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Pillars of faith

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Pillars of Faith

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THE PILLARS OF FAITH

By
Jaafar Sheikh Idris

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INTRODUCTION

The pillars of Faith, *'Iman*, enumerated in many verses of the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, are belief in God, in God's Angels, His Books, His Messengers, in the Hereafter and in *Qadar* (Destiny). These are familiar terms; but the non-Muslim reader would be mistaken if he thought that the Islamic concepts designated by them are the same as those of other religions and philosophies. It is hoped that the following exposition, which is itself made in the light of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet, will make this point clear. It will also make clear the fact that the Islamic concept of faith itself is, in many ways, different from the popular Western one. In the West faith is usually contrasted to reason and knowledge. But according to the Qur'an true faith is that which is based on knowledge and supported by argument. Any belief which is not so based and supported is considered by the Qur'an to be mere caprice and whim which a thinking person must avoid. True faith can therefore be gained through reflection and the acquisition of knowledge, and not by blind and irrational committment. A person armed with such an enlightened faith can enter with great confidence into rational discussion with people who do not share his beliefs with the hope of showing them their mistakes and weaknesses and winning them over to truth. If this paper helps to take the reader a step in that direction it will have achieved its purpose, and all praise is due to God.

GOD

Muhammad, peace be upon him, was sent to invite people to God and to teach them how to perform the task for which they were created, namely to worship Him. Many of the people whom he addressed had a hazy idea of God. Some did believe in Him, though they associated other lesser gods with Him, but a few of them were downright atheists, or materialists, whose creed was, 'we live and we die and nothing causes our death except Time.' [Jathiya, XLV: 24] Before inviting such atheists to God one must first convince them that there is such being. "What reason do you have for believing that there is a God?" This, logically, is the first question which a theistic view of life should address itself to. The Qur'anic answer to it is given in the following words:

"... were they created out of nothing? Or were they the creations (of themselves) or did they create the heavens and earth."

[Tur, LII: 36]

The Qur'an is here saying that for everything like man that has a beginning in time, there are only three ways of explaining how it came to be.

- a. Either it is created, or made, or caused by nothing at all i.e. it came out of nothing.
 - b. Or it is the creator of itself.
 - c. Or it has a creator, cause, or maker, outside itself.
- The third possibility is not mentioned in the quoted verse but it is understood because the verse is addressed to people who deny the existence of a creator and it is telling them that if there is no creator then only two possibilities

remain. But the Qur'an does not go into the details of showing why the first two positions are untenable. Clarity of expression often convinces people of the truth or untruth of a statement. Mental seeing here, more than physical seeing, is believing (or rejecting). This is borne out in the case of these Qur'anic words by a historical event. Jubayr Ibn Mut'im, until then, a non-Muslim was sent by Quraysh on a mission to the Muslims at Madina. He says that when he arrived he heard the Prophet, who was leading the evening prayer, reading *Surat al-tur* and when he reached the foregoing verses "my heart was almost rent asunder."¹ Shortly after that Jubayr embraced Islam.

Why did this happen to him? Probably because the verse made things clear to him for the first time. It is inconceivable for something to come out of or be made by nothing at all, he realized, and it is even more inconceivable that it should bring itself into being. Hence the only conclusion is that it must have a creator outside itself.

A thesis is therefore untenable if it means the denial of any maker or cause whatsoever. But admitting that this is indeed so, one might still wonder why should that cause or maker or creator be the God to whom Muhammad was inviting people? Why shouldn't it be one of the many other gods in whom people believe or why shouldn't it even be the "matter" of the materialists? Almost the entire Qur'an deals with this question but we shall do our best to give a brief answer which would provide the reader with the basics of the Qur'anic position. In a nutshell the answer is as follows: to explain the coming into being of temporal things, the creator (or cause or maker) for which we are

looking, must (logically must) have the attribute of the God to whom Muhammad invites us. How so?

The creator must be of a different nature from the things created because, if he is of the same nature as they are, he will have to be temporal and therefore need a maker. It follows that "nothing is like Him." [Shura, XLII: 11]. If the maker is not temporal then he must be eternal. But if he is eternal, he cannot be caused, and if nothing causes him to come into existence, nothing causes him to continue to exist, which means that he must be self sufficient. And if he does not depend on anything for the continuance of his existence, then that existence can have no end. The creator is therefore eternal and everlasting: "He is the first and the last." [Hadid, LVII: 3] "All that dwells upon the earth is perishing, yet still abides the Face of thy Lord, majestic, splendid." [Rahman, LV: 26-27]

There are two ways in which causes produce their effects. Either they produce them naturally or intentionally. The maker that has the attributes we have enumerated cannot be a natural cause. Because if things of this world flow from Him naturally and spontaneously, they cannot be but of the same nature as He is. And if like all natural causes He causes only under certain conditions, then His power is limited. It follows that He must be a wilful agent. But intention implies knowledge and both imply life. So, that maker must be a living all-knowing agent with a will that is absolutely free. Thus God according to the Qur'an does everything with intention and for a purpose.

