the bracelets of Chosroes on the hands of Sarāqa, a poor Bedouin, and the white castle of Byzantian Emperor in the spark of fire while breaking a stone although he was then himself besieged and famished.

While the Prophet rode through the desert, after migration from Mecca, Sarāqa, a Bedouin pursued him on his fast steed. A miracle happened; the forelegs of Sarāqa's steed went down in the ground and he begged forgiveness of Prophet who remarked: "What would it be like, Sarāqa, when you would put on the bracelets of Chosroes?" And it did come to pass exactly as predicted by him when Caliph 'Umar summoned Sarāqa, after the capture of Madain, to put on the bracelets of Chosroes brought to Madina with the spoils of Persian expedition. Similarly, while digging the wide ditch to protect Madina, on the occasion of the Battle of Trenches, there appeared a huge rock which was ultimately broken by the Prophet. When he struck hard at the stone with his pick-axe, a spark was seen, and the Prophet predicted: "I have seen the white castle of Qaisar² in its light." The pages of history bear ample testimony to the fact that this prophecy came out to be true not very long after when the Muslims captured the capital and the castle of Byzantian Emperor.

Such was the powerful faith of the Prophet of Islam. It

1. Q. IX : 40

2. Heraclius, the Byzantian Emperor.

appeared at a time when the whole world was enveloped by the most widespread Ignorance known to history; for, nothing else could have succeeded in putting an end to this vile-ness and revived faith and moral fervour in man. This is the faith which is sent by God as a mercy and grace for the human race.

"He it is who hath sent among the unlettered ones a messenger of their own, to recite unto them His revelations and to make them grow, and to teach them the Scripture and Wisdom, though heretofore they were indeed in error manifest."¹

"He it is who hath sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it conqueror of all religion however much idolaters may be averse."²

A Nation needed to Strive Perpetually

The vileness of Ignorance had then been drawn to a head; it had become an incurable cancer; no few reformers or an organisation or movement could have taken out the thorn from the flesh of humanity. An *Ummah*, or a nation, was required to strive constantly and for ever against the curse of Ignorance in every place on this wide earth. This nation was to face the blight of evil and to root it out completely; to fill the earth of God with justice and truth in the same measure as the Ignorance of pagan past had stuffed it with tyranny and injustice. The world then needed a great prophet with a great following to accomplish this task. And, for this reason, it came about in that way.

"You are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah."³

Now, Muhammad was sent as a prophet exactly at the

1. Q. LXII : 2
2. Q. LXI : 9
3. Q. III : 110

time when the entire humanity was waiting for him with bated breath, haply in the same manner, as the dry and parched fields of the summertime tarry for the first showers of rainy season.

"And thou seest the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it doth thrill and swell and put forth every lovely kind (of growth).

"That is because Allah, He is the Truth and because He quickeneth the dead, and because He is able to do all things."¹

Transillumination of the World

"All of a sudden the lifeless body of humanity comes to life with new a soul ; man, dead and defunct, rises again from his deep slumber which has been metaphorically described by the historians as rocking of the Chosroes' castle and cooling of the sacred fire of Persia. If strong masonry towers and imperial palaces can be toppled down by the convulsions of earthquakes, why should the designs and the patterns of Caesars and Chosroes and Pharaohs not fall prostrate at the glorious daybreak of humanity's redemption—the revivification of man marked by the commencement of Muhammad's prophethood."²

Rise of a New World

The birth of the Prophet of Islam and the dawn of his prophethood was not the birth of a prophet alone, nor was it the rise of a new nation, nor yet the beginning of a new era ; it was the genesis of a new world which is destined to last till the end of time when it shall return to its Lord and Master.

The influence of Muhammad's prophethood is visible in every thing that the world now contains : it has entered

1. Q. XXII : 5-6

2. Taken from *Ma'aqal al-Insaniyata* by the author.

into the warp and woof of whatever exists today. The beliefs and the patterns of thought, the culture and civilisation, the morals and modes of living, the knowledge and learning, in short, all the spheres of human endeavour have not only been deeply influenced by his prophethood but have also absorbed it so completely that it would now be impossible to pluck out its roots any more. Were the world, somehow, enabled to tear out the traces of Mohammad's prophethood, it would have to give up almost all that is worthy and valuable in its possession. Who can deny that the world owes the debt of its life to the prophethood of Muhammad, for, was it not Muhammad alone who gave it a new lease of life, nay, the very right to live any more? It was he who saved the world by breathing in it the health of soul and spirit of righteousness although it merited, before him, nothing save divine contempt and wrath. Its wickedness and black deeds had paved the way for its final doom and destruction.

"Corruption doth appear on land and sea because of (the evil) which man's hands have done, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return."¹

A Tradition of the holy prophet relates that :

"God looked at the earth, but he disliked both the Arabs and the non-Arabs, save a handful of the people of the Book."

The Age of Ignorance

What did the Lord of the world, the Knower and the Aware, see on the earth? He saw some prostrating before the idols and others giving themselves up to dissipation or dancing attendance upon a sovereign or a devil. He found no trace of virtuousness, no inclination for truth, no cognition of reality, no moral rectitude, no communion with

1. Q. XXX : 41

Him and no atonement for the sake of Hereafter. All the cardinal virtues prized by Him were then non-existent commodities like the elusive elixir or the philosopher's stone. The picture of the era of Ignorance before the advent of Islam, as drawn by Shāh Waliullah in the *Hujjat Aliāh li-Bāligha*, is the most graphic description I have ever come across about those horrid times.

"For the Romans and the Iranians had been keeping a tight hand over the world for several hundred years, they had taken to the enjoyment of easily won luxuries and amusements. Steeped in satanic iniquity and heedless of the life to come, they had become overfastidious in their customs and conventions and acquired a taste for meaningless niceties. They had begun to take pride in excelling one another in current fads and fashions and the seasoning of pleasures. Skilled artisans and ingenious craftsmen had gathered, from all parts of the world, round the metropolitan cities of these empires, always improving and devising new conveniences and comforts which normally became popular as soon as they were contrived. The velvets and clovers produced for the ruling classes thus became a means to hold up one's pomp, pride and circumstances. The standard of living had become so inordinately high that it was unbecoming of a nobleman to don a waist-cloth or a fez less in value than a hundred thousand dirhams. If any grandee could not afford to live in a splendid edifice complete with fountains, baths and gardens, did not have young and good looking slaves and chubby beasts or could not afford to serve sumptuous and tasty dishes to his guests, then he lost the esteem of his friends and acquaintances. Many more details can be given here but you can very well imagine the conditions then prevailing from the modes and manners of the kings and grandees in your own

country.¹ All this mannerism and pretension had become a sort of second nature to them and, even if they had wanted, they would not have got rid of them. These dictates of the then society became, in due course, an onus imposed on the whole society which nobody, neither the rich nor the poor, could throw off easily. The formalities of social code—dainty, elegant and expensive—which had wrapped up the whole society became a curse for every man who found himself always worrying his head on account of them. As a matter of fact, these expensive etiquettes could not be flaunted without spending large sums of money but the money could not be obtained without increasing the tithes and taxes on poor cultivators, tradesmen and artisans. If they refused to pay these ever-increasing taxes, expeditions had to be sent to punish them; and if they submitted meekly then they were treated as beasts of burden, allowed to live only as serfs, cultivating and irrigating the fields of their masters. The life of hard and strenuous labour thus imposed on the whole nation, consequently, left no time to any one to devote his thoughts to the Hereafter or to his ultimate end. One would have failed to find, at times, even one man in the whole country who was mindful of his religion or gave any importance to it.¹²

The New World Order

The prophethood of Muhammad made a clean sweep of the conditions obtaining during the times of pagan past before Islam. The faith in God, yearning to seek His propinquity and the endeavour to acquire the virtues of

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1. Shāh Wallullah refers to the later Moghuls ruling over Delhi in those days.
 2. *Hujjat Allah il-Baligha*, Chap. on Modes of Living and Reform of Customs.

after-life became a conspicuous feature of life in the whole of civilised world which, in turn, gave rise to forces working for moral regeneration of the masses. Decadent nations were imparted a new zest for improving the common weal. The supreme object of these new forces was to save man from the thralldom of his own species in order to convey him to the service of Supreme Being, to divert his attention from the worldly desires to lofty aspirations of the life-to-come and to shake off the tyranny of religions for enabling him to enjoy the justice of Islam. This was the most lofty ideal the world has ever known—an ideal for the achievement of which the valour of the stalwarts, dexterity of the sharpwitted, sagacity of the wise and sapient, knowledge of the savants, lyrical gifts of the poets, swords of the fighters, pen of the writers and creative thought of the idealists had all combined to usher the world in a new era never witnessed before. The world had seen, in the days of Ignorance, men who were slaves to their own sensualities and carnal desires. But, now, under Islam, there arose men in every age and place who were sincere devotees, pious and righteous savants, just rulers, temperate and frugal kings and virtuous fighters in such large numbers that it would be difficult to keep count of them. So worshipful of God they were that even their enemies held them in reverence. They diffused propriety and goodness, true knowledge of God, moral principles, justice and selflessness and commanded the people to walk in the right path and desist from wrong; fought in the way of God with no other purpose save upholding justice and fairplay to all. They created a decorous convention of reform and regeneration, a tradition of inviting people to the way of God which has ever since been carried on, without any break, to this day, as ordained by the Prophet of Islam.

"A section of my followers shall predominate with the ways of righteousness, and their enemies shall fail

to lay a hand on them until the Last Day comes."¹

A Miracle of Muhammad's prophethood

Sheikh-ul-Islām Ibn Taimiyah has vividly described the revolutionary change brought about by the prophethood of Muhammad in the *Al-Jawāb-ul-Sahīh Liman Baddala Dīn-al-Masīh*. I would better reproduce here the passage summing up these striking reforms.

"The character and conduct of the Messenger of Allah (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him) and his sayings and doings constitute a sign among the signs of God. The followers of Muhammad, their religion and their knowledge as well as the miracles worked by the pious and God-moved souls among them can all be reckoned as marks of Divine grace.

"The holy Prophet of Islam was always firm, fair and just in carrying out the Divine commands. He never spoke a lie, nor was unfair, nor unfaithful to any one; rather, he was the most truthful, moderate and rightfully just. He had to pass through all the ups and downs, like war and peace, anxiety and hopefulness, poverty and prosperity, success and failure; sometimes his followers were few and at times a vast multitude was at his back; but he never deviated from the right path, until, at last, Islam spread through the length and breadth of Arabia which was heretofore the land of idols and star worship, fetishism, iniquity and cruelty. Those who were completely ignorant of requittal and the life beyond, became so enlightened, religious-minded, just and righteous that the Christians of Syria were forced to acknowledge that the disciples of Christ would not have been better than they. The effect of Islamic and un-Islamic attainments and acquisitions can still be seen on the face of earth. The knowing and the prudent are fully conscious of the

1. *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. II, p. 143

difference between the two. The followers of Muhammad (on whom be peace) are, in the same way, better than all others in every respect. If their knowledge were to be compared with the knowledge of others and their religion, devotions and divine services were put beside the faith, prayers and supplications of others, it would be recognised that they were far ahead than others in their conviction and reverence to God. If one were to measure their courage and endurance and strivings in the way of God, or else to estimate their generosity, self-denial and hospitality with those of others, one would find that they excelled the followers of other religions in all these cardinal virtues. They inherited these moral gifts from the Apostle of God who taught and guided them in keeping to the right path.

"The nation of Muhammad was not the follower of any scripture like the Jews to whom Jesus Christ came to expound the Law existing beforehand. The faith and morality, knowledge and competence of the Christians were bequeathed to them partly by the Torah, partly by the Psalms of David, partly by the teachings of other prophets and, finally, by Jesus Christ and his disciples, and then they derived something of philosophy and scholasticism and incorporated many a thing that was a part of infidelity and directly opposed to the teachings of Christ.

"But the nation of Prophet Muhammad was not aware of any Scripture existing beforehand. A greater part of his followers was led to believe in Moses, Jesus, David and Torah, New Testament and Psalms through him; for, it was he who asked them to believe in all the prophets of God and all the earlier Scriptures; he asked them not to discriminate between the messengers of Allah. He bade them so as the Divine Command was: We believe in Allah and....."¹

1. Vol. IV, p. 82

Achievement of Muhammad's Prophethood

Importance of Man

The destiny of this world has always been inextricably linked with man. Its grace and disgrace, boon and bereavement being ultimately dependent on man, no calamity would really overtake the world if it were to lose all its assets and affluence, adornments and embellishments, but man were to survive in it. These would, forsooth, not constitute an irreparable loss to the world, for man would redeem every damage and heal every injury. Man would not only restore everything lost by him but would also put back things even more improved and refined through his zeal and industry, talent and skill. If anybody taking command of the world were asked to decide between man without the world or the world without man, he would definitely prefer the first, provided, of course, he were also endowed with understanding and prudence. In fact, one should have no difficulty in making this choice, for, the world has been created for man; it is on account of man alone that the world has its worth and excellence.

Lack of assets and resources, 'means and contrivances do not constitute the bane of this world—it is rather misuse

of these inventions and device . All the horrible misfortunes this world has had to come across in its long history was due to waywardness of man, his deviation from the right path and revolt against his own good sense. The means and resources man possesses are deaf-mute, innocent expedients which merely carry out the orders of their masters. If they were to be blamed for the death and destruction brought through them, they could, at the most, be held responsible for acting swiftly and increasing the volume, intensity and sphere of the catastrophe wrought by them at the bidding of man.

Secrets of Human Nature

This vast universe is incredibly marvellous, so mysterious and puzzling that it makes one bewildered and dumb-founded.

But, if we were to compare our wide world with the unfathomable secrets of human nature, its possibilities and hidden potentialities, the depth and compass of human heart, flight of man's imagination and its wide range, warmth and fervour of his soul, his noble-mindedness and large-heartedness, his never-ending hopes and vaulting aspirations which are satisfied neither by riches nor by brilliant victories, nor even by blissful delights and joyful pleasures and, also, his different states of mind, inclinations and tendencies, which can perhaps never be enumerated, we would find this vast universe a drop in the ocean of human consciousness. The whole world would seem to be a trifling trinket in the bosom of deep, immense sea of man's heart. The unflinching faith of man moves the mountains ; his fire of love braves tempests of violence ; his awe for God, clemency for the poor and the weak and his tears shed for the atonement of his own sins put angels to shame ; his lustre of noble conduct and wholesome intentions take the shine out of the most gorgeous beauty of the world and infinite meadows of the heaven. Man is the essence

and substance of this universe, the elixir or flower of all creations, or the noblest sign among the signs of Great Creator who has fashioned man with the best of morals in a goodly frame.

Highest of the High

Not all the power and pelf that the world can offer, nor all its treasures can be the substitute for a faith which is beyond every doubt. Similarly, all the worldly goods and benefits cannot supplant the love that is chivalrous and self-denying, or the enthusiasm that is unbounded and unblemished, or the sincerity which is candid and guileless, or the morality which reflects integrity of character and high principles, or the service that is rendered without expectation of any return or recognition.

If man were to fathom his own self and realise his worth, the world would find itself incapable of setting a price on him. Were he to give free rein to his determination and intrepidity, he would find the world too narrow and limited for his ambitions; perhaps, as a poet says:

A speck of dust is man, if shrinked and wasted;
But a tiny hovel is outer space, if he is outspread.

The secret of human self can neither be fathomed nor its mysteries unravelled. The reality of self is undefinable and its amazing potentialities are beyond man's wildest dreams. The cognizance, nobility, forbearance and kindness of the mankind, gracefulness and finesse of his consciousness, his self-respect as well as his humility, his living awareness of God and the urge to seek Divine fellowship, his altruism and nobility, his unending quest for knowledge and his inquisitiveness to unmask the secrets of nature indicate but a few dimensions of his self which bedazzle even the shining intellects.

A Great Achievement of Muhammad's Prophethood

Man is, in truth and reality, the fount of all blessings

and benignity, well-being and improvement; he is the answer to every problem, howsoever difficult; but when man gets stunted and wasted, his self becomes rotten and the man within human frame becomes uncommon, or, rather, men cease to be raised by the human societies; and then the prophets come forward to the aid of humanity. Men with wholesome tendencies then begin to appear again in the society. This has been, in every age, the great task of prophethood, but history has once been a witness to the largest group of men being welded into a strong and compact society with virtuous ideals, all sharing the same belief and striving for the same end—this was the greatest achievement of prophethood, and it was realised through the last one, the prophethood of Muhammad.

But, Muhammad had to begin his work in the most unfavourable circumstances. He had to face difficulties which no other prophet or reformer had to encounter before him. The social conditions and the moral climate of the people to whom earlier prophets had been sent were definitely better than the conditions prevailing in the pagan era of Arabia, yet, for all that, the success achieved by Muhammad in the fulfilment of his mission was by far more remarkable and amazingly thoroughgoing than the accomplishments of the prophets before him.

Muhammad had to begin his great task among the people whose manners and behaviours still showed the streaks of their bestiality, but he raised them to the highest peak of humanism that keeps close to the borders of prophethood, which, however, is no longer to be conferred on any man after the advent of the last Messenger of God, Muhammad, on whom be peace and blessings.

The Sober but Winsome Truth

Every follower of Muhammad is, to tell the truth, a shining light of prophetic miracles, a sign of the great achievements of the noble race of prophets and an example of the

noblest creation of God. The pure-hearted among the followers of Muhammad convey, by the inspiring examples of their noble behaviour, such a feeling of the sublime and the good and the excellent as no artist has ever succeeded in presenting a lofty reality through his artistry. Verily, no poet has ever sung, nor can even all the poets make an immortal verse of such beauty and colour as the characters of Muhammad's followers call up before our inward eyes. Nor have the annals of any other people any record of such noble specimens of humanity. Strong in faith, having a deep perception of truth, possessing a loving heart, pure and unfeigned in their lives, humble and God fearing, kind-hearted and well-intentioned, courageous and devout, fighters in the way of God over the day and ascetics spending their nights in vigils and prayers, indifferent to worldly riches and pleasures, always just and warmhearted to the people placed under their charge—such were those who had patterned their lives under the prophetic care of Muhammad.

