

The background of the book cover is a photograph showing the dark silhouette of a mosque against a bright, hazy sky at sunset or sunrise. The mosque features several minarets with bulbous domes and a large central dome. The sky transitions from a pale yellow near the horizon to a soft greenish-blue at the top.

Abdel Haleem Mahmud

*The
Creed of Islam*

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by

Abdel Haleem Mahmud

Foreword by Martin Lings
(Abu Bakr Siraj Ed Din)

Translated by
Dr. Mahmud Abdel Haleem

WORLD OF ISLAM FESTIVAL TRUST

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTES:

- ¹ In the opinion of the translator, there is not as yet any satisfactory translation of the Qur'ān in English.
 - ² The customary invocations after the name of God, the Prophet(s) and others now dead are omitted from this English translation. Muslims may insert such an invocation in their reading if it is so wished.
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The Author

Dr. Abdel Haleem Mahmud was born in Egypt (Eastern Delta Province) in 1910. After completing his education at Al-Azhar University and the Sorbonne (Paris) in religious studies, philosophy, psychology and sociology, he took his doctorate in Islamic Sufism (First class honours: Sorbonne) in 1940, and returned to Egypt as lecturer in psychology at the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn (theology) at Al-Azhar University.

In 1951 he became Professor of Philosophy; in 1964 he was appointed Dean of the Faculty and a member of the Academy of Islamic Research; in 1970 he was appointed Deputy to the Shaikh Al-Azhar and in 1971 Minister of Awqaf (Religious Endowments) and Al-Azhar Affairs. He was appointed Grand Shaikh Al-Azhar in 1973, which position he continues to hold today. Dr. Abdel Haleem Mahmud has travelled widely throughout the Islamic world and outside it, both as a visiting academic and in his capacity as Grand Shaikh Al-Azhar.

In 1976, he visited England to attend the inauguration of the World of Islam Festival. He was presented to H.M. Queen Elizabeth II, and, as well as visiting the Muslim communities of the U.K., was received by His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury and other dignitaries of the churches. He opened the exhibition of 'The Qur'ān' in the British Library (British Museum). His published writing is prolific, ranging from philosophy and ethics to religious subjects, starting with his doctoral thesis in French on al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī and proceeding with many works in Arabic, such as 'Islam and Reason', 'Islamic Mysticism' and 'Islamic Philosophical Thought'.

FOREWORD

Each century, for the men and women who lived in it, was always in the past an object of blame. The twentieth century is the unique exception to this rule. It has been characterized, especially in the West, by an increasing tendency to think that every domain of life should be made to 'conform' to modern times, or in other words 'brought up to date'. Nothing is allowed to escape, not even religion, and many of the so-called religious authorities are much preoccupied with the idea of imbuing their religion with what they call 'the spirit of the twentieth century'.

It could, however, be argued that the idea of conformity may be understood in more than one way. Medicine for example, in order to conform to the age, must be capable of supplying antidotes to all that is most prevalent in the way of illness. Analogously, it would not be unreasonable to maintain that in order to conform to an age characterized by drastic change and turbulent unrest, religion should be more than ever ready to display, and even to advertise, the rocklike stability without which, as the vehicle of External Truth, it can never in any case be true to itself. There is no doubt that the vast majority of believing souls feel a deep need for something in their lives which will always remain the same, and they expect their religion to be the unfailing constant which fulfils this need.

Providence itself would seem to corroborate this point of view. Since Islām is the last religion to be revealed to man, we have a right to assume that it has a providential conformity with the needs of the final phase of this temporal cycle, that is, with the period in which we live when, as the Qur'ān tells us, 'the Hour is at hand';

and if in the light of this sure instance of conformity we seek to define what conformity means, spiritually speaking, we find that it does not mean being an accomplice, as some would like to think. Islām in no sense panders to the short-comings of our time. It is on the contrary an implacable antidote to these failings; and it has been endowed in particular with what might be called a 'built-in safeguard' against change. It is impossible for any group of Muslims to succeed in adapting the religion to suit their own individual preferences. Immutability is one of its integral and basic aspects. The creed and the liturgy of Islām are inviolably proof against human interference.

This does not mean, however, that misleading books cannot be written about Islam. It is therefore reassuring to find in the author's preface:

'The reader will observe that we have attempted to let the Qur'ān and the sayings of the Prophet (Hadith) speak for themselves - as they are the main sources of Islamic teachings - and that we have not added anything which has no support in these.'

The author is moreover an expert. As Shaikh al-Azhar he is the Rector of that University (the oldest in the world) to which, more than to any other, Muslims throughout the centuries have sent their sons from all parts of the Islamic world to be trained as religious authorities. It is therefore no small guarantee for the reliability of this book that it should come from the pen of one who is at the head of this great institution. Nor will anyone deny that amongst those who have held this high office within living memory, Shaikh 'Abdel Haleem Mahmūd is one of the most outstanding figures; and the list of his publications bears witness that it is to the profoundest aspects of religion that he himself is personally drawn.

MARTIN LINGS
(*Abu Bakr Siraj Ed Din*)
London, 1977.

PREFACE

In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.

Praise belongs to God and thanks are due to Him for His Bounty and Grace – out of which He gave us Islām, the perennial religion of submission to His Will – and for guiding us towards it. He brought religion to its culmination with Islām and set the seal on the line of Prophets with the Messenger of Islām, whose message was rendered all-embracing, universal, lasting to the Day of Judgement.

This day have I consummated your religion for you and completed My favour upon you, and chosen Islām to be your religion. (Qur'ān, V, 3)

This is a study of Islām, dealing with the principles of the Islamic creed and touching on the effect they have on the individual who practises them. The essays have been compiled to celebrate the occasion of the World of Islām Festival which was held in London from April to June 1976. It is hoped that, along with other works, it will give readers the opportunity to become acquainted with the essence of Islām and its message. This book aims at the general reader and gives simple images of the tenets of the Islamic creed without becoming too technical or going into great detail. The reader will observe that we have attempted to let the Qur'ān and Sayings of the Prophet (Hadith) speak for themselves – as they are the main sources of Islamic teachings – and that we have not added anything which has no support in these.

I trust that God will render these studies beneficial and that they, and the Festival now passed, will help to bring people nearer to an understanding of Islām and each other. In the Qur'ān, God

speaks to mankind thus:

O mankind, We have created you male and female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may come to know one another: the noblest among you in the sight of God is he who is most dutiful to Him. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware.

°Abdel-Haleem Mahmūd,
Shaykh al-Azhar
(rector of al-Azhar University)
Cairo, 3:12:1976

I. ISLAM: THE WORD AND ITS MEANING

In order to arrive at some understanding of the religion of Islām we should, in the first place, turn to the word itself as a guide, both in its dictionary definition and religious connotations. What is meant by 'a Muslim'?

In defining the lexical meaning, Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/939) said, 'A Muslim is a person who has dedicated his worship exclusively to God, for just as we say in Arabic that something is *'salima'* to a person, meaning that it *became solely his own*, so in the same way *'Islām'* means making one's religion and faith God's alone.'¹

Ibn al-Anbārī's lexical definition agrees with that given of Islām by the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace).² He was once asked, 'What is Islām?' and he replied, 'It consists in giving your heart solely to God and in making Muslims safe from your tongue and hand.'³

With regard to the common definition of Islām amongst Muslim thinkers, it has three constituents:

Firstly, confessing with the tongue that there is no god but God, and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God; secondly, believing from the heart in everything that this Prophet proclaimed in matters of faith, law, ethics and the social system; and thirdly, living in practice according to all that Islām requires, by doing what it enjoins and refraining from what it forbids.

Thus, Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī said about Islām:

¹ Al-Fakhr al-Rāzī's *Commentary on the Qur'ān*, I, p. 432, Cairo, 1318/1900.

² In the Arabic text the name of the Prophet is always followed by a conventional formula of respect. It will not be repeated throughout the translation: Muslim readers will utter the formula for themselves.

³ From a long Hadīth narrated by Ahmad, with a sound chain of authority.

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'In addition to testifying to one's faith, it is believing with the heart and acting in deed, and resigning oneself to God in all that He has decreed and pre-ordained.

'In the same way, the Qur'ān says of Abraham (Peace be upon him):⁴

When his Lord said to him, 'submit!' (aslim), he said: I have submitted (aslamtu) to the Lord of the worlds.

'And in this way, too, God said:

The true religion with God is Islām (submission to God),

and in this way also Joseph prayed:

O make me to die musliman (in true submission),

that is to say, 'Make me one of those who submit themselves to what pleases Thee!' It may also mean, 'Make me safe from captivity to Satan', who had vowed:

I shall seduce them all together, excepting Your faithful servants from amongst them.

