

1.1 THE CATEGORIES OF TAWHEED

Literally *tawheed* means “unification” (making something one) or “asserting oneness,” and it comes from the Arabic verb وَحَّدَ (*wahhada*) which itself means to unite, unify, or consolidate.¹ However, when the term *tawheed* is used in reference to Allaah (i.e. *tawheedullaah*)², it means realizing and affirming Allaah’s unity in all of man’s actions which directly or indirectly relate to Him. It is the belief that Allaah’s One, without partner in His dominion (*ruboobeeyah*), One without similitude in His essence and attributes (*asmaa was sifaat*), and One without rival in His divinity and in worship (*uloohceeyah ‘ibaadah*). These three aspects form the basis for the categories into which the science of *tawheed* has been traditionally divided. The three overlap and are inseparable to such a degree that whoever omits any one aspect has failed to complete the requirements of *tawheed*. The omission of any of the above mentioned aspects of *tawheed* is referred to as *shirk* (which literally means “sharing” but here signifies) the association of partners with Allaah. In Islamic terms this association is in fact idolatry.

Because of this principle of *tawheed*, the Islamic belief in God is uniquely unitarian and Islaam is counted among the world’s monotheistic religions along with Judaism and Christianity. However, according to the Islamic unitarian concept (*tawheed*), Christianity is classified as polytheism and Judaism is considered to be a subtle form of idolatry.

Thus, the principle of *tawheed* is very profound and needs further clarification even among Muslims. This point is vividly illustrated by the fact that some Muslims like Ibn ‘Arabee³ understood *tawheed* to mean monism; that

¹ J.M. Cowan, *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, (Spoken Language Services Inc., New York, 3rd. ed., 1976), p.1055.

² The word *tawheed* does not actually occur in either the Qur’aan or in the statements (*Hadeeths*) of the Prophet (ﷺ). However, when the Prophet (ﷺ) sent Mu’aadh ibn Jabal as governor of Yemen in 9AH, he told him, “You will be going to Christians and Jews (*ahl al-Kitaab*), so the first thing you should invite them to is the assertion of the oneness of Allaah (*Yuwahhidoo Allaah*).” (Narrated by Ibn ‘Abbaas and collected by al-Bukhaaree (Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, (Arabic-English), (Riyadh: Maktabah ar-Riyaad al-Hadeetha, 1981), vol.9, pp.348-9, no.469) and Muslim (Abdul Hamid Siddiq, *Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1987), vol.1, pp.14-5, no.27). In this *Hadeeth* the present tense of the verb from which the verbal noun *Tawheed* is derived was used by the Prophet (ﷺ).

³ Muhammad ibn ‘Alee ibn ‘Arabee was born in Spain in the year 1165 CE and died in Damascus in the year 1240 CE. He claimed to possess inner light and knowledge of Allaah’s greatest name and referred to himself as the seal of the sainthood which he implied was a status higher than

everything which exists is Allaah and Allaah is everything. He asserted that there is only one real existence, which is Allaah everything else is unreal.⁴ Yet, such beliefs are classified by mainstream Islaam as pantheism and, as such, *kufr*. Other Muslims such as the *Mu‘tazilah*⁵ held that *tawheed* consisted of stripping Allaah of all His attributes and asserting that He is present everywhere and in everything; yet these ideas were also rejected by orthodox Islaam and considered heretical. In fact, almost all of the various heretical sects which broke off from the main body of Islaam, from the Prophet’s time till today, began their divergence from the point of *tawheed*. All of those who worked for the destruction of Islaam and the misguidance of its followers have attempted to neutralize the principle of *tawheed*, because it represents the very essence of the divine message of Islaam brought by all the prophets. They have introduced concepts about Allaah totally alien to Islaam; concepts designed to take man away from the worship of Allaah alone. Once people accept these pagan philosophies about God, they become easily susceptible to a multitude of other deviant ideas, all of which eventually lead those who accept them to the worship of created things under the guise of the true worship of God.

The Prophet (ﷺ) himself vividly warned Muslims to beware of such deviations as had befallen the nations before them. He encouraged them to stick closely to the path which he had tread. One day as he sat with his companions, he drew a straight line in the dirt. He then drew a series of lines branching off from either side of it. When the companions asked him what it meant, he pointed to the branches and told them that they represented the various paths of misguidance in this life. He went on to say that at the head of each path sat a devil inviting people to it. After that, he pointed to the straight line in the middle and told them that it represented the path of Allaah. When the companions asked for further clarification, he told them that it was his path and he recited the following verse:

prophethood. In the centuries following his death, his followers elevated him to the status of saint, and gave him the title of *ash-Shaykh al-Akbar* (The Greatest Master), but the majority of Muslim legal scholars considered him a heretic. His principle works are *al-Futooḥaat al-Makkeeyah* and *Fuṣoos al-Hikim*, (H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1953), pp.146-7.

⁴ A modern proponent of this belief called *wahdatul-wujood* is Haroon Yahya. He has included a chapter in most of his works written in refutation of Darwinism promoting this belief.

⁵ A rationalist philosophical school founded in the Umayyad period (i.e. early 8th century CE) by Waasil ibn ‘Ataa and ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd. It gained sway over the ‘Abbaasid state for over a hundred years and continued to influence Islamic thought until the 12th century (*Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp.421-6).

وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ

“This is my path leading straight, so follow it. And do not follow the other paths, or else you will be separated from His (Allaah’s) path.”⁶

It is therefore of the utmost importance that *tawheed* be clearly understood in the way it was taught by the Prophet (ﷺ) and understood by his companions, or else one could easily end up on one of the many deviant paths while claiming *tawheed*, praying, paying *zakaah*,⁷ fasting and making Hajj. Allaah, Most Wise, has pointed to this phenomenon when He said in the Qur’aan,

وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلَّا وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ

“Most of them claim to believe in Allaah, but they really commit *shirk*.”⁸

The three categories of *tawheed* are commonly referred to by the following titles:

1. Tawheed ar-Ruboobeeyah: lit. “Maintaining the oneness of Lordship,” that is, affirming that Allaah is one, without partners in his sovereignty.
2. Tawheed al-Asmaa’ was-Sifaat: lit. “Maintaining the unity of Allaah’s Names and Attributes,” that is, affirming that they are incomparable and unique.
3. Tawheed al-‘Ibaadah: Affirming that Allaah is alone in his right to be worshipped.⁹

The division of *tawheed* into its components was not done by the Prophet (ﷺ) nor by his companions, as there was no necessity to analyze such a basic principle of faith in this fashion. However, the foundations of the components are all implied in the verses of the Qur’aan and in the explanatory statements of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions, as will become evident when each category is dealt with in more detail later.

⁶ Soorah al-An‘aam, (6):153, Reported by Ibn Mas‘ood and collected by an-Nasaa’ee, Ahmad and ad-Daarimee. Authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Sharh as-Sunnah*, vol.1, p.13, no.17.

⁷ annual compulsory charity.

⁸ Soorah Yoosuf, (12):106.

⁹ Ibn Abil-‘Ezz al-Hanafee, *Sharh al-‘Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah*, p.78.

The necessity for this analytical approach to the principle of *tawheed* arose after Islaam spread into Egypt, Byzantium, Persia and India and absorbed the cultures of these regions. It is only natural to expect that when the peoples of these lands entered the fold of Islaam, they would carry with them some of the remnants of their former beliefs. When some of these new converts began to express, in writings and discussion, their various philosophical concepts of God, confusion arose in which the pure and simple unitarian belief of Islaam became threatened. There were also others who had outwardly accepted Islaam but secretly worked to destroy the religion from within, due to their inability to oppose it militarily. This group began to actively propagate distorted ideas about Allaah among the masses in order to tear down the first pillar of *eemaan* (faith) and with it Islaam itself.

The early caliphs and their governors were closer to Islamic principles, and the consciousness of the masses was high due to the presence of the Prophet's companions and their students. Hence, the demand for the elimination of open heretics received immediate response from the rulers. In contrast, the later Umayyad caliphs were more corrupt and as such cared little about such religious issues. The masses were also less Islamically conscious and thus were more susceptible to deviant ideas. As greater numbers of people entered Islaam under the Umayyads, and the learning of an increasing number of conquered nations was absorbed, the execution of apostates was no longer used to stem the rising tide of heresy. The task of opposing it fell on the shoulders of the Muslim scholars of the period who rose to meet the challenge intellectually. They systematically opposed the various alien philosophies and creeds by categorizing them and countering them with principles deduced from the Qur'aan and the Sunnah. It was out of this defense that the science of *tawheed* emerged, with its precisely defined categories and components. Therefore, as the categories of *tawheed* are studied separately and in more depth, it must not be forgotten that they are each a part of an organic whole which is itself the foundation of a greater whole, Islaam itself.

Tawheed ar-Ruboobeeyah (Maintaining the Unity of Lordship)

This category is based on the fundamental concept that Allaah alone caused all things to exist when there was nothing; He sustains and maintains creation without any need from it or for it; and He is the sole Lord of the universe and its inhabitants without any real challenge to His sovereignty. In Arabic the word used to describe this creator-sustainer quality is *ruboobeeyah* which is derived from the root *Rabb* (Lord). According to this category, since God is the only real power in existence, it is He who gave all things the power to move and to change. Nothing happens in creation except what He allows to happen. In

recognition of this reality, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used to often repeat the exclamatory phrase “*La hawla wa laa quwwata illaa billaah.*” (There is no movement nor power except by Allaah’s will).

The basis for the *ruboobeeyah* concept can be found in many Qur’anic verses. For example, Allaah says:

اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ

“Allaah created all things and He is the agent on which all things depend.”¹⁰

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ

“And no calamity strikes except by Allaah’s permission.”¹¹

The Prophet (ﷺ) further elaborated on this concept saying, “*Be aware that if the whole of mankind gathered together in order to do something to help, they would only be able to do something for you which Allaah had already written for you. Likewise, if the whole of mankind gathered together to harm you, they would only be able to do something to harm you which Allaah had already written would happen to you.*”¹²

Thus, what man conceives as good fortune and misfortune are merely events predestined by Allaah as part of the tests of this life. The incidents follow patterns set by Allaah alone. Allaah has said in the Qur’aan:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ مِنْ أَرْوَاجِكُمْ وَأَوْلَادِكُمْ عَدُوًّا لَكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُمْ

“O Believers! Surely there is in your wives and children an enemy for you, so beware of them.”¹³

That is, within the good things of this life there are severe tests of one’s faith in God. Likewise, in the terrible events of life there lies test as is mentioned in the verse,

¹⁰ Soorah az-Zumar, (39):62.

¹¹ Soorah at-Taghaabun, (64):11.

¹² Reported by Ibn ‘Abbaas and collected by at-Tirmitheeh. See Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson -Davies, *An-Nawawi’s Forty Hadith*, (English Trans.), (Damascus, Syria: The Holy Koran Publishing House, 1976), p.68, no.19.

¹³ Soorah at-Taghaabu, (64):14.

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ
وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

“Surely We will test you with fear, hunger, loss of wealth and life and the fruits of your work, so give glad tidings to those who are patient.”¹⁴

Sometimes the patterns are recognizable, as in the case of cause and effect relationship, and sometimes they are not, as in the case when apparently good results come from evil means, or bad results from good means. God has explained that the wisdom behind these apparent irregularities is often beyond man’s immediate comprehension due to his limited scope of knowledge:

وَعَسَىٰ أَن تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَن تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“It is possible that you dislike something that is really good for you, or like something bad for you, but Allaah knows (what is best for you), and you do not.”¹⁵

Apparently evil events in human lives sometimes turn out to be for the best, and apparently good things which people desire turn out to be harmful. Consequently, man’s realm of influence in the course of events which make up his life is limited to mental choices between options presented to him. The ultimate results of these choices, however are not under his control. In other words, “Man proposes and God disposes.” Apparent “good fortune” and “misfortune” are both from Allaah and cannot be caused by good-luck charms such as rabbits’ feet, four-leaf clovers, wishbones, lucky numbers, zodiacal signs, etc., or by omens of bad luck like Friday the thirteenth, breaking mirrors, black cats, etc. In fact, the belief in charms and omens is a manifestation of the grave sin of *shirk* (association) in this form of *ta'weed*. ‘Uqbah, one of the companions of the Prophet (ﷺ), reported *that once a group of men approached Allaah’s Messenger to give their allegiance to him, and he accepted the oath from nine of them but refused to accept it from one. When they asked him why he refused their companion’s oath, he replied, “Verily, he is wearing an amulet.”*¹⁶ *The man who was wearing the amulet put his hand in his*

¹⁴ Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):155.

¹⁵ Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):216.

¹⁶ A charm worn to bring good fortune or avert evil.

cloak, pulled the amulet off, broke it, and then made the oath. The Prophet (ﷺ) then said, “Whoever wears an amulet has committed shirk.”¹⁷

As for using the Qur’aan like a charm or amulet by wearing or carrying Qur’anic verses on chains or in pouches to ward off evil or to bring good fortune, there is little difference between such practices and those of the pagans. Neither the Prophet (ﷺ) nor his companions used the Qur’aan in this fashion, and the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Whoever innovates in Islaam something which does not belong to it will have it rejected.”¹⁸ It is true that the Qur’anic chapters an-Naas and al-Falaq, were revealed specifically for exorcism (that is, for removing evil spells), but the Prophet (ﷺ) demonstrated the proper method by which they should be used. On an occasion when a spell had been cast on him, he told ‘Alee ibn Abee Taalib to recite the two chapters verse by verse, and when he became ill he used to recite them on himself.¹⁹ He did not write them down and hang them around his neck, tie them on his arm or around his waist, nor did he tell others to do so.

Tawheed al-Asmaa’ was-Sifaat (Maintaining the Unity of Allaah’s Names and Attributes)

This category of *tawheed* has five main aspects:

1. For the unity of Allaah’s names and attributes to be maintained in the first aspect, Allaah must be referred to according to how He and His Prophet (ﷺ) have described Him, without explaining away His names and attributes by giving them meanings other than their obvious meaning. For example, in the Qur’aan Allaah says that He gets angry with the disbelievers and the hypocrites. He says:

وَيُعَذِّبُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ وَالْمُشْرِكَاتِ الظَّالِمِينَ بِاللَّهِ ظَنَّ السَّوْءِ
عَلَيْهِمْ دَائِرَةُ السَّوْءِ وَغَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَنَهُمْ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا

¹⁷ Collected by Ahmad.

¹⁸ Reported by ‘Aaeshah and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, (Arabic-English), vol.3, p.535, no.861), Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.3, p.931, no.4266 and no.4267) and Abu Daawood (Ahmad Hasan, *Sunan Abu Dawud* (English Trans.), (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers, 1st. ed., 1984), vol.3, p.1294).

¹⁹ Reported by ‘Aa’eshah and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, (Arabic-English), vol.6, p.495, no.535) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.3, p.1195, no.5439-40).

“...that He may punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the pagans, men and women, who have an evil opinion of Allaah. A circle of evil is around them; Allaah is angry with them, curses them and has prepared for them an evil end.”²⁰

Thus, anger is one of God’s attributes. It is incorrect to say as some have, that His “anger” must really mean His “punishment”, since anger is a sign of weakness in man that does not befit Allaah. What Allaah has stated should be accepted, with the qualification that His anger is not like human anger-based on Allaah’s statement.

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

“There is nothing like him.”²¹

This verse clearly underscores the fact that Allaah’s attributes are different from those of men. When this fact is overlooked, however, a strictly literal interpretation of the verse will result in the denial of God’s very existence. For Allaah describes Himself as living and man lives; therefore, according to this “rationalist” argument, God neither lives nor exists.