"Surely We have created everything in (due) measure."
[Qamar, LXIV: 49]

**“What, did you think that We created you only for sport?”
[Mu’minun, XXIII: 115]**

He is absolutely free to do whatever he wills [Hud, XI: 107] and is aware of every movement of His creation.

**“He knows what is in land and sea; not a leaf falls, but He knows it. Not a grain in the earth’s shadow, not a thing fresh or withered, but it is in a Book Manifest. It is He who recalls you by night, and He knows what you work by day.”
[An’am, VI: 59-60]**

God is a living person with all that this implies:

“There is no God but He, the living, the everlasting. Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep; to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Who is there that shall intercede with Him save by His leave? He knows what lies before them and what is after them, and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge save such as He wills. His throne comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious.”

[Baqara, II: 255]

God is not only willing and powerful, He is also Just in that He does not punish a sinner for more than his crime. He is merciful and His mercy, in the words of the Prophet “overcame his punishment.” So He does not punish us for whatever we do, but forgives and erases our sins, and magnifies and multiplies our good deeds.

“The likeness of those who expend their wealth in the way of God is as the likeness of a grain of corn that sprouts seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains, so God multiplies unto whom He will; God is All-embracing, All-knowing.”

[Baqara, II: 261]

These, and many others which can be arrived at in a similar way, are the attributes which the true creator must possess. Any other being or object which is alleged to be a god or an ultimate cause and which necessarily lacks some of them cannot in actual fact be what it is believed to be. Thus, having shown clearly what the true God should be like, the Qur’an goes on to show why there cannot be any god but He, and reveals the falsity of all alleged gods.

To the worshippers of man-made objects it says:

“Do you worship what you have carved out and God created you and what you make?”

[Saffat, XXXVII: 95]

and

“... have they taken unto themselves others beside Him who create nothing, who are themselves created, who cannot protect them, nor can they protect themselves.”

[‘A’raf, VII: 191-192]

To the worshippers of heavenly bodies it relates as a reminder the story of Abraham:

When night outspread over him he saw a star and said, ‘This is my Lord.’ But when it set he said, ‘I love not the setters.’ When he saw the moon rising, he said, ‘This is my Lord.’ But when it set he said, ‘If my Lord does not guide me

I shall surely be of the people gone astray.' When he saw the sun rising, he said, 'This is my Lord; this is greater!' But when it set he said, 'O my people, surely I am quit of what you associate with God. I have turned my face to Him who originated the heavens and the earth, a man of pure faith; I am not of the idolaters.'

[An'am, VI: 76-79]

And when, later on, the Prophet comes into contact with the Jews and Christians, the Qur'an condemns their belief in the divine nature of human-beings.

"The Jews say, 'Ezra is the son of God.' The Christians say, 'The Messiah is the son of God.' That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted."

[Tawba, IX: 30]

It tells them that if everything is created by God then it must be His servant and cannot, therefore be his son, [Maryam, XIX: 88-95].

It then goes on to explain to the Christians the real nature of Jesus.

"Truly, the likeness of Jesus in God's sight is as Adam's likeness; He created him of dust, then said He unto him 'Be!' and he was."

[Al 'Imran, III: 59]

For someone to take something as a god, it is not necessary that he should acknowledge it as such or worship it in a ritualistic way; it is enough for him to follow its dictates obediently, or devote to it acts or have towards it feelings which should be devoted to or felt towards God only. There are many such unacknowledged gods.

“Hast thou seen him who has taken his caprice to be his God? Wilt thou be a guardian over him?”

[Furqan, XXV: 43]

“They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords apart from God, and the Messiah, Mary’s son, and they were commanded to serve but one God.”

[Tawba, IX: 31]

Thus to be a Muslim—i.e. to surrender oneself to God—it is necessary to believe in the unity of God in the sense of His being the only creator, preserver and nourisher. But this belief—later on called *tawhid ar-rububiyya*—is not enough. In fact many of the idolaters did know and believe that it is the supreme God alone who can do all this. But that was not enough to make them Muslims. To *tawhid ar-rububiyya* one must add *tawhid al-uluhiyya* i.e. one must acknowledge the fact that it is this God alone who deserves to be worshipped, and therefore abstain from directing any of one’s acts of worship to someone or something else.

In the Qur’an the argument for *tawhid al-uluhiyya* is based on *tawhid ar-rububiyya* i.e. if it is God alone who creates and controls everything why then and to what end do you worship others beside Him?