Moreover, God says to the Prophet:

You will not make anyone listen to you except those who believe in Our signs and thus are muslimūn (submissive),

that is, they who yield to truth and submit to it.

And finally,

By which (here referring to the Torah) the Prophets who had submitted themselves (aslamū) to the Lord gave judgement.⁵

However, whether we regard the word 'Islām' from its lexical or religious aspect, we find that it does not refer to a specific person, in the way Buddhism refers to the Buddha or the Zoroastrian faith to Zoroaster; it does not refer, either, to a specific people in the way Judaism refers to a specific people; nor does it denote a certain region or country, as do yet other religions. A religion which is related, or refers to a certain person, or people, or region, is necessarily limited in time by the survival of that person or people, and limited in space by their geographical location. In contrast to

⁴ This is the conventional formula of respect used after mention of all prophets before Muhammad. It will not be used again in this text (see Note 2).

⁵ See the *Mufradāt* of al-Rāghib, under 'Islam'.

this the word 'Islām' knows no such limiting time or space, person or people.

So divorced is the word from any specific location that in considering it we are taken directly to an unlimited sphere which extends beyond the bounds of the globe. Nor is it limited in history by the era of the Muḥammadan mission. Thus our master, Noah said to his people:

If you turn from me, I have not asked you for any reward. No wages are due to me except from God, and I have been commanded to be of the muslimūn (those who submit). (X, 72)

And the Qur'ān says of our master, Abraham:

Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but he was a man of pure faith, musliman (submitting to God): certainly he was no idolator. (III, 67)

Let us note that while our masters Abraham and Ishmael were raising up the foundation of the House of God⁶ they prayed:

Accept this from us Lord, for You are indeed the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. Our Lord, make us muslimaini (both submissive) to You, and of our offspring a nation muslimah (submissive) to You, and show us our holy rites and turn to us. You are indeed the Oft-Turning, the Merciful. (II, 128)

Again, our Masters Abraham and Jacob did not omit to enjoin their sons to be submissive:

Abraham charged his sons with this, and Jacob likewise: My sons, God has chosen for you the religion – see that you die not except as muslimūn (submitting to Him). (II, 132)

And when death came to our master Jacob he was anxious to depart to his Lord feeling reassured about his sons, so he asked them:

What will you serve when I am gone? They replied: We will serve your God and the God of your forefathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac – the One God – to Him we are muslimūn (submissive). (II, 132/3)

And our master, Moses, said to his people:

If you believe in God, my people, put your trust in Him if you are truly muslimūn (submissive to Him). (X, 84)

6 The Ka'ba in Mecca.

And our master, Joseph, turned to God in gratitude and prayer:

Lord, You have given me to rule, and You have taught me the interpretation of dreams. Originator of the heavens and earth, You are my Protector in this world and in the next! Make me die musliman (in true submission) and join me with the righteous.
(XII, 101)

And God inspired Jesus' Apostles:

Believe in Me and My Messenger. They said: We believe - witness that we are muslimūn (submissive).
(V, 111)

And when Jesus perceived his people's unbelief, he asked them:

Who are my helpers in the cause of God? The Apostles replied: We are the helpers of God - we believe in Him: witness that we are muslimūn (submissive to Him).
(III, 52)

The naming of followers of Islām in the present era as Muslims is now seen to have taken place long before their time. Here is a Qur'ānic verse which, referring to Abraham, specifies certain aspects of the mission which God has laid upon the shoulders of the Muslim nation, in which there is a Divine directive which should be the motto of every Muslim:

And struggle for God as is His due, for He has chosen you, and has laid on you no impediment in your religion, being the creed of your father, Abraham. He named you Muslims in former times, and in this the Messenger may testify against you, and you may testify against your fellow-men. So keep up the prayer, pay the alms-tax and hold fast to God: he is your Protector, an excellent Protector, and an excellent Helper.
(XXII, 78)

It is self-evident that Islām must exist entirely independently of the constructions of space or time, and no two persons would differ about its basis, for its essential principles would gain nothing but acceptance and submission from all sincere souls. In this way the Qur'ān reveals the essence of Islām in a few words which can command only respect and belief, where there is due sincerity in the heart of the receiver. Thus God addressed the Prophet:

Say: It is revealed unto me that your God is One God - will you submit to Him?
(XXI, 108)

He is also commanded when addressing the People of the Book⁷ to say to them:

Oh People of the Book! Come now to a word that is common to both of us, that we serve none but God and we associate none with Him and do not take any from among us as lords apart from God. And if they turn away say: Bear witness that we are muslims.
(III, 64)

In another verse God delineates the true believer and true Messenger, indicating in passing the difference between belief and unbelief:

No mortal to whom God has given the Scriptures and whom He has endowed with judgement and prophethood would say to men, 'Worship me instead of God', but rather, 'Be God-orientated, for you have studied and taught the scriptures.' Nor would he order you to serve the Angels and the Prophets as your Gods: what, would he order you to disbelieve after you had submitted?
(III, 79-80)

Thus in a general, all-embracing way, God explains the nature of religious belief, in the form of a rhetorical question:

Who is there that has a better religion than he who surrenders himself entirely to God, doing good?
(IV, 125)

From all these verses we come to realize that the essence of Islām in the sphere of belief is surrendering oneself to God which means, in the first instance, believing in the Unity of God and then that the Unity of God demands that we worship none but Him. It implies that we equate nothing with Him, put no person nor anything before Him and reverence Him alone. It demands, further, that we do not take the Angels or Prophets for Lords: we must be entirely God-orientated, turning to Him alone, and putting our sole hope and trust in Him.

In the sphere of morals, the essence of Islām is Iḥsān which the Prophet defined as 'worshipping God as if you can see Him, and knowing that if you cannot see Him, yet nonetheless He sees you'. The state of being God-orientated applies both to the realm of belief and that of morals; in the latter it means adopting the morals which God has enjoined. Islām, then, demands total surrender to God and fullness of worship, as if the servant can actually see Him.

⁷ Referring to the Jews and the Christians.

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Naturally it is held that nobody would refuse to surrender his face⁸ to God, except those who are completely lacking in religious feeling.

It follows, therefore, that Islām, or self-surrender, is the path of guidance. Hence the Qur'ānic verse:

Whomsoever God desires to guide, He expands his breast to Islām. (VI, 125)

And he whose breast has been expanded to Islām receives light from his Lord. (XXXIX, 22)

Submission to God is explained by Him through the example of the Prophet, whom he addressed in the Qur'ān:

Say: My prayers, my ritual sacrifice, my living, my dying - all belong to God, the Lord of all Being. No peer has He. Thus I have been commanded, and I am the first of those who submit. (VI, 162)

Perhaps the first verse that was revealed from the Qur'ān indicates this equally well, and that it was an instruction from the beginning of the entire mission that everything should be done in the Name of God, and not in that of any other being or creature:

Recite in the Name of Thy Lord who created (man). (XCVI, 1)

The same point was made in other verses:

Eat not of that over which God's Name has not been mentioned: it is ungodliness. (VI, 121)

Islām, or surrender to God is, then, Religion in the absolute sense, as well as religion in its everyday practice, since there can be no religion other than surrendering oneself to God. Whatever definition may be offered for 'religion', its true quality lies in this.

It follows, therefore, that the word 'Islām' is the perfect definition of 'religion' and it also follows that the proposition:

Verily the true religion with God is Islām (III, 19)

is equally exact. The next proposition, which is based on this, is again undoubtedly exact:

Whosoever desires a religion other than Islām, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers. (III, 85)

⁸ The face is the most sublime part of the body, and a worshipper commits it to God, turning it towards him.

Whoever rejects submission to God rejects religion itself. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Qur'ān speaks of a group of sincere followers from among the People of the Book who, as soon as the Qur'ān was read to them, declared that they were indeed Muslim and that they had in fact been Muslims before the Qur'ān had come to their attention:

We have sent our Word to them so that they may be reminded. Those to whom we gave the Scriptures before this believed in it, and when it is recited to them, they say, 'We believe in it; surely it is the truth from our Lord. Indeed, even before it was revealed we had surrendered.' Those shall be given their recompense twice over. (XXVIII, 51)

The logical conclusion from this, therefore, is declared by the Qur'ān itself:

He⁹ has ordained for you as religion that with which He charged Noah and that which We have revealed to you, and that with which We charged Abraham, Moses and Jesus, saying: Observe this faith, and be not divided regarding it; but that to which you call them is unacceptable to the idolators. God chooses for Himself whom He will; and guides to Himself those who repent. (XLII, 13)

Similarly, the Prophet is addressed in the Qur'ān:

Say: We believe in God and that which has been sent down to us, and sent down to Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and the Prophets of their Lord: we make no distinction between them, and to him we surrender. (III, 84)

Surrendering oneself to God is the same as believing in His Unity and worshipping Him accordingly. If the distinguishing feature of Christianity in the present era is, according to al-Bayrūnī, its doctrine of the Trinity, the distinguishing mark of Islām, as he truly observed, is the doctrine of Unity, in which God alone is singled out for Lordship: creating, giving and withholding.