Righteousness in Action

Trustworthy and dependable were the believers brought up by the Prophet of Islam. Their hearts were filled with the awe of God, they preferred Hereafter over the world and all that it stands for and possessed the spirituality which overcomes the material in man. They had no misgivings that this world had been created for them, but they never lost sight of their abode in the world beyond. Consequently, one finds them candidly upright and square-dealing in trades and business, honest and laborious at their jobs, warm-hearted and merciful in the conduct of administration, magnanimous when rolling in riches, patient and enduring in adverse circumstances, impartial and just in administering justice and tried and true in managing the affairs entrusted to them.

Abstinence of the Rulers

A remarkable example of the continence practised by these pious souls is furnished by Abū Bakr, the first Caliph of Islam. Once his wife had a mind to take something sweet. She accordingly saved a little by curtailing her day-to-day expenses, but when Abū Bakr came to know of it, he returned the amount saved to the public treasury and also reduced his daily allowance by the amount thus curtailed by his wife. His remark on the occasion was that since the experience had shown that his family could do in a smaller allowance, it was not lawful for the ruler of Muslims to enjoy ease and prosperity at the cost of public money, and therefore he had no right to draw the full allowance.

Here is another incident, an imperial itinerary of the ruler of the greatest empire then existing in the world, which has been preserved by history. And, this ruler was held in such awe that brilliant generals and governors of provinces could not dare to disobey his commands. The historian, Ibn Kathīr, narrates this grand tour in this manner :

"On his way to Bait-ul-Maqdis 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb was riding a dromedary of dusty colour. He had no cap nor a turban to protect him from the scorching sun. Without reins, he was riding, his legs dangling on both sides of the camel's saddle, on which he had placed a coarse woollen cloth, and which he used to spread for taking rest when he dismounted. An woollen or leather bag he had, filled with leaves, for reclining on the saddle, which he used as a pillow when he got down to take rest. His shirt was of coarse cloth, old and worn out on one side below his armpit.

"He ordered to summon the chief of the tribe, Gulmās. The chief was accordingly called for and then 'Umar asked him to wash his shirt and mend the worn out portion of it. A silken shirt was brought for 'Umar on his request to fetch some cloth for him until his shirt was mended. Amazed to see the silken shirt

he enquired what was it made of. When he was told that it was made of silk, 'Umar again asked what the silk was made of? Thereafter, he put off his shirt and took bath but when his mended shirt was brought back to him, he took off the silken shirt and donned his old one.

"Gulmās then advised 'Umar: 'You are King of Arabia but the people here think little of pack-animals like a camel. In order, therefore, to make an impression on the Romans, you may put on some good clothes and ride a horse!' 'Umar said in reply: 'We are the nation whom Allah has given honour through Islam and and so we shall not now take to anything save Allah. A horse was presented to 'Umar on which he put his mantle and rode on its back without reins or saddle; but in a while he gave an exclamation saying: 'Stop it, stop it. I had never seen the people riding the devil!' His dromedary was consequently brought back and he rode on it."¹

Another historian, Tabrī, relates one more journey of 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb.

"'Umar went on a journey with some companions of the Prophet, on one occasion, after appointing 'Alī as his deputy in Mādina. Travelling opposite Ibla,² when he reached near the place he got aside on the path and asked his slave to get behind his camel. He got down his mount to urinate, but when he returned he exchanged his camel with that of his slave. A group of persons from Ibla, who had come to receive him, could not recognize 'Umar and asked him about the Caliph. 'Umar replied that he was before them. Unable to understand, the group from Ibla went ahead and thus they could meet him only after 'Umar had arrived at Ibla."³

1. *Al-Bidāyah wan-Nihāyah*, Vol. VIII, pp. 59-60

2. On the shore of Red Sea

3. Tabrī, Vol. IV, p. 203-4

Such were these specimens of humanity whose abstinence and temperance, self-denial and kindness, justice and courage and truthfulness and wisdom can set the pace for victorious resistance to one's evil desires. If a historian or a writer or a psychologist or a teacher of ethics were to collect these examples of cardinal virtues, which we find scattered in the pages of history, he would make a valuable addition to biographical literature of the world, displaying great charm, liveliness and sublimity. Although a complete record of all those who drank deep at the fountain of Muhammad's prophetic guidance has not been preserved, we still have a number of elegant and graphic accounts set forth by Arab penmen of the old who were known for their matter of fact yet elegant mode of expression. These character sketches help us to visualise the accomplishment of the last Prophet in the character building of his followers and the noble society brought into existence through his efforts. One of these word paintings, portraying the character of 'Alī ibn Abū Tālib, the fourth Caliph, deserves, by virtue of its intensity of colour and effectiveness, to be treated as a piece of immortal literary creations of the world.

On one occasion Caliph Muāwiyah (661-680) asked Dharār bin Dhamurah, a companion of Caliph 'Alī, to tell something about the latter. Dharār said :

"He was, upon my word of honour, a man of mettle with a stout heart. His was always the last word but rightfully just, and it seemed that wisdom flowed from every word of his speech. He looked askance at the world and its pleasures; the night and its darkness were more agreeable to him. By my troth, his eyes were more often filled with tears and he always appeared to be care-worn. He had the touch of conscience which often made him to reproach himself. He was happy to wear garments made of coarse cloth and partake coarse food, lived like a commoner and made no distinction between himself and others. Whenever

we asked anything, he would reply ; whenever we went to him, he would salute first ; and whenever we invited him, he would come ungrudgingly ; but, despite this nearness, his awe never permitted us to talk in his presence or join in his conversation. Whenever he laughed, his teeth used to shine like hailstones. He respected the pious and loved the poor. No man of influence or authority could hope to achieve any undeserved gain from him, nor the weak ever gave up hope of obtaining justice from him.

"I'll declare to God that I have seen him often after the night-fall, standing on his prayer mat, holding his beard and weeping bitterly. I have heard him sobbing and lamenting : 'O World, dost thou want to entice me away ? Hast thou brought thy charms for me ? Away I away with thee ! Go about thy business and deceive somebody else. I have already divorced thee thrice. O World, thy pleasures are transitory, thy life is short, and thy allurements are unreliable and dangerous. Alas ! I have but little provisions, the voyage is long and the route extremely perilous.'"¹

The First Islamic Society

The first Islamic society which came into existence through the efforts of the Prophet of Islam was the most virtuous, elegant and winsome known to the history of the world, for it had been guided and groomed by the best teacher of humanity. It was a nice, amiable community or a mould of man's goodness whose characteristics have been trenchantly summed up in a few incisive words by 'Abdullah bin Mas'ūd, who was himself a member of that fraternal order. Says he : "Of all the people, they were the purest of heart and the deepest in knowledge, and were also most unassuming whom God had selected for the

1. *Safat-us-Safwah*, Vol. I, p. 122

companionship of His Apostle and raising His chosen way in the world."¹

Whoever shall compare the earliest Islamic society with any other, he will find it surpassingly superior to every other social order. If he finds certain weaknesses in the people belonging to that society—for man is seldom free from weakness and mistake—he would also discover that their shortcomings are thrown in the shade by the excellent humane and moral qualities possessed by them. He would find virtues in them which are to be seen nowhere else in any group of men in any age or country. Sheikh-ul-Islām Ibn Taimiyah has succinctly brought out the pre-eminence of this society which was the emblem of man's cardinal virtues. He writes about the companions of the Prophet:

"The companions were the best group of men among the Muslims for they excelled all in faith and virtuousness and kept themselves aloof from all schisms and frictions. The few failings which are imputed to them, would appear to be insignificant if we were to compare their morals and behaviour with the comportments of the later Muslims. Similarly if one were to weigh the shortcomings of the followers of Islam against the faults of the votaries of other faiths, one would find the former negligible in comparison to the infirmities of the latter. Actually, he is a fibber who magnifies their failings to blacken their fair characters but refuses to see the wholly tarnished record of other nations. Nay, the conclusion thus drawn by anyone speaks of his own misjudgement and ignorance."²

The Later Generations

The prophetic teachings as well as the shining examples of morality whom the Prophet of Islam had reared and

1. *Musnad Dārimi*

2. *Minhāj-us-Sunnah*, Vol. III, p. 324

groomed as exemplars for the later generations, and, above all, his own illustrious personality were to serve as a beacon for all times to come; these were by no means limited to his own time and the generation among whom he had lived and preached. The Prophet is a tower of strength for all nations and all ages, for, he is like the radiant sun whose rays give life and poesy and light to every nook and corner of the world. Mankind, indeed; owes to him all the human virtues like tolerance, liberty, social justice, pursuit of knowledge, in short, all the higher vistas of human grace and goodness.

The prophetic teachings are like a moral force, operating in history, which sharpens the wits and puts the coming generations in the way of righteousness. They consist of the faith in God and certainty of the Day of Requittal, the awareness of one being always under the watchful eye of God, yearning for the heaven and fear of hell, while the character and demeanour of the Prophet set the pace for leading a simple and frugal life, indifference to the transitory life of the world and carefulness of the life-to-come, and giving preference to the welfare of others over that of one's own self or one's relations. These were the humanising influences which gave man insight into the finer instincts of morality and which constituted the perennial guidance of prophethood. They have groomed one generation after another in the righteous way of living and reared, in the past, many a learned teacher and leader, monarch and mendicant. All of them became acquainted with the higher ethical principles and found the goodness of heart from this very seminary; for, it was here that they learnt all about the merits of moral rectitude, human kindness, gentility and seemliness and the niceness of truthfulness and faithfulness. Many of them assumed command over nations, held the keys to the treasures of different lands or had access to all the pleasures which wealth or victory could procure, but they left ascetics and mendicants far

behind them in purity of heart and worshipful obedience to God.

Those who have hearkened to the guidance of prophetic teachings are separated from one another by the expanse of time and space, yet they are all, without any exception, winsome products of Muhammad's prophethood. The charm and beauty of their characters is but a reflection of the brilliance of Muhammad's edification shining through their crystalline souls. None of their comeliness has anything to do with their parentage, circumstances or their own genius, for they would have in all probability grown up as worshippers of idols, as savage monsters if they had not had the teachings of Islam and the example of the Prophet to lighten their paths. Verily, without their ardent desire to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet of Islam they would have neither had faith in the Unity of God, nor warded off the evil, nor would have they been self-sacrificing and continent, largehearted, kind and virtuous.

A Few Disciples of Prophetic School

Let us now take a few examples of the learners of the prophetic school, who were guided and groomed far away from Arabia, the birth place of Islam; were born several hundred years after the teacher *par excellence* and who were not Arabs by race or nationality. One of these was Sultān Salāh Uddīn Ayyūbī (d. 1193), a Kurd by race, who was born in the sixth century after Hijrah. Ibn Shaddād, his secretary, writes about him.

"Enough and to spare were the resources of the empire over which he presided but he had left nothing except one *dinar* and forty seven *dirhams*. Once I saw him with the pilgrims bound for Bait-ul-Maqdis, but he had nothing at all left in the public exchequer to help them. I spoke to him about the matter and at last he decided to sell certain valuables stored in the treasury for giving out gifts to them. He gave away all, not

sparing even a *dirham* of the sale proceeds.

"He gave as freely in straitened circumstances as he opened his purse in times of prosperity. His treasurers, therefore, used to keep a secret balance for the emergencies for, left to himself, he would have given to the last shell. Once I heard him cynically making the remark that there were certain persons for whom money and dust were alike. He was, so to say, indirectly referring to his own views in this regard. He always gave away more than one asked for from him."¹

When this ruler of the great empire extending from Syria in the north to Nubian desert in the south, left this fleeting world, he was literally a pauper whose entire belongings were insufficient to meet his funeral expenses! Ibn Shaddād records that :

"Preparations were then made for his burial. We had to manage it by borrowing the smallest articles such as bundles of straw which were required for covering the grave. After the *Zuhr* prayer, his bier covered with a cheap cloth was taken to the burial place; even the shroud was provided by his minister and amanuensis, Qāzī Fāzil."²

Stanely Lane Poole, another biographer of Sultān Salāh Uddīn pays tribute to the forbearance, humanity and magnanimity of this great conqueror in these words :

"If the taking of Jerusalem were the only fact known about Saladin, it were enough to prove him the most chivalrous and great-hearted conqueror of his own, and perhaps, of any age."³

Thus the salubrious influence of Muhammad's teachings containing unlimited possibilities of goodness, virtue and merit for the posterity, has been at work in every period of history. In many countries, situate at the fringe of Islamic

1. *An-Nawādir-i-Sultāniā*, pp. 13/14

2. *An-Nawādir-i-Sultāniā*, pp. 13/14

3. *Saladin*, pp. 233-34

world, the people who have never had any contact with the Arabs or the earlier converts to Islam nor were ever affiliated to them by way of race, culture or language, have, on accepting Islam, very often exhibited wonderful qualities of head and heart. Oftentimes, they accepted Islam at the hands of a purer soul, and then their progeny produced rulers and conquerors who were as austere puritans as the ascetics. Not a few of them were so temperate and virtuous, God-fearing and just, selfless and kindhearted, truthful and noble that they can take the shine out of monks and priests of other faiths and peoples.

I will give here only one more example out of innumerable models of chaste and pious souls whom one can find at every turn and pass of the long history of Islam in India. It is an specimen of such colour and elegance that the lustre and freshness of its soul-stirring morality is still capable of warming the hearts of the people. He was Muzaffar II (1511-26), the King of Gujarat who had a long-standing enmity with Mahmūd Khilji II (1510-31) of Malwa. Mahmūd bore ill-will towards Muzaffar since his own brother, Muhammad, had rebelled against his authority and thrown himself on the protection of Muzaffar. Mahmūd had, thus, been a source of constant worry to Muzaffar. In due course of time, Mahmūd fell entirely under the influence of his Rajpūt minister, Mendī Rāi, who, losing patience with his master, forced Mahmūd to leave Māndū, his capital, and flee to Gujarat, where he sought the aid of Muzaffar. As soon as Muzaffar heard of Mahmūd's arrival he sent his tents, treasure, and elephants, and entertained him at a banquet to celebrate the occasion. No man infatuated with the spirit of revenge and desirous of taking advantage of the adversity of his former enemy would have entertained Mahmūd with the highest marks of respect. But Muzaffar had no accounts to settle as he considered it a God-send opportunity to be obliging and helpful to his former foe in order to seek the pleasure of God. Muzaffar found this

more favourable to his character, since, the whole course of his behaviour towards Mahmūd shows his anxiety to help a Muslim sovereign regain his lost power and territory. Muzaffar laid open the safety of his realm to danger, but he marched at the head of his forces to relieve Māndū. He defeated the Rājput garrison twice before the walls of the city and formed the siege of the fortress. The Rājput garrison performed the rite of *Jauhar*¹ with a vow to fight to the last. At last, Māndū was carried by escalade after a bloody battle in which nineteen thousand troops lost their lives, and the streets ran with blood, which streamed from the drains which carried rainwater into the ditch.

The capture of Māndū affords another proof of Muzaffar's nobility of character and his Islamic conscience. Some nobles of Muzaffar's army advised him to annex the fertile kingdom of Māndū to Gujarat for it had been lost owing to the folly of Mahmūd. They were, in a way, right in holding this view as according to the age-old convention of the country, the land won by force of arm belonged to the victor. Muzaffar had conquered the province and, therefore, he had every right to hold it as a feudatory.

When Muzaffar came to know of the desire of his nobles, he forbade his troops to enter the city. Mahmūd invited Muzaffar to stay for a while in his capital but the latter politely refused the offer and ordered his forces to return to Ahmadābād. His reply to Mahmūd was that he had come to Mahmūd's help merely to fulfil the divine command which says :

"But if they seek help from you in the matter of religion, then it is your duty to help (them)."²

"A Muslim is brother unto another Muslim whom he neither gives over to the enemy nor degrades."³

1. Committing womenfolk to the fire before taking to the battle-field for final action.
2. Q. VIII : 72
3. A Tradition of the Prophet.

"Now my mission has been achieved with honour to me, yourself and Islam," added Muzaffar, "but, were I to give ear to what I have heard my companions talking about, all efforts and fighting in the way of God would come to naught. It was not me but you who allowed me to partake in this blessing and, therefore, I want to return to my dominion for I wish neither to render my labour worthless nor to mix my virtuous acts with vices."

When Māndū was captured Mahmūd had taken Muzaffar to have a look at his magnificent fortress and flourishing city, which, amidst the splendid mountains of Mālwā, covered a broad expanse of rolling jungle, deep and dense valley, interrupted by smiling lakes and fertile fields. The natural setting of the city gave a solemnity to its own intrinsic beauty which was decked out on the occasion by the radiant faces of pretty slave girls lining up to welcome the two monarchs. But, Muzaffar had cast his eyes down to avoid the gaze of smiling nautch girls. At last, Mahmūd could not hold himself from asking his bashful friend, "What's the matter, Sir, that you neither lift up your eyes nor take a glance at these girls?"

Muzaffar came back calmly, "Mahmūd it is not lawful for me. Has not God told us: "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest?"

Taken aback, Mahmūd gave tongue again in broken voice, "But these are my bondmaids and I am a slave unto you! You have purchased me by your kindness and thus they would be lawful to you, if your goodself were pleased to have one of them."

But, even this could not satisfy Muzaffar for he knew that nothing forbidden by God could be made permissible by man.²

This pious and reverent king had thus set an example

1. Q. XXIV : 30

2. For details see Asfi's *Zafer-ul-Walū*.

of his beauty of holiness regenerated by the teachings and ethical norms of Islam. This King, who lived like a man inspired by his religion, had been the seventh in the lineage of Wajih-ul-Mulk of Didwānā, a Rājput, who had been converted to Islam during the reign of Firūz Tughlaq. There can be no doubt that Muzaffar was imbued with the humanising influence of Muhammad, whom he loved and respected as a grateful follower, and tried to live up to the teachings of that great master.