“O you men, serve your Lord who created you, and those that were before you; haply so you will be god-fearing; who assigned to you the earth for a couch, and heaven for an edifice, and sent down out of heaven water, wherewith He brought forth fruits for your provision; so set not up rivals to God wittingly.”

[al-Baqara, II: 21-22]

Having known the true God, man is called upon to affirm what he knows i.e. to believe and have faith in God, and

not allow any ulterior motives to induce him to deny a fact which he knows to be true.

“... that they who have been given knowledge may know it is the truth from thy Lord and so believe in it, and thus their hearts become humble unto him.”

[Haj, XXII: 54]

“But when our signs came to them visibly, they said, ‘This is a manifest sorcery;’ and they denied them, though their souls acknowledged them, wrongfully and out of pride.”

[Naml, XXVII: 14]

When faith enters a person's heart, it causes therein certain mental states, which result in certain apparent actions, both of which are the proof of true faith.

Foremost among those mental states is the feeling of gratitude towards God, which could be said to be the essence of *ibada* (worshipping or serving God).

This feeling of gratitude is so important that a nonbeliever is called *kafir* which means, ‘one who denies a truth’ and also ‘one who is ungrateful.’ One can understand why this is so when one reads in the Qur’an that the main motive for denying the existence of God is that of unjustified pride. Such a proud person feels that it does not become him to be created or governed by a being whom he must thus acknowledge to be greater than himself and to whom he must be grateful.

“Those who dispute concerning the signs of God without any authority come to them, in their hearts is only pride that they shall never attain.”

[Ghafir, XL: 56]

With the feeling of gratitude goes that of love

“There are some people who take to themselves (for worship) others apart from God loving them as they should love God: But those who believe, love God more ardently than they love anything else.”

[Baqara, II: 165]

A believer loves and is grateful to God for His bounties, but being aware of the fact that his good deeds, whether mental or physical, are far from being commensurate with Divine favors, he is always anxious lest because of his sins God should withhold from him some of these favors or punish him in the hereafter. He therefor fears Him, surrenders himself to Him, and serves Him with great humility.

“Your God is one God, so to Him surrender. And give thou good tidings unto the humble who, when God is mentioned, their hearts quake.”

[Anfal, VII: 2]

One cannot be in such a mental state, without being almost all the time mindful of God. Remembering God is thus the life-force of faith, without which it fades and might even wither away. So,

“The faithful are those who remember God, standing and sitting, and on their sides.”

[‘Al ‘Imran, III: 191]

The Qur’an therefore prescribes and describes, in great detail ways and means of helping man to remember God and keep his faith alive. All Qur’anic and Prophetic injunctions and prohibitions which extend to all aspects of human life—acts of worship and personal matters, social relations, political order, etc., etc.—are designed to put

man in a state which is conducive to God's remembrance. The details of this Islamic way of life were expounded in the Madina period, and we shall not therefore be concerned with them now. But the main principles of this new order were already laid down in the Makkan period, and will be summarized at the end of this chapter.

We shall now go on to deal with the other pillars of faith. These are belief in life after death, in God's angels, His books, His messengers and His *qadar*, the arguments for all of which are almost entirely based on the assumption that the audience believes in God.

THE HEREAFTER

The Qur'anic arguments for the reality of another life after death are intended to prove that it is possible and also desirable that there should be such a life, and that without believing in it our belief in the true God cannot be complete.

i. Many of the people whom the Prophet addressed in Makka did believe—as we said before—in a supreme God, but many of them thought that it was impossible for their dead and disintegrated bodies to be resurrected. They therefore mocked and laughed at the Prophet when he told them about it. The Qur'anic reply was that there was no reason for such astonishment and mockery because resurrection is not only logically but physically possible for the following reasons:

a. If it is God who created man in the first place, why should it be impossible for him to recreate him when he dies? Resurrection should be easier than original creation.

“He it is He who originates creation, then brings it back again and this (the latter) is easier for Him.”

[Rum, XXX: 27]

b. If you think about it carefully, you will come to see that the bringing of life to the dead is a common natural phenomenon. To believe in the possibility of the resurrection of human beings, a thinking person does not need to see a person coming to life again. It is enough to see other dead bodies coming to life.

“And of His signs is that thou seest the earth humble; then, when we send down water upon it, it quivers and swells. Surely He who quickens it is He who quickens the dead; surely He is powerful over everything.”

[Fussilat, XLI: 39]

“Was he not a sperm-drop spilled? Then he was a blood-clot, and He created and formed and He made of him two kinds, male and female. What! is He not able to quicken the dead?”