In fact, the similarity between God’s attributes and those of mankind is in name only and not in degree. When attributes are used in reference to God, they are to be taken in the absolute sense, free from human deficiencies.

2. The second aspect of *Tawheed al-Asmaa’ was-Sifaat* involves referring to Allaah as He has referred to Himself without giving Him any new names or attributes. For example, Allaah may not be given the name *al-Ghaadib* (the angry one), in spite of the fact that He has said that He gets angry, because neither Allaah nor His messenger has used this name. This may seem to be a very fine point, but it must be maintained in order to prevent the false description of God. That is, finite man is in no position to define the infinite Lord of creation.

The names *an-Naasir* and *ar-Rasheed* are among the common names which cannot be authentically attributed to Allaah. Although their meanings are true and are mentioned as attributes of Allaah, they cannot be found in any Qur’aanic text or authentic *hadeeth*. They do, however, exist in a few *hadeeths* containing a list of the 99 names of Allaah, some of which can be found printed in copies of the Qur’aan. Unfortunately, all of these *hadeeths* are inauthentic.

3. In the third aspect of *Tawheed al-Asmaa’ was-Sifaat* Allaah is referred to without giving Him the attributes of His creation. For example, it is claimed in

²⁰ Soorah al-Fath, (48):6.

²¹ Soorah ash-Shooraa, (42):11.

the Bible and Torah that Allaah spent the first six days creating the universe then slept on the seventh.²² For this reason, Jews and Christians take either Saturday or Sunday as a day of rest during which work is looked at as a sin. Such a claim assigns to God the attributes of His creation. It is man who tires after heavy work and needs sleep to recuperate.²³ Elsewhere in the Bible and Torah, God is portrayed as repenting for His bad thoughts in the same way that humans do when they realize their errors.²⁴ Similarly the claim that God is a spirit or has a spirit completely corrupts this are of *tawheed*. Allaah does not refer to Himself as a spirit anywhere in the Qur'aan nor does His Prophet (ﷺ) express anything of the nature in *hadeeth*. In fact, Allaah refers to the spirit as part of His creation.²⁵

The key principle which should be followed when dealing with Allaah's attributes is the Qur'anic formula,

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

“There is nothing at all like Him, and He is hearer and seer of all.”²⁶

The attributes of hearing and seeing are among human attributes, but when they are attributed to The Divine Being they are without comparison in their perfection. However, when these attributes are associated with men they necessitate ear and eye apparatuses which cannot be attributed to God. What man knows about the Creator is only what little He has revealed to him through His prophets. Therefore, man is obliged to stay within these narrow limits. When man gives free reign to his intellect in describing God, he is liable to fall into errors by assigning to Allaah the attributes of His creation.

In their love of pictorial representations, Christians have painted, carved and molded innumerable human likenesses and called them images of God. These have served to pave the way for the acceptance of Jesus' divinity among the masses. Once they accepted the conception of the Creator as being like a human being, accepting Jesus as God presented no real problem.

²² Genesis 2:2, “And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.” (*Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version (Nelson, 1951), p.2.

²³ In contrast Allaah says explicitly in the Qur'aan, “No tiredness overcomes Him nor sleep...” (Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):255).

²⁴ Exodus 32:14, “And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people.” (*Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version).

²⁵ Allaah clearly states that in the following verse: “They ask you (Muhammad) about the spirit. Tell (them) that the spirit (exists) by my Lord's command” (Soorah al-Israa, (17):85).

²⁶ Soorah ash-Shoora, (42):11.

4. The fourth aspect of *tawheed as-Asmaa' was-Sifaat* requires that man not be given the attributes of Allaah. For example, in the New Testament Paul takes the figure of Melchizedek, king of Salem, from the Torah (Genesis 14:18-20) and gives both him and Jesus the divine attribute of having no beginning or end:

1. For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him, and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. **He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the son of God he continues a priest forever.**²⁷

'5. So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, "Thou art my son, today I have begotten thee"; as he says also in another place, "Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek."²⁸

Most *Shi'ite* sects (with the exception of the *Zaidites* of Yemen) have given their "*imams*" divine attributes of absolute infallibility,²⁹ knowledge of the past, the future and the unseen, the ability to change destiny³⁰ and control over the atoms of creation.³¹ In so doing they set up rivals who share God's unique attributes and who, in fact, become gods besides Allaah.

5. Maintaining the unity of Allaah's names also means that Allaah's names in the definite form cannot be given to His creation unless preceded by the prefix '*Abd* meaning "slave of" or "servant of." Many of the Divine names in

²⁷ Hebrews 7:1-3, (*Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version).

²⁸ Hebrews, 5:5-6 (*Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version).

²⁹ Muhammad Rida al-Muzaffar states in his book *Faith of Shi'a Islam*, (U.S.A.: Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 2nd ed. 1983): "We believe that, like the prophet, an **Imam must be infallible, that is to say incapable of making errors or doing wrong, either inwardly or outwardly, from his birth to his death, either intentionally or unintentionally**, because the Imams are the preservers of Islam and it is under their protection." (p.32). See also *Islam*, (Teheran: A Group of Muslim Brothers, 1973), p.35, by Sayed Saeed Akhtar Rizvi.

³⁰ Al-Muzaffar further states: "We maintain that the powers of the Imams to receive inspiration has reached the highest degree of excellence, and we say that it is a Divinely-given power. By this means **the Imam is able to understand information about anything, anywhere, and at any time**, and he understands by means of this Divinely - given power at once, without recourse to methodological reasoning or guidance from a teacher.

³¹ Al-Khomeini states: "Certainly the Imam has a dignified station, a lofty rank, a creational caliphate, and sovereignty and mastery over all atoms of creation." (Aayatullaah Musavi al-Khomeini, *al-Hukoomah al-Islameeyah*, (Beirut: at-Talee'ah Press, Arabic ed., 1979), p.52).

their indefinite form like *Ra'oof* and *Raheem* are allowable names for me because Allaah has used some of them in their indefinite forms to refer to the Prophet (ﷺ):

لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ
رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

“A messenger has come to you from among yourselves who is grieved by whatever afflicts you. He is full of concern for you, full of pity (*Ra'oof*) and full of mercy (*Raheem*) for the believers.”³²

But *ar-Ra'oof* (the One Most Full of Pity) and *ar-Raheem* (the Most Merciful) can only be used to refer to men if they are preceded by ‘*Abd*’ as in ‘*Abdur-Ra'oof*’ or ‘*Abdur-Raheem*’, since in the definite form they represent a level of perfection which only belongs to God. The ‘Abbaside Caliph, Haroon *ar-Rasheed*, used the title “*ar-Rasheed*” which would have been rejected by the scholars of his time, had it been actually one of Allaah’s names. On the other hand, names like ‘*Abdur-Rasool*’ (slave of the messenger), ‘*Abdun-Nabee*’ (slave of the Prophet), ‘*Abdul-Husayn*’ (slave of Husayn), etc., where people name themselves slave to other than Allaah are also forbidden. Based on this principle, the Prophet (ﷺ) forbade Muslims from referring to those put under their charge as ‘*abdee*’ (my slave) or *amatee* (my slave girl).³³

Tawheed al-‘Ebaadah (Maintaining The Unity of Worship)

In spite of the wide implications of the first two categories of *tawheed*, firm belief in them alone is not sufficient to fulfill the Islamic requirements of *tawheed*. *Tawheed ar-Ruboobeeyah* and *Tawheed al-Asmaa’ was-Sifaat* must be accompanied by their complement, *Tawheed al-‘Ibaadah*, in order for *tawheed* to be considered complete according to Islaam. This point is substantiated by the fact that Allaah Himself has related in clear terms that the *mushrikoon* (idolators) of the Prophet’s time confirmed many aspects of the first two forms of *tawheed*. In the Qur’aan Allaah tells the Prophet (ﷺ) to say to the pagans:

³² Soorah at-Tawbah, (9):128.

³³ (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.), vol.3, pp.1385-6, no.4957).

قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَمَّنْ يَمْلِكُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَمَنْ يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ
مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَيُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَمَنْ يُدَبِّرُ الْأَمْرَ فَسَيَقُولُونَ اللَّهُ

“Say: ‘Who is it that gives you sustenance from the sky earth, governs sight and hearing, brings forth life form dead (matter) and death from the living; and plans the affairs of man?’ They will all say: ‘Allaah’.”³⁴

وَلَكِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَهُمْ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ

“If you asked them who created them, they would surely say, ‘Allaah’.”³⁵

The pagan Makkans all knew that Allaah was their creator, sustainer, their Lord and Master; yet that knowledge did not make them Muslims according to God. In fact, Allaah said:

وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلَّا وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ

“Most of them do not believe in Allaah except while joining partners to Him.”³⁶

Mujaahid’s³⁷ commentary on this verse was as follows: “Their belief in Allaah, represented by their statement, ‘Allaah created us, provides for us and takes our lives, did not stop them from worshipping other gods along with Allaah.’”³⁸ From the previously mentioned verses, it is clear that the *kuffaar* (disbelievers) knew of Allaah’s sovereignty, dominion and power. In fact, they used to faithfully devote various types of worship to Him like Hajj, charity, animal sacrifices, vows and even prayers in times of dire necessity and calamity. They even used to claim that they were following the religion of Abraham. Because of that claim, Allaah revealed the verse:

³⁴ Soorah Yoonus, (10):31.

³⁵ Soorah az-Zukhruf, (43):87.

³⁶ Soorah Yoosuf, (12):106.

³⁷ Mujaahid ibn Jubayr al-makkee (642-722) was Ibn ‘Abbaas’ most outstanding student. The narrations of his *Tafseer* (commentary) of the Qur’aan has been compiled by ‘Abdur-Rahmaan at-Taahir and published in two volumes under the title, *Tafseer Mujaahid*, (Islamabad: Majma’ al-Buhooth).

³⁸ Collected by Ibn Jareer at-Tabaree.

مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ
الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Abraham was not a Jew, nor was he a Christian, but (he) was a true Muslim and not among those who joined partners with Allaah.”³⁹

Some pagan Makkans even believed in the Resurrection and the Judgement and others in predestination (*qadar*). Ample evidence of their belief can be found in pre-Islamic poetry. For example, the poet Zuhayr was reported to have said: about punishment:

“It is either delayed, placed in a book and saved for the Day of Judgement, or hastened and (injustice) avenged.”

‘Antarah was quoted as saying:

“O ‘Ebil, to where will you run from death, if my Lord in the sky has destined it?”⁴⁰

In spite of the Makkan’s confession of *tawheed* and their knowledge of Allaah, Allaah classified them as disbelievers (*kuffaar*) and pagans (*mushrikoon*) simply because they worshipped other gods along with their worship of Allaah.

Consequently, the most important aspect of *tawheed* is that of *tawheed al-’Ibaadah*, maintaining the unity of Allaah’s worship. All forms of worship must be directed only to Allaah because He alone deserves worship, and it is He alone who can grant benefit to man as a result of His worship. Furthermore, there is no need for any form of intercessor or intermediary between man and God. Allaah emphasized the importance of directing worship to Him alone by pointing out that this was the main purpose of man’s creation and the essence of the message brought by all the prophet. He said:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِي

“I did not create the *jinn* and mankind except for My worship.”⁴¹

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ

³⁹ Soorah Aal-’Imraan, (3):67.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Sulaymaan ibn ‘Abdul-Wahhaab’s *Tayseer al-’Azeez al-Hameed*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaamee, 2nd., 1970), p.34.

⁴¹ Soorah adh-Dhaariyaat, (51):56.

**“Verily, We have sent to every nation a messenger (saying),
‘Worship Allaah and avoid false gods.’”⁴²**

Understanding the purpose of creation in a complete sense is beyond man’s innate abilities. Man is a finite created being and cannot reasonably hope to fully comprehend the actions of the infinite Creator. Hence, God made it a part of man’s nature to worship Him, and He sent prophets and books of divine revelation to clarify the aspect of the purpose of creation which was within man’s mental ability to grasp. That purpose is, as previously mentioned: the worship of God (*‘ebaadah*) and the main message of the prophets was to worship God alone, (*Tawheed al-’Ibaadah*). Consequently, the gravest sin is *shirk*, the worship of others instead of Allaah or along with Allaah.

In Soorah al-Faatihah, which every Muslim is required to recite in his or her daily prayers, verse four reads, **“You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek help.”** This is a clear statement that all forms of worship should be directed exclusively to the One who can respond: Allaah. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) confirmed the concept of unity of worship saying, *“If you ask in prayer ask only Allaah, and if you seek help, seek it only from Allaah.”*⁴³ The absence of any need for intercession is further emphasized by the any verses indicating His closeness to man. For example:

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِي إِذَا دَعَانِي فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لِي
وَلْيُؤْمِنُوا بِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْشُدُونَ

**“When My servants ask you (O Muhammad) about Me (tell them),
‘Verily I am close (to them); I listen to the prayer of every one who
calls on Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me in order
that they may be guided aright.”**⁴⁴

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

**“It is We who created man and We know what his soul whispers to
him, for We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.”**⁴⁵

The confirmation of *Tawheed al-’Ibaadah* conversely necessitates the denial of all forms of intercession or association of partners with Allaah. If someone prays to

⁴² Soorah an-Nahl, (16):36.

⁴³ Reported by Ibn ‘Abbaas and collected by at-Tirmithi, See *An-Nawawi’s Forty Hadith*, (English Trans.), p.68.

⁴⁴ Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):186.

⁴⁵ Soorah Qaaf, (50):16.

the dead seeking their influence on the lives of the living or the souls of those who have passed away, they have associated a partner with Allaah, because worship is being shared between Allaah and His creation. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said, in no uncertain terms, “Prayer (*du‘aa*) is worship.”⁴⁶ And, Allaah, Most Great and Glorious, said:

أَفَتَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنْفَعُكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَضُرُّكُمْ

“Do not worship besides Allaah that which cannot help or harm you.”⁴⁷

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ عِبَادٌ أَمْثَلُكُمْ

“Those on whom you call besides Allaah are only slaves like yourselves.”⁴⁸

If someone prays to the Prophet (ﷺ), or to jinn, angels or so called saints asking for help or asking them to request help from Allaah on his behalf, he has also committed *shirk*. The concept of “Ghaus-i-Azam” (*al-Ghawth al-A‘dHam*), a title given by the ignorant to ‘Abdul-Qaadir al-Jeelaanee,⁴⁹ is also an expression of *shirk* in this form of *tawheed*. The title literally means “the greatest source of rescue; the one most able to save someone from danger,” and such a description only belongs to Allaah. When misfortune occurs, some people call on ‘Abdul-Qaadir by this title seeking his aid and protection, even though Allaah has already said:

وَإِن يَمْسَسْكَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ فَلَا كَاشِفَ لَهُ إِلَّا هُوَ

“If Allaah allows harm to befall you none can remove it except Him.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol.1, p.387, no.1474.

⁴⁷ Soorah al-Anbiyaa, (21):66.

⁴⁸ Soorah al-A‘raaf, (7):194.