A Perennial Source of Inspiration

How many disciples has had this blessed seminary of prophethood in the east and west, in times medieval and modern, and what a splendid example of their morals and behaviour have they set in every field of human endeavour!

The seemly influence of Muhammad's prophethood has revealed itself in countless miens as glittering gems. It often became visible in the gallantry of Tāriq, or the boldness of Muhammad bin Qāsim, or the courage of Mūsā bin Nasīr; sometimes it emerged in the intellectual calibre and profoundness of Imām Abū Hanifa, or Imām Shāfi, or in the perseverance and dauntless spirit of resolution displayed by Imām Mālik and Imām Ahmad bin Hanbal; on occasions it made its appearance in the kindly goodness of Nūr Uddīn Zangī or the indefatigable efforts and strivings of Salāh Uddīn Ayyūbī; at times it turned up in the shape of Al-Ghazālī's genius, or the heavenly spirituality of Sheikh 'Abdul Qādir Jīlānī, or the inspiring forcefulness of Ibn Jauzī's dress of words; frequently it burst upon the view like the sword of Muhammad the conqueror or as the daring exploits of Mahmūd of Gazna; not infrequently it came forth in the guise of a colossus of knowledge like Ibn Taimiyah, or a capable sovereign like Sher Shāh Sūrī, or a man of iron will as was Aurangzeb 'Ālamgīr; and, its inner spirit recurrently

appeared on the horizon with the cognizance of recondite truths and intrinsic core of reality in the writings and preachings of Mujaddid Alf Thānī, or 'Abdul Wahhāb's call to righteousness, or the farsighted sagaciousness of Shāh Walī Ullah, or the altruism of later reformers and revivalists.

The genius and intellectualism of all these emblems of human greatness belonging to different spheres and fields of human activity, owe their training and guidance to the Alma Mater which came into existence with the prophethood of Muhammad, and which, as a historical force, not only provided the conditions for fuller development of human faculties, but also produced, despite numerous impediments and vagaries of time, master spirits of every age. This was the school of goodness which can claim to have reared and trained God-fearing man with resplendent beauty of spirit, who have always been the guardians and guides of humanity in obedience to the divine command which runs :

"(They are) humble toward believers, stern towards disbelievers, striving in the way of Allah, and fearing not the blame of any blamer."¹

But the voice of prophecy also carries the warning for every man—

"But if these disbelieve therein, then indeed We shall entrust it to a people who will not be disbelievers therein."²

1. Q. V : 54

2. Q. VI : 89

Finality of Prophethood

Now, that I have placed before you, thanks to God, the salient features of prophethood, in general, and that of the last Prophet, in particular, as one finds it delineated in the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, it appears necessary that I should say something about the finality of prophethood also. The enquiry of this issue should proceed in the light of the Qur'ān, *Hadīth* and history of religions. This should, in fact, not only be in the sequel of any talk on prophethood, but is also demanded by the erratic and monstrous hair-splitting of the topic by certain self-seeking and wayward persons whose sole aim in raising this question is to mislead Muslims and to change their accepted belief in the finality of Muhammad by posing it as a disputed issue. The treatment of the subject, thus, requires a more detailed treatment than I have attempted in the earlier chapters.

Perfection of Islam

The Will and Pleasure of the Omnipotent God unfolded itself by making Islam perfect and complete, suited to the demands of all times and climes. Muhammad, the blessed Apostle of God, faithfully delivered the message vouchsafed to him and strived with all his might to raise an *Ummat*

or community which could discharge the responsibilities of prophets, and, then, this *Ummat* was entrusted the charge of spreading the message of Islam, safeguarding its pristine purity against all deviations and innovations and, also, of assuming the leadership of humanity in order to guide it on the right path.

"You are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and ye believe in Allah."¹

It all happened in accordance with the Divine Knowledge which is ancient and eternal; the pre-ordained Will of God was that successors of the Prophet, beacons of light and learning, shall live through every age to defend the religion of God against exaggeration of the overcredulous, misrepresentation of the dissenters and gullibility of the naives. This was the pre-determined design of God thus explained through the voice of prophecy.

"A group of my followers shall stick to the right path and shall also be preponderant. Those who will keep away from them will be unable to put them to any harm, until the Day of Judgement arrives and finds them in the same condition."²

Termination of Prophethood after Muhammad

After the pre-determined decree of God had been fulfilled, it was announced that no guidance in regard to the Creed and the Law, on which depends the salvation of man in this world and the next, shall henceforth be imparted through revelation or the angels or any new messenger of God, and that the communication of divine command through these sources shall be terminated

1. Q. III : 110

2. *Muslim*, on the authority of *Thaubān*

after Muhammad, the last of the prophets.¹

It is important to observe that the Qurʾān repeatedly refers to the angels, particularly Gabriel, through whom divine revelations were sent down to the earlier prophets as well as to the last Prophet of God for the edification and guidance of human beings.

"He sendeth down the angels with the Spirit of His command unto whom He will of His bondmen, (saying): Warn mankind that there is no god save Me, so keep your duty unto Me."²

"And lo! it is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds,

"Which the True Spirit has brought down upon thy heart, that thou mayst be (one) of the warners,

"In plain Arabic speech."³

"And it was not (vouchsafed) to any mortal that Allah should speak to him unless (it be) by revelation or from behind a veil, or (that) He sendeth a messenger to reveal what He will by His leave. Lo! He is Exalted, Wise."⁴

"Say: The Holy Spirit hath revealed it from thy Lord with truth, that it may confirm (the faith of) those who believe, and as guidance and good tidings for those who have surrendered (to Allah)."⁵

"Nor doth he speak of (his own) desire,

1. The verses of the Qurʾān and the Traditions of the Prophet leave no doubt that the divine revelations are communicated through the medium of angels, particularly Gabriel. This would also be clear from the verses quoted here, but most of the books by theologians and scholastics speak only of revelation without mentioning Gabriel or any other angel. The Qurʾān, however, distinctly asserts Gabriel as the medium of divine revelation.

2. Q. XVI: 2

3. Q. XXVI: 192-95

4. Q. XLII: 51

5. Q. XVI: 102

"It is naught save an inspiration that is inspired, which one of the mighty powers hath taught him.

"One vigorous ; and he grew clear to view when he was on the uppermost horizon.

"Then he drew nigh and came down till he was (distant) two bows' length or even nearer,

"And He revealed unto His slave that which He revealed."¹

"Say (O Muhammad, to mankind): Who is an enemy to Gabriel ! For he it is who hath revealed (this Scripture) to thy heart by Allah's leave, confirming that which was (revealed) before it, and a guidance and glad tidings to believers."²

"That this is in truth the word of an honoured messenger, mighty, established in the presence of the Lord of the Throne,

"(One) to be obeyed, and trustworthy ;

"And your comrade is not mad,

"Surely he beheld him on the clear horizon, and he is not averse of the Unseen."³

But the inspirations, intuitions and spiritual visions perceptible to the evolved and elevated souls, betaking to vigils and meditations, have nothing to do with the revelations clothed in the dress of divine messages from the Most High to His apostles ; since, such inspirations may sometimes be bestowed to those who are neither godly in spirit nor on the right path.⁴

1. Q. LIII : 3-10

2. Q. II : 97

3. Q. LXXXI : 19-24

4. It cannot be denied that even non-Muslims have such beatific visions wherein they have some sort of inspiration. Many instances of this nature have come to light and this is confirmed by a Tradition of the Prophet, which says : "There were people in Banī Israel before you who made prophesies, but they were not messengers of God (Abū Hurairah).

[Continued on next page]

Termination of prophethood after Muhammad is an edict from God and it has been announced in no uncertain words such as to leave any doubt about its purpose and intention. Nobody can dispute this divine command unless he has an axe to grind or else has a concealed reason for his conduct.

Characteristics Befitting only the Last Prophet

The unique manner in which the Qur'ān expresses the termination of prophethood and the various reasons it gives for it are abundantly satisfying. A legitimate argument put forth in support of the termination of prophethood, as it ought to be, is the description of sterling qualities and characteristics of the last Prophet, which convinces every man possessing good sense that a Prophet so noble, so estimable must needs be the beacon of light and guidance and an exemplary teacher for all mankind to the

The well-known saint and gnostic, Sheikh Muhiuddin Ibn 'Arabi Andalūsi (d 1240), has expressed the view that the inspirations of mystics and mendicants are limited to perception of truth or enlightenment of their heart but these do not extend to the injunctions of the law. But, if they do claim to prescribe or abrogate any injunction of the *Shari'ah*, they must not be relied upon (*Futūhāt-i-Makkiyah*, Vol. III, Sec. 310, p. 50 and Vol. II, Sec. 283, p. 823).

Sheikh-ul-Islām Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Taimiyah writes in *Kitāb-un-Nabuwāt* that although *Wahy* or revelation is the word used for prophets as well as for beatified souls who are not prophets, "the persons transported to the spiritual realm to whom is divulged something of the Unseen are neither impeccable nor prophets, nor all of their intuitions and inspirations can be relied upon, for sometimes devil reveals to them something of that which is not of divine source. Such inspirations have a devilish origin and their mistake can be discerned only after the teachings of the prophets are available. (p. 67). Several other mystics, particularly Mujaddid Alf Thāni Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindī, have dealt with the issue in greater detail. The letters of the Mujaddid explain the question with great clarity and vision.

end of time. Says the Qurʾān :

“Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets ; and Allah is ever Aware of all things.”¹

Now, take another example. To declare Muhammad as the last Prophet, the Qurʾān employs, naturally, the language and idiom of the people among whom it was sent, for, it was first addressed to them and they were expected to understand its expression and to explicate it to others. Arabic, as a language of verbal intercourse, was a copious and expressive tongue, yet, it had no better word than *Khatam* to denote the sense of termination. This was the word used by the then Arabs in their conversation, writings and poetry signifying finality, and from it were derived all the verbal senses like *Khātām*, *Khatām* and *Khatam* used in the Qurʾān to denote that Muhammad was the last of the prophets after whom nobody was to be raised to that exalted office.²

The Qurʾān also adverts to those marks and features of the last Prophet which sound the keynote of his being the exemplar and model *par excellence* for all times to come.

“Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last-Day, and remembereth Allah much.”³

1. Q. XXXIII : 40. Mark the words ‘Allah is ever Aware of all things’ which assume a special significance coming, as they do, after declaring Muhammad as the Seal of the Prophets. One might think how a prophet can be a guide to the human beings to the end of time and how can his teachings suffice for the ever changing needs and demands of man in future. The answer to the questions of this nature is concise and to the point : Allah is ever Aware of all things.
2. For a detailed discussion on the topic see Ibn Manzoor’s *Lisān-ul-ʿArab*, Jauhari’s *Sihāh-ul-ʿArabia*, Ibn Sīdah’s *Al-Muhkam*, Mujīd Uddīn Firozābādī’s *Al-Qāmūs ul-Muhīt* and the commentary on the last one entitled *Tāj-ul-ʿUrūs* by Saliyid Murtaza Zabīdī.
3. Q. XXXIII : 21

"Say, (O Muhammad, to mankind): If ye love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."¹

"O Prophet! Lo! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner.

"And as a summoner unto Allah by His permission, and as a lamp that giveth light."²

God is immeasurably and eternally exalted and His knowledge comprehends all things, hidden and manifest, whether in heaven or earth. None can conceive Him investing eternity to anything transient, for even a well-advised writer would not sing the praises of a king whose authority he knows to be short-lived, nor a flatterer would blandish panegyrics for a sickly child who is likely to fade away like a shadow. It is for such undeserved praises that a poet has said.³

Throned on the highest bliss,
But it vanished like a dream!

1. Q. III : 31

2. Q. XXXIII : 45-46

3. This was one of the reasons why Ibn Taimiyah denied that Abraham was asked to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. He says that the command to offer Isaac for sacrifice would have ill-matched the prediction that Isaac would have a son. Ibn Qayyim, who records the arguments of his teacher, says: "How could Isaac be deemed as earmarked for sacrifice when his mother had already been told that she would have a son, and the grandson Jacob, even before Isaac was born. He bases his argument on the following verse of the Qur'an.

"They said: Fear not! Lo! We are sent unto the folk of Lot. And his wife, standing by, laughed when We gave her good tidings (of the birth) of Isaac, and, after Isaac, of Jacob." (Q. XI : 70-71)

It was thus inconceivable, says Ibn Taimiyah, "that God should give Abraham the glad tidings of a son, and a grandson through him, and then ask him to offer up that son for sacrifice" (*Zad-ul-Ma'ad*, Vol. I, p. 16).

Divine Arrangements for Preservation of Muhammad's Traditions

For the predestinate will of God was that the blessed Prophet should be the shining example for all human beings, in all ages, it became obligatory that divine dispensation should take care of the safe-keeping of untainted account of the life, character, habits and demeanour of that exemplar. The Muslims, in consequence, devoted themselves to finding out all the details about the Prophet's appearance, dealings, likes and dislikes, in short, every incident even remotely connected with him, and recording the same for posterity. The task so engaged their minds that human history knows of no parallel interest showed to anything else. It seems as if some mysterious power had gripped their minds and hearts, and it constantly pressed them to take no rest without bringing their assignment to completion.

The great interest as well as meticulous care exhibited for recording the minutest details about the Prophet can be seen from the books of Traditions and biographies which give such details as the Prophet's appearance and habits, speech and gait, way of eating and dressing and similar numerous details. All these accounts related by the members of the Prophet's household or those followers who had spent most of their time with him illustrate the care and caution exercised in preserving authentic information about him. There can be no denying the fact that no similar life-like portrait of any other person has been preserved in any language or literature.

Even a cursory look at the *Shama'il* of Imām Muhammad ibn 'Isā Tirmizī (824-892) is sufficient to convince one that collection of such details as features and character, personal traits and habits, likes and dislikes was something peculiar in the case of the Prophet of Islam. It would, indeed, be futile to look for similar information in the biographies of other renowned personages or even prophets. Of course, all this effort did

not come to be made by some fickle chance, nor was it due to any unusual craze of a few persons.¹

Similarly, if one were to go through *Al-Adab-al-Mufrad* written by the great scholar, Imām Bukhārī (810-869), in which he has collected the sayings, acts and teachings of the Prophet on the subject of moral norms, social laws, obligations and duties, values and ideals upheld by Islam, one would be convinced that far from being the result of any casual effort, it was all due to the Will of God that these books should have come to be written for illuminating the straight path for subsequent generations. These writings bear witness to the truth of what had been thus ordained :

"Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much."²

And, it was all done to leave no pretext for the lazy and insincere to avoid following the example of the one raised by God as a model for the whole mankind. They cannot now say that like the prophets of old whose names and garbled reports are all that remain now with their followers, authentic record of the life and conduct of the eternal exemplar to be followed by them are not available to lighten their path.

Traditions of the holy Prophet are very like a journal or

1. Muslims have preserved not merely the biographical accounts of the Prophet, but also social, cultural, administrative and economic conditions of his time which give us a lucid account of social surroundings in which Islam was first preached. One would be forced to concede that such details are nowhere to be found in the historical records of previous nations. Anyone desiring to see these for himself is referred to *At-Takhrij* of Abul Hasan ʿAlī Al-Khazʿalī Al-Tilmisānī (1310-1378) which was brought to completion by another scholar, ʿAllāma ʿAbdul Haʿī Al-Kalānī in his *Al-Tartīb-ud-Dāriyah*. These constitute an encyclopaedia of the Prophet's time.

2. Q. XXXIII : 21

a graphic memoir of his life extending to twenty-three years after he was raised to prophethood. This record tells us the daily routine of the Prophet, his habits, dealings, inclinations and the smallest details of his behaviour, in short, the Traditions throw such a flood-light on the life and character of the Prophet as it would be difficult to conceive of for any other person, past or present. These are a means to know everything about the Prophet as intimately as if one were present in his discourses : one can listen him talking to his companions and behold him performing his daily routine. This was the method adopted for preserving his true-to-life portrait in words, and it was also free from all the dangers of pictorial representation or sculptural carving which had very often led the votaries of pious souls in the olden times to raise those admired by them to the pedestal of godhood.

It would be sufficient to read the account of the last *haj* performed by the Prophet to know how graphic and precise was the description of every event connected with him. One would be amazed to find that even trifling matters of little or no historical importance, which are normally skipped in narration of travel accounts of kings, heads of states or other important personages, have been placed upon record by his companions.¹

These extensive reports about the Prophet, thus collected, were used by deeply-learned men, from time to time, to compile books containing guide-lines for different sections of the Muslim community. Any Muslim who wants to follow in the foot-steps of the Prophet in his day-to-day

1. *Sihāh-us-Sittah* set down even such small affairs as the Prophet's putting on of *ihrām*, use of scent and sacrifice of animals and the places where he performed any particular act. All the stop-overs of the journey have been marked down ; even the appearance of a snake in the night at Mina, and its slipping away unhurt has not escaped the attention of the narrators. The Traditionists have made a note of all those persons who have had the honour of riding the Prophet's dromedary with him on any occasion.

manner and morals, will find, even today, sufficient guidance in these treatises. The number of such books, written in every language spoken by the Muslims, is not only quite large but also pretty extensive in scope and content. To give but one example, the *Zād-ul-Ma'ād fi-Hudā Khair-ul-'Ibād*, written by Ibn Qayyim (1291-1350), a disciple of Sheikh-ul-Islām Ibn Taimiyah, shows the assiduousness and profound knowledge of the Traditionists.¹

Biographies of the Prophet and Records of earlier Prophets

How God willed the memoirs of the last Prophet to be preserved for posterity who were to follow his shining example, is amply illustrated when we see that the chronicles of almost every prophet of yore have been lost in the foggy mist of times past. This is but a pointer to the fact that earlier guides of humanity had been sent for the people of their own age and that is why Providence never intended to keep their biographies safe for the coming generations.