[Qiyāma, LXXV: 37-40]

ii. Why is resurrection desirable? Simply because without it, God would not be the Just and Wise and merciful God He is. God created men and made them responsible for their actions; some behaved well but others did not. If there is no future life in which the virtuous are rewarded and the vicious are punished, there would be no justice and the creation of men in that way and the sending of Prophets to them would be to no purpose at all. But this kind of behaviour is not expected of a man known to be rational and just, let alone the Perfect Creator.

“What! does man reckon he shall be left to roam at will?
What! did you think that we created you only for sport and
that you would not be returned to Us?

[Mu'minun, XXIII: 115]

“Surely for the God, fearing shall be gardens of bliss with
their Lord. What! shall we make those who have surrendered
like to the sinners? What ails you then, how you judge?

[Qaf, LXVIII: 34-36]

“We have not created the heavens and earth, and what is
between them, for vanity; such is the thought of the
unbelievers.”

[Sad, XXXVIII: 27]

iii. Is the real and only motive for denying the reality of
a life after death that which is expressed by the arguments
which the deniers put forward, and to which the Qur'an
replies? By no means, says the Qur'an. The real motive is
often a psychological one. Those who do evil do not wish
to be punished and it is this wishful thinking that leads
them to deny the reality of a time when such punishment
shall take place.

“Does man reckon We shall not gather his bones? Nay,
but man desires to continue on as a libertine, asking,
‘When shall be the Day of Resurrection?’”

[Qiyama, LXXV: 3-6]

“And none cries lies to it (the day of judgement) but every
guilty aggressor.”

[Mutaffifin, LXXXIII: 12]

A question that is often raised in connection with reward
and punishment in the hereafter and which causes some
people to doubt the desirability if not the truth of such a
life is, ‘Do we do what is good because it is good or for fear

of punishment and expectation of reward? If we do it for the former, then what is the use of believing in the hereafter, and if we do it for the latter we will not be acting morally. 'The answer to this question depends on whether God enjoins us to do an act because it is good, or whether it is this Divine injunction which makes the action good. And it seems to me to be very clear that the goodness of an act is logically prior to its being an object of a Divine injunction. Otherwise it would be a tautology to say 'God enjoins what is good' because it would only mean God enjoins what He enjoins. But the Qur'an abounds in statements like the former, and it is very clear that they are not intended to be tautological.

The answer to our original question then is that we do what is good because it is good. But since to give good for good is itself good, there is no contradiction in saying that one does good because the God whom he loves and in Whom he puts his trust tells him to do it, and because he expects to be rewarded by Him for doing it.

According to the Qur'an God created man of an original nature—called *fitra*—which possesses what we might call a moral sense, which enables man to recognize without any external aid certain acts like telling the truth and being grateful as good, and by reason of which he is inclined to do good once he comes to know it. True religion is built on the basis of this original human nature. Religion strengthens nature and brings to fruition the seeds of virtue that reside in it. That is why Islam is said in the Qur'an to be *fitrat-Allah* and why the Prophet says that he was sent only to perfect good conduct.¹ The Qur'an praises those in whom this moral sense is sharp and condemns those in whom it has become so blunt that the ugliness of vice becomes in their eyes the model of beauty:

¹Hadith (Jabir)

“But God has endeared to you belief, decking it fair in your hearts, and He has made detestable to you unbelief and ungodliness and disobedience. Those they are the right-minded, by God’s favour and blessing, God is All-knowing, All-wise.”

[Hujuràt, XLIX: 7-8]

“Say: ‘Shall we tell you who will be the greatest losers in their works.’ Those whose striving goes astray in the present life while they think that they are working good deeds.”

[Kahf, XVIII: 103-104]

“And when he turns his back, he hastens about the earth, to do corruption there, and to destroy the tillage and the stock; and God loves not corruption.”

[Baqara, II: 205]

So a Muslim does good because he is endeared to it, and eschews vice because it is detestable to him. But since a Muslim surrenders himself to God and loves and fears Him, and since God loves virtue and enjoins it and hates vice and forbids it, he does the former and avoids the latter in obedience to his Lord. And since those who do good shall—in the hereafter—live a life of bliss, the highest type of which would be the state of being near to God and enjoying His sight, while those who lead an evil life shall suffer all kinds of chastisement the most terrible of which shall be the state of being deprived from that sight, a Muslim would be wise to always have that future and eternal life in mind and endeavour to do here all kinds of work that would help to elevate his position there.

“Say: Is there any of your associates who guides to the truth?

Say: God—He guides to the truth; and which is worthier to be followed—he who guides to the truth, or he who guides

not unless he is guided? what then ails you, how you judge?
[Yūnus, X: 35]

“Say: If you love God, follow me, and God will love you, and forgive you, your sins;”

[‘Al’Imrān, III: 31]

“Surely the pious shall be in bliss, upon couches gazing (at their Lord); thou knowest in their faces the radiancy of bliss as they are given to drink of a wine sealed, whose seal is musk. So after that let the strivers strive.”