⁴⁹ ‘Abdul Qaadir (1077-1166) was a principal of a school of Hanabalite Law and a Ribaat (monastery) in Baghdad. His Sermons (collected in *al-Fat-h ar-Rabbaane*, Cairo 1302) were strictly orthodox with some, mystic interpretations of the Qur’aan. Ibn ‘Arabee (born 1165) declared him the *Qutb* of his time and stated that he had a rank which placed him above all beings except God. ‘Alee ibn Yousuf ash-Shattanawfee (d. 1314 CE) wrote a book called *Bahjat al-Asraar* (Cairo, 1304) in which he attributed many miracles to ‘Abdul-Qaadir. The Qaadiireyah Sufi order is named after him and its spiritual exercises and regulations traced back to him. (*Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp.5-7 and 202-205).

⁵⁰ Soorah al-An‘aam, (6):17.

According to the Qur'aan, when the Makkans were questioned about directing their prayers to their idols, they answered,

مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَى

“We only worship them so that they may bring us closer to Allaah.”⁵¹

The idols were only used as intermediaries yet Allaah called them pagans for their practice. Those among Muslims who insist on praying to other than Allaah would do well to reflect on this fact.

Christians, influenced by the teachings of Saul from Tarsus (later called Paul), deified Prophet Jesus and directed their prayer to him and his mother. The Catholics among Christians have saints for every occasion to whom they direct their prayers in the belief that these saints can directly influence the affairs of this world. The Catholics also use their priests as intercessors between themselves and Allaah in the mistaken belief that the priests are closer to Allaah due to their celibacy and piety, and thus more likely to be listened to by Allaah. Most *Shi'ite* sects have devoted certain days of the week and hours of the day for prayer to 'Alee, Faatimah, Hasan and Husayn⁵² due to their distorted belief in intercession.

Worship ('*ebaadah*) in the Islamic view, includes more than just fasting, paying *zakaah*, Hajj and animal sacrifices. It includes emotions like love, trust, and fear, all of which have degrees which should only be directed to God. Allaah has addressed these emotions and warned against excesses in them as follows:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْدَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ

“There are among men those who take (for worship) others besides Allaah as equals to Him. They love them as they should only love Allaah. But those who believe have a much greater love of Allaah...”⁵³

أَلَا تَقَاتِلُونَ قَوْمًا نَكَثُوا أَيْمَانَهُمْ وَهَمُّوا بِإِخْرَاجِ الرَّسُولِ وَهُمْ بَدَءُوكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ أَتَخْشَوْنَ اللَّهَ فَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَخْشَوْهُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

⁵¹ Soorah az-Zumar, (39):3.

⁵² Faatimah was the Prophet Muhammad's youngest daughter who married the Prophet's cousin 'Alee ibn Abee Taalib, and Hasan and Husayn were their sons.

⁵³ Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):165.

“Will you not fight people who broke their oaths, plotted to expel the messenger and were the first to (attack) you? Do you *fear* them? Allaah has more right to be *feared* if you are truly believers.”⁵⁴

وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَتَوَكَّلُوا إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ

“Put your *trust* in Allaah if you are truly believers.”⁵⁵

Since the term *Ibaadah* means total obedience, and Allaah is considered the ultimate lawgiver, the implementation of secular legal systems not based on divine law (*Sharee‘ah*) is an act of disbelief in the divine law and belief in the correctness of such systems. Such a belief constitutes a form of worshipping other than Allaah (*shirk*). Allaah said in the Qur’aan:

وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

“Those who do not rule by what Allaah has revealed are disbelievers (*kafiroon*).”⁵⁶

On one occasion, the Prophet’s companion, ‘Adee ibn Haatim, who was a convert from Christianity, heard the Prophet (ﷺ) recite the Qur’anic verse,

اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهْبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا لَّا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ سُبْحَانَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

“They have taken their rabbis and monks as lords besides Allaah,”⁵⁷

so he said: ‘Surely we did not worship them.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) turned to him and said ‘Did they not make forbidden (*haraam*) what Allaah had made allowable (*halaal*)⁵⁸ and you made it *haraam*, and did they not make *halaal* what Allaah made *haraam*⁵⁹ and you made it *halaal*?’ He replied, ‘We certainly did.’ The Prophet (ﷺ) then said, ‘That was how you worshipped them.’⁶⁰

Hence, a significant part of *Tawheed al-Ibaadah* involves the implementation of *Sharee‘ah*, especially in lands where Muslims form the

⁵⁴ Soorah at-Tawbah, (9):13.

⁵⁵ Soorah al-Maa’idah, (5):23.

⁵⁶ Soorah am-Maa’idah, (5):44.

⁵⁷ Soorah at-Tawbah, (9):31.

⁵⁸ Christian clergy made *haraam* the marrying of more than one wife and the marrying of first cousins. Roman Catholicism forbade priests from marrying and forbade divorce in general.

⁵⁹ The Christian Church made *halaal* the consumption of pork, blood and alcohol. Some of them also made allowable painting and statues depicting God as a man.

⁶⁰ Collected by at-Tirmithee.

majority of the population. Divine law should be re-introduced in the many Muslims countries where governments now rule according to imported capitalist or communist constitutions, and Islamic law is either totally extinct or relegated to a few areas of minor importance. Likewise, Muslim countries where Islamic law is on the books but secular laws are in force, should implement the *Sharee'ah* as it pertains to all aspects of life. The implementation of non-Islamic rule in place of *Sharee'ah* in Muslim lands is an act of *shirk* and *kufir* as indicated by the previously quoted verse. However, as Ibn 'Abbaas explained, it is not the major act of disbelief which takes one out of the fold of Islaam but a lesser form. Consequently, ruling by non-Islamic law does not automatically make the doer a disbeliever unless he or she actually believes that non-Islamic laws are superior or equal to divine law. Therefore, the currently common practice of some extreme groups of declaring all Muslim rulers and those who work under them to be disbelievers (*takfeer*) simply because they uphold un-Islamic systems is incorrect. However, it is the duty of those in positions of authority to change such systems, while those in positions of influence should advise the rulers in a way which would not incite rebellion and bloodshed among the masses. As for those not in such positions, they should despise un-Islamic government for the pleasure of God and for the upholding of *ta'weed*.

1.2 THE CATEGORIES OF SHIRK

The study of *tawheed* cannot be considered complete without a careful analysis of its opposite, *shirk*. Some mention of *shirk* has already been made in the previous chapter and examples of it have been given to illustrate how *tawheed* may be obliterated. However, in this chapter *shirk* will be looked at as a separate topic whose grave importance Allaah has attested to in the Qur'aan:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ

“Surely Allaah will not forgive the association of partners (*shirk*) with Him, but He forgives (sins) lesser than that of whomever He wishes.”¹

Because the sin of *shirk* denies the very purpose of man's creation, it is to God the gravest of sins, the unforgiveable sin.

Shirk literally means partnership, sharing or associating,² but Islamically it refers to the act of assigning partners to Allaah in whatever form it may take. The following analysis of *shirk* will correspond to the three broad categories developed in the study of *tawheed*. Hence, we will first look at the main ways in which *shirk* can occur in the area of *ruboobeeyah* (lordship), then *asmaa' was-sifaat* (divine names and attributes), and finally in *Ibaadah* (worship).

Shirk in Ruboobeeyah

This category of *shirk* refers to either the belief that others share Allaah's lordship over creation as His equal or near equal, or to the belief that there exists no lord over creation at all. Most religious systems fall into the first sub-category of *shirk* in *Ruboobeeyah* while it is the philosophers and their man-made philosophies that tend to fill the second one.

¹ Soorah an-Nisaa, (4):48.

² *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, p.468.

(a) Shirk by Association: Beliefs that exemplify shirk by association are ones in which a main God or Supreme Being over creation is recognized, though His dominion is shared by other lesser gods, spirits, mortals, heavenly bodies or earthly objects. Such belief systems are commonly referred to by theologians and philosophers as either monotheistic (having one god) or polytheistic (having more than one god). According to Islaam, all of these systems are polytheistic, and many represent various stages in the degeneration of divinely revealed religious systems, which were all originally based on *tawheed*.

Within Hinduism the Supreme Being, *Brahman* is conceived as indwelling, all-pervading, unchangeable and eternal, the abstract, impersonal Absolute, in which all things have their origin and end. On the other hand the god *Brahma* is the personified creator of the universe who forms a trinity with the preserver god, *Vishnu* and the destroyer god, *Shiva*.³ Thus, *Shirk* in *Ruboobeeyah* is-expressed in Hinduism by the delegation of God's creative, destructive and preservative powers to other gods.

Christian belief states that the one God reveals himself in the three persons of Father, Son (Jesus Christ) and Holy Spirit. These three persons are nevertheless regarded as a unity, sharing one 'substance.'⁴ Prophet Jesus is elevated to divinity, sits on the right hand of God and judges the world. The Holy Spirit, which in the Hebrew Bible is the means by which God exercises His creative power, in Christian thought becomes a part of the God-head. Paul made the Holy Spirit the alter ego of Christ, the guide and help of Christians, first manifesting itself on the day of Pentecost.⁵ Consequently, *Shirk* in *Ruboobeeyah* occurs in the Christian belief that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are God's partners in all of His dominion, in their belief that Jesus alone pronounces judgement on the world, and in their belief that Christians are helped and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Zoroastrians (Parsis) conceive of God, Ahura Mazda, as being the creator of all that is good, and is alone worthy of absolute worship. Fire is one of the seven creations of Ahura Mazda and is considered his son or representative. But they also commit *Shirk* in *Ruboobeeyah* by conceiving of evil, violence and death as being the creation of another god called Angra Mainyu whom they represent by the symbol darkness.⁶ Hence, God's sovereignty over all creation (i.e. His

³ W.L. Reese, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), pp.66-7 and 586-7. See also John Hinnells, *Dictionary of Religious* (England: Penguin Books, 1984) pp.67-8.

⁴ *Dictionary of Religions*, p.337.

⁵ *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, p.231.

⁶ *Dictionary of Religions*, pp.361-2.

ruboobeeyah) is shared with an evil spirit elevated to the level of an opposing god due to man's desire not to attribute evil to God.

In the Yoruba religion, followed by over 10 million people in West Africa (mainly Nigeria), there is one supreme God, Olorius (Lord of Heaven) or Olodumare. Nevertheless, modern Yoruba religion is characterized by a great many forms of Orisha worship, so that it appears as strict polytheism.⁷ Consequently, Yorubas commit *Shirk* in *Ruboobeeyah* by turning over all of God's functions to minor gods and spirits.

The Zulus of South Africa believe in one God, Unkulunkulu, meaning the ancient, the first, the most revered one. The principal specific titles for God are Nkosi yaphezulu (Lord of the Sky) and *Muvelingqanqi* (the first to appear). Their supreme Being is represented as a male, who along with the earth female, brings forth the human world. Thunder and lightening are in the Zulu religion acts of God, whereas sickness and other troubles in life may be caused by ancestors, the *idlozi* or *abaphansi* (those under the earth). The ancestors also protect, punish, or neglect the living, ask for food, are pleased with ritual and sacrifice, and take possession of fortune tellers (*inyanga*).⁸ Thus, *Shirk* in *Ruboobeeyah* occurs in the Zulu religion not only in their concept of the creation of the human world, but also in their attribution of good and evil in human life to the work of ancestral spirits.

Among some Muslims people, *Shirk* in *Ruboobeeyah* is manifested in their belief that the souls of saints and other righteous humans can affect the affairs of this world, even after their deaths. Their souls, it is believed, can fulfil one's needs, remove calamities, and aid whoever calls on them. Thus grave worshippers assign to human souls the divine ability to cause events in this life which in fact only Allaah can cause.

Common among many *Sufis* (Muslim mystics) is the belief in "*Rijaal al-Ghayb*"⁹ (men of the unseen) the chief of whom occupies the station called "*Qutub*" from which the affairs of this world are governed.¹⁰

(b) Shirk by Negation This sub-category represents the various philosophies and ideologies which deny the existence of God either explicitly or implicitly. That is, in some cases God's non-existence is stated (atheism), while in other cases His

⁷ *Dictionary of Religions*, p.358.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.363.

⁹ Literally, "men of the unseen world." The world is supposed to endure due to the intercessions of a hierarchy of "averting" Saints whose number are fixed, the place of one who dies being immediately filled. (*Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, p.582).

¹⁰ *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, pp.55.

existence is claimed, but the way in which He is conceived actually denies His existence (pantheism).

There are a few ancient religious systems in which God does not exist, foremost among them being the system attributed to Gautama Buddha. Buddhism, a reformist movement in Hinduism opposed to the caste system, was founded in the 6th century B.C. during the same period as Jainism. During the 3rd century B.C. it became the state religion. Eventually it was assimilated by Hinduism, Buddha himself becoming one of the avatars (incarnations of God). It disappeared from India but became dominant in China and other Eastern nations. Hinayana Buddhism (400-250 B.C.), the earlier and more strict of the two interpretations of Buddhism which arose after Gautama Buddha's death, makes it clear that there is no God; hence the burden of salvation belongs to the individual alone.¹¹ Thus, this ancient strain of Buddhism may be cited as an example of *Shirk* in *Ruboobeeyah* wherein God's existence is explicitly denied.

Similarly, in the teachings of Jainism as systematized by Vardhamana, there is no God, but liberated souls achieve something of this status, having immortality and omniscience; and the religious community treats the liberated ones as though they were divine, building temples to them and venerating their images.¹²

Another ancient example is that of the Pharaoh of Prophet Moses' time. Allaah mentioned in the Qur'aan that he negated the existence of God and claimed to Moses and the people of Egypt that he, Pharaoh, was the only true lord of all creation. Allaah quoted him as saying to Moses,

قَالَ لَنْ اَتَّخِذَ اِلٰهًا غَيْرِي لِاَجْعَلَنَّكَ مِنَ الْمَسْجُوْنِيْنَ

“If you choose a god besides me, I will surely imprison you.”¹³

and to the people

فَقَالَ اَنَا رَبُّكُمْ اَلْاَعْلٰى

“he proclaimed, ‘I am your Lord, the Most High.’”¹⁴

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a number of European philosophers asserted the non-existence of God in what became known as the “death of God philosophy.” The German philosopher Philipp Mainlander (1841-1876) in his

¹¹ *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, p.72.

¹² *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, pp.262-3.

¹³ Soorah ash-Shooraa, (26):29.

¹⁴ Soorah an-Naazi'aat, (79):24.

principal writing, *The Philosophy of Redemption*, 1876), states that the world begins with the death of God, since God is a principle of unity shattered in the plurality of the world and a principle of joy denied in the law of suffering which dominates the world.¹⁵ In Prussia, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) supported the idea of the “death of God” proposing that God was nothing more than a projection of man’s uneasy conscience and that man was the bridge to the superman.¹⁶ Jeal Paul Sartre, a French philosopher of the twentieth century, also echoed the “death of God” thought. He claimed that God could not exist because He was a contradiction in terms. The idea of God, according to him, is a projection which man must make, being what he is.¹⁷

Darwin’s (d. 1882) proposal that man was merely a glorified ape was widely adopted in the theories of social scientists and philosophers of the nineteenth century as it provided a “scientific” basis for the non-existence of God. According to them religion evolved from animism to monotheism along with man’s supposed social evolution from an independant individual to a national state and his physical evolution from ape to man.

Evolutionists attempt to escape the questions surrounding creation by claiming that there was none, and by assigning Allaah’s attribute of being without beginning and end to matter itself which He has created. Present day holders of this belief are the followers of Karl Marx, Communists and scientific socialists, who claim that the origin of everything in existence is matter in motion. They further claim that God is figment of man’s imagination, created by the ruling classes to justify their hereditary rule and divert the attention of the oppressed masses from the realities in which they live.