We need see only the biographies of Jesus Christ to understand this fact. Jesus was the last Prophet of God sent before Muhammad; his followers are second to none in their literary endeavours and the love and respect for Jesus Christ. They have exalted him to the position of Three in One and One in Three. Yet, the journals of this Saviour preserved by his followers are so scanty and meagre that no vivid treatment of his character and life is possible, let alone to be presented as an example to be followed by others. Not very long ago, the Christian world held the view that the New Testament contained an account of the last three years of his life, but modern researches

1. The book, which has always been highly valued by the scholars, has been printed time and again. The copy before us, printed by Matba Maimana, Egypt, in 1324/1906, in two volumes containing 926 pages is, so to say, an encyclopaedia of Traditions, ethics and jurisprudence.

have revealed that the Evangelists do not have a record of more than fifty days of the Christ's ministry.¹

The material to reconstruct the life-story of the founders of other religions is also buried under the debris of irrecoverable past. Not only the authentic facts of their lives but the links that could have connected the different episodes related about them have been lost so completely that neither any time relation between the events of their lives is possible to reconstruct nor can these disjointed narratives serve as a model for guidance and enlightenment of human beings.² All this would really appear to have happened in obedience to the Divine Will or the Law of Nature, for, historical characters of momentary importance have necessarily to be short-termed. The values that are incapable of enlightening the path of humanity need not linger on generation after generation. But, the guidance needed forever must live on, as fresh as a flower, to the last syllable of recorded time.

The Bond of Love between Muhammad and his Followers

Anybody who goes through the instructions contained in *Ṣūratul Ahzāb*, *Al-Hujarāt*, *Al-Tahrim*, and *Al-Mujādilah* about giving one's love and regard to the holy Prophet, as well as those divine compliments and rewards and blessings bestowed on him, to which references can be found in the verses of *Al-Fath*, *Az-Zuha* and *Al-Inshirāh*, he would avouch

1. Rev. Dr. Charles Anderson Scot acknowledges in his article on Jesus Christ, written for the 14th edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica, that :

"The attempt to write a Life of Jesus' should frankly be abandoned. The material for it certainly does not exist. It has been calculated that the total number of days of His life regarding which we have any record does not exceed 50." (Vol. XIII, pp. 16/17)

2. See the second, third and fourth chapters of the *Khutbāt-i-Madras* or the famous '*Madras Lectures*' by Maulānā Sayed Sulaimān Nadwi.

that the fragrance of the Prophet's character which shines through all he says or does, must belong to a messenger of God sent to all nations and for all times—a sun of guidance that shall continue to illuminate the world for ages and ages. A neoteric prophethood, with or without a *Sharīah*, would, doubtlessly, run counter to the meed of praises lavished for the Prophet in the Book of God. Such a new fangled prophethood, at the same time, weakens that bond of love, abiding and effective, existing between the Prophet and his followers; it severs the link between the Muslims and the Prophet's teachings, his companions and his household, and the holy cities where he first preached the message of God. For every new apostleship must inevitably take its place between the last Prophet and his followers, it would assuredly break the cohesion of the *Ummat*, consciously or unconsciously, and weaken its love and affection for the holy Prophet.¹ This is all quite natural and in keeping with the standing order of things for God has not kept two hearts in the bosom of any man.

Now, as the things stand, no man endowed with good sense or having an insight into the vital impulses of man or the history of peoples and religions, can guarantee the continuance of undiminished loving regard of a people for their Prophet, his companions and his progeny, his birth place and household, his language and culture after the emergence of any intervening prophethood. Such a rift in the lute is inevitable process of history which never takes a different course.

The Qur'ān and the *hadith* demand, indisputably, that

1 The belief in *Imāmat* as also the exaggerated regard for the saints like Sheikh 'Abdul Qādir Jilāni by certain misguided sects, which endues the qualities of prophethood, and sometimes even ascribes divine attributes to these objects of love leads, at all events, to a decline in the affectionate regard which has always been the most prominent feature of relationship subsisting between the Muslims and the beloved Prophet of Islam.

the Muslims must adore the Prophet more than their own lives, belongings and progeny and prefer him over everything else in the world. A Tradition of the Prophet says :

"None of you shall be a believer unless he holds me dearer than his father and his sons and all other persons whom he admires."¹

Similarly, the Qur'ān's word of command is that :

"The Prophet is closer to the believers than their selves, and his wives are (as) their mothers."²

Love is born of faith, lives on devotion, and dies the moment the loyalty to a third person intervenes between the adorer and the adored. For this is the way things go, belief in a new prophet would surely kill the trust and the respect and the love for the Prophet most lovable of all.

Muhammad's characteristics opposed to New Prophethood

The Qur'ān expresses finality of Muhammad's prophethood in a unique manner—it is a novel style in all its intensity and colour of diction, speaking of the universal nature of his prophethood and transcendentalism of his *Sharī'ah* after which no divine guidance would be vouchsafed to man. Yet, the phraseology is in plain and simple Arabic allowing no euphemism or diffuseness in its matter of fact articulation. It says in plain words that the religion brought by the last Prophet is perfect, abiding and capable of meeting the needs of human society to the end of time.

"This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed my favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM."³

This verse was revealed on the day of 'Arafah during the pilgrimage of farewell performed by the Prophet in 632.

1. *Tabrānī, Mu'ajjam Kabīr and Ausat*

2. Q. XXXIII : 6

3. Q. V : 3

The Traditionists and biographers of the Prophet are unanimous that no revelation carrying any divine injunction was revealed thereafter. The Messenger of God lived for eighty-one days more after revelation of this verse, but many of his companions who loved him with all their heart and soul, and among whom Abū Bakr and ʿUmar certainly occupied the foremost place, immediately realised that these words meant the seal and termination of the revelations. They foresaw the significance of the revealed verse, for the perfection of Islam meant the completion of divine blessing in the shape of prophethood, whose bearer was soon to receive summons from On High. Some of the companions began to shed tears while others looked forward to the end of the world.¹ But, those deeply learned and wise among the Jews interpreted this verse as a singular honour to Islam, not shared by any other religion. They opined that it was a distinction granted to Muslims who should celebrate the day when this verse was revealed as a festive occasion of great jubilation.

The prophetic insight had revealed to the Messenger of God that it was his last opportunity to address a hundred thousand dutiful followers eager to listen to him and follow his directions. The Prophet, therefore, said to them :

“O people! No prophet is to come after me and no community will be raised after you. So listen carefully and devote yourselves in obeisance to your Lord, offer prayers five times a day, keep fast for a month, pay the poor-due cheerfully and obey your rulers and chiefs. If you would do so, you would find a place in the Paradise.”²

The Quʿrān has, in the same way, made it explicitly clear that the religion of the last Prophet was preordained

1. See *Sahih Bukhārī*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Jamʿi Tirmizī*, *Sunnan Nisāi*, *Musnad Ahmad* and *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*.

2. *Ibid.*

to ascend the pinnacle of glory, to spread its light in the whole world and to overcome all other religions.

Says the Qur'ān :

"He it is Who hath sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may cause it to prevail over all religion. And Allah sufficeth as a Witness."¹

"He it is Who hath sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it conqueror of all religion however much the disbelievers may be averse."²

"Fain would they put out the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah will perfect His light however much the disbelievers are averse."³

All these predictions and promises, declaring a great future for the religion of Peace, show that the guidance brought by the last of the Prophets is a vital need for the mankind in every part of the world and in every age. The Will of Heaven must prevail whether certain people like it or not ; its enemies shall have to accept it ultimately whether by peace or by war. Keeping in view how the future of this religion has been foretold so emphatically, in what challenging terms, would it not be without rhyme or reason to expect any alteration in it or to look forward to any new prophet being sent again ?

Universal Nature of Muhammad's Prophethood

All the religions and the laws promulgated before Islam were designed to cater for the needs of particular nations or for particular time and place.⁴ Judaism was never meant for the whole of mankind ; nor were the Jews ever told to preach

1. Kinz-ul-Ammal, vol. V, p. 295

2. Q. XLVIII : 28

3. Q. LXI : 9

4. See Deut : 18 : 15, 18 : 18 and 33 : 1-2

their religion to the gentiles and non-Jews. On the contrary, Old Testament contains several injunctions to preach the faith of Moses only to the Children of Israel.¹ Judaism developed, in consequence, principles which made a distinction between the Jews and the gentiles and had a different set of standards to judge the virtuous and evil deeds of the people belonging to Israel and those of others.

Maryam Jameelah, who was formerly a Jewess, writes in *Islam versus Ahl al-Kitab, Past and Present* that "not only do Jews fail to preach their faith to others but they do not welcome converts. In all history I know of only two instances when non-Jews accepted Judaism en masse—in Yamen some centuries prior to the birth of our holy Prophet and the tiny, short-lived kingdom of the Khazars, who were of Tartar origin, in Russia."²

The innate spirit of the Old Testament, making itself visible from every word of it, gives the impression that it is a *Shāhnāmāh* or eulogium of the ancestors of Jews. It has none of the spiritual teachings and moral lessons, concepts of human equality and dignity, homilies impressing upon the mind the need to discipline one's self, preachments favouring the good of the hereafter in preference to the things worldly and material, or discourses instilling the awe of God and fear of divine retribution. It neither touches the right chord which makes one God-minded nor awakens the spirit of human nobility and distinction in its non-Jewish readers. The entire Scripture revolves, with its fables and commandments, round the Jews whom their religion and revelations exalt as the 'chosen race' and the 'Children of God'.

Christianity too, in a like manner, is meant for the Israelites alone. Jesus Christ had himself made it abundantly clear to his disciples that his message was meant

1. For details see chapter 22 of vol. III of *Rahmatul-lit-Alimīn* by Qazi Muhammad Sulaiman Mansūrpuri.

2. Pp. 22/23

only for the Jews.

"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."¹

And when he was requested by a Canaanite woman to cure her daughter grievously vexed with the devil, he replied:

"It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs."²

Jesus preached not only to his own people, the Jews, living in Judea but also forbade his twelve disciples to diffuse the gospel to others. He commanded them, saying:

"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."³

The chauvinistic basis of social structure built up by other eastern and Asiatic religions is even more glaringly conspicuous. The Aryans had condemned the servile population under them as impure and treated them as beasts and dogs.⁴

A new prophet, with new teachings and a new law, capable of meeting the changed situation was thus the demand of the time and will of Divine mercy and wisdom. For the reason that religions very often relax their canons to give free reins to the rich and the ruling classes, or go the other way round to deny the pleasures, just and lawful, or else make the life extremely hard and unbearable under the influence of dry puritans and ascetics, a new prophet is needed from time to time for setting right these aberrations. Jesus had accordingly told his people that:

"And (I come) confirming that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful some of that which was

1. Mt. 15: 24

2. Mt. 15: 26

3. *Ibid*, 10: 5-7

4. For a detailed account see 'Caste System and the Unfortunate Sudras' in chapter I of the *Islam and the World* by the author.

forbidden unto you. I come unto you with a sign from your Lord, so keep your duty to Allah and obey me."¹

So, these are the two reasons for the advent of a new prophet. But the Qur^ʿān proclaimed the termination of both these causes ; it declared that being a universal message from God, no nation or people shall henceforth be denied its blessings.

"Say (O Muhammad) : O mankind ! Lo ! I am the messenger of Allah to you all—(the messenger of) Him unto Whom belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. There is no God save Him. He quickeneth and he giveth death."²

"And We have not sent thee (O Muhammad) save as a bringer of good tidings and a warner unto all mankind ; but most of mankind know not."³

"We sent thee not save as a mercy for the peoples."⁴

"Blessed is He Who hath revealed unto His slave the Criterion (of right and wrong), that he may be a warner to the peoples."⁵

"Lo ! it is naught else than a reminder for all peoples."⁶

And, there are many more verses of the Qur^ʿān which go to show that Islam is a common patrimony of all races, nations and peoples, not confined to any country or region, nor does it make any distinction between the Jews and the Brahmins ; it recognises neither race nor colours nor admits of any social gradation ; it approves of fidelity and devotion, uprightness and veracity, good faith and piety and virtuous and angelic deeds, no matter where these are to be found.

1. Q. III : 50

2. Q. VII : 158

3. Q. XXXIV : 28

4. Q. XXI : 107

5. Q. XXV : 1

6. Q. XXXVIII : 88

That is why God proclaimed to the mankind :

"O mankind ! lo ! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo ! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo ! Allah is Knower, Aware."¹

The Prophet of Islam also declared on the occasion of his victory over Mecca that—

"All are the progeny of Adam, and Adam was created of clay. No Arab has a preference over a non-Arab, save on account of his piety."²

Ahmad ibn Hanbal relates a Tradition, in the *Musnad*, from the Prophet which says :

"If knowledge were to be found on Pleiads, some of the persons from Iran shall attain it."³

Then, on the other hand, the Qur'³ān emphasises, time and again, that Islam is the natural religion of man, easy and practicable.

"Allah desireth for you ease ; He desireth not hardship for you."⁴

"He hath chosen you and hath not laid upon you in religion any hardship."⁵

The overreligious ascetics and ignorant priests had made the earlier religions hard and impracticable ; man was made to undertake a voyage through a channel narrow and unnavigable ; hence the eventual law and prophethood put an end to all those hardships and lightened the burden of humanity. Alluding to this feature of the last prophethood, the Qur'³ān

1. Q. XLIX : 13

2. *Tirmizi*

3. In volume I of *Al-Jawāb ul Sahīh Baddala Dīn il Masih*, Ibn Taimiyah has discussed in detail the question relating to universality of Muhammad's prophethood.

4. Q. II : 185

5. Q. XXII : 78

says :

"He will enjoin on them that which is right and forbid them that which is wrong. He will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit for them only the foul ; and he will relieve them of their burden and fetters that they used to wear."¹

The Qur'ān also tells us that if all the wise-heads and lawgivers were to frame ordinances designed to meet all human needs in different circumstances, they would not be able to do so because they cannot plumb the secrets within the ken of Divine knowledge.

"Your parents and your children : Ye know not which of them is nearer unto you in usefulness. It is an injunction from Allah. Lo! Allah is Knower, Wise."²

"Allah would explain to you and guide you by the examples of those who were before you, and would turn to you in mercy. Allah is Knower, Wise.

"And Allah would turn to you in mercy : but those who follow vain desires would have you go tremendously astray.

"Allah would make the burden light for you, for man was created weak."³

With the advent of Islam, no new religion need come now either for propagating a universal principle of human guidance or for reforming the erraticism of former religions. No fetters now remain to be broken up for setting man free since the religion last sent by God is both world-wide in its concept as well as easy to practise.

Qur'ān and the Earlier Scriptures

Before the Qur'ān was committed to humanity, every

1. Q. VII : 157

2. Q. IV : 11

3. 2Q. IV : 26-28

scripture had been subjected to interpolations, modifications and alterations or was wholly destroyed by the ravages of time. This was because God had not taken the responsibility to protect them from corruption or destruction. These scriptures were committed to the care of their religious leaders since the peoples to whom these were assigned needed them only for a limited space of time. The Qur'an alludes to this fact in this verse.

"Lo! We did reveal the Torah, wherein is guidance and a light, by which the Prophets who surrendered (unto Allah) judged the Jews, and the rabbis and the priests (judged) by such of Allah's Scripture as they were bidden to observe, and thereunto were they witnesses."¹

The corruption of these Scriptures is a historical fact accepted by the followers of all the earlier religions. The Bible of the Hebrews was several times burnt or destroyed, and, as acknowledged by Jewish historians, it had to be rewritten at least thrice after complete destruction. First, it were the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar (605 B. C. to 564 B. C.) who attacked Judah in 586 B. C., destroyed the magnificent temple of Solomon containing the Ark and the sacred Scriptures and the relics of Moses and Aaron, slaughtered a great number of Jews and dragged off the rest into exile where they remained in Babylonian captivity for fifty years. The first five books of Old Testament known as Torah, were reconstructed by Ezra from his memory who is also credited with the writing of the Prophets. To these were later added the "latter prophets" and Psalms of David by Nehemiah.

The Jewish Scriptures were wiped out for the second time when Antiochus IV came to the throne in 175 B.C. Palestine had fallen under the Seleucid or Asiatic section of Macedonian Empire a few years back in 198 B.C.

1. Q. V : 44

Antiochus forced the Jews to worship the Greek gods, Zeus and Dionysos, forbade them to observe their religious rites or circumcise their children or even to have the copies of Hebrew scriptures. In the temple of Jerusalem he erected an altar to Zeus and sacrificed on it pigs, the most unclean of all animals. Now the Maccabees restored the Hebrew scriptures again and added the books that are known as "The Writings".

Palestine fell to the Romans under Titus (40-81) who attacked Jerusalem on 7th September 70 A.D., destroyed the second Temple again and took away the sacred scriptures to Rome. The Jews were again exiled and dispersed. It was feared that the oral law would be lost for ever unless it was also recorded in writing. Therefore, the learned rabbis codified the law in a book known as *Mishnah*.

The views of the Jewish people about the preservation and correctness of what they deem to be revelations differ from the criteria set up by the Muslims about the immutable character of the Qurʾān. The Muslims have preserved the Qurʾān as the unchangeable word of God, abiding in its original form since the day it was revealed, while the mutability of the Hebrew scriptures is not considered by the Jews to be against its divine character. The Jews' own description of the Books of their Bible and the ascription of their authorship to the 'ancient sages' is illuminating as well as interesting.