Say: Lord, Master of Sovereignty, You bestow sovereignty on whom You will and take it away from whom You will: You exalt whom You will and You abase whomsoever You will: all that is good is in Your hand; You have power over everything. (III, 26)

9 God talks of Himself as "He" and "We" in the Qur'ān, often in the same verse, as here.

God Almighty invests the entire Kingdom in its small and large aspects, in health, strength, glory and fame, means of livelihood and wealth; and He possesses it in matters of the heart; for the heart of a man or woman is held between two fingers of God the Compassionate. He undertakes the guidance of that heart, and whomsoever God guides, no man can lead astray. He controls the Hereafter (*The Master of the Day of Judgement*). He, the High and Exalted, has absolute authority over great and small. Not an atom's weight nor anything smaller or bigger than that escapes His Knowledge, Power, Will or Wisdom, in earth or in the Heavens, and His guardianship over all is comprehensive, embracing and absolute.

Let us now return to the verse:

Say, 'People of the Book, come now to a word that is common to both of us - that we serve none but God and that we associate none with Him, and do not take any from among us as Lords, apart from God.' And if they turn away, say: Bear witness that we are Muslims. (III, 64)

This means that if they do not admit these beliefs, the fact that he is a Muslim should be declared, that is, his belief in the Unity of God.

In fact, Islām, like other religions before it in their original clarity and purity, is nothing other than the declaration of the Unity of God, and its message is a call to testify to this Unity, since the basic essence of Islām and all its teachings and principles point to It, while all the ritual practices are intended to make man aware of It.

To begin with, we have the first statement of belief: *I bear witness that there is no god but God*, the eternal Divine Message, and secondly: *I bear witness that Muḥammad is His Messenger*, who transmitted the Message. These two statements sum up the doctrine of the Unity of God.

So the duty to declare this Unity is the basis and essence of Islam, but it is not a mere expression without foundation in the heart and feelings. Unless a man's belief in the Unity of God dominates him completely, penetrating all areas of his feeling and awareness, soaking up his heart and soul, moulding the activity of his body and directing him to the right goal, his faith cannot be complete. In order to make it possible for a man to uphold God's

Unity in a practical way, Islamic rites were introduced. Thus the ritual prayer is, in essence, separation from all other than God in order to be connected with Him, and thus it bears witness to the Unity of God. Hence the prayer begins with the words, 'God is Supreme' (*Allāhu akbar*), to make the person feel from the outset that God is greater than all masters and individuals to whom one may attach one's hopes and expectations, and that that hope should be set on Him alone, for He is greater than all creatures and more exalted and powerful.

Then follow all the positions of prayer: reciting while standing upright, followed by the positions of bending forward, kneeling, prostration with forehead on the ground, and the final formula said while sitting; the aim being to declare in every movement and position the separation from all other than God in order to face only towards Him and to surrender oneself to Him.

As for fasting, it is raising oneself for a period of time above matter, bad thought and language, and bad action, for the sake of pleasing God. It is raising oneself above human imperfection, which manifests itself in passions, words or deeds, so that the soul may be freed for a period of time to contemplate the perfection of God. It is an attempt to take on certain qualities which are in the nature of God, since He is Absolute Perfection, lacking nothing, and any man aspiring towards perfection must assume those aspects of it which God desires of him. Fasting, then, is raising the self above human imperfection in the cause of submitting to the Oneness of God.

Likewise, *zakāh*¹⁰ (alms-tax) aims at the same goal. It is expending material things such as humans run after and almost worship, and devoting them to God; it means relinquishing that which has once been gained for the gratification of the self and the passions, and devoting it to the purposes of God.

As for the Pilgrimage - may God grant us to do it every year! - it is from beginning to end a withdrawal from the world towards God. It is divesting oneself of the past, since it begins with

¹⁰ The Arabic word, '*zakāh*' means both charity and also a statutory portion of one's wealth given every year for the use of the needy and other services. The word has the added significance of purification of a man's soul and wealth by spending in this way, thereby making his soul and wealth increase.

renunciation of one's sins, that is, those periods of life during which one was heedless and distracted from remembering God and which led to serving another instead of God, making a lord of one's passions and thus falling into disobedience and sin. For the pilgrimage one even discards the clothes of the past and from the first moment engages in 'responding' to God alone. This responding is a pure declaration of the Unity of God: it is a complete answer to the order to abandon all substitutes for God:

I respond to Thee, O Lord, I respond: Praise, Grace and Kingdom belong to Thee, without equal: I respond.

By raising their voices with this call, which has sweet fragrance and a glittering brilliance which ascends to the heavens whose gates open for it, the pilgrims rally under the banner of the Unity of God.

The rites of the Pilgrimage follow each other in succession, whether obvious and outward, or inward and symbolic, and transcending the visible action: declaring the Unity and calling It out,¹¹ circumambulating Its central symbol,¹² running for the sake of It,¹³ or standing looking up to It,¹⁴ praying to God to accept the pilgrims into the band of those followers of all prophets who declared the Unity of God. God addressed the Prophet:

We never sent a Messenger before you except that We revealed to him, saying: There is no god but I, so serve Me. (XXI, 25)

These are some aspects of upholding the Oneness of God in one's beliefs. Now we come to upholding it in morals. The essence of this is that all personal and social behaviour should spring from a divine teaching. Upholding God's Unity in the field of morals manifests itself first in the intention held by the person when he decided that all his acts and all his absentions are for the sake of God alone. In other words, his whole life must be for God, and not only his life but also his death. In general, upholding the Unity of God is to give oneself to Him when standing and when sitting, in

¹¹ The responding formula, here translated.

¹² Circumambulating the Ka'ba.

¹³ The rite of running between the two hills, al-Safā and al-Marwa, in commemoration of the running of Ishmael's mother, Hagar, in search of water.

¹⁴ The rite of standing on Mount 'Arafat.

sleep and in waking, in speech and in silence, in anger and in satisfaction, in friendship and in enmity, in buying and in selling, in work and in rest, in one's passing thoughts and in one's settled opinions, in teaching and in suggesting, in advising and in warning.

As an all-embracing law, we repeat again that upholding the Unity of God is to direct one's prayers, rites, life and death towards God alone, the Lord of all beings. The more closely a man comes to this Unity in his beliefs, morals and intentions, the nearer he is to fulfilling the Islamic ideal. The Quran states:

To God belongs sincere religion. (XXXIX 3)

referring by that to its being free from any trace of contamination, whether in beliefs or in morals, which begin with the intention.

More than anyone else, God is above the need for an associate, so if any man does something in the Name of God *and* of other than Him, He will disassociate Himself from it. In a Holy Utterance¹⁵ God says:

I am above partners, so if anyone does something for Me and for another I will leave it for the other.

And the Prophet said,

'It is the intention behind the action that counts in deeds and everyone receives according to what he intends; so whoever migrates intending it for God and His Messenger, his migration is for God and His Messenger, and whoever migrates intending to have some wordly gain or a woman to marry, his migration is for that.'

All this leads us to the true meaning of Islām, which, as already stated, is surrendering oneself to God. We repeat the exalted saying of the Prophet narrated by the noble companion, 'Amr ibn 'Absah:

'A man said, "Messenger of God, what is Islām?" The Prophet (May God's Grace and Peace be upon him) said, "It consists in making over your heart entirely to God and in the safety of Muslims from your tongue and your hand."'¹⁶

¹⁵ Recorded by Ahmad on sound authority. The words and meaning of the Qur'ān are from God, whereas in a Holy Utterance the meaning is from God, but the words are the Prophet's. In the Prophet's own sayings the meanings and the words are his.

¹⁶ Recorded by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and al-Tirmidhi in a long saying of the Prophet.

There is no doubt that the fact that Muslims are safe from a man's tongue and hand springs from the subjection of his heart to God; this safety is thus in accordance with the saying of the noble Prophet:

'Had his heart been submissive, his limbs would have been submissive', and in accordance with his saying, as narrated by al-Nu'mān ibn Bashīr:

'There is in the body a piece of flesh which, if it is sound, the whole body will be sound, and if it is unsound the whole body will be unsound, and that is the heart.'