An example of this form of *shirk* among Muslims is that of many Sufis such as Ibn ‘Arabee, who claim that only Allaah exists. (All is Allaah, and Allaah is all). They deny the separate identity of Allaah and thereby in fact deny His existence. This idea was also expressed in the 17th century by the Dutch Jewish philosopher, Baruch Spinoza, who claimed that God is the total of all parts of the universe including man.

Shirk in al-Asmaa was-Sifaat

Shirk in this category includes both the common pagan practice of giving Allaah the attributes of His creation as well as the act of giving created beings Allaah’s names and attributes.

¹⁵ *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, p.327.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.391.

¹⁷ *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, pp.508-9.

(a) Shirk by Humanization

In this aspect of *Shirk in al-Asmaa' was-Sifaat*, Allaah is given the form and qualities of human beings and animals. Due to man's superiority over animals, the human form is more commonly used by idolaters to represent God in creation. Consequently, the image of the Creator is often painted, moulded or carved in the shape of human beings possessing the physical features of those who worship them. For example, Hindus and Buddhists worship countless idols in the likeness of Asian men and consider them manifestations of God in creation. Modern day Christian belief that the Prophet Jesus was God incarnate — that the Creator became His creation — is another good example of this type of *Shirk*. There have been many reckoned Christian painters like Michaelangelo (d. 1565), who painted pictures of God as a naked old European man with long flowing white hair and beard on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican. These pictures have, in turn, been held by the Christian world in the highest esteem.

(b). Shirk by Deification This form of *Shirk in al-Asmaa' was-Sifaat* relates to cases where created beings or things are given, or claim, Allaah's names or His attributes. For example, it was the practice of the ancient Arabs to worship idols whose names were derived from the names of Allaah. Their three main idols were: al-Laat, taken from Allaah's name al-Elaah; al-'Uzza, taken from al-'Azeez; and al-Manaat, taken from al-Mannaan. During the Prophet Muhammad's era there was also a false prophet in a region of Arabic called Yamaamah, who took the name *Rahmaan* which only belongs to Allaah.

Among the *Shi'ite* sects is the *Nusayreeyah* of Syria, who believe that the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, 'Alee ibn Abee Taalib, was a manifestation of Allaah and give him many of Allaah's qualities. Among them too are the *Ismaai'is*, also known as Agha Khanis, who consider their leader, the Agha Khan, to be God incarnate. Also include in this category are the Druze of Lebanon who believe that the Faatimid Caliph al-Haakim bi Amrillaah, was the last manifestation of Allaah among mankind.

Claims of Sufis (Muslim mystics) like al-Hallaaj that they have become one with God and as such exist as manifestations of the Creator within His creation may also be included in this aspect of *Shirk in al-Asmaa' was-Sifaat*. Modern-day spiritualists and mediums, such as Shirley Maclaine and J.Z. Knight, often claim divinity for themselves as well as mankind in general. Einstein's theory of relativity ($E=mc^2$, energy is equal to mass times the square of the speed of light) taught in all schools, is in fact an expression of *Shirk in al-Asmaa' was-Sifaat*. The theory states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed; it

merely transforms into matter and vice versa. However, both matter and energy are created entities and they both will be destroyed, as Allaah clearly states:

اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

“Allaah is the creator of all things...”¹⁸

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ

“Everything in (the world) will perish...”¹⁹

The theory also implies that mass and energy are eternal having no beginning or end since they are supposed to be uncreated and transform into each other. However, this attribute belongs only to Allaah who alone is without beginning or end.

Darwin’s theory of evolution is also an attempt to explain the evolution of life and its forms from lifeless matter without the intervention of God. One of the leading Darwinists of this century, Sir Aldous Huxley expressed this thought as follows:

“Darwinism removed the whole idea of God as the creator of organisms from the sphere of rational discussion.”²⁰

Shirk in al-‘Ebaadah

In this category of *shirk*, acts of worship are directed to other than God and the reward for worship is sought from the creation instead of the Creator. As in the case of the previous categories, *Shirk* in *al-‘Ibaadah* has two main aspects.

(a) *Ash-Shirk al-Akbar* (Major Shirk)

This form of *shirk* occurs when any act or worship is directed to other than Allaah. It represents the most obvious form of idolatry, which the prophets were

¹⁸ Soorah az-Zumar, (39):62.

¹⁹ Soorah ar-Rahmaan, (55):26.

²⁰ Quoted in Francis Hitching’s, *The Neck of the Giraffe*, (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1982), p.254 from Tax and Callender, 1960, vol.III, p.45.

specifically sent by Allaah to call the masses of mankind away from. This concept is supported by Allaah's statement in the Qur'aan:

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَسُولًا أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ

“Surely we have sent to every nation a messenger saying, worship Allaah and avoid *taaghoot* (false gods).”²¹

Taaghoot actually means anything which is worshipped along with Allaah or instead of Allaah. For example, love is a form of worship which, in its perfection, should only be directed to Allaah. In Islaam, the love of God is expressed by total obedience to Him. It is not the type of love which man naturally feels toward creation; towards parents, children, food, etc. To direct that type of love towards God is to lower Him to the level of His creation which is *Shirk* in *al-Asmaa' was-Sifaat*. Love that is worship is the total surrender of one's will to God. Consequently, Allaah told the Prophet (ﷺ) to tell the believers:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ

“Say: If you love Allaah, follow me and Allaah will love you.”²²

The Prophet (ﷺ) also told his companions, “None of you is a true believer until I become more beloved to him than his child, his father and the whole of mankind.”²³ Love of the Prophet (ﷺ) is not based on his humanity but on the divine origin of his message. Thus, like the love of Allaah, it is also expressed by total obedience to his commands. Allaah said in the final revelation:

مَنْ يُطِعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ

“Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed Allaah.”²⁴and

قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ

“Say: Obey Allaah and obey the Prophet...”²⁵

If man allows the love of anything or anyone to come between himself and Allaah, then he has worshipped that thing, In this way, money can become one's god or even one's desires could become a god. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “The

²¹ Soorah an-Nahl, (16):36

²² Soorah Aal'Imraan, (3):31.

²³ Reported by Anas and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (English Arabic), vol.1, p.20, no.13) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.1, p.31, no.71).

²⁴ Soorah an-Nisaa, (4):80.

²⁵ Soorah Aal'Imraan, (3):32.

worshipper of the dirham will always be miserable,²⁶ and Allaah said in the Qur'aan,

أَرَأَيْتَ مَنْ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ

“Have you not seen the one who takes his desires as his god?”²⁷

Much emphasis has been placed on the evils of *Shirk* in *Ibaadah* (worship) because it contradicts the very purpose of creation as expressed in Allaah's statement:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِي

“I have not created Jinn or mankind except for My worship.”²⁸

Major *shirk* represents the greatest act of rebellion against the Lord of the Universe, and is thus the ultimate sin. It is a sin so great that it virtually cancels out all good a person may do and guarantees its perpetrator eternal damnation in Hell. Consequently, false religion is based primarily on this form of *shirk*. All man-made systems in one way or another invite their followers to the worship of creation. Christians are called upon to pray to a man, a Prophet of God named Jesus, whom they claim to have been God incarnate. Catholics among Christians pray to Mary as the “mother of God”, to angels like Michael who is honored on September 29 (Michaelmas Day)²⁹ as well as to human saints, whether real or fictitious.

Muslims whose acts of worship fall into this category of *shirk* are those who pray to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) or to mystics in the Sufi hierarchy of saints, believing that they can answer their prayers, though Allaah has clearly said in the Qur'aan:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَتَاكُمْ عَذَابُ اللَّهِ أَوْ أَتَتْكُمْ السَّاعَةُ أَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ تَدْعُونَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

²⁶ Reported by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, (English-Arabic), vol.8, p.296, no.443).

²⁷ Soorah al-Furqaan, (25):43.

²⁸ Soorah adh-Dhaariyaat, (51):56.

²⁹ William Halsey (ed.), *Colliers Encyclopedia*, (U.S.A.: Crowell-Collier Educational Foundation, 1970, vol.16, p.110).

“Say: Think to yourselves; if there came upon you Allaah’s punishment or the Final Hour, would you then call on other than Allaah? (Reply) if you are truthful.”³⁰

(b) Ash-Shirk al-Asghar (Minor Shirk) Mahmood ibn Lubayd reported, “Allaah’s Messenger (ﷺ) said: *The thing I fear for you the most is ash-shirk al-asghar (minor shirk). The companions asked O Messenger of Allaah, what is minor shirk? He replied, ‘Ar-Riyaa’ (showing off), for verily Allaah will say on the Day of Resurrection when people are receiving their rewards, ‘Go to those for whom you were showing off in the material world and see if you can find any reward from them.’*”³¹

Mahmood ibn Lubayd also said, “*The Prophet (ﷺ) came out and announced, ‘O people, beware of secret shirk!’ The people asked, ‘O Messenger of Allaah, what is secret shirk?’ He replied, ‘When a man gets up to pray and strives to beautify his prayer because people are looking at him, that is secret shirk.’*”³²

Ar-Riyaa’

Riyaa’ is the practice of performing any of the various forms of worship in order to be seen and praised by people. This sin destroys all the benefits that lie in righteous deeds and brings on the one who commits it a serious punishment. It is particularly dangerous, because it is natural for man to desire and enjoy the praise of his fellow men. Doing religious acts to impress people or in order to be praised by them is, therefore, an evil which deserves man’s utmost caution. This danger is really significant to the believers, whose goal is to make all of the acts of their lives religious acts dedicated to God. In fact, the likelihood that knowledgeable true believers would commit *ash-shirk al-akbar* is small, since its pitfalls are so obvious.. However, for the true believer like everyone else, the chance of committing *riyaa’*’s is great because it is so hidden. It only involves the simple act of changing one’s intention. The motivating forces behind it are also very strong, since it comes from man’s inner nature. Ibn ‘Abbaas alluded to this reality when he said, “*Shirk is more hidden than a black ant creeping on a black stone in the middle of a moonless night.*”³³

Thus, great care has to be taken to ensure that one’s intentions begin pure and remain pure whenever righteous deeds are being done. In order to ensure this, the

³⁰ Soorah al-An‘aam, (6):40.

³¹ Reported by Ahmad, at-Tabaraanee and al-Bayhaqee in *az-Zuhd*, See *Tayseer al-‘Azeed al-Hameed*, p.118.

³² Collected by Ibn Khuzaymah.

³³ Reported by Ibn Abee Haatim and quoted in *Tayseer al-Azeed al-Hameed*, p.587.

saying of Allaah's name is enjoined in Islaam before all acts of importance. A series of *du'aas* (informal prayers) have also been prescribed by the Prophet (ﷺ) before and after all natural habits like eating, drinking, sleeping, sex, and even going to the toilet, in order to turn these everyday habits into acts of worship and develop in Muslims a keen awareness of Allaah. It is this awareness, called *taqwaa*, which ultimately insures that intentions remain pure.

The Prophet (ﷺ) also provided protection against the inevitable acts of *shirk* by teaching certain specific prayers which may be said anytime. Abu Moosaa said, "One day Allaah's Messenger delivered a sermon, saying, 'O people, fear *shirk* for it is more hidden than the creeping of an ant.' Those whom Allaah wished asked, 'And how do we avoid it when it is more hidden than the creeping of an ant, O Messenger of Allaah?' He replied, 'Say:

الهُمَّ إِنَّا نَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ نُشْرِكَ شَيْئًا نَعْلَمُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا لَا نَعْلَمُهُ

Allaahumma innaa na'oodhu bika an nushrika bika shay'an na'lamuh, wa nastaghfiruka limaa laa na'lamuh. (O Allaah, we seek refuge in your from knowingly committing *shirk* with you, and we ask your forgiveness for what we do not know about).³⁴

In the following chapters a more detailed look will be taken at the most prominent areas in which *shirk* in its three aspects most commonly occurs.

³⁴ Collected by Ahmad and at-Tabaraanee.

1.3 SAINT AND GRAVE WORSHIP

Among the community of believers, some are superior to others; and this superiority is a direct result of their own strivings. It is a superiority linked to *Eemaan*, the strength and depth of faith. A living faith drives the one who possesses it to shield himself from whatever displeases Allaah. This shield in Arabic is called. “*Taqwaa*.” It has been variously translated as “fear of God”, “piety”, as well as “God-consciousness”; and it carries all these meanings and more. Allaah clearly expressed the superiority of *Taqwaa* as follows:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ

“Verily the most noble among you is the one with the most *Taqwaa*.”¹

Allaah is here saying that the only factor which makes a believing man or woman truly superior to another is the level of *Taqwaa*. It is this piety or fear of God which elevates man from the level of “thinking animal” to that of governor (*Khaleefah*) of the planets. The importance of the fear of Allaah in a Muslim’s life cannot be overstressed. Allaah mentioned *Taqwaa* and its derivatives 26 times in the Qur’aan, everywhere emphasizing that *Taqwaa* is the driving force behind living faith. Without it, faith is only a meaningless jumble of memorized words and phrases, and ‘righteous’ deeds only shells of pretence and hypocrisy. Consequently, piety is preferred over all other consideration in all of life’s transactions. The Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) said: “A woman is married for four (reasons): her wealth, her nobility, her beauty, and her piety. Choose the pious one and be successful.”² No matter how beautiful, rich or well bred a woman might be, if she is not pious, she is inferior to a pious, ugly, poor woman from a dishonorable family. The converse is also true, as the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “If a man whose practise of the religion satisfies you, asks you for your daughter in marriage, you should marry them; otherwise there will be corruption in the land.”³

¹ Soorah al-Hujuraat, (49):13.

² Reported by Abu Hurayrah and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, (Arabic-English), vol.7, pp.18-9, no.27) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.2, p.749, no.3457).

³ Reported by Abu Hurayrah and collected by at-Tirmithee.

The Prophet (ﷺ) once reprimanded Abu Dharr for derisively calling Bilal, ‘son of a black woman’, then he went on to say, “*Look! Surely you are not better than a brown man nor a black man except by fearing Allaah more than them.*”⁴ This understanding was hammered home time and time again by Allaah’s Messenger (ﷺ). Even in the Farewell Pilgrimage, done shortly before he died, he lectured the people on the insignificance of racial differences and the all importance of *Taqwaa*.

The most pious individuals are only known to Allaah, because the seat of *Taqwaa* is the heart. Man can only judge people by each other’s outward deeds which may or may not be misleading. Allaah made that abundantly clear in the following verse:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يُعْجِبُكَ قَوْلُهُ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيُشْهَدُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ مَا فِي قَلْبِهِ وَهُوَ أَلَدُّ
الْخِصَامِ

“There is among people in this life, he whose speech will dazzle you. And he will call on Allaah as a witness to what is in his heart; yet, he will be among the most vicious of enemies.”⁵

Therefore, it is not permissible for humans to designate certain people as being particularly saintly and pious to a degree beyond the reach of ordinary humans. The Prophet Muhammad (r) specified among his companions (*Sahaabah*) some whom he gave glad tidings of paradise in this life.⁶ However, such pronouncements were based on revelation and not his own ability to judge the hearts. For example, when the (r) said concerning those who make a pledge of allegiance known as *Bay‘ah ar-Ridwaan*, “*No one who made the pledge beneath the tree will enter the hellfire,*”⁷ he was confirming the Qur’anic verse revealed to that effect:

لَقَدْ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ يُبَايِعُونَكَ تَحْتَ الشَّجَرَةِ

“Allaah is pleased with the believers when they pledged allegiance to you beneath the tree.”⁸

⁴ Reported by ‘Abdullaah ibn ‘Amr and collected by Ahmed.