[Mutaffifūn, LXXXIII: 22-26]

Why should one who did good live in such bliss, one might ask? and the prompt Qur’anic answer is:

“Shall the recompence of goodness be other than goodness.”

[Rahman, LV: 60]

ANGELS

These are beings of a different nature from man. While man is created from soil they are created from light.² And thus human beings—except Prophets—cannot see them in their original nature, but may see them if they take a physical form. Our knowledge of them is therefore almost entirely based on what God and His Prophets tell us about them. But why should we bother to know about them? Because they play a very big role in conducting our affair. To know about them could perhaps be said to be useful to us in the same manner as knowledge of the working of natural causes and other people’s behaviour is useful.

We are told that these almost innumerable beings who are extremely powerful are created in such a way that they

²Sahih Muslim, kitha az-zuhd, ch. MCCXXVII, hadith

always obey and never go against Divine commands, and continuously serve and never tire of serving the Lord. [Anbiya, XXI, 19-20; Tahrim, LXVI: 6]

But inspite of this they are—as a species—in a lower degree than the human species, and this is symbolized in the fact that when Adam was created they were ordered to prostrate themselves before him as a sign of greeting and respect.³

Here are some of their activities in connection with human beings.

Their main task, the one from which their name is derived is that of conveying God's messages to His chosen prophets. This great honor is assigned mainly to their leader Gabriel (or Jibril as the name is pronounced in Arabic).

“A noble messenger having power, with the Lord of the Throne, secure, obeyed there (in heaven) and trusty.”

[Takwir, LXXXI: 19-21]

A message carried by beings of such a nature is sure to reach its destination intact.

They attend to and watch over us. They keep a record of our good and bad deeds, and never a word we mention passes without being registered by them either for or against us. [Qaf, L: 17-18]

They play a role in the causation and happening of seemingly purely natural phenomena, like wind and rain and death. [Nazi'at, LXXIX: 1-5]

³This verse [Isra', XVII: 70] has been given (by some) as evidence for the fact that the human species is better than the species of angels. Ibn Kathir in his *tafsir of Qur'an al'Azim*.

And to them is assigned the role of helping the believers to the extent of fighting on their side in times of war. [Ā'Imran, II: 124], and of protecting them [Ra'd, XIII: 11], and praying for them [Ghâfir, XL: 7].

BOOKS

A Muslim believes that the Qur'an is the word of God. But it is not the only word. God sent many prophets before Muhammad and He spoke to them as He spoke to him. So a Muslim also believes (in fact he would not be a Muslim if he did not believe) in these earlier books, like the Torah and the Gospel, since the true believers are those who "believe in what has been sent down to thee (Muhammad) and what has been sent down before thee" [al Baqara, IV: 4].

"Say: We believe in God, and that which has been sent down on us, and sent down on 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 division between any of them."

[al Baqara, II: 136]

God created men so that they may serve Him. His being a servant of God constitutes the essence of man. Man cannot therefore attain to his true humanity and acquire peace of mind unless he realises this aim for which he was created. But how can he do this? God, being merciful and Just, has helped him in many ways. He granted him as we said before an originally good nature that is inclined to know and serve its true Lord. He granted him a mind that possesses a moral sense and the ability to reason. He made the whole universe a natural book full of signs that lead a

thinking person to God. But to make things more specific, to give him more detailed knowledge of his Lord, and to show him in a more detailed manner how to serve Him, God has been sending down verbal messages through His prophets chosen from among men, ever since the creation of man. Hence the description of these messages in the Qur'an as guidance, light, signs, reminders, etc.

All these books advocated basically the same message,

“And we sent never a Messenger before thee except that we revealed to him, saying, ‘there is no God but I; so serve Me.’”

[‘Anbiya’, XXI: 25]

And the religion which they all expounded is Islam i.e. surrender to God,

“The true religion with God is Islam.”

[Al-‘Imrān, III: 19]

Thus Noah (X:72) Abraham (III: 67), Jacob and his sons (II: 133), the Apostles (V: III), etc. were all Muslims.

Islam in this sense is in fact the religion of the universe.

“What! do they desire another religion than God’s and to Him has surrendered (aslama = became a Muslim) whatsoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they shall be returned.”