Someone may ask, "How does one surrender oneself to God? What are the means and what is the way one should follow? As for the means, they are the divine principles which God laid down through the tongue of His Prophet, whether in the Qur'ān or in his sayings and actions.¹⁷ Anyone wishing to surrender to God must refer to the Qur'ān and the Prophet's sayings and actions. Anyone desiring guidance to the way of the good life of religion and morality will inevitably refer to the pages of the Qur'ān and to the sayings and actions of the Prophet. That is because the Qur'ān is the only text in the world in which the Divine Speech explaining religion has been preserved (by God's preservation), without alteration either by addition or omission. The Qur'ān did not merely preserve the Divine Revelation in meaning; it preserved the Speech itself, and this is a status to which no other work can aspire, for it reveals a degree of accuracy and truth not equalled, or approximated by any other. It is a source of great pride to the Muslims that in their religion they refer to the Divine Text itself in all its accuracy, freshness, blessing, brilliance and splendour. It is a glory to the Arabic language that it preserves this text intact:

A Book whose Verses are perfected and then made distinctly clear, from One All-Wise, All-Aware. (XI, 1)

As for the conclusion at which we wish to arrive, it is that religion, surrendering oneself to God, upholding the Unity of God, and Islām all have the same meaning, each explaining and

¹⁷ The sayings and actions of the Prophet are known as Ḥadīth (s.)/Aḥādīth (pl.), translated by the words, 'saying', or 'tradition'.

enlightening the other; all are universal, absolute, and unlimited in time or space.

The word 'Islām' in its very sound and completeness is the best description of them all. This general statement needs to be explained in detail in the following chapters.

This day have I consummated your religion for you, and completed My blessing upon you, and chosen for you Islam to be your religion. (V, 3)

II. GOD EXISTS

In our observations of the universe as a whole we find so close an interrelation of its components that it can be said with certainty that every part, from the heavens to the earth and what lies in between – both the inhabited places and the mountains and valleys, the plants and animals – comprise a unity whose parts are complementary and mutually bound together. Such a structure, whose billion billions of parts are thus interconnected, repudiates altogether any theory derived from ‘blind nature’, or ‘co-incidence and chance’. When these explanations are put aside it emerges that the universe must have a maker. Observe this celebration of interdependence in the following verses:

Let man reflect on the food he eats: how We poured out the rain abundantly, and split the earth into fissures, and how We then made the grains to grow, and vines and reeds, olives and palms and gardens and fruits and pastures – an enjoyment for you and your cattle to delight in.
(LXXX 24)

Observe again the connexion between the heavens and the earth and between water and plants:

Have you not seen how God has sent down from the heavens water, which penetrates the earth and collects as springs? Then how with it He brings forth crops of diverse hues, which wither, turn yellow, and then He crumbles them into chaff? Clearly in that stands a reminder for men of understanding.
(XXXIX, 21)

This inherent connexion between the different realms of the universe is termed by philosophers ‘the teleological proof’, or ‘the proof from purpose’, from the fact that everything in the universe is intended, and coincidence contributes nothing to its purpose-

fulness, nor chance. Consider the purpose and goal in the following verses:

Have they not beheld the sky above them, how We have built it and adorned it, leaving no cracks? And how We spread out the earth and set upon it immovable mountains and how We made to grow therein pairs of every joyous kind for an insight and a reminder to every penitent man; and how We sent down out of Heaven blessed water with which to bring forth gardens and harvest rains and tall palm trees laden with date-clusters, sustenance for men, thereby giving new life to some dead land? – Such will be the Resurrection. (L, 6-11)

We may truly reflect on the following verses:

It is God who sends down water out of the sky, and with it quickens the earth after it was dead. Surely in that is a sign for a people who have ears to hear. In cattle, too, there is a lesson for you; we give you to drink of what is in their bellies, between filth and blood – pure milk, sweet to those who drink. And we give you the fruits of the palms and the vines from which you derive sweet-tasting liquid and fair provision. Indeed this is a sign for men of understanding. And your Lord inspired the bees, saying, 'Build your homes in the mountains, in the trees and in the thatch of roofs, then feed on every kind of fruit and follow the ways of your Lord, so easy to go upon.' Then there comes forth out of their bellies a liquid of various colours wherein is healing for men. Truly in this is a sign for a people who reflect. (XVI, 65-69)

Maintaining the World through Knowledge, Direction and Care

Another idea occurs in the minds of some people, namely that this purposeful interconnexion, this intended mutual coherence, came about with its fixed laws and unchanging rules and was an operation which must needs work in this way, and that God finished creating it and fashioning it with precision, so that it now runs according to what was decreed for it by God. It moves automatically according to the intended purpose, in keeping with laws which God has laid down and does not interfere with: it moves of its own accord without the will of God entering into every action or inaction, speech or silence.

But this is not so. The true Islamic perspective is that God holds in His hand this interconnected structure at every moment and throughout every second, for if He were to abandon anything in it for the twinkling of any eye, it would dissolve and vanish. God says:

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God holds the Heavens and the Earth lest they cease to be; should they cease to be, none would hold them in existence other than He. Surely He is All-Clement, All-Forgiving. (XXXV, 41)

It is He who holds the birds in the sky:

Have they not regarded the birds that are made subservient in the air of the heavens? Naught holds them but God! Surely therein are signs for a people who believe! (XVI, 79)

Have they not regarded the birds above them, spreading their wings and closing them? Naught holds them but the All-Merciful; surely He sees everything! (LXVII, 19)

God is the Possessor of Sovereignty. He grants it at any moment to whomsoever He wishes, and takes it back at any moment, likewise. It is He who ordains the night and day at the sunrise and sunset, and it is He who grants life and reclaims it, whenever a creature is born or dies.

And he says:

Say: O Lord, Master of Sovereignty, You bestow sovereignty on whom You will and take it away from whom You will; You exalt whomsoever You will and You abase whomsoever You will: all that is good is in Your hand; You have power over everything; You cause the night to pass into the day and the day into the night; You bring forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living, and You provide for whomsoever You will without reckoning. (III, 26-27)

The good reader will observe the use of the present tense throughout these verses, which in Arabic indicates the present and the future, and there are many verses in this vein. God says, for instance:

He it is who shapes you in the womb as He wills; there is no god but He, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. (III, 6)

And among His signs is that He looses the winds, bringing good tidings, so that He may let you taste of His Mercy [the rain], and that the ships may run at His commandment, and that you may seek His bounty, and render thanks to Him. (XXX, 46)

God is He who looses the winds that stir up clouds, spreading them in heaven how He will and breaking them; then you see the rain issuing from within them and He sends it down on those servants whom He chooses. How they rejoice, although before it was sent down on them they were in despair! Behold, then, the marks of God's Mercy, how He quickens the earth after it was dead -

truly He is the Quickener of the dead and He is the All-Powerful over everything!
(XXX, 48-50)

There is no doubt that God created, determined and made the laws and set the rules: this is one thing. Maintaining it once it has been initiated is quite another matter. So, after the creation follows the maintenance, which is continuous and unending. This is the meaning of 'al-Qayyūmīyyah', one of the attributes of God, for 'al-Qayyūm' is one of His Names, which means 'the Self-Subsistent One by whom everything exists and continues to be'.