"Jewish tradition, while insisting that some Biblical books were composed by the chief actors therein, which is not at all unreasonable, does not hesitate to admit later elaboration and revision of certain Books in the Bible."¹

"Ancient Jewish traditions attributed the authorship of the Pentateuch (with the exception of the last eight verses describing Moses' death) to Moses

1. Vellintine's One Volume Jewish Encyclopaedia, London, p. 93

himself. But the many inconsistencies and seeming contradictions contained in it attracted the attention of the Rabbis, who exercised their ingenuity in reconciling them."¹

"Spinoza goes so far as to attribute the composition of the Pentateuch not to Moses, but to Ezra, which view appears to have existed even in the time of the Apocrypha The latest analysis, however, has led finally to the definitive attribution of the Pentateuch contents to no less than twenty-eight different sources."²

The New Testament contains even more alterations than the Old; the modern explosion of the new learning and new discoveries in Biblical scholarship has made the quest for its authenticity even more dubious than ever before. The fact is that the great chasm existing between the Jesus of Nazareth and modern scholarship is perhaps unbridgeable. The four Synoptic Gospels were continuously elaborated, corrected and altered from time to time by the scribes and the process continued during the prolonged controversy that attended the attempt to formulate the fundamental doctrines of orthodox Christianity in terms of a creed at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., and subsequently at Constantinople in 381 A.D. These Gospels, more of a nature of biographical account and traditions of Jesus Christ than revelations, were compiled by various writers from different sources from about A.D. 65 to 100. All kinds of conjectures have been made about possible writers of the Synoptic Gospels, but they remain an enigma to the scholars who are still reviewing the problem of their composition and sources.³

1. Jewish Encyclopaedia, Volume IX, p. 589

2. *Ibid* p. 590

3. For a detailed account of the composition and authorship of Synoptic Gospels see pages 176-180 of the *History of Religions* by E. O. James (London, 1956).

These books are not comparable even to those Traditions of the Prophet which come under the second and third category, that is, those known as *Hadīs-ul-Gharīb* and *Khabar-ul-Wāhid*, let alone the authentic Traditions contained in the *Sihāhus-Sittah* or the six authentic collections of the Prophet's sayings and doings. The authentic Traditions, according to Muslims, must have indisputably been related by narrators plainly and distinctly; the chain of narrators from the last link up to the Prophet must be unbroken; the subject related must have come under the actual ken of its first narrators; every one of the narrators must have been a person conspicuous for his piety, virtue and honesty; every one of the narrators must have received more than one *Hadith* from the narrator immediately preceding him; every narrator must be well-known for his learning; and, finally, the import of the Tradition must not be contrary to the injunctions contained in the Qur'ān, or to the religious doctrines, or to the Traditions proved to be correct, or of a nature that people should hesitate in accepting them. It would, however, be futile to seek for the narrators from whom the supposed compilers of the Synoptic Gospels had learnt the accounts put into writing by them.

Besides the difficulty of ascertaining the authorship of New Testament, another burden of the Bible is its original language and translation. Being originally written in ancient Hebrew, the language of Jesus Christ, and in Koine (post-classical Greek), the Bible has lived mainly in translations. All translations, made from one language into another, are imperfect and the way of translation has been hard. They are, of a fact, no better than a collection of stories and folk-lore comparable to what are regarded by Muslims as *rawāyah* or unauthentic stories or legends prevalent among the masses. The Gospels are so very dissimilar to the Qur'ān that only those who are unacquainted with the nature of the two Scriptures would commit the

folly of bringing them into comparison.

A French Orientalist, Eton Dien, has thus evaluated the literary and historical importance of the Synoptic Gospels.

"There is the least doubt that the Gospel given by God to Jesus Christ and his people has been lost. No trace of the original revelation remains now; it became extinct or was destroyed on purpose. That is why the Christians have accepted four Gospels in place of one, but their historical character and authenticity is very doubtful. The earliest copies of the Gospel are in Greek which is not allied to the Semitic language spoken by Jesus Christ, and this explains why the rapport between the Greek Gospels and their herald is very feeble in comparison to the Bible of the Jews or the Qur'ān of the Arabs."¹

The crudities of the Bible are even more appalling; it contains numerous internal contradictions, incredible dogmas and mistakes about historical events.² The Bible ascribes things to God which are unbecoming of the Divine Being—contradictory to the Power and Excellence of God as accepted by almost every religion—and casts reflections on the prophets which would be unworthy of even ordinary mortals, let alone the exalted messengers of God. But, in spite of all its myths and fables and inconsistencies, the Bible has been a sacred Book for the followers of two great religions for thousands of years. Islam, too, accepts these Scriptures, although in a limited sense, and calls their followers as the People of the Book. There are

1. Azwā-*Alal Masihiyah*, pp 52-53

2. *Izhār-ul-Haq* by Maulānā Rahmat Ullah Kirānwi lists 122 textual contradictions and 108 mistakes in the Bible which could not be reconciled so far. Its Urdu translation under the name of *Bible se Qur'ān Tak*, by Maulana Muhammad Taqī Ijasmānī, has recently been brought out in Pakistan.

still older scriptures, however. The Vedas of India and the Avesta of Iran are so ancient that it is difficult to trace their origin and find out their essential teachings. They have survived from times immemorial, but now it is impossible to determine their authenticity or the age when they were written.

A. Barth, Member of the Societe Asiatique of Paris, writes in *The Religions of India* about the origin of Indian sacred scriptures.

"If we except a certain quantity of appended matter, which criticism has no difficulty in discriminating from the genuine work, we have in these writings, as a whole, an authentic literature which professes to be what it is, which neither asserts by itself a supernatural origin nor seeks to disguise its age by recourse to the devices of pasticcio. Interpolations and later additions are numerous enough, but these have all been made in good faith. It is nevertheless difficult to fix the age of these books, even in any approximate degree. The most recent portions of the Brahmanas which have come down to us do not appear to go further than the fifth century before our era. The rest of the literature of the Veda must be referred to a remote antiquity, and assigned, in a sequence impossible to determine with any precision, a duration, the first term of which it is absolutely impossible for us to recover."¹

We should better look to the conclusions of Indian scholars deeply learned in ancient thought and literature of the country. One of these, Suresh Chandra Chakravarti, Lecturer in Calcutta University, writes in his *Philosophy of the Upanishads*:

"The two extreme views are represented by Balgandhar Tilak and by Max Muller. Tilak thinks that the Vedic hymns are as old as 4,500 B.C. Max Muller could

1. *The Religions of India*, pp. 4-5

not give Rig-Veda an earlier date, than 2,200 B.C. though he freely admits that Rig-Veda consists of the earliest record of Aryan thought. . . . Without making any attempt to fix the age of Rig-Veda, it can be safely said that, although the different hymns of the Rig-Veda have been placed together in one Samhita, the component parts of the Rig-Veda cannot be taken to have been composed at one and the same time, and therefore no particular historical date can be fixed as the age of the Rig-Veda. It will have to be admitted that the hymns of the Rig-Veda, from the beginning to the end, must have taken numerous centuries to compose."¹

And, the fundamental thought of the Vedas has been thus described by the renowned scholar and ex-President of India, Dr. Radhakrishnan.

"The general conception of the Vedas were neither definite nor detailed, and so allowed themselves to be handled and fashioned in different ways by different schools of thought. Besides, the very vastness of the Vedas, from which the authors could select out of free conviction any portion for their authority, allowed room for original thought."²

As for Avesta, the sacred Scripture of the Parsees, the finding of a scholar qualified to speak on the subject is given here. He is Robert H. Pfeiffer, ex-Chairman of the Department of Semitic languages and Curator of the Semitic Museum, Harvard University, who says in his article on Avesta :

"The original Avesta (according to tradition) comprised all knowledge and was destroyed for the most part by Alexander. Out of its remnants, a work of 21 volumes (or *nasks*), was prepared in the 3rd century A.D. but only one *nask* (*Vendidad*) survives complete; the

1. *The Philosophy of the Upanishads*, pp. 24-26

2. *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. II, London (1927), pp. 21-22

Dinkard (in Pehlavi) gives a list of the others. After the 9th century, only the parts dealing with the worship were taken to India and are extant in five parts : *Yasna* (including the *Gathas*), *Vispered*, *Vendidad*, *Yashta* and *Korda Avesta*.¹

But, the Qurʾān is the last of all revelations which not only testifies the earlier revelations but also claims to complete and fulfil the divine guidance. Man has to depend on it for finding the right path, the path to fellowship of God and rectitude, till the Day of Reckoning. It is a unique Scripture since it has not undergone the slightest change or interpolation. God is its Guardian who has taken upon Himself the responsibility of safeguarding its text against every alteration.

"Lo ! it is an unassailable Scripture. Falsehood cannot come at it from before it or behind it. (It is) a revelation from the Wise, the Owner of Praise."²

The divine pledge for its protection carries the guarantee that the holy Qurʾān shall never be destroyed or mutated, nor will it die away from the memory, nor meet any other accident like the Torah. Says God about this radiant Book :

"Lo ! We, even We, reveal the Reminder, and lo ! We verily are its Guardian."³

The pledge of Divine guardianship covers its protection, preservative, propagation and study and is also a promise against its being forgotten or becoming incomprehensible or inoperable. The word *Hāfīz*, used by God for Himself is extremely significant and comprehensive.

For God had promised to preserve the Book, exactly in the form it had been revealed to the Prophet. He had also made all the arrangements and created ways and means for

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1. *An Encyclopaedia of Religions*, New York, 1945
 2. Q. XL1 : 41-42
 3. Q. XV : 9

the fulfilment of that great task. As soon as any verse of the Qurʾān was revealed, the followers of the Prophet vied with one another to commit it to their memory. The inimitable symphony of the Qurʾān, the purity, grace and elegance of its style were as much responsible for this attraction as was the pureheartedness of those to whom it was first addressed. Side by side, the Qurʾān contained all the instructions about the mode of worship and promulgated injunctions with a bearing upon the social, political, cultural and intellectual needs of the growing Muslim society. All these causes went to create a fondness and an ardent affection for the Qurʾān which was like an insatiate thirst of enjoying a greedily desired object. This is illustrated by the fact that seventy of those Muslims who were killed at the well of Maʿūnah, in 625, hardly three years after the migration of the Prophet to Madina, were those who had committed the Qurʾān to their memory.¹ There has always been a large number of persons, in every Muslim land, and in every age, who have learnt the whole of the Qurʾān by heart, and studied and taught it to others. The Muslims have always loved to recite Qurʾān, not in the prayer alone, but to derive inspiration and solace through its recital. People who have not had the opportunity of living among the Muslims might find it hard to believe, but the fact remains that there have always been innumerable persons who could recite the whole of the Scripture from memory, and even today their number would exceed several hundred thousand.

The immediate successors of the Prophet gave first priority, as if inspired by some divine presage, to the Qurʾān being put into writing instead of relying solely on the memory of the people. Soon after the battle with the people of Yamāmah, wherein a great many of those who had learnt the Qurʾān by heart had been slain, ʿUmar advised the first

1. *Al-Bidāyah-wan-Nehāyah*, Vol. IV. p. 71. Also see *Sahih Bukhari and Muslim*.

Caliph Abu Bakr to get the whole Scripture written in a book. Prior to it, the Qurʾān had been recorded by the people on the leaves of the date, and slabs of white stones, and the breasts of the people that remembered it. ‘Umar constantly pressed Abū Bakr for collecting the Qurʾān in one Book until, at length, God opened the breast of Abū Bakr so to do it, and he entrusted the job to Zaid ibn Thābit. Zaid sought for the verses and collected it from the writings and memory of those who had learnt it by heart. Thus the Qurʾān was written within two years of the death of the Prophet. During the Caliphate of ‘Uthmān, reports were received that people in the far off areas conquered by the Muslims were learning to recite Qurʾān in different ways according to various dialects of the Arab tribes. Conversion of non-Arabs to Islam, in large numbers, was another cause to ensure preservation of the Qurʾān in its original form. Accordingly, ‘Uthmān got several copies of the Scripture made out from the collection of Abū Bakr and sent them to every quarter of the countries of Islam; and kept one at Madina which he named *Al-Imām*. This edition of the Qurʾān produced by ‘Uthmān has been handed down to this day unaltered; and this is the Qurʾān still used by every Muslim for recitation and prayer. Nobody has ever raised any dissenting voice against the copies of this Scripture circulated in A.H. 25, nor is there any Museum or library possessing a variant text of the Qurʾān.¹ There has also been a complete consensus

1. A. Mingana, Keeper of the Oriental Manuscripts in the John Raylands Library and Lecturer in Arabic, University of Manchester writes: "There are in public libraries of Europe many Quranic manuscripts of high antiquity, the oldest dating probably from the 2nd Islamic century, but, apart from some anomalies of spelling due to rudimentary character of the early Arabic orthography, no real variant can be detected in them. This conclusion is borne out by Noldake, who examined such manuscripts, and by the present writer, who for the purpose of this article consulted three of them preserved in the John Rayland Library" (*Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics*, Vol. X. p. 549).

of opinion among all Muslims, to whatever sect they may belong, on this compilation; they have all held the opinion that this is the word of God in absolute purity, as dictated by God to Muhammad through archangel Gabriel, without any corruption, accretion and mutilation. And, now with the present means of publication and the existence of innumerable persons who can repeat the whole text from their memory, there is absolutely no danger of any interpolation in its text. In the 11th edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, it has been acknowledged that the Qur'ān is par excellence "the most widely read book in existence."¹

The orientalist, especially western scholars of Islam, most stoutly deny that the Qur'ān is the word of God vouchsafed to Prophet Muhammad through *Wahy*, yet they avouch the pristine purity of its text. An inveterate enemy of Islam, such as Sir William Muir was, and whose *Life of Muhomet* compelled Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, an enthusiastic supporter of Western education and liberalism, to write *Khutbā-ti-Ahmadiyah* to confute him, writes about the Qur'ān in his book.

"Contending and embittered factions, taking their rise in the murder of Othmān himself within a quarter of a century from the death of Mahomet, have ever since rent the Mahometan world. Yet, but one Corān has been current amongst them; and the consentaneous use by them all in every age up to the present day of the same Scripture, is an irrefragable proof that we have now before us the very text prepared by command of the unfortunate Caliph. There is probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text. The various readings are wonderfully few in number, and are chiefly confined to differences in the vowel points and diacritical signs.

1. Vol. XV, pp. 898 (11th Edition)

But those marks were invented at a later date."¹
Wherry writes in his *Commentary on the Qurʾān*:

"The text of the Qurʾān is the purest of all the works of a like antiquity."²

Another English translator of the Qurʾān, Palmer, says:

"Othman's recension has remained the authorised text . . . from the time it was made until the present day."³

Lane-Pool writes in the '*Selections from the Kuran*':⁴

"It is an immense merit in the Kuran that there is no doubt as to its genuineness That every word we can now read with full confidence that it has remained unchanged through nearly thirteen hundred years."

With the Word of God remaining intact, Islam never needed a new Prophet for separating the untruth from the truth, nor a new revelation to take the place of a gospel corrupted and mutilated by man.

Qurʾān's silence about Advent of a New Prophet

This is, thus, the infinite, ever-abiding Book of God, a standard and a criterion which continues to enlighten the path of Truth and rectitude. It leaves nothing of the spiritual needs of man in dark, yet it is completely silent about the advent of any new Prophet after Muhammad. This was, undoubtedly, an important matter of crucial importance which ought to have been clearly stated if a prophet was to reappear again in the world. A book which speaks of the portents like 'the smoke'⁵, 'the beast'⁶ and 'the Gog and

1. *Life of Mahomet* (London—1912), Vol. I pp XXII-XXIII

2. Vol. I (Turner, London), p. 349

3. Palmer, '*The Qurʾān*', Introduction, p. LIX

4. (Turner, London), Introduction, p. c.

5. But watch thou for the Day when the sky will produce visible smoke that will envelop the people. (Q. XLIV : 10-11)

6. And when the word is fulfilled concerning them, We shall bring forth a beast of the earth to speak unto them because mankind had not faith in Our revelations. (Q. XXVII: 82)

Magog¹ announcing the advent of the Day of Judgement, would have surely foretold the arrival of the new Prophet, if only to tell its followers to receive him with open arms whenever he comes. Is not man, after all, averse to everything new, and is he not disposed to reject a new messenger of God? Was it not, then, necessary that the Qur'an should have warned the Muslims against being uncordial to the new harbinger of truth, whose rejection would have laid open their faith to danger and invited the wrath of God? How could have the Prophet, whose mercy and compassion for his followers been thus praised by God, kept quiet, leaving his followers groping in darkness?

"There hath come unto you a messenger, (one) of yourselves, unto whom aught that ye are overburdened is grievous, full of concern for you, for the believers full of pity, merciful."²

How could have such a Prophet spoken of the arrival of Anti-Christ but kept silence about the advent of a new Prophet? This was certainly a matter of grave concern for his followers, for on it depended their salvation as well as their remaining on the path of righteousness.

The Qur'an, in fact speaks so candidly of the perfection of Islam and termination of prophethood that nobody who is conversant with the Arabic language and diction can entertain any doubt about these matters, unless, of course, one is insincere or insolent enough to twist the Quranic verses with some ulterior motive. Nevertheless, the Prophet has further elucidated the Quranic statements in even clearer terms in order to leave no uncertainty or ambiguity lurking in the mind of credulous people. There are numerous Traditions³ which teach the principle of prophethood

1. Until, when Gog and Magog are let loose, and they hasten out of every mound. (Q. XXI : 96)

2. Q. IX : 128

3. The renowned Traditionist, Maulānā Anwar Shāh Kāshmirī says in

[Continued on next page

and explain, with illustrations, why a new prophet would not be needed by humanity after the Prophet Muhammad. Here we shall give only five Traditions on the subject of finality of Muhammad's prophethood, which have been taken from the *Sihāh* or the six correct books of *Hadith*.

"The prophets of Banī Israel used also to possess authority over them, and when one prophet died, another took his place. There shall be no prophet after me, but there would be my vicegerents."¹

"The Prophet said: 'The likeness between me and the prophets before me is as the likeness of a man who built a beautiful house but left to put a brick in the corner. Then, the people who saw the house, going round it, wondered why the brick had not been put in that corner. So, I am that very brick and seal of the prophets.'²

"The Prophet said: 'I have been allowed to take precedence of all other prophets in six things: I have been granted a perfect speech; I have been helped by way of deference and awe; the booty of war has been made lawful for me; the earth has been made a purifier and a place of worship for me; and I have been sent unto the whole of creation and the chain of prophets has been brought to completion through me.'³

"It is related by Jubair bin Mut'am that the Apostle

his book entitled *Aqidatul Islam*' that there are 200 Traditions about the finality of prophethood (p. 318). Maulānā Mufti Muhammad Shafi of Deoband has given 210 such Traditions in '*Khatm-i-Nabūwat*'. The number of such Traditions is certainly more than these.