[Al-‘Imrān, III: 83]

If the religion of all prophets is the same in its essence and basic foundation, not so are the ways of life based upon it. [Ma’ida, V: 48]

One last important point about books is that with the exception of the Qur’an they have not been preserved

intact, but have either been completely lost or else suffered distortion and corruption. As to the Qur'an God has decreed that it shall never be subjected to such distortion but shall be preserved by Him. [Hijr, XV: 9]

MESSENGERS

Messengers are human beings chosen by God who have the honor of conveying God's message to other men and women. Being such a Messenger is not a position that one attains by any consciously designed effort. It is a grace from God, but God grants this grace to those who are deserving of it. Messengers are not then, like the rank and file of us. True, they are men but they are men of an extremely high moral, spiritual and intellectual standard that qualifies them—in the eyes of God—to be the bearers of His light to the world. When God chooses any of them, He supports the messenger with a clear 'sign' [Hadīd, LVII: 25] that proves the truth of his claim, and distinguishes him from false prophets, sorcerers and soothsayers [Taghābun, LXIV: 41-42], Tāhā, XX: 69]. None of them betrays the message or falls short of being exemplary in practicing what he preaches. [Hūd, XI: 88].

Asked about prophet Muhammad's conduct his wife Ayesha said, "It was the Qur'an," meaning that he embodied all the ideals which the Qur'an presents.

Two related points about messengers which the Qur'an stresses, and which therefore deserve some elaboration are the humanity of prophets and the nature of their task.

Despite the vast spiritual, moral and intellectual difference between them and ordinary men, and despite the special relation with God that they enjoy, prophets are

nonetheless humans with all that this term implies. They beget and are begotten; they eat and drink and go about in market places [Furqān, XXV: 20]; they sleep and they die [Anbiyā, XXI: 34]; they forget and they err [Tāhā, XX: 121]. [Kahf, XVIII: 34].

Their knowledge is limited; and can therefore tell only that part of the future which God reveals to them [Jin, LXXII: 26-27]. They cannot intercede with God on behalf of any person except with His permission [Jin, LXXII: 26-27], and it is not left to them to cause people to go in the right path (Qasas, XXVIII: 56). In short, they have no part to play in the running of the affairs of the universe [Al-'Imrān, III: 128]. Many early Muslim scholars have observed that to emphasize the humanity of the Prophet the Qur'an called him 'servant of God' on the three occasions on which he was honored.

"Blessed be He who has sent down the Salvation [Qur'an] upon His servant."

[Furqan, XXV: 1]

"Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Furthest Mosque the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs."

[Bani Israil XVII: 1]

"When the servant of God stood calling on Him, they were well-nigh upon him in swarms."

[Jin, LXXII: 119]

A Prophet whose humanity is specially emphasized is Jesus. He was created in the same manner as Adam was created, from soil [Al-'Imrān: III, 59]; he is the son of Mary not of God [Nisā', IV: 157]; he and his mother used to eat food [Mā'ida, V: 75]; he is indeed the word of God [Baqara, II: 45] but since he is a human being in the full sense of the word, this should not be interpreted to mean that there is a Divine element in him. He is the word of God only in the sense that God said 'Be' and he was. But in that sense everything is the word of God. Why then is he in particular called the word of God? Because, as many scholars have, rightly explained, he came more directly as a result of this word. Jesus is thus a loyal servant of God who never claimed that he was in any sense divine.

[Mā'ida, V: 116-117].

Messengers are entrusted, we said, with the task of conveying God's word to other people. But this is not as simple as it looks. It implies many things which are not at first sight clear, and which the Qur'an therefore expounds and elaborates.

The most important point of which all Messengers are reminded, and which is very easy to forget or be heedless of, is that since their duty is only to convey the message they are not responsible for peoples' reaction to it, once they have made it clear to them. God has given man the power to understand the difference between truth and falsehood, especially in matters religious, once this has been explained to him. God has also given him the ability, by reason of his free-will, either to accept or reject this truth. And since it is only God who knows what goes on in people's minds, it is only He who can judge who is worthy of being guided and who deserves to be left groping in the

dark; and it is God who according to this knowledge guides whom He will and withholds His guidance from whom He will. A prophet has no such power, and cannot, therefore, guide whom he loves. [Qasas, XXVIII: 56].

“Then remind them thou are only one who reminds, thou art not charged to oversee them.”

[Ghashiya, LXXXVIII: 21-22].

He should not, therefore feel sad if people turn away from him, or impute falsehoods to his message [An'am, VI: 33-34]. But this is a most difficult rule to abide by. We love to be accepted by the community in which we live; many of us must have experienced that strange feeling of sadness, loneliness, and being lost when we come to live as aliens in a new community. We undergo a similar but more intense feeling, when as a result of our intellectual convictions we come to hold about life views that are entirely different from those of our own community. One easy and usual escape from the psychological and other hardships of such a life is to live in seclusion from society. Those who, for some reason cannot afford such a withdrawal, more often than not, sacrifice intellectual honesty for conformity with their community. Prophets have of course to live in the midst of the people for whom they are sent and they do not of course go to the extent of betraying their message. To have to cling tenaciously to the word of God, and yet live in the midst of people, is perhaps the greatest difficulty they have to put up with. This is made evident by the fact that most of the few occasions on which the Qur'an expresses God's disapproval of a certain line of behaviour taken by the Prophet Muhammad are related to his being so keen to

win adherents as to verge on exceeding the desirable limits.