Does 'maintenance' mean simply 'upholding the universe'? No, it is maintaining it with care, and direction in accordance with this knowledge, lest it disappear. Such is the essential meaning of the prayer, 'Lord, leave me not to myself for the twinkling of an eye, or for less than that'. This is because if God were to leave a person to himself physically he would disintegrate, because He is upholding him, and if He leaves man to himself spiritually he would fall an easy prey to Satan, temptation or evil. This maintaining care embraces the universe with an all-inclusive, all-embracing knowledge. He says in His Book:

He knows the Secret and that which is yet more hidden (XX, 7)

It is obvious what is meant by the Secret - as for what is even more hidden, it is anything in the unconscious, and:

He knows the treachery of the eyes and what the breasts conceal. (XL, 19)

He knows the unseen as well as the seen:

God knows what every female bears and the womb shrinking and swelling; everything with Him has its measure - the Knower of the unseen and the visible, the All-Great, the All-Exalted. It is all the same whether any of you conceal his speech, or proclaim it, or whether any of you hide himself in the night or go forth in broad daylight. (XIII, 8-10)

His knowledge is not confined to the past or the present: it includes the future. He says:

Every misfortune that befalls the earth or your own person is ordained in a Book, before We bring it into being: that is easy for God. (LVII, 22)

As He has declared that His knowledge is all-embracing by saying that He knows the unseen and the seen (the unseen here is the world of metaphysics, and the seen the world of physics), He

also elaborates this truth in its intricate parts and details, making it clear that He knows the insignificant and small, as well as the great:

With Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them but He. He knows what is in land and sea; not a leaf falls but He knows it; not a grain in the darkness of the earth, not a thing, fresh or withered, but it is recorded in a clearly laid-out Book. It is He who makes you sleep like the dead by night, and He knows how you work by day; then He raises you up therein, to fulfil your allotted span of life; then unto Him shall you return. Then He will inform you of all that you have done. (VI, 59-60)

Again He says:

He knows what penetrates into the earth and what comes forth from it, what comes down from heaven and what goes up to it - he is the All-Compassionate, the All-Forgiving. The unbelievers say, 'The hour of Doom will never come to us!' Say, 'Yes indeed, by my Lord, it shall come to you, by Him who knows the unseen - not so much as the weight of an atom in heaven or earth escapes Him, nor is there anything smaller or greater but it is recorded in a clearly laid-out Book'. (XXXIV, 2-3)

We have been discussing the divine maintenance of the universe with knowledge, and this, in fact, is inseparable from maintaining it with care in the right direction. This latter is based upon the first, and indivisible from it. We begin our discussion on this maintenance with direction by saying that it is an act of Grace. The divine direction will always care for man, directing him, out of solicitude, providing him with life itself and pleasure in life, for God has shaped everything in such a way as to make them accord with the true interests of man.

The Care of God for the Universe

So far we have used expressions like 'purposeful interrelationship', 'upholding' and 'direction': now we will use the word, 'care'. God the Almighty cares for the universe and His concern is all-pervading. The word 'care' does not take us away from the atmosphere of purposeful interrelationship or upholding and direction, but it tinges the discussion of the proof of God's existence with a tender and personal hue. When the proof is coloured with this gentle, kindly tint, it is called 'the proof of caring'. The Qur'ān

is brimming with words directing people's attention to God's care for the universe, and especially for man in the universe. God's Mercy abounds with grace towards man:

Have we not assigned to him two eyes, a tongue and two lips and pointed out to him the two paths (of right and wrong)? (XC, 8-10)

And among His signs is that He created for you of yourselves, spouses, that you might repose in them, and He has set between you love and mercy - surely in that are signs for those who reflect. (XXX, 21)

And surely We have honoured the descendants of Adam and carried them on land and sea, provided them with good things and exalted them above many of our creatures. (XVII, 70)

God speaks of the numerous favours which He bestows. He refers to the favour of night and day in these words:

Say, 'Think! If God should make the night unceasing above you, until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God shall bring you illumination? Can you not hear?' Say, 'Think! If God should make the day unceasing above you, until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God shall bring you night to repose in? Can you not see? Out of His Mercy He has appointed for you night and day, for you to repose in and seek his bounty, so that you may give Him thanks.' (XXVIII, 71-73)

This proof of caring is one of the most beautiful proofs of the existence of God, Who says:

Do you not see how God has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and earth, and how He has lavished on you His visible and unseen favours? Yet among men there are those who dispute concerning God, without knowledge or guidance or an enlightening Scripture. (XXXI, 30)

To deduce that God exists from the proof of his concern is as old as mankind. Every human being feels that he is encircled by God's favour, both inside and outside Him. God expresses the idea which every person can imagine, upon some slight reflection:

If you reckoned up God's blessings you would never be able to count them. (XVI, 18)

Socrates, father of philosophers, silenced Aristodemos with similar reasoning. He asked him:

“Is there anyone whose skill in his craft pleases you?”

Aristodemos answered, “Yes”, and named the man he considered the most skilful contemporary poet. Then Socrates asked, “Whom do you consider higher – one who makes statues without life and intellect, or one who makes living, moving figures?” He answered, “He who makes living forms, unless these forms were by coincidence a chance handiwork and not the work of intelligence”. Socrates said, “If we suppose that there are certain things, the purpose of which we cannot see, and others whose purpose and use are obvious, what do you say of them? Which are the work of intelligence and which the work of coincidence?” He answered, “There is no doubt that things whose purpose and use are obvious are the work of intelligence.” Socrates said, “Do you not see that the Maker of man, when He first made him, created means of sensing because of their obvious use, giving him sight and ears to see and hear what is appropriate for his life? And what is the use of splendid things to smell if we did not have the nostrils, and how would we perceive the taste of things and distinguish the bitter, sweet and tangy, if we did not have the tongue with which to taste? Our sight is exposed to harmful things. Can you not see that the divine power looked after this and gave us eyelids like shutters, to stop what may harm the sight, and made the lashes like a seive to protect the eyes from any harm in the wind? And what do you say of the hearing organ? It receives all sorts of sounds and never gets full! You see how the front teeth of animals are arranged, prepared to cut the food and then to send it back to the molars! If you reflect on such arrangements, can you still doubt whether all this has come about by coincidence, or is the product of intelligence?” Aristodemos said, “Yes, indeed, if we reflect on this we will not doubt that they are the work of a Wise Creator, Who cares much for His creation.”¹⁸

The care of God which pervades the whole universe which man can apprehend with his seeing eyes and hearing ears and thinking mind and speaking tongue, and which he can observe in every grace of God around him, in which he is steeped, excludes all

¹⁸ Quotation taken from Devid Santillana MSS.

chance and coincidence. That structure which controls all our aims and attainments also excludes chance and coincidence.

The Proof of Composition

Let us now talk about composition and how it may guide us to the Creator. Take one of the simplest possible constructions, the mattock, which the peasant uses in the field, or the hammer which the craftsman uses in his work. If a man passes by the mattock and observes a long smooth piece of wood to which a piece of iron has been firmly fixed, would he think that this happened through pure chance? If such reasoning would not hold in a simple, easy case like this, it would never hold for a complex structure like a watch or a radio set, for instance.

As the late Dr. Muḥammad Abdullah Draz said,

‘Imagine a house whose rooms are well provided with luxurious furniture, standing on a high mountain surrounded by a thick forest; suppose that a man came across this house but could not find anybody nearby. Suppose that he thought that rocks from the mountain had been scattered around and then automatically collected together to take the shape of this splendid palace with its bedrooms, chambers, corridors and fittings; that the trees in the wood had split of their own accord into boards and formed themselves into doors and beds, seats and tables, each taking its place in the palace; that the fibres from the plants and wool and hair of the animals of their own accord had changed into embroidered cloth and then were cut into carpets, pillows and cushions and dispersed about the rooms and settled onto the sofas and chairs; that lamps and chandeliers by themselves had fallen into this palace from all directions and fixed themselves into the ceilings, singly and in groups – would you not conclude that this must be a dream or a legend, or the reasoning of someone disturbed in his mind?

‘What, then, do you think of a palace whose ceiling is the sky, whose floor is the earth, whose pillars are the mountains, whose ornamentation is the plants and whose lamps are the stars, moon and sun? In the correct judgement of the intellect, can it be of lesser importance than that house? Is it not more likely to direct the attention and mind to a Shaping Creator, Alive, Self-Subsistent, Who created and shaped and Who determined and guided?’

We have not yet finished talking about chance. We must ask,

when has chance ever built a palace? Indeed, when has it made one single room with a door and windows? When has it even produced a well-made door, a mere door?

And do you think that if a man brought millions of printing letters and began to move them around day after day, week after week, year after year, that he would obtain from them, by chance, a composition which is a book of literature, philosophy, or mathematics? As the orientalist Devid Santillana said, even after moving them around for generations, after all his toil he would still be left with individual letters. If this is so, as Santillana continues, how can we imagine that this universe, with the perfection and harmony between its individual parts and their amazing compatibility with each other, could ever have come about through random movement in a limitless void, as the materialists imagine? There is no doubt that rational people would agree with Aristotle that 'Every order bespeaks the intelligence behind it'.

Similarly, al-Kindī, the first Muslim philosopher (185-252/801-866), considered that the evidence of craftsmanship in a door, couch or chair, with its design and perfected order, does not reveal its maker any less than the universe reveals its omnipotent Creator. People of complete integrity would not doubt this. If we observe the world in its totality, as al-Kindī says, we find it well-arranged with its parts interlocking, designed according to a most useful and perfect order, with some parts the source of others and some acting counter to them. All this is clear to anyone with a comprehensive view. Al-Kindī adds that the external manifestations and phenomena that register upon the senses give the clearest indication of the design of the first Planner:

'There is, in the organization of this universe and its arrangement, the fact that some of its parts affect others, while some are led by others and some make others subservient; and in the perfection of its shape in the best possible form; in the existence of every being and the dissolution of every dissolving thing and in the firmness of every firm thing and in the disappearance of every vanishing thing, a most complex indication of shaping and organization: and with every plan there is a Planner and an embodiment of the most practical wisdom, and behind all wisdom there is a Wise One. The fact that planning requires a Planner and wisdom a Wise One is something about which no two persons can disagree.'