⁵ Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):204.

⁶ Among them are ten well known, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmaan, ‘Alee, Talhah, az-Zubayr, Sa’d ibn Abee Waqqaas, Sa‘eed in Zayd, ‘Abdur-Rahmaan ibn ‘Awf, Abu ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Jarraah (see *al-Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah*, pp.485-7).

⁷ Reported by Jaabir and collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.3, p.1034, no.4576).

⁸ Soorah al-Fat-h, (48):18.

Similarly, he judged some whom everyone thought were destined to paradise to be among those destined for the hellfire. All such judgements were based on revelation. Ibn ‘Abbaas said that he was told by ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab that *on the day of (the battle) of Khaybar, some of the Prophet’s companions came and said, “So and so is a martyr and so and so is a martyr,” but when they came to a man about whom they said, “So and so is a martyr,” Allaah’s messenger declared, “By no means! I have seen him in hell in a cloak which he took (from the spoils) dishonestly.” Allaah’s messenger then said, “Go, Ibn al-Khattaab, and announce among the people three times that only the believers will enter paradise.”*⁹

In Christian tradition down through the ages, some individuals were highly praised for their supposed spiritual achievements. Miracles were attributed to them and the rank of “saint” was bestowed on them. In pre-Christian Hindu and Buddhist tradition, teachers who were supposed to have climbed the ladder of spiritual excellence and who had performed supernatural feats were also given titles like *Guru, Avatar*, etc., indicating spiritual superiority. These designations have led the masses to either seek intercession through them or to worship them as gods. Consequently, these religious traditions have lists of saints to whom the masses fervently pray. Islaam, on the other hand, opposes even the excessive praise of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) who said, *“Do not praise me excessively as the Christians did to ‘Eesaa ibn Maryam, verily I am only a slave, so call me instead the slave of Allaah and His messenger.”*¹⁰

Walee : The “Saint”

The term saint has been used to translate the Arabic word *Walee* (pl. *Awliyaa*) which Allaah used to designate those who are close to Him. But, a more appropriate translation is “close friend” because *Walee* literally means an “ally.” Allaah even uses it to refer to Himself in the verse:

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

“Allaah is the *Walee* of those who believe and takes them from the darkness into light.”¹¹

He also uses it to refer to Satan as in the verse:

⁹ Collected by Muslim. See *Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.) vol.1, p.65, no.209.

¹⁰ Reported by ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab and collected by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim (See *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.4, p.435, no.654).

¹¹ Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):257, 3:68, 42:9 and 45:19.

وَمَنْ يَتَّخِذِ الشَّيْطَانَ وَلِيًّا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ خَسِرَ خُسْرًا مُبِينًا

“Whoever takes Satan as a *Walee* instead of Allaah, has clearly lost all.”¹²

This term also means “close relative” as in the following verse:

فَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا لَوْلِيَّهِ سُلْطَانًا فَلَا يُسْرِفُ فِي الْقَتْلِ

“We have given power to the *Walee* of whoever is wrongly killed, but do not be excessive in the execution (of the murderer).”¹³

It is also used in Qur’aan to indicate closeness between men, for example,

لَا يَتَّخِذُ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الْكَافِرِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

“The believers should not take the disbelievers as *Awliyaa* instead of other believers.”¹⁴

But the usage which concerns us most is “*Awliyaa-ullaah*” close friends of Allaah. In the Qur’aan Allaah has designated among mankind certain types of individuals whom He considers especially close to Himself. Allaah’s description of His *Walees* can be found in Soorah al-Anfaal where Allaah states:

إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَهُ إِلَّا الْمُتَّقُونَ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“Verily His (Allaah’s) *Awliyaa* are only those with *Taqwaa*, but most people do not realize that.”¹⁵

And Soorah Younus:

أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ * الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَكَانُوا يَتَّقُونَ

“Behold! Certainly no fear nor grief shall overcome that *Awliyaa* of Allaah, those who believe and have *Taqwaa*.”¹⁶

Allaah explains for us that the criterion for “*Walaayah*” (divine friendship) is *Eemaan* (faith) and *Taqwaa* (piety) and these qualities are shared by all true believers.¹⁷ Among the ignorant masses, the main criterion for *Walaayah*

¹² Soorah an-Nisaa, (4):119, 7:27, 30, and 4:75.

¹³ Soorah al-Israa, (17):33.

¹⁴ Soorah Aal ‘Imraan, (3):28, 4:139, 144 and 5:51.

¹⁵ Soorah al-Anfaal, (8):34.

¹⁶ Soorah Yonus, (10):62-3.

¹⁷ *Al-Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah*, p.358.

(“Sainthood”) is the performance of miracles which are commonly called *Karaamaat* to distinguish them from the miracles *Mu’jizaat* of the prophets. To most who hold this belief, the faith and practise of the “miracle” worker are of no consequence. Hence, some who have been designated “saints” held heretical beliefs and practises, while others were known to have abandoned the religious rituals, and, yet others were even involved in licentious and vulgar behaviour. However, nowhere has Allaah made the working of miracles a stipulation for being His *Walee*. Therefore, as earlier states, all believers who have *Eemaan* and *Taqwaa* are *Walees* of Allaah and He is their *Walee*, as Allaah Himself said,

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

“Allaah is the *Walee* of those who believe.”¹⁸

Consequently, Muslims are not allowed to designate certain believers as belong *Awliyaa* of Allaah and not others. In spite of this clear Islamic position, a hierarchy of so-called Muslims saints has become a prominent feature in *Sufi* circles and among the masses who blindly follow them. In ascending order of merit they are: the *Akhyaar* (chosen) who number 300; the *Abdaal* (substitutes) numbering 40; the 7 *Abraar* (pious); the 4 *Awtaad* (pegs); the 3 *Nuqabaa* (watchmen), the *Qutb* (pole) who is considered the greatest saint of his time, and at the top of the list is the *Ghawth* (Succor), the greatest of Saints, who is believed, in some circles, to be capable of taking on his shoulders a portion of the sins of the believers. According to the belief of “mystics”, the saints of the top three classes are present invisibly in Makkah at the hours of prayer. When the *Ghawth* dies, the *Qutb* replaces him and there is a moving up all through the series, the purest soul of each class rising to the next degree.¹⁹ This body of mythology has been borrowed from Christianity, just as *Dhikr* beads were adopted from the Christian rosary, and *Mawlid* from the Christian celebration of Christmas.

Fanaa: The Union of Man With God

A close look at various lists of the most prominent so-called saints, reveals names like that of al-Hallaaj who was publicly executed as an apostate for daring to openly claim divinity in his infamous pronouncement “*Anal-Haqq*” ‘I am the Reality’ when Allaah already said:

¹⁸ Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):257.

¹⁹ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, p.629. See also ‘Alee ibn ‘Uthmaan al-Hujweeree, *Kashfal-Mahjoob*, trans. by Nicholson, (London: Luzac, rep. 1976), p.214.

ذَلِكَ بَأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّهُ يُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى

“That is so, because Allaah is the Reality and it is He who gives life to the dead.”²⁰

What led this deranged individual to make such a pronouncement was his belief in a principle very similar to the ultimate state of being in Buddhism known as “*Nirvana*.”²¹ In this state, according to a branch of Buddhist thought, the ego disappears and the human soul and consciousness are extinguished.²²

This concept also forms the core of a philosophy known as “mysticism.” Mysticism²³ is defined as an experience of union with God and the belief that man’s main goal lies in the seeking that union. The origins of mysticism can be found in the writings of ancient Greek philosophers like *Plato’s Symposium* in which mention is made of various ladders of ascent, composed of step and hard steps, whereby a union of the soul with God is finally attained.²⁴ A parallel concept can also be found in Hinduism’s identification of *Atman* (human soul) with *Brahman* (the impersonal Absolute), the realization of which is the ultimate goal or release from existence and rebirth.²⁵ Greek mystic thought blossomed in the Gnostic Christian movements which, like that of Valentinus (c. 140 CE), reached their peak in the second century CE. These trends were combined in the third century with Platonism by the Egypto-Roman philosopher, Plotinus (205-270 CE), to form a religious philosophy known as *neoplatonism*. Christian anchorites or hermits of the 3rd century CE, who began the monastic tradition in Christendom by withdrawing into the Egyptian desert, adopted the mystic goal of union with God as it was propounded in neoplatonic thought at that time, within a framework of meditative and ascetic practises of self denial. Although it was “St.” Pachomius (290-346 CE) who established the first set of rules for Christian monasticism and founded nine monasteries in the Egyptian desert; “St.” Benedict of Nursia (480-547 CE), in developing the Benedictine Rule for the monastery at

²⁰ Soorah al-Hajj, (22):6 and 62, 24:25 and 31:30.

²¹ Sanskrit term meaning “blown out” referring to the extinction of all worldly desires, or salvation. Though the term originated in Vedantic (*Bhagavad Gita* and the Vedas) it is most often associated with Buddhism. In *Hinayana* Buddhism the term is equated with extinction while in *Mahayana* Buddhism it is a state of bliss (W.L. Resse, *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), p.393).

²² Ibid., p.72.

²³ From the Greek “*Mystes*” meaning “one initiated into the mysteries.” The term is derived from the Greek mystery religious whose initiates bore the name “*mystes*” (*Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, p.374).

²⁴ *Colliers Encyclopedia*, vol.17, p.114.

²⁵ *Dictionary of Religions*, p.68.

Monte Cassino in Italy, came to be regarded as the real founder of Western monastic order.²⁶ The mystic tradition kept alive in monastic Christianity began to find expression among Muslims from about 8th century CE, a century after the borders of the Islamic state had expanded to include Egypt and Syria and its major centers of monasticism.²⁷ A group of Muslims who were not satisfied with what the *Sharee'ah* (Islamic Law) had to offer, developed a parallel system which they named the *Tareeqah* (the way). Just as the ultimate goal of the Hindu was unity with the world soul and of the Christian mystic union with God; the ultimate goal of this movement became *Fanaa*, the dissolution of the ego, and *Wusool*, the meeting and unification of the human soul with Allaah in this life. A series of preliminary stages and state which had to be attained were defined. They were called *Maqaamaat* (stations) and *Haalaat* (states). A system of spiritual exercises was also designed for the initiate in order to bring about this "meeting." These exercises of *Dhikr*²⁸ often involved head and body movements and sometimes even dance, as in the case of whirling dervishes. All of these practises were attributed to the Prophet (ﷺ) through chains of narration in order to validate them, but there does not exist any authentic support for them in any of the classical books of *Hadeeth*. A multiplicity of systems evolved, and orders, similar to those among Christian monks, appeared named after their founders, like the *Qaadiri*, *Chishti*, *Nakhshabandi*, and *Teejaani* orders. Along with that, volumes of legends and fairy tales were spun around the founders and the outstanding personalities of these orders. And, just as Christian and Hind monks chose special isolated structures (i.e. monasteries) in which to house their communities, the *Sufi* orders developed similar housing schemes called *Zaawiyahs* (lit. corners).

In time , a body of heretic creeds developed out of the mystic "union-with-God" belief. For example, most orders claimed that Allaah could be seen when the state of *Wusool* (arrival) was achieved. Yet when 'Aa'eshah asked the Prophet (ﷺ) if he

²⁶ *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion*, pp.365-6 and 374.

²⁷ "The authors of treatises on Muslims mysticism have often compared the "annihilation" of *Sufism* with Buddhist *Nirvana*; but according to others this comparison is entirely inadequate as the Buddhist idea of annihilation is independent of the idea of God and includes the idea of transmigration of souls, to which *Nirvana* puts an end. In Muslim mysticism on the other hand, there is no question of the passing of soul upon death into another body and the notion of a personal and all-present God is throughout predominant. The origin of the Muslim conception of *Fanaa* has rather to be sought in Christianity from which it seems to be borrowed. This conception simply means the annihilation of the individual human will before the will of God, an idea which forms the center of all Christian mysticism." (*Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, p.98).

²⁸ *Dhikr*, which normally means the remembrance of God, in mystic circles, is used to refer to the continuous repetition of God's names and attributes.

saw Allaah during *Mi'raaj* (ascension) he replied that he had not.²⁹ Prophet Moosaa (r) was also shown that neither he nor any man could withstand seeing Allaah in this life by Allaah revealing some of His being to a mountain which crumbled to dust during the revelation.³⁰ Some *Sufi* adepts claimed that when the state of *Wusool* was attained, the mundane obligations of *Sharee'ah* like five times daily *Salaah*, were no longer obligatory. Most of them prescribed that prayers to Allaah could be sent through the Prophet (ﷺ) or through the co-called saints; many also began the practice of making *Tawaaf*,³¹ animal sacrifices and other acts of worship around the shrines and tombs of the saints. *Tawaaf* can be observed today around the grave of Zaynab and Sayyid al-Badawi in Egypt, around the tomb of Muhammad Ahmad (The *Mahdi*) in Sudan, and around the Darghas of countless saints and holy men in India and Pakistan.

The *Sharee'ah* came to be looked at as the outer path designed for the ignorant masses, while the *Tareeqah* was the inner path of an elite enlightened few. Opinionated *Tafseer* (Qur'anic commentary) appeared in which the meanings of the Qur'anic verses were bent and twisted to support the heretical ideas of the mystic movement. Greek philosophical thought was also blended with fabricated *Hadeeths* to produce a body of inauthentic literature which challenged the early Islamic classics and eventually displaced them among the masses. Muslim was introduced in most circles and drugs like marijuana could be found in others as a means of heightening the pseudo-spiritual experience which they all sought. Such was the legacy of the latter generation of *Sufis* which had been built on the false premise that union of the human soul with Allaah was attainable.. The early generation of pious individuals, like 'Abdul-Qaadir al-Jeelani, and others to whom some orders were attributed, clearly understood the importance of distinguishing between the Creator and the created. The two could never become one, as One was Divine and Eternal, while the other was human and finite.

The Union of God With Man

Nothing escapes Allaah's knowledge, therefore, the wise are those who act accordingly. They feel His presence at all times. They carefully perform all their obligatory (*Fard*) duties, then they piously try to make up for any of the inevitable deficiencies by doing a host of voluntary acts. These voluntary acts help to protect the obligatory duties. For example, during times of weakness or spiritual lows, one may become lax in fulfilling one's religious duties. However, those who had

²⁹ Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.1, pp.111-12, nos.3337, 339 and p.113, no.341.

³⁰ Soorah al-'Araaf, (7):143.