Another scholar, Maulānā Mahmud Hasan Khān of Tonk has summed up the findings of earlier scholars, Traditionists, scholastics and the mystics in *Meyār-us-Sunnat-li-Khatm-un-i-Nabūwah* which is perhaps the most detailed dissertation on the subject.

1. *Sahih Bukhāri, Muslim and Tirmidhi* on the authority of Ibn Abī Hātim
2. *Muslim, Tirmidhi, and Ibn Mājah*
3. *Tirmidhi*

of God said : I am Muhammad; I am Ahmad; I am the Abolisher through whom God shall abolish infidelity; I am the Assembler for God shall resurrect others after me on the Day of Judgement; and I am the Successor after whom there shall be no prophet."¹

Settled Opinion about finality of Prophethood

For the reason that the Quranic verses were explicitly clear and Traditions were handed down by very many distinct chains of narrators, the companions of the Prophet were unanimous in holding the view that prophethood had come to an end after the last Apostle of God, and that no new prophet shall ever come after him. The consensus of opinion among the companions is a fundamental rule of Islamic *Sharī'ah*, for none could be expected to understand the meaning and purpose of prophetic pronouncements better than they. All the companions were thus agreed, without any exception, in declaring Musailamah as an infidel and a disbeliever against whom it was perfectly lawful to wage the holy war. Musailamah, nevertheless, testified to the prophethood of Muhammad, commended his followers to do the same in giving out call to prayer, professed his faith in the Qur'ān and claimed to follow its injunctions; but, he also claimed to receive revelations, mis-interpreted the Qur'ān and laid the claim to share prophethood with the last of the prophets. He, thus, wanted to open the door to a sort of subsidiary prophethood although ministering to the paramount law of Muhammad's apostleship. Musailamah, the Liar, was thus a precursor of all the impostors who later on made a claim to prophethood in Islam. He was killed in the battle of Yamāmah, but twelve hundred Muslims had to lay down their lives fighting that impostor.² Aswad 'Unsī was another impostor who claimed to be a prophet

1. Bukhari, *Muslim* and *Abū Nu'aim*

2. *Tārikh Tabrī*, Vol. III, p. 254

during the life time of the Prophet and he had also been slain for his misdemeanour.

After the demise of the holy Prophet, the entire community honoured the earlier consensus and treated such claimants to prophethood as rebels who had lapsed from the faith of Muslims.¹ This became, in fact, a part of the creed of Muslims to which they have been attached² so ardently that no false trumpeter of his own prophethood could ever reach the ear of Muslims. These impostors have been so hated and abhorred by the Muslim masses that their number in the long and chequered history of Islam has remained surprisingly insignificant. This appears all the more amazing when we look at the large number of Muslims spread over several countries, absence of any arrangement for the propagation of religious tenets and the social, political and intellectual upheavals through which they have had to pass in different times and countries. In a religious community as the Muslims have always been, the claim to prophethood would have surely served as a ladder to success and achieving honour and power for any self-centered charlatan, but, no matter how, the number of such pretenders among

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1. The learned doctors of religion who have upheld this consensus were: Qāzī 'Aiyāz (d. 1149) in *As-Shifā*, Vol. II, pp. 270-71; 'Allāma Shahrastānī (d. 1153) in *Al-Mijāl Wan Nahī*, Vol. III, p. 249; Mullā Ibn Najīm (d. 1562) in *Al-Ishbāh Wan Nazā'ir*, p. 179; Mulla 'Alī Qārī (d. 1607) in *Sharh Fiqah Akbar*, p. 202; and the great mystic Imām 'Abdul Wahāb Shairānī in *Al-Yuwāqiyat wal-Jawāhar*, p. 35. If anybody has cited any authority against this accepted principle, he has either quoted his writings out of context or misrepresented the views held by that authority.
 2. Islamic history has preserved the names of such impostors whom it knows by the name of *mutanabbi* or false prophets. Anybody nick-named with this badge of infamy was never accorded any regard for his talents. To give an example, Abū Tayyab Ahmad bin al-Husain al-Kindī (d. 695), the poet laureate of his time and a noted litterateur, has been forgotten by the posterity except by the name of *mutanabbi* even in literary circles.

Muslims has been fewer than those in several other smaller communities.

It is also significant that those who had claimed prophethood among the Muslims never achieved any appreciable success nor could entrap significant numbers as their followers, despite general ignorance of the Muslim masses and their own artfulness. Certain authentic Traditions of the Prophet foretell that the number of such masqueraders to the end of time shall not exceed seventy among the Muslims. This number would appear to be negligible if we were to take into consideration the long stretch of time for which this prophecy has been made, vicissitudes of fortune and ignorance of Muslims as well as the numerous factions in which they have been divided ; but this would again bespeak of their implicit belief in the Quranic verses and Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad declaring finality of his prophethood.

Muhammad—The Last Prophet

Finality of Prophethood—A Boon to Humanity

Divine wisdom decided to terminate prophethood when humanity came of age. From the confined limits of Ignorance, in which mankind had been detained for several hundred years, for reasons more than one, it was now crossing over to the wide, open world of knowledge, intellectual development and universal solidarity, and was ready to plumb the secrets of nature. For the notions of family, tribe, race, colour and country were then giving place to the concepts of cosmic transcendentalism, one-ness of mankind, heavenly guidance and the benefits of joint endeavour, enlightenment and edification, man could be expected to overcome all the dark, divisive forces hampering his well-being. Now, at that crucial stage, man had had to build his life on the revelation vouchsafed to the the last of prophets, pin his faith in him and follow the law promulgated by the Book which testifies, completes and guards the truth of the earlier revelations. Thenceforward advancement of humanity was to depend only on his own endeavour, thinking and working, and, also, march forward in the light of this very Book of Books.

The times past bear witness to the chaos and tumult

which man had had to face in ascertaining the claims of soothsayers and false prophets who professed to possess miraculous powers and revelations from God. Oftentimes the whole communities were plunged in disorder and wasted their energies in trying to shield themselves from the menace of these pretenders.

Advent of a truthful Messenger of God was, on the other hand, not something insignificant like the appearance of a political leader, or a ruler, or a reformer, for the rejection of the latter has never meant provoking divine condemnation and chastisement. Unlike other people claiming leadership of a country or community whose call for obedience is not backed by pleasure or displeasure of God, the prophets come as a criterion of truth and justice and the rejection of their call amounts to aligning oneself with falsehood and evil; the prophets constitute the determinant of divine dispensation for their peoples. The nations of the bygone times were not destroyed, as the Qur³an tells us, by their blasphemy and irreligion, or else by their moral corruption and prodigality but because of their contemptuous rejection and derision of the prophets and insolent behaviour towards them. The Qur³an narrates the appalling behaviour of evil-minded people to their prophets in innumerable verses, some of which are given here.

"And every nation purposed to seize their messenger and argued falsely, (thinking) thereby to refute the Truth. Then I seized them, and how (awful) was My punishment."¹

"Whenever its messenger came unto a nation they denied him; so We caused them to follow one another (to disaster) and We made them bywords. A far removal for folk who believe not:"²

"He said: My Lord! Help me because they deny me.

1. Q. XL: 5

2. Q. XXIII: 44

"He said : In a little while they surely will become repentant.

"So the (Awful) Cry overtook them rightfully, and We made them like as wreckage (that a torrent hurleth). A far removal for wrongdoing folk."¹

"Messengers (of Allah) have been derided before thee, but that whereat they scoffed surrounded such of them as did deride."²

"And verily messengers (of Allah) were mocked before thee, but long I bore with those who disbelieved. At length I seized them, and how (awful) was My punishment !"³

"Not one of them but did deny the messengers, therefor My doom was justified."⁴

"And We destroyed no township but it had its warners."⁵

Termination of prophethood has saved mankind from the ordeal to which it was exposed every now and then. For a true prophet constitutes the saving principle for the entire humanity, man had to put off all his business and ascertain the truthfulness or falsehood of every new messenger of God. Termination of this process, thus, has spared man from this effort which had, in the past, always proved to be onerous. Had the prophets been still coming, every new claimant to prophethood, coming forward time and again, would have demanded the obedience of his fellowmen; each would have condemned his detractors as infidels and fought them to the end; carved out a separate community out of the existing followers of different religions; and the world would have still been engaged in a war of attrition. Many of those pretending to be apostles of God

1. Q. XXIII : 39-41

2. Q. VI : 10

3. Q. XIII : 32

4. Q. XXXVIII : 15

5. Q. XXVI : 208

sent from On High, would have, surely, been eccentrics, or tricksters, or else crafty persons seeking power or pelf, or tools of the powers that be; even among the simple-hearted claimants to prophethood one would have found men misled by their own ignorance or thrown off the scent by misdirected meditations and travails or a false sense of piety. World has come across impostors of all these categories during the times past. Their fallaciousness can now be easily discerned by us with our widened experience and knowledge, greater insight into human psychology and better understanding of the concealed aims of political intriguers.

Confusion, created by False Prophets

The Old Testament shows how a great number of false pretenders to revelation and prophecy, basing their claims on omens and dreams, had cut loose the Jewish society during the ancient times. The Scriptures of Banī Israel are replete with warnings against these sham forecasters.

"Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD."¹

"Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you; saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish."²

"And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me; for Tabri'ah and Sanbal'lat had hired him. Therefore was

1. Jer : 23-32

2. Jer. 27 : 9-10

he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and *that* they might have *matter* for an evil report, that they might reproach me."¹

"And the word of the LORD, came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of your own hearts. Hear ye the word of the LORD; Thus saith the LORD GOD; woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing."²

"A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely; and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to *have it* so; and what will ye do in the end thereof?"³

"For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; let not your prophets and your diviners, that *be* in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed. For they prophesy falsely unto you in my name: I have not sent them, saith the LORD."⁴

History of the Jews shows that false prophets continued to appear after the Old Testament had been compiled. A large number of these diviners turned up after the Jews became victims of overwhelming circumstances, when, in the face of disasters and repeated devastations, the Jews saw the glimmerings of a Messiah who would some day redeem his people, defeat their enemies and restore their lost power and prestige. This messianic hope of the people, which had helped to keep alive the hope and confidence of the Jewish people during the age of terrible adversity, was turned to their advantage by selfish diviners and soothsayers. Many of them laid a claim to prophethood to improve the occasion by creating new

1. Neh. 6 : 12-13

2. Ezek. 13 : 1-3

3. Jer. 5 : 30-31

4. Jer. 29 : 8-9

factions; they mislead the people to ever increasing waywardness and corruption, and, above all, corrupted the true faith by their immorality and worship of old pagan divinities. This, naturally, caused a great concern to the well-meaning scribes and priests among the Jews. Albert M. Hyamson, a member of the American and English Jewish Historical Societies, gives an account of these pseudo-Messiahs:

"From the final loss of independence of the Jewish State until within a few generations ago, Jewish history has known the frequent advent and passing of self-styled Messiahs, prophets of hope in the darkest periods of the Diaspora, self-appointed leaders of the Jewish race in the return to the land from which their ancestors were exiled. The appearance of a Messiah was often, especially in the case of the earlier ones, accompanied by revolts and uprisings, and these almost invariably occurred at times when, and in localities where, anti-Jewish persecution was prevalent. Moreover, these Messianic movements were frequently, especially in the later cases, of a political nature. The religious aspect of this rising was, however, seldom absent, and in many instances the new teacher, anxious to signalise his activity and to secure his influence by religious innovations, endeavoured to subvert the basic teachings of Judaism, to which, in consequence, considerable harm sometimes occurred. New sects were created on some occasions; on others wholesale adoption of Mohammadanism or Christianity took place."¹

Opening of the Christian era saw, owing to personal, political, economic or factional interests of these pretenders, frequent appearance of such pseudo-prophets. Several passages of the New Testament advert to these false

1. Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics, Vol. 8, p. 581

prophets and their evil courses.

"And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Anti-och. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world; which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar."¹

"And as we tarried *there* many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles."²

"Beware of the false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."³

"But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion: that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ."⁴

"Behold, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."⁵

"But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest, saying: This man is the great power of God."⁶

1. Acts. 11 : 27-28

2. Acts. 21 : 10-11

3. Mt. 7 : 15

4. 2 Cor. 11 : 12-13

5. 1 Jn. 4 : 1

6. Acts. 8 : 9

"And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus."¹

"And Jesus answered and said unto them. Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many."²

Jesus also warned his disciples on another occasion that—

"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"³

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light."⁴

During the first two centuries after Christ the number of imposters who claimed to work miracles and deluded the ignorant by their visions and alleged prophecies was so great that the Christian church found it hard to maintain its unity and creed. The threat posed to the existence of the Church in the initial period of its history by the large number of false prophets has been described by Edwin Knox Mitchell, Professor of Graeco-Roman and Eastern Church history in the Hartford Theological Seminary in an article on prophecy in Christianity.

"The appearance of these false prophets, pretending superior wisdom, ere long created distrust and aroused the churches and their leaders to the dangers that threatened their welfare. But as yet there was no recognised 'form of discipline' adequate for the suppression of those would-be spokesmen and pretentious revealers of the secret counsels of God. There were

1. Acts. 13 : 6

2. Mt. 24 : 4-5

3. Mt. 7 : 16

4. 2 Cor. 11 : 13-14

no specific standards by which to test and try those 'spirits'. Standards, however, were sure to be found, and, if not found, then created, by the churches for their protection from vagaries in doctrines and aberrations of life. The apostles, whether in common councils or as individuals, were the first court of appeal. They based their judgements on the words of the Lord and the mind of Christ. The rise and development of the monarchical episcopate was here and there favoured and fostered in the interest of sound doctrine and as a restraint against new-fangled notions, foreign to the faith. Hermas Pastor (*Mand xi and xii*) and Ignatius (*Eph. vii, ix and xvi, Mag. viii, Tral vi. Phil ii, iii, Symr. iv, vii and Pol. iii*) are full of warnings and admonitions against false prophets and teachers; and Ignatius especially exhorts to obedience of the bishop. This was his hope for maintenance of sound doctrine. Clement likewise relies upon the bishops (i.e. presbyters) for the preservation of the unity and purity of the Church (1 and Cor. xlii-xliv). Prophecy, however, was not yet suppressed, but only repressed and somewhat regulated by the rising officials in the Churches. The *Didache* informs us that prophecy was still free and in good repute in Syria (or Egypt) although often counterfeited and condemned (xi-7-12). Its days, however, were numbered, for it was soon to share the general distrust and opposition towards all extravagant claims to divine wisdom. The Gnostics and Marcion had prophets as well as the churches, and they were sometimes indistinguishable from each other. Then the rise of Montanism was in some respects but a resurgence of prophetism. It was an effort to revive primitive Christian conditions where each believer was free to exercise his God given gift.

"The churches were now put on the defensive and they soon sought to cooperate in the maintenance of

their apostolic heritage. Joint action in councils was the most effective means at hand. This brought the bishops together and greatly increased their prestige and power. The appeal to the words of Christ was enlarged to include an appeal to the teachings and writings of the apostles and the use of the Old Testament as a book of discipline and standard of doctrine grew in favour. The Law and the Prophets had sufficed for Israel, and the Old Covenant needed only to be supplemented by the New with its apostolic guarantees. Prophecy was thus placed under the restraint of written records, and it was considered more important to interpret the old prophecies than to utter new ones. All the unstable, intermittent spiritual gifts shared the fate of the prophetic. Tongues, miracles, healings waned; and by the end of the 2nd century they were all, including prophecy, under restraint of the regular officials of the respective churches and subordinates to them."¹

Finality of Prophethood—A Logical Culmination

It was perfectly logical as well as inevitable, too, that after the complete and final guidance had been vouchsafed to the Prophet of Islam, the chain of prophecy should come to an end with him. The creed and the law, the individual and the social norms of behaviour, all were finally and fully established by the Last Prophet on principles so complete and appropriate that a healthy and progressive society could be raised and sustained on its bases in any country or age. At the same time, the society to be so established allowed full scope to the individual without applying any coercion or curbs on him. The development of individual's personality and the perfection of his spirituality goes ahead in such a social order jointly with the advancement of the

1. Encyclopaedia of Religions and Ethics, Vol. 10, p. 383

entire social group. The Individual finds nothing wanting, nothing against his natural, inborn dispositions in this social order, since, he is fully equipped to keep pace with the society evolving to a higher plane of its growth and development. This is brought about by the law given by Islam which is always ahead of time—a superb example of divine wisdom for it allows both the society and the individual to blossom without allowing one to impair the growth of the other.

This vast universe, the law sustaining its existence and our knowledge of the past and present conditions of man all the world over, leave no doubt that God has created everything in a just and balanced measure. There is nothing superfluous or wanting in it. The disbalance or inconsistency, if we observe anywhere, is really an indication of our own faulty perception or imperfect knowledge of the natural phenomena and its secrets. But, the law governing human behaviour needs a far keener perception and finer sensibility to apprehend it correctly than that required to understand the outward, physical manifestations of this universe. This is because the law of human behaviour has a bearing on the intrinsic essence or quintessence of the world spirit which forms the objective of its existence. The externality of the world is merely an expression of its inwardness. And, since Muhammad's prophethood had laid bare the innermost recesses of human heart—the essential nature of man—it did not require any other evidence to prove the culmination of divine guidance. For this was the ultimate end of divine guidance, and was, in reality, fully achieved through the prophethood of Muhammad, the appearance of a new apostle of God would have been against His own law besides putting humanity to yet another but unnecessary trial.