The above manner of demonstration is the method which Kant, the greatest philosopher of Germany, declared to be the clearest and strongest proof of the existence of God. It is the way that has been followed by many thinkers from East and West. All these proofs of the existence of God may be summed up in the following verses from the chapter in the Qur'ān called 'The Great News'.

Did We not spread the earth as a bed, and raise the mountains as pillars? And did We not create you in pairs and appoint your sleep for a rest, and appoint night as a mantle and the day for your livelihood? And did We not build above you seven mighty heavens, and appoint a refulgent lamp, and did we not send down abundant water cascading from the clouds, that We may bring forth thereby grain and plants and gardens thick with foliage?(LXXVIII, 6-16)

The presence of God is too obvious to need further demonstration. The proofs of purpose, caring and composition about which we have been speaking are but one proof, each being named after the beautiful aspect under which it appears. They are no more than effects which point to a cause, and may be clearly seen - just as the track indicates the passage of the passer-by, as the beduin said of old, so the heavens with its signs of the zodiac and the earth with its pathways immediately proclaim the All-Wise and All-Knowing Creator.

This method, which requires proof for the existence of God is not the only one in the Islamic tradition, however. Now that we have demonstrated the concept of proof, in accordance with the fashion of our times, we shall briefly, with the aid of God, demonstrate another approach to this subject.

God is, in the minds of believers, manifestly obvious. He is more obvious than all else; indeed the Effector is more obvious than the effect and the Creator more evident than his creation, while the Bringer-into-Existence is more crystal-clear than the forms which have been brought into existence. One of the Names of God is 'al-Zāhir' ('the Outwardly Manifest'). Tāj al-Dīn ibn Aṭā'llāh al-Sakandarī, a leading savant in Islamic Law, as well as being a renowned mystic, considers this meaning in a number of aphorisms of typically fine craftsmanship. In Arabic the basic formula remains unchanged, but in each aphorism telling details differ, giving to each aphorism a pleasing and subtle significance. He says, among other things, the following:

'How can it be conceived that something conceals Him,

When it was He Who made everything manifest?
 How can it be conceived that something conceals Him,
 When it was He Who was manifest before the existence of
 everything?
 How can it be conceived that something conceals Him,
 When He is nearer to you than everything?
 How can it be conceived that something conceals Him,
 When, but for Him, nothing would have come into existence?
 Great is the difference between Him through Whom we prove things,
 And those things which we need to prove;
 God, through whom we prove things, made truth known to His
 people,
 Thus proving it by its Origin:
 Seeking to prove God is a sign of not finding your way to Him:
 Otherwise, when was He ever absent so that we need to prove Him?
 When was He ever far away that we should need His traces to lead us
 to Him?

As for seeking to prove the Effector by the effect, ibn Aṭā'llāh
 speaks thus in his prayer to God:

'My Lord, how can we seek to prove You with what depends on
 You for its very existence?
 Can it be possible that other than You is more manifestly obvious than
 You, so that it can make You manifest?
 When wert You ever absent, that
 You need a proof to lead to You?
 When wert You ever far away, that traces may lead us to You?

But this is a Ṣūfī method, to which we only refer, without going
 more deeply into it here.

III. MUHAMMAD IS THE MESSENGER OF GOD

*And I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.*¹⁹

To a Muslim, there is no escape from admitting the above statement. Bearing witness that there is no good but God and testifying that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God are admissions of belief that are complementary aspects of the one faith, inseparable one from the other.

How do we bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God? The great religious scholar, al-Ghāzālī said,

‘If you doubt whether a certain person is a prophet or not, you will have no certainty except by knowing his condition, either by observing him yourself or by hearing from people who themselves have heard it in an uninterrupted and reliable transmission from those who saw it.

‘If you know about medicine or jurisprudence you can recognize physicians or jurists by knowing what they are like or by hearing what they say, or by observing them directly. You can thus tell for yourself, not being obliged to have recourse to others who know it, that al-Shaf‘ī is a jurist and Galen a physician. You would even be able to learn some medicine or jurisprudence and read the books and writings of these two men and, in the nature of things, you would soon find out what they are like. The position would be the same once you understood the meaning of Prophethood.’

Let us observe something of the brilliance and splendour of this

¹⁹ In discussing the existence of God we followed the approach that it is a matter that needs proving; as for proving the truth of the blessed Prophet, the Qur’ān directs our attention to circumstances and conditions, arguments and proofs which demonstrate his truthfulness. Thus, if we attempt here to write at length about proving his truthfulness we are simply following the Qur’ānic approach.

Prophet as we follow the stages of his life.

He was descended from noble ancestors: history tells us about their eminence and high birth and about the noble deeds which they carried out for humanity and for the greater good. Quṣayy, for instance, who was one of the ancestors of the Prophet, built the Assembly Hall in Mecca, with its door facing the House of God. It was a chamber of counsel, a parliament and an executive body and even more than that: all the affairs of the tribe of Quraysh were settled there: deliberations, marriages and decisions about war. They would not tie the banner to the spear when appointing a commander for a campaign, whether for themselves or for others, except at this assembly, and it was Quṣayy who performed this ceremony. Men travelling with the camel caravans to trade would only depart from that spot and when they returned they would end their journey at the Assembly Hall in honour of Quṣayy, to seek his opinion and show appreciation of his standing. They would follow his command as if it were a religion laid down to be observed in his life and after his death.

Quṣayy's son, ʿAbd Manāf, followed him and he was also a notable man, pre-eminent among his people, as was in turn his son Hāshim, who saved the people of Mecca from dying of hunger in the lean years that struck them and depleted their wealth.

As for ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, the grandfather of the blessed Prophet, he was held a sage among his own tribe and all the Arabs. Some of the deeds recounted of him are upheld in the Qurʾān, such as the prohibition of incest, the institution of cutting off the hand of a thief and the prohibition of burying new-born girls alive.

All his biographers agree that the Prophet's father and mother were held high in moral esteem and birth, descended from the most noble and distinguished houses of Mecca. As the historian ibn Hishām said, in his lineage the blessed Prophet occupied the central place in the honourable chain of his people and he was of the noblest descent, both on his mother's and father's side. His birth marked the preliminary step towards achieving the purpose of Divine Wisdom in taking humanity out of darkness into light. His birth paved the way for this in the sense that God surrounded the Prophet in the period that preceded his mission with care and protection, so that he would be worthy of taking on the greatest

mission of preaching the universal religion and showing mankind the true significance of the relationship between man and God, and the responsibility in personal behaviour incumbent upon individuals. He set out to define the responsibility of every member of society, whether ruler or ruled, husband, father, son or brother, worker or manager, and so on, as it is included in the following Ḥadīth of the Prophet:

‘Each of you is a shepherd and everyone of you shall be questioned respecting those, or that, of which he is shepherd: the leader is a shepherd and he will be questioned about those under his care; a man in his house is a shepherd and will be questioned about that which is under his governance; and the woman in her husband’s house is a shepherdess and shall be questioned about her domain of rule; and the servant is a shepherd in his master’s wealth, and he will also be questioned about his domain of responsibility. So every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you shall be questioned in respect of what is under him.’

From the very time of his birth all the foundations of error and deviation began to be shaken. The biography of the Prophet alludes to this, using symbols which we shall look at, simply as expressive symbols.

Among the first stories is that about the night of his birth, when the water ebbed in the lake of Sāwā and caused the palace of Khosroes to crack, and the fire of the Zoroastrians to die out. As for the idols which were round the Ka’ba, their inevitable fate and sure destruction was to come: their days were numbered in years and days. The pillars of polytheistic error and heresy, injustice and tyranny, began to collapse from the time of the birth of the blessed Prophet. The appearance and spread of light, guidance and true direction were imminent.