³¹ Walking around an object of religious devotion.

voluntary practises would likely neglect some of their voluntary practises, while keeping their obligatory duties intact. If they did not have a protective shield of voluntary acts and they fell into a period of spiritual laziness, some of their obligatory duties are likely to be discarded or neglected. The more someone strengthens his obligatory practices by performing voluntary acts, the more his life conforms to the *Sharee'ah*, the will of Almighty Allaah. Allaah conveyed this principle through the Prophet (ﷺ) in a *Hadeeth* saying: “*The most beloved thing with which My slave may come close to me is that which I have made obligatory (Fard) on him. My servant will continue to come closer to me by voluntary acts (of worship) until I love him. If I love him, I will be his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hand by which he grasps, and his foot by which he walks. If he asks Me anything I would give it and if he seeks refuge in Me I would protect him.*”³²

This *Walee* of Allaah would only hear, see, grasp and walk to what is *Halaal* (lawful), while conspicuously avoiding all the *Haraam* (prohibited) as well as that which leads towards it. This is the only true goal worthy of dedicating one’s life. its attainment is the perfection of man’s dual role as servant of God and governor of the world. But, it cannot be reached except by the route prescribed in the *Hadeeths*. First the compulsory duties have to be completely established, then the prescribed voluntary acts of worship have to be performed consistently and according to the *Sunnah*. Allaah emphasized this fact by telling His Prophet to inform the believers:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ

“Say, if you love Allaah, follow Me (Muhammad) and Allaah will love you.”³³

Therefore Allaah’s love can only be attained by strictly following the directives (*Sunnah*) of His Apostle (r) and by carefully avoiding all innovations in religious matters. This formula is contained in the following *Hadeeth* in which the Prophet (ﷺ) was reported by Abu Najeeh to have said, “*Keep to my Sunnah and that of the rightly guided caliphs. Bite on it with your molars. And beware of innovations, for verily they are all heresy (Bid‘ah) and heresy is misguidance which leads to the hell fire.*”³⁴

³² Reported by Abu Hurayrah and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, (Arabic-English), vol.8, p.336-7, no.509).

³³ Soorah Aal ‘Imraan, (3):31.

³⁴ Collected by Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*,(English Trans.) vol.3, p.1294, no.4590 and at-Tirmithi. (Saheeh Sunan Abu Dawud, vol.3, p.871, no.3851).

One who strictly follows this principle will only listen to what Allaah wishes for him to listen to. For Allaah said describing the righteous:

وَإِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ الْجَاهِلُونَ قَالُوا سَلَامًا

“And when the ignorant (mockingly) address them, they merely say: ‘Peace.’”³⁵

Elsewhere in the Qur’aan He also said,

وَقَدْ نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الْكِتَابِ أَنْ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ آيَاتَ اللَّهِ يُكْفَرُ بِهَا وَيُسْتَهْزَأُ بِهَا فَلَا تَقْعُدُوا مَعَهُمْ حَتَّى يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِ إِنَّكُمْ إِذَا مِثْلَهُمْ

“He has already revealed to you in the Book, that when you hear the signs of Allaah denied and ridiculed, you should not sit with them unless they change the subject. If you did you would be like them.”³⁶

By him listening only to what Allaah wishes for him to hear, Allaah has metaphorically become his hearing. In a similar way, Allaah becomes his sight, hands and feet.

This is the correct interpretation of the previously mentioned *Hadeeth* in which Allaah states that He will become man’s hearing, sight, hands and feet. Unfortunately, this *Hadeeth* has been misinterpreted by mystics as support for the concept of union with Allaah - May Allaah forbid.

Roohullaah: The “Spirit” of Allaah

Support for the mystic belief in the re-unification of the human soul with Allaah has also been falsely deduced from some of the verses of the Qur’aan itself. The following verses in which Allaah said:

ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ

“Then He (Allaah) fashioned him (Aadam) and blew in him from His spirit.”³⁷

and

³⁵ Soorah al-Furqaan, (25):63.

³⁶ Soorah an-Nisaa, (4):140.

³⁷ Soorah as-Sajdah, (32):9 and 38:72.

فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتَهُ وَنَفَخْتَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي

“When I fashioned him and blew into him of My Spirit.”³⁸

have been used as evidence for the belief that every human being contains within his body a part of God. The portion of Allaah’s “spirit” which Allaah breathed into Aadam has supposedly been inherited by all of his descendents. Reference has also been made to Prophet ‘Eesaa about whose mother Allaah said,

وَالَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَجَعَلْنَاهَا وَابْنَهَا آيَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ

“She was chaste, so We blew into her from Our Spirit...”³⁹

Thus, it is believed among mystics that this divine eternal spirit within man yearns to reunite with its origin from whence it came. However, this is not the case. Possessive pronouns (my, your, his, her, our) in Arabic, as in English, have to general meanings depending on the context in which they are used. They may describe an attribute or a possession which is or is not a part of its owner. For example, in Allaah’s command to Prophet Moosaa (Moses)

وَاضْمُمْ يَدَكَ إِلَى جَنَاحِكَ تَخْرُجَ بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ

“Put your hand inside your shirt and it will come out shining unharmed...”⁴⁰

both the “hand” and “shirt” belonged to Prophet Moosaa but his hand was an attribute which was a part of him, while his shirt was a possession which was not a part of him. The same is the case relative to God with regards to His attributes and His creation.⁴¹ For example, in the case of divine mercy wherein He says:

وَاللَّهُ يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ

“Allaah give His mercy specifically to whomsoever He wishes...”⁴²

Allaah’s mercy is one of his attributes and not a part of His creation. On the other hand, Allaah sometimes refers to created things as “His” to emphasize the fact that He created them. Yet others are referred to as His to indicate the special position of honor with which He views them. For example, with respect to the

³⁸ Soorah al-Hijr, (15):29 and Soorah Saad, (38):72.

³⁹ Soorah al-Anbiyaa, (21):91 and Soorah at-Tahreem, (66):12.

⁴⁰ Soorah Taaha, (20):22.

⁴¹ *Tayseer al-‘Azeed al-Hameed*, pp.84-5.

⁴² Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):105.

She-Camel sent as a test to Prophet Saalih’s people, the Thamood, Allaah quoted Prophet Saalih as saying,

هَذِهِ نَاقَةٌ لِلَّهِ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ فَذَرُّوْهَا تَأْكُلُ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ

“This is Allaah’s camel sent to you as a sign. So allow it to graze in Allaah’s earth.”⁴³

The camel was miraculously sent as a sign to the Thamood who did not have any right to deny it from grazing, because the whole earth belongs to Allaah. Similarly is the case of the Ka’bah about which Allaah made a covenant with Prophets Ibraaheem (Abraham) and Ismaa’eel (Ishmael):

أَنْ طَهَّرَا بَيْتِي لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْعَاكِفِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ

“That they may purify My house for those who circle it, cling to it, bow down prostrate (near it).”⁴⁴

and paradise in the case of the righteous who on the Day of Judgement will be told by Allaah **“Enter My Paradise.”⁴⁵**

As for the spirit (*Rooh*), it is one of Allaah’s creations. Allaah states in the Qur’aan

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

“They ask you concerning the spirit, tell them the Spirit is from my Lord’s command; and you have not been given except a very small amount of knowledge.”⁴⁶

Elsewhere in the Qur’aan He said:

إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

“If Allaah has decided a thing, He only has to command: Be, and it is.”⁴⁷

And He also said:

خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

⁴³ Soorah al-A’raaf, (7):73.

⁴⁴ Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):125.

⁴⁵ Soorah al-Fajr, (89):30.

⁴⁶ Soorah al-Israa, (17):85.

⁴⁷ Soorah Aal ‘Imraan, (3):47.

“He (Allaah) created him (Aadam) from clay then said: Be, and he was.”⁴⁸

The command is “be” for all of creation. Therefore, the spirit is created by Allaah’s command. Islaam does not consider God to be an incorporeal Spirit, as do some religions like Christianity. He has neither corporeal body nor is He a formless spirit. He has a form befitting His majesty, the like of which no man has ever seen or conceived, and which will only be seen (to the degree of man’s finite limitations) by the people of paradise.⁴⁹ Consequently, when Allaah refers to the blowing of a spirit from Himself into prophets Aadam and ‘Eesaa, special honor is given to their created spirits due to the prominence of Prophet Aadam’s position in relation to the rest of mankind and to clarify the confusion concerning Maryam’s virgin birth of Prophet ‘Eesaa. Even Allaah’s attribution of the act of blowing to Himself is, in fact, a clarification of His will and supreme power, for it is the angels who actually insert and extract the souls into man. This fact is evident from the following *Hadeeth* of Ibn Mas‘oud who reported that Allaah’s Messenger said, “*Verily you creation is combined in you mother’s womb for forty days in the form of an oily fluid, then as a leach-like clot for a similar period and as a clump of flesh for another similar period. Then an angel is sent to him to blow the spirit into him...*”⁵⁰

Thus, Allaah has the spirit blown into every human by one of His angels. By saying that ‘He blew’, Allaah in fact reminds us that He is the primary cause of all that takes place in creation, as He said:

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

“Allaah created you and whatever you do.”⁵¹

Just prior to the battle of Badr the Prophet (ﷺ) threw a handful of dust at the enemy ranks assembled hundreds of yards away, but Allaah caused some of the dust particles to miraculously reach all of the eyes of the enemy. Allaah referred to the Prophet’s action as follows:

وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَمَى

“It was not you that threw when you threw but it was Allaah who threw.”⁵²

⁴⁸Soorah Aal ‘Imraan, (3):59.

⁴⁹ See the **Chapter on Seeing Allaah**, p.136 of this work for further detail on this point.

⁵⁰ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.4, pp.290-1, no.430) and Muslim. (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.) vol.4, p.1391, no.6390).

⁵¹ Soorah as-Saaffaat, (37):96.

Thus, by attributing the Spirit to Himself. Allaah simply gave it a special place of honour among the spirits which He has created. No that He, Allaah, has a spirit and blew off a piece of it into both Prophet Aadam and Prophet ‘Eesaa. To further emphasize that point Allaah also refers to the Angel sent to inform Maryam as “His spirit”:

فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا

“So we sent to her Our Spirit who took the appearance of a well formed man.”⁵³

The Qur’aan is a totality. Its verses explain themselves and the sayings and practices of the Prophet (ﷺ) further clarify its meanings. When verses are taken out of context, the meanings, of the Qur’aan can easily be distorted. For example, verse four of Soorah al-Maa’oon reads:

فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ

“Woe be on those who make prayer (Salaah).”

This verse by itself is in total contradiction to the rest of Qur’aan and Islaam. *Salaah* has been made obligatory throughout the Qur’aan, For example, Allaah said:

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي

“Verily I am Allaah, there is no god besides me, so worship me and establish prayer (Salaah) in order to remember Me.”⁵⁴

Yet this verse curses those who make *Salaah!* However, the verses which follow it clarify the intended meanings as:

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ * الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ * وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ

“Those who are negligent in their *Salaah*, who do it to be seen. Yet they refuse even the simplest of kindness.”⁵⁵

Thus, Allaah’s curse is on the *Salaah* of the hypocrites who pretend belief and not on all who make *Salaah*.

⁵² Soorah al-Anfaal, (8):17.

⁵³ Soorah Maryam, (19):17.

⁵⁴ Soorah Taahaa, (20):14.

⁵⁵ Soorah al-Maa’oon, (107):5-7.

A more meaningful translation of the verse “*Then He fashioned him (Adam) and blew into him from His spirit,*” would be “**Then He fashioned him and caused one of His (noble) spirits to enter him.**” Consequently, there is no basis in the divine scriptures for the mystic belief in the uncreated soul of man, yearning to re-unite with its origin, God. In Islaam, there is no distinction between the Arabic terms *Rooh* (spirit - pl. *Arwaah*) and *Nafs* (soul-pl. *Anfus*) with respect to man except that when it is connected to the body it is usually referred to as a *Nafs*.⁵⁶ In the Qur’aan God states:

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا

“It is Allaah who takes the souls (*Anfus*) at death and those which do not die (He takes) during their sleep...”⁵⁷

The Prophet (ﷺ) was reported by Umm Salamah to have said, “*Verily, when the spirit (Rooh) is taken the eyes follow it.*”⁵⁸

The successful souls will be made to enter paradise as Allaah said to the righteous souls

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ * ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً * فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي *
وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

“O soul (*Nafs*) at peace, come back to your Lord pleased with yourself and pleasing to Him. Enter among My devotees. Enter My paradise.”⁵⁹

Thus, in the end, the righteous human soul will not become extinguished in God nor unite with His supreme being, but will remain a finite spirit reunited with a finite body enjoying the pleasures of paradise for as long as Allaah wishes.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRAVE WORSHIP

⁵⁶ *al-‘Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah*, p.394.

⁵⁷ Soorah az-Zumar, (39):42.

⁵⁸ Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.2, p.437, no.2005).

⁵⁹ Soorah al-Fajr, (89):27-30.

Throughout much of human history, honoring the dead through elaborate burial rites, ornate tombs and decorated graves, along with festivals of commemoration and adoration has led to great confusion and misguidance in religion. As a result, much of mankind has become involved in some form of grave worship. In fact, the religion of most Chinese, who represent between a quarter and a third of mankind, is ancestor worship. Most of their religious rites are connected with graves and the worship of representations of their ancestors.⁶⁰ The graves of holy or saintly men among Hindus, Buddhists and Christians, have become shrines where rites of worship like prayer, sacrifice and pilgrimage are performed on a large scale. With the passage of time, Muslim rulers and the masses strayed away from the fundamental principles of the Islamic creed and began to imitate the pagan practices of the non-Islamic nations around them. Huge edifices were built over the grave of companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) like ‘Alee, major jurists like Imaam Abu Haneefah and Imaam ash-Shaafi‘ee, and those designated as Sufi “saints” like Junayd and ‘Abdul-Qaadir Al-Jeelaanee. In more recent times this practice of building shrines included even the graves of leaders of social movements like Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, and Muhammad Ahmed, the so-called Mahdi of the Sudan. Today many ignorant Muslims travel vast distances in order to perform religious rites of *tawaaf* around these tombs. Some even make prayer inside and outside of them, and other ‘piously’ bring sacrificial animals to these cursed sites in order to perform the rites of *dhabh* (ritual sacrifice) there. Most of those who perform rites of worship at graves hold the false belief that the righteous among these dead people are so close to Allaah that all acts of worship done in their vicinity will more likely be accepted by Allaah than if they were done elsewhere. That is, since these dead individuals were blessed, all that is near them must also be blessed. Their tombs and even the land on which they are built must be permeated with the overflow of their surplus blessing. Because of this belief, grave-worshippers often wipe the walls of graves, then wipe it on themselves in order to collect extra blessings. Often they collect the earth in the vicinity of the graves, in the vain belief that the earth has special healing powers due to the effect of the blessings manifest in

⁶⁰ The veneration of ancestors (*Pai Tsu*) is one of the most ancient, persistent, and influential themes in Chinese religion and traditional Chinese society. According to their beliefs, the *Hun* (spiritual soul) and the *P’o* (gross soul) of the dead are dependent for their survival and happiness upon the offerings of spirit money, incense, food and drink made by their descendants. In return, the *Hun*, as a spirit (*Shen*), can achieve considerable benefits for the family by means of its supernatural contacts. In the case of ordinary beings this relationship is only considered to last for three to five generations. The souls are then succeeded by more recent ones. (*Dictionary of Religions*, p.38).

those buried there. Many among certain branches of the *Shi'ites* collect clay from Karbala, where Imaam Hussain was martyred, and bake them to make small tablets on which they prostrate during their *salaah* (prayer).

Prayers to the Dead

Those who practice grave worship direct prayers to the dead in two ways:

1. Some use the dead as intercessors. They pray to them in the way that Catholics use their priests in the confession of their sins. Catholics confess their sins to their priests and the priests ask God's forgiveness for them. Thus, the priests act as middle-men between the people and God.

The pre-Islamic Arabs viewed their idols in a similar way. Allaah quoted the pagan Arabs as saying,

مَا نَعْبُدُهُمْ إِلَّا لِيُقَرِّبُونَا إِلَى اللَّهِ زُلْفَىٰ

“We only worship them so that they may bring us closer to Allaah.”⁶¹

Some grave worshippers among Muslims pray to the dead asking them to convey their requests to Allaah for the fulfillment of their needs. This practice is based on their belief that righteous dead people are not only closer to Allaah than they are, but also that they are capable of hearing any man's request and fulfilling it, even after their death ! Thus, the dead become idol intermediaries capable of doing favors for the living.