Vitality of Islam

Now in the sunshine of Muhammad's guidance no man

can pretend to say that he cannot attain spiritual perfection or fellowship of God nor can he plead his inability to move forward on the path of steadfast conviction, perfection of the self and purification of the morals. But, if he does so, his failure can be attributed to his own irresoluteness or cowardice, greed for material welfare or ignorance of the Divine Scripture and prophetic teachings. If a man is sincere and diligent Islam can lead him to the pinnacle of virtues next only to the exalted stage of prophethood.

The sign and mark of Islam's potentiality in this regard is demonstrated by the marvellous Book of God which is fadeless, ever-blooming and with wonders without end ; as well as by the *Salāt*, brimming with life and vigour, a sure, infallible means for attaining propinquity to God. Each of these bears out the untarnished truth of Islam. People have gone ahead with the help of these two, in every age, to attain a sublimity of spirit beyond the reach of the most wise and sapient. And their numbers have always been ever so many in Islam. These purer souls have made plain, by their own example of virtuous living and sincere love of man and God, that the followers of Islam no longer stand in need of any new guide from On High. They have been reinvigorating the Muslim society by guiding it on the path of virtue and goodness in compliance with the divine command which calls upon all the Muslims to seek the help of God through submission to Him and prayer and striving in His way.

"And strive in the path of Allah with the endeavour which is His right. He hath chosen you and hath not laid upon you in religion any hardship ; the faith of your father Abraham (is yours). He hath named you Muslims of old time and in this (Scripture), that the Messenger may be a witness against you, and that ye may be witnesses against mankind. So establish worship, pay the poor-due, and hold fast to Allah. He is your Protecting Friend. A blessed Patron and a blessed

Helper."¹

Another ingrained quality of this religion is its propensity to revolt against everything that is repugnant to its own essence and spirit. This is the inherent power of Islam which strives against frowardness and perversion hurtful to the grace and merit of human values; fights with the forces of evil, apostasy and tyranny; maintains and promotes the standard of Islamic morality; speaks out truth in the face of tyrants and kings; urges to get away from the deception of one's own greed and passing fancy and helps to reject all vagaries of innovations and deviations from true faith even at the cost of one's reputation, personal injury or even life. The Book of God always exhorts the believers to be steadfast on truth and justice, to depose truthfully even against their own parents and relations, to cooperate with goodness and piety and to keep away from guilt and misconduct, to strive in the way of God, to enjoin the right and to forbid the wrong, to seek the good graces of the Lord and those who love Him, to be at odds with the devil and its team-mates and to prefer the Hereafter over the world and all that it stands for. Cast in the same mould are the *ahādīth*, the sayings and doings of the Prophet, which call upon every man to keep in the right path and hold aloof from transgression and perversion; appeal to combat the sinister and the peccant with one's hands, tongue and heart, according to one's ability and strength; and threaten those who join hands with the enemies of God and saboteurs of true faith with chastisement. Such Traditions are very many and well-known and they have always given heart to reformers, in every age and at every critical juncture of the history of Islam, to fight to the last drop of their blood for the preservation of Islamic principles.

"Some of them have paid their vow by death (in battle), and some of them still are waiting; and they

have not altered in the least."¹

Such is the Book of God, keeping the followers of Islam away from evil and ignorance, animating their hearts with unbounded zeal for truth and virtue and infusing courage and faith in the indolent and the weak for upholding the cause of righteousness.

The Secret of Islam's Perennial Freshness

"History bears a testimony to the fact that there has never been a spell, however brief, during the past one and a half thousand years when the message of Islam was eclipsed or its teachings were engulfed by heresy, and the Islamic consciousness became dormant enough to accept a contaminated faith. Whenever an effort was made from any quarter whatsoever to distort the tenets of Islam, pervert or falsify its teachings, or it was attacked by sensist-materialism, some one invariably came forward to accept the challenge and fought it out to the grief of Islam's adversary. History records many a powerful movement which had once posed a danger to Islam but now it is difficult to find out even the true impact of its thought. Only a few persons know today what *Qadrīyah* (Rationalists believing in free will), *Jahmiyah* (Determinists), '*Itizāl*' (Dissenters), Creation of the Qur'ān, Existentialist Monism, *Dīn-i-Ilāhī* etc. exactly mean, although these represented, at one time or the other, very important schools of thought and, with the most powerful imperialist powers of their day and some extremely learned and able persons at their back, they had threatened to stifle Islam. Finally, however, it was Islam which gained ascendancy over these contending forces. These powerful movements are known today as simply different schools of thought and are to be found now in philosophical and dialectical treatises. This tradition of struggle against un-Islam, the spirit to preserve and

1. Q. XXXIII : 23

renovate the pristine teachings of the faith and the effort to infuse people with a revolutionary spirit to re-assert the divine message are as old as Islam itself."¹

Finality of Prophethood—A Defence against Heresy

The strong, unbroken tradition of revivalist endeavour in Islam, seeking to restore the faith in its original purity, and the continuous struggle against the tyrants for restoring what is due to the poor and lowly stems from general Islamic consciousness. It holds the more learned in the community responsible for upholding truth and justice, maintaining the standards of candour and fair play, commending the right and forbidding the wrong and spreading the original creed unencumbered by later accretions. The existence of this awareness and the consequential efforts show, by the same token, that Muslims have never looked forward to the appearance of a redeemer or a new prophet, nor have they ever suspended their efforts in the hope of a new Messiah descending from the heavens to lead them on in the reformation and renovation of their faith and the community.

But, the followers of other religions or even those sects among Muslims which have placed reliance in a contrary principle, have never been inclined to take the responsibility of fighting the evil and restoring virtue and goodness. Airy hopes have been the parents of their faith. Lying for ages inactive, dreaming of a saviour and a prophet of hope, and, consequently, compromising with the worst situations, they never gave rise to any reformatory or revivalist movement of a fundamentalist character. Their voice of conscience to restore true faith has gradually languished and wasted away. Historians have failed to find the reason for it, but it has certainly been due to their belief in the appearance of a Messiah as promised in their

1. *Saviours of Islamic Spirit*, Vol. I, p.11

traditions. This has also been the result of a similar belief of certain sects in Islam who have placed undue reliance on certain holy personages, possessing supernatural powers, having access to divine secrets and affiliated with the prophetic spirit, who would make their appearance in the last days of stress and difficulty.¹

There is not the least doubt that the apocalyptic doctrines asserting appearance of new apostles, pretending superior wisdom to prove the continuance of divine revelation, and the obscure arguments advanced in their support, create distrust in the durability of divine guidance itself and shake the confidence of man in his own ability to strive for holding up truth and virtue. These dogmas, thus, degenerate into senseless tricks and juggling and encourage unworthy pretenders to delude the ignorant by their visions and alleged wonders. They create new schisms which drift into hostility and hatred of the original faith.

Finality of Prophethood—A boon for Muslims

Proclamation of God that the prophethood had come to its end, made even before the Prophet left this fleeting world, was a godsend blessing for Muslims. The declaration that no new prophet would come after Muhammad, nor would there be a new revelation, nor a new religious order after him, was a bounty from God envied by the learned and earnest Rabbis of the Jews who were aware of the stimulus given to eschatological speculations, confusion of thought and religious schisms brought about by the pseudo-Messiahs during the long periods of distress undergone by

1. A befitting example of such a faith is the belief in the twelfth Imām, Muhammad al-Mahdi, son of Al-Hasan al-Askari, who, according to the Imāmiyah sect of the Shi'ās, will appear to restore the rule of justice to the earth. Born at Baghdad in 868, he is believed to have entered a cellar with his mother, where he is still living and would come out before the end of the world.

(*Kashful-Ghitā*, pp. 2 and 109)

the Jewish people. An authentic Tradition records that "Once a Rabbi said to Caliph 'Umar: You have a verse in your Holy Book, which, if it had been revealed to us we would have celebrated the day of its revelation as a festival." Caliph 'Umar asked: "Which is that verse?" The Rabbi replied: "It is: *This day have I perfected your religion for you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM.*"¹ Caliph 'Umar then said: "I fully remember the day and the time when this verse was revealed to the Prophet, on whom be peace and blessings. It was Friday, the evening of Arafat."²

The incident illustrates the great honour bestowed on Muslims and also the feeling of jealousy it aroused in the learned among the Jews. The Tradition also speaks of the omission of this great guarantee for other religions and the cause of their lack of confidence which is, contrarily, so very conspicuous in the followers of Islam. There is, however, nothing strange in it, for, the earlier religions were sent down at a time when the human race as well as its religious consciousness were passing through different stages of development. The mantle of final prophethood, like a robe of honour, was meant for man mature of days, and, therefore, it was reserved for the last of the prophets. Only the followers of the last Prophet, the best of people among the human race, deserved that honour.

Protection against Confusion of Thought

The belief in the termination of prophethood has ever protected this religion from the credulity of its own simple-minded adherents and the pseudo-prophets, and stood guard over its followers against running into intellectual confusion and anarchy of creeds to which earlier religions had slid back time and again. This was the doctrine which has helped this religion and its followers to guard

1. Q. V : 3

2. Bukhārī, *Sihāh* and *Sunān Musnad Ahmad*

themselves against the foul play of the hypocrites and masqueraders and enabled Islam to preserve its original creed and fundamental beliefs over the past several hundred years. Had this principle not been there to guide the Muslims, each of their numerous sects would have evolved a different creed, a different spiritual and intellectual ideal, a different religious centre and a different history of its own.

Finality of Prophethood—A Boon to Civilisation

The belief in the finality of prophethood has rendered a great service to man by ministering to his intellectual development, for it has taught him to rely on his knowledge, experiences and mature judgement. Inasmuch as it tells man that he need not look to the heavens for further guidance, it fastens his eyes upon this world about which he need now think and harness its resources to his benefit. In a like manner, man now needs to exercise his mind and think out how to build up a healthy and progressive society, on the bases of spiritual and moral foundations. Finality of prophethood, thus, asks man to be courageous and take risk for his betterment and progress, teaches him to place reliance in his own capacities and lays open the vast field of further progress which can be achieved through his own efforts and struggles.

Had this creed of the termination of prophethood been denied to man, he would have lost confidence in his own self; he would have hanged in doubt, still looking toward the heavens instead of fixing his gaze to the world. He would have still been in a state of suspense, uncertain about his future, like an easy-believing soul who could be easily hoodwinked by every prevaricator. Whenever such a believer was told by a false claimant to prophethood that he had come to give finishing touches to the imperfect garden of humanity,¹ he would have been forced to think

1. Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad Qādiāni says in one of his couplets :

Imperfect was so long the humanity's garden,
My advent gave it the pink of perfection.

whether the impairment of human nature could ever be imparted acme of perfection ?

And, in this way, man would have looked forward, at every stage, to the promised Messiah to come and finish off the job left incomplete by his predecessor. Man would have always been marking time, sitting idle, unable to utilize his own resources and intellectual capacities either for improving, refining himself or the world entrusted to his charge. This is what Iqbāl explains in the 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' in these words :

"In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot for ever be kept in leading strings ; that in order to achieve full self-consciousness man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Qurʾān, and the emphasis it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality."¹

Menace of False Prophets

Muslims have never come across, in their long history, a menace more perilous than the threat of the false prophets, but more often than not these pretenders had little success in misleading them. The stir caused by them was always short-lived like a bubble, but the danger to which the Muslim community was laid open by the latest claimant of prophethood, Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad Qādiānī (1840-1908), in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, became more dangerous owing to the then

1. *Six Lectures on the Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, pp. 176-77.

obtaining political situation.¹

Danger posed by Gnostic Imagery and Illuminations

All those who have studied the development of mysticism in Islam and other religions have reached the conclusion that intuitive religious perception culminating into gnostic imagery, beatific visions and illuminations and the ascetic-mystical attitudes claiming a theosophical link with the Unknown, which very often lead to make the apocalyptic a characteristic form of such intuitive experiences, open the gates of dubious claims and antinomian tendencies. For the source of such intuitive perceptions is oftentimes the predilection of the mystic, or his circumstances, or even devilish illusion, those who lay a claim to these illuminations sometimes become, consciously or unconsciously, impious ministers of evil. The habits and customs, subconscious delusions, distorted impressions, traditional beliefs, mythological conceptions and the circumstances under which a mystic undertakes the journey of spirit, all combine to shape the pattern of his mystical experience.²

1. For a detailed account of this menace see the author's "*Qādiānism—A Critical Study*" brought out by the Academy of Islamic Research and Publications.
2. Dr. Sir Muhammad Iqbāl has alluded to this mistaken form of mystical experience with his characteristic insight into the philosophical and intuitive thought. He says :

"I dare say the founder of Ahmadiyya movement did hear a voice; but whether this voice came from the God of Life and Power or arose out of the spiritual impoverishment of the people must depend upon the nature of the movement which it has created and the kind of thought and emotion which it has given to those who have listened to it."

(Islam and Ahmadism, p. 17)

Then, he proceeds to conclude in the same paper—

"Thus all the actors who participated in the drama of Ahmadism were, I think, only innocent instruments in the hands of decadence."

(Islam and Ahmadism, p. 17)

[Continued on next page]

Several of those masters who have had a practical experience of beatific visions and illuminations assert that it is virtually not possible for the mystical experiences to be completely free from the beliefs and traditions of the mystic or even the circumstances attending these perceptions.¹

Therefore, if anybody considers theophanic vision or divine inspiration to be indispensable for salvation or perfection of faith, he commends the optional to be obligatory.² The prescripts of this type obviously

The same idea has been expressed by Iqbāl more trenchantly in one of his couplets which reads:

Save us God, from the revelation of the serf,
It lays the people in ruins like Chinghez!

1. Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi Mujaddid Alf Thāni (d. 1624) has enunciated the matter in some detail in his letters in which he explains, on the basis of personal experience, that pure and unalloyed intellect as well as untainted mystic experience are unthinkable. He had thus anticipated Emmanuel Kant, the German philosopher, by two hundred years, who, too, in his 'Critique of Pure Reason' expressed doubt in the capability of pure intellect or reason to arrive at a conclusion not influenced by the circumstances, heredity, habits, beliefs and customs. Mujaddid Alf Thāni, however, goes a step further than Kant, and throws light on the non-existence of pure intuition and spiritual experience. (See *Maktūbāt Mujaddid Alf Thāni*, Vol. I, letter No. 266 to Khwājā Abdullah and others.)
2. Saiyid Muhammad bin Yūsuf Husaini of Jaunpūr (1443-1504) the founder of the *Mahdawiyyah* Sect, had declared that "if a man is denied the vision of God in this world, that is, he fails to have gnostic perception either in a state of consciousness or in dream, then he is not a Muslim." This pronouncement had sent the whole of Indian Muslim society in the tenth century, extending from the eastern part of the country to Afghanistan in the west, in a flutter. It had caused such a trepidation that the view put forth by Saiyid Muhammad had become a burning topic of discussion in all the circles of religious scholars and courts of the Muslim Kings. Saiyid Muhammad was a pious and godly soul, truthful and sincere, who had not only attained the higher stages of spirituality but was also known for his

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mistreat the simplicity of the faith, injure universal principles of Islam and open the door to confusion and intellectual anarchy as was done by Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad Qādiānī. The latter had also set up mystical experiences, spiritual visions and intuition as a necessary outcome of meditations and travails, and as an evidence of true faith. He had expressed the view that a religion which denied such intuition was dead or rather devilish, and led its followers to the Hell. If the puritans and ascetics of any religion, he claimed, were not rewarded with transports and illuminations, then they were wayward and blind.¹

Such a proposition of religious truth is so manifestly wrong that it need not be discussed in any detail. The companions of the Prophet of Islam were trained and guided under prophetic care; they had absorbed the teachings of the Qurʾān as no other generation of Muslims ever did after them, nor can the later Muslims of any age claim to equal them as the best exemplars of virtue and godness; for it was through their efforts that the message of Islam was carried to the four corners of the world. Yet, none of them ever claimed gnostic vision of reality nor did anyone of them demand conformity with the content of a deep and spiritual experience. No companion of the Prophet ever laid a claim to the communion with On High, nor we find them in competition in the ways of mystical-ascetic disciplines, nor yet history records any

religious zeal, yet his intuition was faulty for he claimed to be the 'Promised Messiah' or the Messiah predicted to appear at the end of time in some of the Traditions. He thus commended Muslims to join their faith in certain things which were by no means obligatory.

(For a detailed account
see *Hayāt-i-Pāk* by Maulvi
Mahmūd Yādallāhī
Mahdawi).

1. *Barāhīn-i-Ahmadiyah*, Vol. V, p. 183

incident that anyone of them had expressed regrets for not being raised to a higher plane of spiritual consciousness. How, then, can any Muslim deem it necessary to seek or stress intuitive perception of the inner content of faith ?¹

It has happened several times in the past, as history of religion tells us, that separatist movements based on an individual's experiences or claims develop into extremist factions which gradually cut themselves adrift from the parent community. Such schisms very soon declare the rest of the Muslims as apostates, diverge into a new religion and give rise to intricate problems which defy solution even by the combined effort of the whole community, their leaders and religious mentors.²

Collective Intuition of Muslims

Islam has been favoured by the infinite mercy and grace of the Lord, with a collective intuition which is free from all dangers inherent in taking to a new course or following the decision of any individual.

Whenever the Muslims are faced with any intricate or difficult problem or the march of time throws up a new question which cannot be solved by the ordinary process, God invariably inclines the hearts of a group among the deeply-learned, pious and sincere Muslims, who apply themselves wholeheartedly and find out the correct answer to that question. They feel so determined to get to the bottom of the problem that one might say that they have been commanded by God or driven by some force beyond them to set the matter at rest. Such is the combined endeavour of the community in the hour of every crisis

1. For a detailed discussion see Chapter IV of Section II in *Qadianism—A Critical Study* by the author.
2. While this chapter was being written, Pakistan decided to treat Qadianis as a non-Muslim minority, in order to placate the agitated Muslim masses of that country, as demanded by almost all the Muslim organisations within and outside Pakistan.

to which we have given the name of 'collective intuition'—and numerous examples of this nature can be found in the history of Islam.