The newly born baby was called Muḥammad: as for the reason for this, on one hand it is related of his mother, Āminah, that when she conceived him she had a visitation in which she learned that she had conceived the master of the nation and that when he fell to the ground at his birth she must say, ‘I protect you in the Name of the One God from the evil of the envious’, and that she should then call him Muḥammad (which means ‘the Praised One’). On the other hand, it is told that when the baby was brought to be shown

to his grandfather, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, he was asked, 'What do you call your grandson?' He answered, 'Muḥammad', so when he was asked, 'Why do you give him a name which is not the name of any of your forefathers or people?', he answered, 'I have hopes that all the people on earth will praise him'. This, as the story goes, was because he had had a dream which al-Qayrawānī narrated in his book, *Al-Bustān*:

'Abd al-Muṭṭalib saw in his sleep that it was as if a silver chain came out of his back, which had one end in the sky and one end in the earth, one in the East and one in the West; this charm became like a tree, with light on every single leaf and all the people of the East and West were as if they were clinging to it. He recounted his dream and it was interpreted that a child would be born in his descent who would be followed by the people of the East and West and that he would be praised by the dwellers of heaven and earth, and this is why he named him Muḥammad.'

His nurse, Ḥalīmah al-Sa'diyyah, took young Muḥammad to live with her in the desert in the neighbourhood of Bani Sa'd. It is not surprising that this future prophet of light filled his journey from Mecca to her neighbourhood with joy and liveliness, hope and optimism. In the company of Muḥammad, in his innocence, purity and smiling childhood, and all his radiant freshness, Ḥalīmah and her husband, and even the beasts they rode on, felt very lively during the journey, for it was an easy one. He filled Ḥalīmah's dwelling with joy and delight and a radiant sense of life spread throughout the place and among its occupants (God give blessing to everything in it), so that the family were happy. Accordingly, as their gentleness and compassion towards Muḥammad increased, so he grew up in an atmosphere of kindness, friendliness and love. All this was planted in his growing soul and heart which were filled with the fresh shoots of the finest feelings and sensitivity. At this stage we come across yet another of these beautiful symbols which deepen the significance of his biography.

In his fourth year the age of discernment began. The Divine Care protected him with what is symbolically described in accounts of his life as 'The Splitting of the Breast'. This account is narrated by Muslim in his collection of *Aḥādīth*:

'It was narrated by Anas, a Companion of the Prophet, that Gabriel came to the blessed Messenger of God (as he was to be) while he was playing with young children; took him and laid him on the ground and cleaved open his breast, taking out of his heart a clot, and saying, 'This is Satan's mark in you'. Then he washed it in a golden basin in the water of Zamzam and joined the wound up again, having returned the heart to its place. His playmates ran to his foster-mother, telling her that he had been killed, so they all ran back and met him coming towards them, pale-faced.'

The mark of Satan was taken out of his heart at this early age, and so, as his mother Āminah said of him, 'By God, Satan will have no way to him'. And so it was: Satan had no way to the blessed Prophet, since God protected him completely throughout his life from any stain of impurity.

When the Prophet was still a strong youth, Mecca was full of all varieties of pleasures, passionate and impure – drinking halls were to be found all over the town, so were dubious places with lewd singers and dancers. Young men threw themselves into these pursuits, but the Almighty willed that Muḥammad should keep away from such things. Al-Bukhārī, in his collection of Aḥādīth, narrates that the blessed Prophet once said, 'I never considered following any of the pleasures of the Age of Barbarism²⁰ except on two occasions'. On each occasion he was looking after some sheep with a boy from his tribe, and he asked his companion to look after them instead so that he could go to Mecca, where there was a wedding celebration at which there would be delights and music. Both times, as he was approaching the house to join in, sleep overtook him and he slept until he felt the rays of the risen sun. These incidents show how God protected the blessed Prophet from the evils and corrupt behaviour of the Age of Barbarism.

The above narrative incidentally tells us that before his mission Muḥammad worked at times as a shepherd. He did this in the neighbourhood of Banī Sa'd and in Mecca, and he later told us in one of his sayings that 'The missions came to Moses while he was a shepherd, also to David, and the message came to me, too, when I was a shepherd looking after the sheep for my people at Aḥyād'. The author of *Al-Rawḍ al-'Unuf* comments that God willed that

²⁰ The Pre-Islamic period.

His prophets should work as shepherds in this way in preparation for their becoming shepherds of nations which would be under their care.

And so the period of youth passed, and the blessed Prophet was still pure and untainted.

Because of what they had seen, observed and ascertained of his qualities in which his integrity appeared manifest and brilliant, everybody described him as 'Al-Amīn' ('The Honest One'). He was honest with himself in not allowing himself to be attracted by the pitfalls of polytheism, passions or impurity; he was honest with people in not injuring their honour and in not causing enmity between one person and another by slander and backbiting; he was honest with money which was put in his charge to be kept in his custody or to trade with, for he did not steal, deceive or cheat. He was honest in his speech, and he did not lie or exaggerate. He was honest with secrets and did not dissimulate or divulge. He was The Honest One.

And all the people of the tribe of Quraysh concurred in this: when they were rebuilding the Ka'ba they came to the point where they had to raise the black stone to set it in its place, and each wanted to have the honour: they drew swords and battle was about to start, when they agreed to accept the arbitration of the first man to enter the precinct, and they all shouted with joy when they saw Muḥammad coming, 'Here is the Honest One!' Honesty was well-known in him, then and throughout his life. In later years he said, 'There is no faith in one who has no honesty'.

When the verse, "*Warn your nearest kinsfolk*" was revealed to him, he began to preach openly. He went up onto al-Ṣāfā hill and cried, 'People of the Quraysh!', so they said among themselves, 'Muḥammad is crying out on al-Ṣāfā!' They assembled there and said to him, 'What is the matter?' He asked them, 'If I told you that some advancing army on horses is at the foot of the mountain coming to attack you, would you believe me?' They answered, 'Yes, you are not an untrustworthy person, and we have never known you to be a liar'. So he said, 'I bring you warning of a terrible chastisement [on the Day of Judgement]'. And then he called each clan by name, 'O clan of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, and 'Abd Manāf, and of Zuhrah', and so on until he had named all the clans

of the Quraysh, and then he said, 'God ordered me to warn my nearest kinsfolk, and I can bring you no benefit in this world or in the world to come unless you admit that there is no god but God'.

As the Messenger of God asked for a vote of confidence for the Quraysh by raising the banner of his honesty in their faces, he was fully confident that his life was so pure that there could be nothing impure in it to reverse their opinion. His life was of unchangeable innocence and purity and he was thus able to challenge them openly by declaring frankly that his life proved the truth of all he said.

Had the Meccans around him been truthful and sincere he would not have needed to issue this challenge: it would have been sufficient for him simply to tell them that he was the Messenger of God and they would have accepted it. Many in fact did believe simply because he told them, and they did so owing to their wealth of experience of his veracity and sincerity both towards themselves and towards others. Khadijah believed and Abū Bakr believed, and so did Waraqah and others. They believed him immediately he told them, because of what they knew of him and his life. Abū Sufyān, at a time when he was at his most bitter enmity with the Messenger of God conceded his honesty in his interview with Heraclius:

'Heraclius asked him, "Did you ever suspect him of lying before he said he was a Prophet?" Abū Sufyān said, "No", and Heraclius concluded, "I would say that he would not have shunned lying before people if he was prepared to lie before God". Then he asked him whether Muḥammad had ever been known to be treacherous and Abū Sufyān answered, "No". So Heraclius said, "I asked you whether he was treacherous and you answered "No", and such are the messengers of God - they are not treacherous".'

The story of this interview is narrated in the books of Aḥādīth and in biographies of the Prophet, and it is worth reflection because it is the conclusion of a wise person and shows the logic of a thoughtful man, and we shall take from it here the relevant part about the life of the Prophet and leave the other part, which deals with his mission, until later:

'Heraclius said to Abū Sufyān, "I asked you about his lineage, and you

said that he was of high descent, and such are messengers: they are from the noble stock of their people. And I asked you whether anyone before him had said as he had and you said No; and I reflected that if someone had said it before him I would have said, 'This is a person who is saying something in imitation of someone before him'; I asked you whether any of his ancestors were kings and you said No; and I said I thought, had any of them been king I would have said, 'This is a man who is trying to restore the kingdom of his ancestors'".

If we study the life of the blessed Prophet from the point of view of heredity or psychological development, we find that it proves his complete sincerity. His life was a complete illustration and fulfilment of what the Arab historian, ibn Khaldūn, said were the signs of prophethood and which people of intelligence and penetrating insight would confirm. One of these signs is that before their mission prophets should be endowed with goodness and intelligence and avoid all that is reprehensible and any kind of impurity – such is the meaning of their being 'under divine protection', as if they had been created to transcend all that is blameworthy in life as if it were in opposition to their very nature.