2. Others pray directly to the dead, begging them forgiveness for their sins. In so doing, they give dead humans Allaah's attribute of being *at-Tawwaab*, the one to whom repentance is due, as well as that of being *al-Ghafoor*, the only one capable of forgiving sins. There is a strong similarity between their practice and that of the Catholics among Christians who call on special saints for the fulfillment of their daily needs. For example, if something is lost, Saint Anthony of Thebes is prayed to in order to help find it.⁶² St. Jude Thaddaeus is the patron saint of the impossible and is prayed to for intercession in incurable illnesses, unlikely marriages, and the like.⁶³ If someone is setting out on a journey, Saint Christopher, the patron saint of travelers, used to be prayed to for protection up until 1969 when he was officially struck off the list of saints by papal decree, after

⁶¹ Soorah az-Zumar, (39):3.

⁶² *The World Book Encyclopedia*, (Chicago: World Book, Inc., 1987), vol.1, p.509.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, vol.11, p.146.

it was confirmed that he was fictitious.⁶⁴ Included in this category are Christians in general with regard to Prophet Jesus whom they consider to be God incarnate. Most Christians pray to Jesus instead of God. There are also many ignorant Muslims throughout the world who direct their prayers to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) in this fashion.

Both of methods of grave worship are totally rejected by the teachings of Islaam, which hold that one who dies enters the dimension called the *Barzakh*, where his deeds come to an end. He is unable to do anything for the living, though the results of his deeds may affect the living and continue to earn reward or punishment for himself. Abu Hurayrah reported Allaah’s Messenger as saying, “*When a man dies, his (good) deeds come to an end, except in three ways: charity of continuing benefit, knowledge beneficial to people, and a righteous child who prays for him.*”⁶⁵ The Prophet (ﷺ) also took great pains to explain that he could not benefit anyone in this life, regardless of their closeness to him. Allaah commanded him in the Qur’aan to say to his followers:

قُلْ لَا أَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُ أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبِ لَأَسْتَكْتَرْتُ
مِنَ الْخَيْرِ وَمَا مَسَّنِيَ السُّوءُ إِنْ أَنَا إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ

“I have no power to bring good or avert harm, even regarding myself, except as Allaah wills. If I had knowledge of the unseen, I would surely have accumulated only good and no evil would have befallen me. But I am only a warner and a bringer of glad tidings for those who believe.”⁶⁶

One of his companions, Abu Hurayrah, reported that when the verse

وَأَنْذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ

“Warn your nearest kin”⁶⁷

was revealed to the Prophet, he said, “*O people of Quraysh, secure deliverance from Allaah (by doing good deeds). I cannot avail you at all against Allaah, O sons of ‘Abdul-Muttalib, I cannot avail you at all against Allaah, O (my uncle) ‘Abbaas ibn ‘Abdul-Muttalib, O (my aunt) Safeeyah, I cannot avail you at all*

⁶⁴ Ibid, vol.3, p.417.

⁶⁵ Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.3, p.867, no.4005.

⁶⁶ Soorah al-‘Araaf, (7):188.

⁶⁷ Soorah ash-Shu‘araa, (26):214.

against Allaah, O Faatimah, daughter of Muhammad, ask me whatever you like, but I have nothing which can avail you against Allaah!”⁶⁸

On another occasion, one of the Prophet’s companions concluded his statement to the Prophet (ﷺ) with the phrase, “It is what Allaah wills, and what you will.” The Prophet (ﷺ) immediately corrected him, saying, “Are you making me an equal to Allaah? Say: ‘It is what Allaah alone wills.’”⁶⁹

In spite of this clear indication that the Prophet (ﷺ), has no power to change what Allaah has destined many Muslims not only pray to him for help, but also pray to a hierarchy of saints. This heretical practice is based on the claim or mystics (Sufis) that the cosmic order is preserved by a fixed number of saints called *Rijaal al-Ghayb* (the men of the unseen world). When a holy man among them dies, his place is immediately filled by a substitute. At the peak of the hierarchy is the *Qutb* (people or mystic axis of the world), or the *Ghawth* (succour). ‘Abdul-Qaadir al-Jeelaanee (d. 1166 C.E.) is popularly referred to as *al-Ghawth al-A’dham (Ghaus-e-Azam)* “the greatest source of help,” and in times of calamity many turn to him for help, crying out, *Yaa ‘Abdal-Qaadir, aghithnee!* (O ‘Abdul Qaadir, save me!) Such unmistakable pronouncements of *shirk* are common even though practicing Muslims repeat in each of their daily prayers the phrase, *Eeyaaaka na ‘budu wa eeyaaaka nasta ‘een (You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help).*

Both using the dead as intercessors and praying to them directly contain the grave sin of *shirk*, which Islaam vigilantly opposes, yet both methods have managed to creep into the religious practices of the masses of Muslims today in one form or another. In so doing they inadvertently confirm the veracity of Allaah’s ominous statement in the Qur’aan,

وَمَا يُؤْمِنُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِاللَّهِ إِلَّا وَهُمْ مُشْرِكُونَ

“Most of them (claim) belief in Allaah, while committing *shirk*.”⁷⁰

They also confirm the Prophet’s warning, reported by Abu Sa’eed al-Khudree: “You will follow the practices of your predecessors, inch by inch and yard by yard; so much so that if they were to enter a lizard’s hole, you would also follow

⁶⁸ Collected by Muslim and al-Bukhaaree See *Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.1, p.136, no.402, and *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.4, pp.478-9, nos. 727-8.

⁶⁹ Collected by Ahmad.

⁷⁰ Soorah Yosuf, (12):106.

them.” When he was asked if he meant the Jews the Christians, he replied “If not them, who else?”⁷¹

This prophecy not only refers to the present varieties of grave worship among Muslims, but also forebodes the imitation of christian idolatory, as in the catholic veneration of icons. Thawbaan reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “*The Last Hour will not come until some groups of my nation worship idols,*”⁷² and Abu Hurayrah reported that he said, “*The Last Hour will not come until women from the Daws tribe wiggle their buttocks (as they circumambulate) around the temple of the idol*”⁷³ *al-Khalasah.*”

In light of the above warnings it is, essential that Muslims have a clear understanding of religion, its origin and its historical development once this is achieved practices such as those we have discussed may be comprehended in their proper context, and the Islamic ruling on them will become obvious. In the following pages then, we shall analyze the development of religion with a view to understanding the origins of grave and idol-worship.

Restrictions on Visiting Graves

The fact that grave-worship was among the last things which the Prophet (ﷺ) warned against before leaving the world indicates that this practice would become a serious test for his *ummah*. In the formative years of Islaam, the Prophet (ﷺ) had forbidden his followers from even visiting graves, and it was not until *tawheed* (belief in God’s unity) was firmly established among them that the ban was lifted. The Prophet (ﷺ) was reported to have said, “*I used to forbid you from visiting graves, but now you should visit them, for surely they are reminders of the next life.*”⁷⁴

However, in spite of this allowance, the Prophet (ﷺ) placed certain restrictions on the visiting of graves in order to avoid its deterioration into grave worship in later generations:

⁷¹ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.9, pp.314-5, no.422) and Muslim, (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.4, p.1403, no.6448).

⁷² Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud* (English Trans.) vol.3, pp.1180-1, no.4239), Ibn Maajah and at-Tirmithi.

⁷³ Ibn Atheer, *An-Nihaayah fee Ghareeb al-Hadeeth wa al-Athar*, (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Islaameeyah, 1963), vol.1, p.64.

⁷⁴ Narrated by Buraidah ibn al-Husaib and collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.2, pp.463-4 no.2131), Abu Daawood *Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.) vol.2, p.919, no.3229), an-Nasaa’ee. Ahmad and al-Bayhaqee.

1. As a means of setting up a barrier against grave worship, prayer was totally forbidden in graveyards regardless of the intention. Abu Sa‘eed al-Khudree reported from the Prophet (ﷺ) that he said: “*All the earth is a masjid (place of worship) except graveyards and toilets.*”⁷⁵ Ibn ‘Umar also reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “*Pray in your houses; do not make them graveyards.*”⁷⁶ Voluntary prayer is recommended in the home as an example for the family. If no prayer takes place there, it then resembles a graveyard in which no prayer is allowed. Although praying to Allaah in a graveyard is not in itself *shirk*, the ignorant, under Satan’s influence, may assume that prayers in graveyards are *to* the dead and not *for* them. Consequently, this avenue to idolatry was decisively blocked. On one occasion the second Caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab, noticed another of the Prophet’s companions, Anas ibn Maalik, praying near a grave and called out to him, “The grave! The grave!”⁷⁷
2. A second barrier was placed by the Prophet’s (r) prohibition of purposely praying in the direction of graves because such an act may be later understood by the ignorant as prayer directed to the dead themselves. Abu Marthad al-Ghanawee reported that the Prophet said, “*Do not pray towards graves not sit on them.*”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Collected by at-Tirmithe, Abu Daawood, (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.), vol.1, p.125, no.492), and Ibn Maajah.

⁷⁶ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, (Arabic-English), vol.2, p.156, no.280), and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol.1, p.376, no.1704).

⁷⁷ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.1, p.251, no.48). These *Hadeeths* also confirm that the Prophet’s prohibition of prayer in graveyards was not due to the area being considered ritually impure (*Najis*). The graves of the prophets are pure, because, according to the Prophet (ﷺ), Allaah has not allowed the earth to eat their bodies. Hence, the Prophet’s curse on the Jews and Christians for taking the graves of their prophets as places of worship was due to the *Shirk* involved and not the impurity of the area. (*Tayseer al-‘Azeez al-Hameed*, p.328).

⁷⁸ Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.2, p.460, no.2122), Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.), vol.2, p.917, no.3223), an-Naasaa’ee and Ibn Maajah. This includes even *Du‘aa* (informal prayer) in their direction, because the Prophet (ﷺ) had said that ***Du‘aa* is worship** (Collected by al-Bukhaaree in *al-Adab al-Mufrad*), Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.), vol.1, p.387, no.1474), at-Tirmithe and Ibn Maajah. *Du‘aa* should be made in the same direction as *Salaah* (Formal prayer, towards the *Qiblah* (Makkah)).

Note:

It should also be noted that in Islam the funeral service is **not** held in the graveyard, but in a prayer area set aside for large congregational prayers or in a masjid. Furthermore, because the body is placed at the front of the congregation, directly in front of the *Imaam* (prayer leader), the funeral prayer (*Salaatul-Janaazah*) does not have any bowing (*Rukoo‘*) or prostration (*Sujood*), so as not to give anyone the impression that the prayer is **to** the dead and not merely **for** the dead as the wordings of the prayer clearly indicate.

3. The recitation of Qur'aan in graveyards is not allowed, as neither the Prophet (ﷺ) nor his companions were known to do so. When the Prophet's wife, 'Aa'eshah, asked him what to say when visiting graveyards, he told her to give *salaams* (greetings of peace) and a supplication for those buried but did not tell her to recite al-Faatihah or any other chapter from the Qur'aan.⁷⁹ Abu Hurayrah further reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) had said, “Do not make your houses graveyards, for verily Satan flees from the house in which Soorah al-Baqarah is read.”⁸⁰ This narration and others like it imply that the Qur'aan is not to be read in graveyards. Qur'anic recitation is encouraged in one's house, and making it like a graveyard, in which no recitation should take place, is forbidden.⁸¹
4. The Prophet (ﷺ) forbade the white-washing of graves, the building of structures over them,⁸² writing on them,⁸³ or raising them above ground level.⁸⁴ **He also taught that any** such structures should be torn down and the graves made level with the ground. 'Alee ibn Abee Taalib reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) ordered him to demolish all idols he came across, and to level all graves more than a **palm's** width high to the height of the surrounding earth.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ Naasir ad-Deen al-Albaanee, *Ahkaam al-Janaa'iz*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaamee, 1st ed., 1969), p.191. The text of the Du'aa is as follows:

السلام على اهل الديار من المؤمنين والمسلمين ويرحم الله
المستقدمين منا والمستأخرين وإنا ان شاء الله بكم لا حقون

“*As-Salaamu ‘alaa Ahlid-Diyaari minal-Mu’mineen wal-Muslimeen Yarhamullaahu al-Mustaqdimeena minnaa wal-Musta’khireen wa Innaa in Shaa Allaahu bikum Laahiqoon*. Peace be upon the Believers and Muslims among the inhabitants of these dwellings. May Allaah have mercy on those who have gone ahead of us, and those following us. And we shall-Allaah willing- be joining you.” (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.2, pp.461-2, no.2127).

⁸⁰ Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.1, p.377, no.1707). at-Tirmithee and Ahmad.

⁸¹ As for the recitation of Soorah Yaseen, there is no narration concerning graveyards and the narration about its recitation over the dying is inauthentic (*Da’eef*). See *Ahkaam al-Janaa'iz* p.11 and p.192 fn.2.

⁸² Reported by Jaabir and collected by Muslim, (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.2, p.459, no.2116) and Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.), vol.2, pp.216-7, nos.3219-20).

⁸³ Reported by Jaabir and collected by Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud* (English Trans.), vol.2, p.216, no.3219) and an-Nasaa’ee.

⁸⁴ Reported by Jaabir and collected by Muslim, (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.2, pp.459-60, no.2116) and Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud* (English Trans.), vol.2, p.216 no.3219) and an-Nasaa’ee.

⁸⁵ Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.2, p.459, no.2115), Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.), vol.2, pp.914-15, no.3212), an-Nasaa’ee and at-Tirmithee. The text of the *Hadeeth* is reported by Abu al-Hayyaaj al-Asadee wherein he said that ‘Alee ibn

5. The building of masjids over graves was expressly forbidden by the Prophet (ﷺ). The Prophet's wife 'Aa'eshah, reported that when death was descending upon Allaah's Messenger, he drew his striped cloak over his face saying, "May Allaah's curse be on the Jews and Christians for taking the graves of their prophets as places of worship."⁸⁶
6. In order to prevent grave worship, the Prophet (ﷺ) also forbade annual or seasonal gatherings even around his own grave. Abu Hurayrah reported that he said, "Do not make my grave an 'eed (place of celebration), nor make your houses graveyards, and ask (Allaah's) blessings for me wherever you may be, for they will reach me."⁸⁷
7. Setting out on journeys to visit graves was also forbidden by the Prophet (ﷺ). This practice forms the basis of idolatrous pilgrimages in other religions. Abu Hurayrah and Abu Sa'eed al-Khudree both reported that Allaah's Messenger said, "Do not travel except to three masjids, Masjid Haraam (the Ka'bah in Makkah), the masjid of the Messenger, and all Aqsa Masjid."⁸⁸ While returning from a trip Abu Bashrah al-Ghifaaree met Abu Hurayrah and the latter asked him where he was coming from. Abu Bashra replied that he was

Abee Taalib said to him, "Shaal I send you as the messenger of Allaah sent me? To deface every statue or picture in houses and level all elevated graves."

Note

These *Hadeeths* have been forgotten in many Muslim lands where graveyards have become filled with a variety of structures built over graves in imitation of other nations. In some lands like Egypt, graveyards resemble towns with well defined streets. Tombs to house the dead resemble houses, so much so that in some places poor families have broken into them and set up permanent residence in them. Based on this *Hadeeth* and others like it, not only should such tombs be demolished, but also mausoleums like the Taj Mahal in India, the one erected over the grave of the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in Karachi, Pakistan, the tomb of the claimed Mahdi in Sudan that of Sayyid al-Badawee in Egypt, etc. Such a step would also cancel the role of the *Sadanah* (custodians) of the shrines who live off the generous donations of visitors who believe that generosity to the custodians can facilitate prayers to saints and guarantee results.