“Yet perchance if they believe not in this tiding, thou wilt consume thyself, following after them of grief.”
[Kahf, XVIII: 6].

“Indeed they were near to seducing thee from that We revealed to thee, that thou mightest, forge against Us another, and then they would surely have taken thee as a friend. And had We not confirmed thee, surely thou were near to inclining unto them a very little; then would We have let thee taste the double of life and the double of death; and then thou wouldst have found none to help thee against Us

[Isra', XVII: 73-74].

QADAR

The original meaning of the word *Qadar* is specified measure or amount whether of quantities or qualities. It has many other usages which branch out from this core. Thus *yuqad-dir* means, among other things, to measure or decide the quantity, quality, position, etc. of something before you actually make it. And it is this latter sense which interests us here.

“God is the creator of everything, but whatever He creates, He creates with *qadar*.

[Qamar, LIV: 49]

He knows before creating it, that He is going to create it and that it shall be of such and such magnitude, quality or nature etc. and specifies the time of its coming into being and passing away, and the place of its occurrence. If so, then

one who believes in the true God should believe that there are no accidents in nature. If something disagreeable happens to him, he should say "God *qad-dara* (ordained), and He did what He willed" and not waste himself over wishing that it had not occurred, or worrying why it should occur. If on the other hand something agreeable happens to him he should not boast of it, but thank God for it.

"No affliction befalls in the earth or in yourselves, but it is in a Book, before We create it; that is easy for God; that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor rejoice (vaingloriously) in what has been given to you, God loves not any man proud and boastful."

[Hadid, LVII: 23].

If God *yuqad-dir* (predestines, predetermines etc.) everything, that includes our so called free actions. But if so in what way can they be said to be free, and how are we responsible for them? This question occasioned the appearance, at a very early history of Islam, of two extreme theological sects. One of them, called the *Qadariya*, asserted man's free will and responsibility to the extent of denying God's foreknowledge, and claiming that God knows our free made actions only after we have performed them. The other, called the *Jabriyya*, did just the opposite and claimed that there was no difference between the motions of inanimate things and our movements in performing so-called free actions, and that when we use intentional language we speak only metaphorically.

But there is no need to go to such extremes, since it is not difficult to reconcile Divine *Qadar* and human responsibility. God decided to create man as a free agent, but He knows (and how can He not know?) before creating

every man how he is going to use his free will; what, for instance, his reaction would be when a Prophet clarifies God's message to him. This foreknowledge and its registering in a 'Book' is called *Qadar*. 'But if we are free to use our will' a Qadari might say, 'We may use it in ways that contradict God's will, and in that case we would not be right in claiming that everything is willed or decreed by God.' The Qur'an answers this question by reminding us that it was God who willed that we shall be wilful, and it is He who allows us to use our will.

"Surely, this is a Reminder; so he who will, takes unto his Lord a way, but you will not unless God wills."

[*Insan*, LXXVI: 29-30].

'If so', says a Qadari, 'He could have prevented us from doing evil.' Yes indeed He could.

"Had God willed, He would have brought them all together to the guidance; if thy Lord had willed whoever is in the earth would have believed, all of them, all together."

[*Yunus*, X: 99].

"Had God willed, they were not idolaters; and we have not appointed thee a watcher over them neither art thou their guardian."

[*An'am*, VI: 107].

But He had willed that men shall be free especially in regard to matters of belief and disbelief.

Say: "The truth is from your Lord; so let whosoever will believe, and let whosoever will disbelieve."

[*Kahf*, XVIII: 29].

But men would not be so free if whenever any of them wills to do evil God prevents him from doing it and

compels him to do good.

“If our actions are willed by God,” someone might say, “then they are in fact His actions.” This objection is based on a confusion. God wills what we will in the sense of granting us the will to choose and enabling us to execute that will i.e. He creates all that makes it possible for us to do it. He does not will it in the sense of doing it, otherwise it would be quite in order to say, when we drink or eat or sleep for instance, that God performed these actions. God creates them, He does not do or perform them. Another objection, based on another confusion, is that if God allows us to do evil, then He approves of it and likes it. But to will something in the sense of allowing a person to do it is one thing; and to approve of his action and commend it, is quite another. Not everything that God wills He likes. He has, as we have just read in the Qur’an, granted man the choice between belief and disbelief, but He does not, of course, like men to disbelieve (to be thankless).