Ibn Khaldūn goes on to give some examples from the life of the Prophet in explanation of this principle:

'There is a trustworthy Ḥadith that while he was a boy the Prophet helped his uncle, al-ʿAbbās, to carry some stones for building the Ka'ba. He collected them in the apron of his gathered-up robe and became uncovered; at once he fell down in a faint, which caused him to become covered up again. He was once invited to a wedding banquet with all its attendant diversions and frolics, but sleep overpowered him until the sun rose, so that he neither saw nor took part in any of the activities. By his nature he instinctively avoided food which had an offensive smell such as onions and garlic, and when questioned about this he said, "I commune with such beings as you do not commune with".'

One of the subtle observations to which ibn Khaldūn draws our attention is his reference to the circumstances and atmosphere in which the blessed Prophet lived, and his life before and after the mission, remarking that it was all holy and virtuous, whether in his personal behaviour or in his relationship with the Angel of Revelation. Ibn Khaldūn adds:

'Consider this: when the Prophet told Khadījah about the Angel, she wanted at once to test him and said, "Let me come in between you and your mantle", and he allowed her to do so: at which the experience of revelation ceased and she said, "It must be an angel and not a devil", meaning that the Angel would not have approached a woman embraced by her husband. She also asked the prophet about the clothes he most liked to wear when the Angel came to him and he said, "White and green", meaning that white and green are colours of goodness and Angels, while black is the shade of evil and devils - and vast is the difference.'

This approach that we have followed in our discussion, and which was followed by ibn Khaldūn and by Heraclius before him, is that of primordial nature and of reason and it is likewise that approach followed by the Qur'ān. Primarily it is the approach of primordial truth: that is why when the Prophet suddenly confronted Khadījah with news of the revelation and when he said to her, "I fear for myself", she replied, "No, by God, God would not shame you, since you are faithful to the bonds of your kinsfolk, and you shoulder the burdens of those in difficulty; you give to those in need and extend hospitality to guests, and help others to bear calamities suffered in the cause of truth". Herein we are following the approach of the Qur'ān, which shows that the life of the Prophet stands as reliable proof that he was truthful in all that he said, for he was, as addressed in the Qur'ān, . . . of sublime moral stature, while the Prophet said, 'I have been sent to bring to fulfilment noble qualities of character'. The moral aspect of his character was well-known to his people since they had known Muḥammad as they knew their sons and brothers, and nothing of his behaviour was unknown to them. It says in the Qur'ān:

Those to whom we gave the Scriptures recognize it (this Revelation) as they know their own son, yet some of them deliberately conceal the truth. (II, 146)

The Qur'ān directs our attention to the fact that the blessed Prophet was unlettered:

Never have you read a book before this, nor have you ever transcribed one with your right hand. Had you done either of these the unbelievers might have doubted. (XXIX, 48)

One notable point is that the Prophet had lived with his people

for forty years without revealing any message or his prophethood, and even when the years of his ambitious youth were over he did not issue any call or predict any leadership, rule or mission; only when he had reached the prime of his life did he begin to talk about God's choosing him to transmit the Message:

Had God so wished, I would not have recited the Qur'ān, nor would He have given you any knowledge of it. A whole lifetime I dwelt amongst you before it was revealed: will you not understand? (X, 16)

The Qur'ān challenges the unbelievers' truth and sincerity, or, you may say, their honesty, by putting forward one simple command which it was not difficult for them to carry out:

Say: 'I give you but one admonition: stand up before God in pairs or singly and ponder whether your compatriot is truly mad. He is sent forth to warn you against a dreadful chastisement.' (XXXIV, 46)

Moreover, the Qur'ān challenges them with itself.

There is no doubt that every sincere person would, on listening to the Islamic call, agree with the Negus (the ruler of Ethiopia at the time of the Prophet) that what Muḥammad brought 'comes from the same source of light'. The Negus had an unshakable belief in Jesus, and when he heard a description by the Muslims who visited him of the call to Islam, he believed in Muḥammad as he believed in Jesus, accepting that he was truthful, deriving his call from God. The Negus said this when he heard Ja'far ibn Abi Ṭālib describe to him the Age of Barbarity compared with that of Islam, both of which he knew well, since he had lived through both these periods. All the information in the documents supports what Ja'far said about the Age of Barbarity, and the Qur'ān and Aḥādīth confirm his words about Islām. Ja'far said:

'O King, we were an uncivilized people, worshipping idols, eating corpses, committing abominations, breaking natural ties, treating neighbours badly, and our strong devoured our weak. Thus we remained until God sent us an apostle whose lineage, truth, trustworthiness and clemency we know. He summoned us to acknowledge God's unity and to worship Him and to renounce the stones and images which we and our fathers formerly worshipped. He commanded us to speak the truth, be faithful to our engagements, mindful of the ties of kinship and of the duty of being good neighbours,

and to refrain from crimes and bloodshed. He forbade us to commit abominations and to speak lies, to devour the property of orphans or to vilify chaste women. He commanded us to worship God alone and not to associate anything with Him, and He gave us orders about prayer, almsgiving and fasting. (At this point he enumerated the conditions of Islām to the Negus). We believed him to be speaking the truth and we had faith in him and followed him in all he had brought from God, and we worshipped God alone without associating anything with Him. We treated as forbidden what He forbade, and as lawful what He declared lawful.'

When the Negus heard this he was convinced that Muḥammad was speaking the truth and said the famous words quoted above.

As for Heraclius, al-Bukhārī tells us that when he questioned Abū Sufyān about the call to Islām the latter told him:

'“Muḥammad commands people to believe in God alone and to associate nothing with Him, and forbids them to worship idols and commands them to prayers, truth and chastity, and to keep the bonds of kinship”. Heraclius said, “If what you tell me is the truth, then this man would possess the land under my very feet here. I knew that a prophet was due to come, but I did not know that he would be from amongst your people, for if I knew that I could reach him I would take the trouble to go and meet him, and if I were with him I would wash his feet”.'

This approach, that of demonstrating the sincerity of a claim by the claim itself, which was followed by Heraclius and the Negus, is the approach which al-Ghazālī confirmed when he said:

'If you examine the Qur'ān and Aḥādīth attentively, you cannot but come to the realization that Muḥammad is in the highest rank of prophethood. You can confirm this by testing what he said about religious observances and their effect in purifying hearts, and how the Prophet was truthful in saying, “He who practises what he knows, God will cause him to inherit knowledge of what he did not know”, and that “He who supports an unjust person, God will eventually give that person power over him”, and, “If a man starts the day making his anxiety one thought only, that of piety, God will suffice him for all the anxieties of this world and the next.” If you test this with one thousand or two thousand or three thousand persons you will receive this inevitable confirmation, after which you will have no doubt about his prophethood.'

In the opinion of al-Ghazālī, reflecting in the call to Islām is one of the principal means of proving the truthfulness of the blessed Prophet.

Ibn Khaldūn, the great sociological writer, followed this method of reasoning. He outlines in a general way many sound approaches to matters concerning prophethood. We quote here what he said in relation to proving the trustworthiness of a messenger by studying his mission, especially when this mission is, like Islām, pure goodness. He says:

‘Another sign by which they can be recognized is the fact that they call on people to embrace religion and to worship God in the way of prayer, almsgiving and self-restraint. Khadījah, as well as Abū Bakr, took that conduct as proof of the Prophet’s truthfulness. They did not need any further sign of his mission beyond good conduct, and according to a sound Ḥadīth, when Heraclius received the Prophet’s letter in which he was asked to become a Muslim, he is said to have called such Qurayshites as could be found in his country, among whom were Abū Sufyān, and to have asked them about the Messenger’s state of being (some of which has already been quoted above). One of the questions he asked concerned what the Prophet commended them to do. Abū Sufyān’s reply was, “Prayer, almsgiving, keeping the bonds of kinship and self-restraint, and other matters”. Heraclius’ comment was, “If it is all really as you say, he is a prophet, and he will take possession of this very ground upon which I am standing”.’ (‘Self-restraint’ (‘afāf’) has in this context the meaning of ‘immunity from sin and error’ (‘iṣmah’).)

It is worth noting that Heraclius considered that ‘iṣmah’ and the call to religion and divine worship were proofs of the genuineness of his prophethood, and did not require a miracle.

In fact, if we consider the contents of the mission of the Prophet, we find that it realizes in a most accurate way the goal which God had set in sending it down in the first place, that is, extending Mercy towards all mankind, for He had said to the Prophet:

We sent you only as a blessing for all beings. (XXI, 107)

Mercy, which we will discuss more fully in a later chapter, is the principal characteristic of all Islamic teachings, whether they concern society or the individual; whether they deal with the intellectual, ethical or legal aspects of life. This mercy arises in all