But, there are also times when some of the pure and elevated souls have an immediate apprehension of the right course. An example of the intuition of this nature can be found in *Adhān*, the call to prayer, which was prescribed by the Prophet after 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb and 'Abdullah bin Zaid were simultaneously communicated the words of the call heard by them in their dreams.¹ *Lailatul-Qadr* or the Night of Power furnishes another example of similar nature. It has been related on the authority of 'Abdullah bin 'Umar that "a few companions of the Prophet who had had the vision of *Lailatul Qadr* in the last seven nights of the month of Ramadhān in their dreams came to the Apostle of God and told him about what they had seen. The Prophet thereupon said, "I find that all of you have similar visions about the last seven nights, therefore, whoever desires to find it should seek it in these seven nights."

The prayer of *Tarāwīh*, offered during Ramadhān, furnishes yet another example of somewhat analogous nature. The Prophet started to offer this prayer but abandoned it after three days lest it should become a burdensome obligation for his followers.² The Muslims, however, continued to offer it individually until Caliph 'Umar decided to perform the prayer in congregation. Obviously, the decision of Caliph 'Umar was guided by divine intuition, for, it proved to be immensely beneficial to the community. The prayer of *Tarāwīh* not only created the zeal for spending the nights of Ramadhān in vigils and adoration of God but also led to the memorising of the Qur'ān. The earnestness of the *Ahl-i-Sunnat* in learning

1. *Abū Dā'ūd, Tirmidhī, Dārimī and Ibn Mājah,*

2. *Bukhārī* on the authority of Ayesha.

the Qurʾān by heart and its recital as compared to the absence of similar fervour in other sects of Islam, who do not offer *Tarāwīh* prayer, is a manifest sign of 'Umar's right-guided intuition.

And, oftentimes, this 'collective intuition' takes the shape of unanimous consent of a vast majority of Muslims on a certain issue which cannot, by any means, be treated as the result of fortuitous circumstances or conspiracy by a section amongst them. Such a consensus of opinion of the majority of learned Muslims is either advantageous to Islam and the Muslims, provides a solution to certain important problem affecting their community life and puts an end to certain menace or dangerous situation, or helps to achieve certain desired objectives.

The instances of the 'collective intuition' of this category are very many: collection of the Qurʾān during the caliphate of Abū Bakr, collection and critical examination of the Traditions during the first two centuries of Islamic era, deduction of laws and principles of Islamic jurisprudence by the learned doctors of religion, and the amplification and development of all those branches of learning which have helped in preserving the original text of the Qurʾān and its study and propagation of Islam are befitting examples of such a collective intuition.

The system of spiritual purification which later on developed into an elaborate discipline designed to identify the machinations of the devil within man and its suppression through spiritual realisation and communion with God is the inner dimension of the Islamic *Sharʿīyah*, recognised by it as *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification) and *ihsān* (devotion). Known as *tasawwuf* (mysticism) to later generations, it furnished yet another manifestation of 'collective intuition'. It was refined and developed by the noble masters of spirit into the greatest act of devotion to God and as a means for striving against the burden of one's own carnal self. God made it a medium of revivifying listless hearts and cool

spirits and it was then utilised by the great saints and their disciples to spread the message of Islam in far off lands like India, Far East and Africa. Innumerable people were guided through it while many amongst them imparted faith and righteousness to the Muslim society of their times. They were not ascetics embodying the quiescent spirit of inactivity, since, many of them fought like heroes in the battlefields. Nobody who has not closed his eyes to the history of Islam can deny the great service rendered by these travellers of the path of spirit to the cause of faith.

Another shining example of this 'collective intuition' can be found in the great endeavour made from time to time to discredit and confute the misguided sects, irreligious philosophies, skeptic patterns of thought and blasphemous movements inviting people to profanity and inaction. It was the 'collective intuition' of Islam which produced master spirits of the age, at the appropriate moment they were needed, who unravelled wickedness of these bad influences and saved the Muslims from their pernicious effects. All these are the achievements of divine inspiration granted by the Lord to a section of Muslims in every age and place, for they are not only the last of the right-guided people but also the star of hope for entire mankind. This is, undoubtedly, the sign of this *ummat* being the chosen community while its 'collective intuition' is a testimony of the termination of revelation after the last Apostle of God. We do not find such a continuous and marked example of 'collective intuition' in the followers of earlier prophets who were not blessed with it because the prophethood was not to be terminated in their times.

Seeds of Strife

The intellectual confusion and disruption in the Muslim society brought about by the false prophets are matters of grave concern to every follower of Islam. In these days of materialism and godlessness, people are little inclined to

prefer claims of higher spirituality; but were the people infatuated with the craze to put forward their claims to prophethood like Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad Qādiānī and his zealous followers, condemning every other Muslim, rejecting him as an apostate and an unbeliever, the resulting confusion and anarchy, strife and struggle in the world of Islam could be very well visualised by all of us. Would not, then, the community raised by God to make Islamic brotherhood a living reality by effacing the prejudices of colour, race, nationality and tongue turn into small, warring religious factions, condemning one another to the point of heresy?¹

The danger posed by the continuance of prophethood in Islam was realised by Maulvī Muhammad ‘Alī Lahorī, a prominent follower of the Mirzā, who raised his voice against it, but he could not go to the root of the menace for he still continued to hold the Mirzā as a revivalist and Promised Messiah. Appealing to the good sense of his co-religionists, Maulvī Muhammad ‘Alī says:

"Reflect, for the sake of God, that if the belief of Miān Sāhib² is accepted that the prophets will continue to come, and that thousands of prophets will come, as he has written explicitly in *Anwār-i-Khilāfat*, will not these thousands of groups denounce one another as *Kāfirs*? And so, what will happen to Islamic unity? Let us assume that all those prophets will be confined

1. Philosopher-Poet Iqbal has pointedly expressed the principle of Unity of Islam in one of his articles. He says:

"Islam is essentially a religious order which has defined limits, that is, belief in the Unity and Omnipotence of God, faith in the prophets and termination of prophethood on the advent of His last Messenger, Muhammad (peace be upon him). Faith in the last mentioned creed is, in reality, the distinguishing feature between a Muslim and a non-Muslim and is a determinant whether a certain individual or group forms part of the Muslim community or not."—(*Harf-i-Iqbal*, pp. 136-7).

1. That is, Miān Bashīr Uddīn Mahmood, the son and successor to Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad Qādiānī.

to the Ahmadi group alone. Then, how many factions will there be in the Ahmadi group? After all you are aware of what happened in the past, how one of these groups became favourable to and another opposed to the Prophet after his advent. Then, will that very God who has expressed the will to unify all the peoples of the world at the hands of Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him), now divide Muslims into numerous factions, each one of them calling the other *Kāfir*, having no Islamic relationship and unity among themselves? Remember that if the promise to make Islam predominant over all religions in the future is true, then, that tragic day when thousands of prophets will go about with their own separate exclusive mosques, each with its own group of mentors of true belief and salvation, denouncing all other Muslims as infidels, will never dawn in the history of Islam."¹

In short, the termination of prophethood and revelation signifying the end of the probationary period of human race with the advent of the last prophet, Muhammad, the Shining Light and Leader of all Humanity (on whom be peace and blessings), is without doubt the greatest of divine blessings on man. This is the spiritual principle for unity of mankind and a means to divert the energies of human beings to fruitful channels. It protects the identity of Muslims and their vigour and power for it gives them confidence in themselves as well as in the ever-abiding nature of their religion, places the responsibility of universal leadership on their shoulders and urges them to strive in the way of God to the Last Day. This is the foundation on which the edifice of Islam has been raised.

Worst Enemies of Islam

Whoever lays a claim to any new prophethood in any

1. *Radd-i-Takfir-i-Ahl-i-Qibla*, p. 49-50

shape or form or helps or abets such a pretender is the worst enemy of Islam and Muslims and a tool in the hands of Islam's bitterest foes. Islam can never forgive the guilt of such wrongdoers. *Verily, the pronouncement of Lord God is absolutely correct.

"Who is guilty of more wrong than he who forgeth a lie against Allah, or saith: I am inspired, when he is not inspired in aught; and who saith: I will reveal the like of that which Allah hath revealed? If thou couldst see, when the wrongdoers reach the pangs of death and the angels stretch their hands out, saying: Deliver up your souls. This day are ye awarded doom of degradation for that ye spake concerning Allah other than the truth, and used to scorn His portents.

"Now have ye come unto Us solitary as We did create you at the first, and ye have left behind you all that We bestowed upon you, and We behold not with you those your intercessors, of whom ye claimed that they possessed a share in you. Now is the bond between you severed, and that which ye presumed hath failed you."¹

1. Q. VI: 94-95

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Glossary

Adhān : "Announcement", call or summons to public prayer, proclaimed by the *Mū'azzin* (Crier) in a harmonious and sonorous voice before the stated hours of prayer from every mosque.

Ahl-i-Sunnat : "The people of the path." The larger portion of the Muslims is known by this name because of its adherence to the Traditions of the Prophet and the practice of his companions. Unlike the Shi'ahs, the *Ahl-i-Sunnat* acknowledge the first four caliphs to have been the rightful successors of the Prophet.

Ahmadi, Ahmadiyya : The followers of Mirzā Ghulām Ahmad Qādiānī who first claimed to be the Promised Messiah and, then, promoted himself to prophethood, declaring that all Muslims rejecting his claim were apostates. They have ever been held by the general body of Muslims as beyond the pale of Islam, and have been declared a non-Muslim minority even in Pakistān, their native country.

Amīnun : 'Amīn' or Trustworthy was the title given to Muhammad when a youth, on account of his fair and honourable bearing, which won the confidence of the people.

ʿArafah : The ninth day of the month of *Zul-Hijjah* when the pilgrims stay on mount ʿArafāt and recite the mid-day and afternoon prayers, and hear the *Khutbah* or sermon of pilgrimage.

Bāṭiniyah : Inner, esoteric. The Bāṭinites maintained that only a symbolic interpretation requiring gradual initiation by an illuminated teacher, could reveal the real meaning of the Qur'ān. The word, they claimed, was like a veil, hiding the deep and occult meaning never attainable by those clinging to literal explanation. Being a Shi'āite theological school of thought, they also upheld the doctrine of the divine source of *Imāmat* (the spiritual leadership of an Imām) and of the transmission of divinely ordained hereditary succession from Caliph 'Alī.

Bait-ul-Maqdis : "The Holy House". The temple of Jerusalem where now stands the Dome of the Rock, which is also known as the Mosque of 'Umar. Next to Ka'aba, it is the most sacred mosque where all the prophets are reported to have said their prayers.

Dīn : or "the way", meaning religion. It is used especially for the religion of the prophets and their inspired books.

Dīn-i-Ilāhī : Jalāl Uddīn Muhammad Akbar, the great Moghul Emperor, had initiated a new religion, known as *Dīn-i-Ilāhī*, with the sole purpose of producing an amalgam of Hindu and Muslim faiths in order to strengthen and consolidate the Moghul Empire. People who embraced the faith had openly to forsake the conformist or orthodox Islam which, according to Akbar, had outlived its utility after a thousand years of its inception. Although the new religion claimed to embody the merits of all the faiths without any prejudice, it was particularly harsh to Islam and held its injunctions to be retrogressive.

Hadīth : 'Prophetic tradition', which can better be called a narrative of some act or word of the Prophet Muhammad, or an act tacitly approved by him. As opposed to the Qur'ān, which is a direct revelation from God, the Prophet's instructions on religious and social

matters were given according to divine inspiration. The *Hadīth* thus represents an authentic interpretation of the Qurʾān, a valuable source of law and an infallible guide for the overwhelming majority of Muslims in every situation of their spiritual and secular life.

Hadīs-ul-Gharīb : A classification of *hadīth* with reference to the manner in which it has been narrated. *Hadīth-ul-Gharīb* represents a Tradition related by only one line of narrators.

Hāfiz : 'A guardian or protector'. The term is also applied to one who has committed the entire Qurʾān to his memory.

ʿIbādāt : Prayer or devotional exercise which every Muslim is required to render to God. It comprises *sālat* or ritual prayer, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage.

Ihrām : The pilgrim's dress and also the state in which the pilgrim is held to be from the time he puts on this distinctive garb until he lays it aside.

Ihsān : means to confer favour or to perform an action in a perfect manner. The term has been used in the Prophetic Traditions for the sincere worship of God. The Prophet said : "*ihsān* is both to worship God as if thou sawest Him, and to remember that God seest thee." The word is used in this sense by the *sufī* mystics.

Ilāh : An object of worship or adoration i. e. god or deity. The term Allah, 'God' is *ilāh* with the definite article *Al*, i. e. *Al-ilāh* or Allah—the God.

Imāmat : Following an *Imām* i. e. one who leads, a normal guide or a model. In the Shiʿaite creed, the *Imām* is the faultless, infallible leader, an offspring of ʿAlī, to whom spiritual leadership is supposed to have been passed on from the Prophet.

Imāmiyah : The chief sect of the Shiʿahs, namely, those who receive twelve descendants of ʿAlī, the fourth caliph,

as the rightful and impeccable guides. The twelfth one, Muhammad, son of al-Hasan al-ʿAskarī, or the Imām Mahdī, is supposed to be still alive, though he has withdrawn for a time, and will appear again in the last days as Mahdī or Director to set the world on the path of righteousness.

ʿItizāl : *lit.* 'the seceded', the word is applied to the school of Wāsil ibn ʿAtā who broke away from Hasan al-Basrī. The school rejected eternal attributes to God in order to avoid making eternals more than one, denied that the Qurʾān was the eternal word of God, held major sins to be unpardonable by God and rejected the view that the believers would have the vision of God in the Paradise. They denounced all comparisons and similitudes applied to denote the attributes of God.

Jahmiyah : was the sect founded by Jahm ibn Safwān (d. 717). He borrowed from the Murjites sect the doctrine that true faith is founded on conviction independent of external manifestations; and from the Mʿutazilites, the rejection of all similitudes to explain the attributes of God. Unlike the Mʿutazilites, the Jahmiyah believed in absolute predestination, that is man has neither power nor choice in deciding his actions.

Jauhar : A custom of the Rajpūts of India during medieval times whereby their womenfolk committed suicide by plunging into fire, before the warriors faced an overwhelming foe in battlefield, in order to save their honour and to avoid falling in the hands of the victors.

Kāfir : *lit.* 'The coverer' i. e. one who hides or covers up the truth. The word is generally used to define one who is a nonbeliever in the Unity of God and apostle-ship of Muhammad.

Khabar-ul-Wāhid : Another category of *hadīth* according to manner of narration. The term stands for a Tradition

related by one person and handed down by one line of narrators. It is a disputed point whether a *Khabar-ul-Wāhid* can form the basis of a religious injunction.

Lailatul Qadr : 'the Night of Power'—A night in the month of Ramadhān which excels a thousand months, according to the Qurʾān. The excellences of the night being innumerable, it is generally spent in vigils and prayer by the pious Muslims.

Mahdawayah : Followers of a religious guide, such as, Saiyid Muḥammad bin Yūsuf al-Husainī (847-910 AH) of Jaunpur in India, and more recently, al-Mahdī of Sudān, who made a claim to be the leader predicted in the Traditions to appear before the end of the world. He is believed to fight the infidels and to fill the earth with equity and justice.

Mutanabbī : 'A false prophet' or impostor, the first pretender to prophethood being Musailamah Kazzab—Musailamah the liar. Several such claimants to prophethood appeared from time to time but none ever succeeded in misleading the Muslims.

Qadriyah : The followers of Mʿabad al-Juhaim (d. 699 AD) who was first to discuss the problem of the freedom of will. He proclaimed that man held power (*qadr*) over his actions, and consequently, the tyrants and cruel kings and rulers were responsible for their unjust deeds.

Rabb : 'The Lord' or the Sustainer. A title frequently used in the Qurʾān for the Divine Being. In its literal meaning it signifies one who brings up anything gradually to perfection.

Rawāyah : 'Legends' or stories popularly regarded as historical by the illiterate folk.

Salāt : Prayer composed of a fixed pattern of genuflexions, prostrations and recitals of sacred text, offered five times a day by Muslims.

Sharīʿah : is the 'way of religion' or 'the law', consisting of

the teachings of the Qurʾān and precepts of the Prophet and established for the guidance of the people. It is divided into five parts, viz, belief, moralities, devotions, transactions and punishments. Islamic law is a typical example of the law meant for an ethical society for it covers both the duties towards God and the duties to one's fellow beings.

Shāhnāmā : The great epic of Abul-Qāsim Firdausī narrating the heroic deeds of ancient Iranian kings and heroes.

Shiʿah : *lit.* 'Split' and also 'followers'—a general designation covering various Islamic sects not following the conformist or orthodox faith. The Shiʿahs maintain that ʿAlī, a cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad was the first legitimate *Imām* or successor of the Prophet, who ought to have been appointed as Caliph after him. Unlike the great majority of Muslims, the Shiʿahs maintain that this high office of Islam was a prerogative of the Prophet's offspring and, hence, the election of the first three Caliphs was wrong.

Tasawwuf : A Persian word used to express the doctrine of the *Sūfīs* or Muslim mystics. It represents the inner or esoteric dimension of Islam and, like the *Sharʿah*, it has its roots in the Qurʾān and the Prophetic practice.

Tazkiyah : *lit.* 'purification'. It denotes both the purification of body as well as soul; the latter through devotional exercises and complete resignation to the will of God.

Ummat : A people or a nation being the followers of a Prophet. The concept of nationality, however, runs counter to the fundamental Islamic principle of *Ummat* which binds a people by nothing but the consciousness of a common faith and common moral outlook. The groupment being of an ideological nature transcends all barriers of race, colour and language.

Wahy : is inspiration. The divine influence may enlighten a God-moved soul in more than one way, but the expression is commonly used for the communication received by a prophet of God through the archangel Gabriel.

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