“If you are unthankfull, God is independent of you. Yet He approves not unthankfulness in His servants; but if you are thankful, He will approve it in you.”

[Zumar, XXXIX: 7].

CONCLUSIONS

These in resume are the basic truths to which the Prophet Muhammad invited his people. The best proof — besides the foregoing arguments — of their being truths, and very important truths for man, is the good effect which they produce in man’s internal state, and thus his outward behaviour. We have already, in dealing with belief in God, pointed to some of the feelings towards Him, brought

about by belief in His existence and His attributes of perfection.

Since man's attitude in relation to his fellow-human beings is very much connected with his attitude towards God, that belief in God with resulting feelings towards the Divine, is bound to produce in man's heart feelings towards other men that are appropriate to it. And since man's outward behaviour regarding God and other men is generated, by his real beliefs about and feelings towards them, it is only to be expected of true religion to call for a set of behaviour that is both a natural outcome of its set of beliefs and a factor of strengthening them. The internal state to which Muhammad invited men is called '*Imān*' (faith or belief). The external behaviour based on it is called *Islam*. At the Makkan period he concentrated mostly on the first, without entirely neglecting the second, which he elaborated at Madina when the first Muslim independent community was formed. Even at Makka the Prophet Muhammad was directed by God to invite people to the following acts of worship and moral behaviour.

1. To keep their faith alive and strengthen it Muslims were told to recite the Qur'an and study it carefully, to learn from the Prophet and say as often as possible, and specially on some specified occasions, certain prayers, and to perform prayer in the manner which Gabriel demonstrated to the Prophet. All this is *salat* in its widest sense.

2. After *salat*, the serving of God, comes *zakāt* which in its broadest sense includes any act of service to other men. Being good to men is the fruit and therefore the proof of the tree of faith. He is not truthful who harms men and yet

claims to believe in and love God.

“Hast thou seen him who does not believe in retribution (in the hereafter)? that is he who repulses the orphan and urges not the feeding of the needy. So woe to those that pray and are heedless of their prayers, to those who make display and refuse charity.”

[Ma’ûn, CVII].

The first three verses of this *Sura* were revealed at Makka and the rest at Madina. The Madinan verses speak about the hypocrites who perform outward acts of worship that do not originate from any sincere faith. But their behaviour betrays them, since it is the same as that of the Makkan professed unbelievers.

Following are a few examples of *Zakât* which the Qur’an advocated at this early period.

Acquisition of wealth for its own sake or so that it may increase the worth of its collector is condemned. Mere acquisition of wealth counts nothing in the sight of God. It does not give man any merit whether here or in the hereafter.

“Who gathered riches and counted them over thinking that his riches have made him immortal.”

[Humaza, CIV: 2-3].

Those “who amassed and hoarded” wealth in this life are to be called in the hereafter by a furnace that ‘scathes away the scalp’ [Mu’arij, LXX: 15-18]. Wealth for its own sake is among the vices of men which can be eradicated only by the kind of belief and practices which Muhammad taught. [Ma’arij, LXX: 19-27].

Man should acquire wealth with the intention of spending it on his own needs, and the needs of others.

“Man, the Prophet tells us, says: ‘My wealth! My wealth!’ Have you any wealth except that which you wear and tear, eat and consume up, give as alms and thus preserve?” Wealth should be spent on the needy (specially-if they are parents or relatives), on orphans and those who ask owing to poverty, on the freeing of slaves etc. The following verses were among the earliest that were addressed to the Prophet.

“As for the orphan, do not oppress him, as for the beggar, scold him not.”

[Dhuha, XCIII: 9-10]

Among the qualities that characterize a true believer is the quality of giving the needy and the outcast, as their right, a specified portion of his wealth. [Ma’ārij, LXX: 24-25].

There is on the way to success in the hereafter a steep path that can be attempted only by one who performs the following deeds:

“The freeing of a slave, or giving food upon a day of hunger to an orphan near of kin or a needy man in misery”

And then

“become of those who believe and council each other to be steadfast, and counsel each other to be merciful.”

[Balad, XC: 13-17].

Besides helping his fellowmen in this way man should also be truthful and honest with them and fulfil his promises to them. [Ma’ārij, LXX: 32-33]. He should not infringe upon their rights especially those of life [LXXX: 8-9], and of decency. [Ma’ārij, LXX: 29-31].

That briefly, is the message which Muhammad addressed to his Makkan audience.

دعائم الإيمان

تأليف

فضيلة الشيخ

جعفر شيخ إدريس



البنك التعاوني للدعوة والإرشاد وتوعية الجاليات
بأحرار والكورنيش ووسط جدة
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