⁸⁶ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.1, p.255, no.427), Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.1, p.269 no.1082), Abu Daawood, (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.), vol.2, p.917, no.3221), and ad-Daarimee.

⁸⁷ Collected by Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.), vol.2, p.542-3, no.2037) and Ahmad. If annual gatherings around the Prophet's (r) grave are forbidden, then the huge gatherings and celebrations held on different occasions, like birthdays, at the shrines built over the graves of so-called saints, are completely outside the teachings of Islaam. Not only should the shrines be demolished, as indicated by the Prophet's command narrated by the fourth Righteous Caliph, 'Alee, but these religious festivals should also be stopped.

⁸⁸ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, (Arabic-English), vol.2, p.157, no.281), Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.2, p.699, no.3218), Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.), vol.2, p.540, no.2028), at-Tirmithee, an-Nasaa'ee and Ibn Maajah.

coming back from at-Toor where he had made prayer. Abu Hurayrah said, “If only I had caught you before you left, for I heard Allaah’s messenger say, ‘Do not travel to other than three masjids..’”⁸⁹

“Taking Graves as Places of Worship”:

Ibn Mas‘oud reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “The most evil of mankind are those who will be alive when the Last Day arrives and those who take graves as places of worship.”⁹⁰ Jundub ibn ‘Abdillaah reported that five days before the Prophet’s death he heard him say, “Those before you took the graves of their prophets as places of worship. Do not take graves as places of worship for verily I forbid you to do so.”⁹¹ After understanding clearly from the previous *Hadeeths* that taking graves as places of worship is forbidden by the Prophet (ﷺ), it is necessary to define exactly what is meant by the phrase “Taking graves as places of worship.” There are three possible meanings which can be deduced from the phrase in Arabic:

1. *Making Prayer or Sujood (prostration) on or Towards a Grave.* Praying on the grave is forbidden explicitly in Ibn ‘Abbaas’ *Hadeeth* in which the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Do not pray towards graves nor on them”⁹² as well as the *Hadeeth* narrated by Abu Marthad mentioned earlier.
2. *Building a Masjid over a Grave or Putting a Grave in a Masjid.* Building masjids over graves is forbidden by Umm Salamah’s *hadeeth* in which the Prophet (ﷺ) explained that those who build places of worship over graves are the most evil of creation in Allaah’s sight. Placing a grave in a *masjid* was also forbidden according to ‘Aa’eshah interpretation of the Prophet’s final statement, “May Allaah curse a people who take their Prophets’ (r) graves as masjids.”⁹³ When the suggestion was made to bury the Prophet (ﷺ) in his *masjid*, she opposed it based on the Prophet’s (r) last words.
3. *Praying in a masjid containing a grave,* Praying in a *masjid* built over a grave is forbidden, because it is a natural consequence of the prohibition placed on building *masjids* over graves. The prohibition of a path necessarily prohibits

⁸⁹ Collected by Ahmad and at-Tayaalasee and rated *Saheeh* (authentic) by al-Albaanee. See *Ahkaam al-Jaanaa’iz*, p.226.

⁹⁰ Collected by Ahmad.

⁹¹ Collected by Muslim, (*Sahih Muslim*, (English Trans.), vol.1, p.269, no.1083).

⁹² Collected by at-Tabaraanee.

⁹³ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.1, p.255, no.427 and vol.2, p.232, no.414), Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.1, p.269, no.1082), Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud* (English Trans.), vol.2, p.917, no.3221), and Ahmad.

what is at the end of the path. For example, the Prophet (ﷺ) forbade wind and stringed musical instruments (*ma'aazif*). Abu Maalik al-Ash'aree reported that he heard the Prophet (ﷺ) say, "There will be among my followers those who make allowable (*halaal*) fornication and adultery, the wearing of silk (for men), taking intoxicants, and musical instruments (*ma'aazif*)."⁹⁴ Both the playing of these instruments and listening to music are automatically prohibited as they are the purposes for which musical instruments are made. Similarly, neither the prohibition on building *masjids* over graves nor the order to build them elsewhere is aimed at the act of construction, for building is in itself permissible. It is, in fact, aimed at the performance of *salaah* in them, which is the purpose for which they are built. Thus, the prohibition of building *masjids* on graves automatically implies the prohibition on *salaah* in such *masjids*.

Masjids with Graves

Such *masjids* are of two types with regard to their origin-

- a. *masjid* built over a grave, and
- b. *masjid* in which a grave has been put, some time after its construction.

Naturally, there is no difference between the two as far as *salaah* is concerned. In both cases, *salaah* in them is despised if no regard is paid to the grave, and *haraam* if *salaah* to the grave is intended. However, the method of correcting such *masjids* varies according to their origin:

1. A *masjid* built over a grave should be demolished and the grave levelled if it has a structure over it. Because such a *masjid* was originally a grave, it should be returned to its original state.
2. A *masjid* in which a grave has been placed should be left intact, but the grave should be removed. In this case the *masjid* was originally a *masjid* and not a grave; thus, it should be returned to its original states.

The Prophet's Grave

The presence of the Prophet's grave in his *masjid* in Madeenah can neither be used to justify the placing of bodies in other *masjids* nor the building of *masjids* over graves. The Prophet (ﷺ) did not order that he be buried in his *masjid*, nor did his companions put his grave into the *masjid*. The companions of the Prophet (ﷺ)

⁹⁴ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, (Arabic-English), vol.7, p.345, no.484 [B]).

wisely avoided burying the Prophet (ﷺ) in the local graveyard for fear that later generations would become overly attached to his grave. ‘Umar, the freed slave of Ghafrah, related that when the *sahaabah* (companions of the Prophet (ﷺ)) gathered to decide on the Prophet’s (r) burial, one said: “Let us bury him in the place where he used to pray.” Abu Bakr replied, “May Allaah protect us from making him an idol to be worshipped.” Others said, “Let us bury him in al-Baqee’ (a graveyard in Madeenah) where his brothers among the Muhaajireen (migrants from Makkah) are buried.” Abu Bakr replied: “Verily burying the Prophet in al-Baqee’ is detestable because some people may try to seek refuge in him which is a right belonging only to Allaah. So, if we take him out (to the graveyard), we will ruin Allaah’s right, even if we carefully guard the Messenger’s grave.” They then asked, “What is your opinion, O Abu Bakr?” He replied, “I heard Allaah’s Messenger say: *‘Allaah has not taken the life of any of his prophets except that were buried where they died.’* Some of them said, “By Allaah, what you have said is pleasing and convincing.” Then they made a line around the Prophet’s bed (in ‘Aa’eshah’s house) and dug the grave where his bed was. ‘Alee, al-‘Abbaas, al-Fadl, and the Prophet’s family took his body and prepared it for burial.⁹⁵

‘Aa’eshah’s house was separated from the *masjid* by a wall and it had a door through which the Prophet (ﷺ) used to enter the *masjid* to lead *salaah*. The companions sealed off this doorway in order to complete the separation of the Prophet’s grave from his *masjid*. Consequently, the only way that his grave could be visited at that time was from outside the *masjid*.

Expansions of the *masjid* took place in the time of the second Caliph ‘Umar and the third Caliph ‘Uthmaan. But both of them cautiously avoided the inclusion of either ‘Aa’eshah’s house or that of any of the other wives of the Prophet (ﷺ). Expansion in the direction of the houses of the wives of the Prophet (ﷺ) would have automatically included the Prophet’s grave in the *masjid*. However, after the death of all the *sahaabah* who were in Medinah,⁹⁶ Caliph al-Waleed ibn ‘Abdil-Malik (reign 705-715 C.E.) was the first to extend the *masjid* in an easterly direction. He included ‘Aa’eshah’s house inside the *masjid*, but demolished the houses of the other wives of the Prophet (ﷺ). The expansion was reported to have been carried out by al-Waleed’s governor ‘Umar ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez.

When ‘Aa’eshah’s house was included inside the *masjid*, a high circular wall was built around it so that it would not be visible at all from inside the *masjid*. Two additional walls were later built at an angle from the two northern corners of the

⁹⁵ Collected by Ibn Zanjooyah and quoted by al-Albaanee in *Tahdheer as-Saajid*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaamee, 2nd. ed., 1972), pp.13-4.

⁹⁶ The last *Sahaabee* to die in Madeenah was Jaabir ibn ‘Abdillaah. He died there in 699 CE during the reign of Caliph ‘Abdul-Malik (reign 685-705 CE).

house in such a way that they met each other forming a triangle. This was done to prevent anyone from facing the grave directly.⁹⁷

Many years later, the familiar dome was added to the roof of the *masjid* and was placed directly above the Prophet's (ﷺ) grave.⁹⁸ The grave was later surrounded by a brass cage with doors and windows, and the walls of the grave itself were draped in green cloth. In spite of the barriers which have been placed around the Prophet's grave, the error still remains to be corrected. Walls should once again be placed to separate it from the *masjid* so that no one could pray in its direction nor visit it inside the *masjid*.

Salaah in the Prophet's Masjid

The prohibition of *salaah* in *masjids* with graves in them is applicable to all *masjids* except that of the Prophet (ﷺ). This is due to the many special virtues attributed to prayer in it, not found in any other *masjid* containing a grave.⁹⁹ The Prophet (ﷺ) himself pointed out this special feature saying, "Do not journey except to three *masjids*: al-Masjid al-Haraam, al-masjid al-Aqsa, and this Masjid of mine."¹⁰⁰ He also said: "A single *salaah* in this *masjid* of mine, is better than 1,000 *salaahs* elsewhere, except al-Masjid al-Haraam."¹⁰¹ He even assigned special significance to a part of his *masjid* saying: "The area between my house and my pulpit is a garden from the gardens of paradise."¹⁰² If *salaah* in the Prophet's *masjid* was considered *makrooh* (disliked), the virtues of his *masjid* would be negated and it would be made equal with all other *masjids*. Just as *salaah* in general has been forbidden at certain times, yet allowed if it has a defined purpose (e.g., *janaazah*) other than optional prayer, *salaah* in the Prophet's *masjid* is likewise desirable due to its exceptional nature.¹⁰³ And, Allaah forbid, if a grave were to be put in either al-Masjid al-Haraam or al-Masjid

⁹⁷ Narrated by al-Qurtubee and quoted in *Tayseer al-'Azeez al-Hameed*, p.324.

⁹⁸ Sultan Kalawoon as-Salaahie built the first dome over the chamber in 1282 CE and it was first painted green by order of Sultan Abdul-Hameed in 1837 (see Ali Hafiz, *Chapters from the History of Madinah*, (Jeddah: Al-Madina Printing and Publication Co., 1st ed., 1987), pp.78-9).

⁹⁹ There is no truth to the story that Prophet Ismaa'eel and his mother or any of the other prophets are buried in the open portion of the Ka'bah Commonly called "Hujr Ismaa'eel."

¹⁰⁰ Reported by Abu Hurayrah and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.2, p.157, no.281), Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.2, p.699, no.3218) and Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud* (English Trans.), vol.2, p.699, no.3218).

¹⁰¹ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.2, p.157, no.282) and Muslim, (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.2, p.697, no.3209).

¹⁰² Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.3, pp.61-2, no.112) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.2, p.696, no.3204).

¹⁰³ *Tahdheer as-Saajid*, pp.196-200.

al-Aqsaa, *salaah* would still be desirable in them due to their special virtues and place of honor in the sight of God.¹⁰⁴

1.4 TRANSCENDENCE

Allaah, Most Great and Glorious, has described Himself in His revealed books and through His prophets in order that man may have a better understanding of just who He is. Since the human mind is limited in its knowledge and scope, it is impossible for it to understand something which has no limits. Therefore, Allaah mercifully took it upon Himself to reveal to man some of His attribute, in order that mankind may not confuse the attributes of created things with those of Allaah. When Allaah's attributes are confused with those of creation, man ends up deifying creation. It is this deification of creation which is the essence and basis of idolatry in all of its forms. In all pagan religions and cults created beings or objects are falsely endowed by man with divine attributes and consequently they become objects of worship instead of Allaah or along with Allaah.

Among Allaah's countless attributes is one which is of paramount importance with regard to the worship of God as opposed to the worship of His creation. It is an attribute which became confused with the appearance among Muslims of the Greek-influenced *Mu'tazilite* school of philosophical thought and remains misunderstood among many Muslims until today.¹ This critical attributes is that of "*al-'Uloo*", which in English means highness or transcendence. When it is used to describe Allaah, this attribute refers to the fact that Allaah is above and beyond His creation. He is neither enclosed by the creation nor is any part of the creation above Him in any way. He is not a part of the created world nor is it a part of Him. In fact, His Being is totally distinct and separate from His creation. He is the Creator and the universe and its contents are all a part of His creation. However, His attributes function without restriction in His creation. He sees, hears and knows all, and He is the prime cause of all the happens within the worlds of creation. Nothing happens without His will. Consequently, it may be said that the Islamic concept of Allaah in relationship to His creation is essentially dualistic, but in relationship to Allaah alone or creation alone it is strictly unitarian. It is dualistic in the sense that Allaah is Allaah, and creation is creation. Two separate entities, the Creator and the created, the Infinite and the finite. Neither is one the other nor are they both one. At the same time the Islamic concept is uncompromisingly unitarian in the sense that Allaah is absolutely one, without parents, offspring or partner. He is unique in His divinity and nothing is similar to Him. He is the sole source of power in the universe and everything

¹ Nassiruddeen al-Albaanee, *Mukhtasar al-'Uloo*, (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaamee, 1st ed., 1981), 233.

depends on Him. Likewise, it is firmly unitarian vis-a-vis creation, because all of the universe and its contents were created by Allaah alone. All created beings and entities are the product of the same Creator, and, as such, are constructed from the same elemental substances, the building blocks of “nature”

Significance:

The attribute of transcendence has special significance to man with regard to his worship of God. Prior to the arrival of Islaam in its final form, man had strayed far away from the implications of this noble attribute. Christians claimed that Allaah had come to the earth and became flesh and blood in the form of man, Prophet ‘Eesaa (Jesus), whom they claim was crucified and died. The Jews before them also claimed that Allaah came down to earth in the form of a man and lost in a wrestling match with Prophet Yaqoob (Jacob).² The Persians regarded their kings as gods endowed with all of Allaah’s attributes, and, consequently, they worshipped them directly. The Hindus believed that *Brahman*, the supreme Being, was in every place and in everything so they worshipped countless idols, human beings and even animals as personifications of *Brahman*.³ In fact, this belief has taken Hindus to an incredible state wherein they actually make pilgrimage to their Holy city of Banaras to worship the god Shiva personified as an erect male penis endearingly called “*lingam*.”⁴

The Hindu idea that *Brahman* is everywhere later became a part of the Christian belief system and eventually found its way among the Muslims many generations after the Prophet (ﷺ). When the philosophical books of India, Persia and Greece were translated during the Golden Age of the ‘Abbaasid Empire, the concept of Allaah being everywhere and in every thing was introduced into philosophical circles and became a foundational principle in the creed of *Sufi* (mystical) orders. Eventually it gained sway with a philosophical school known as the *Mu‘tazilah* (the Rationalists) followers of which occupied key posts in the administration of the ‘Abbaasid Caliph, Ma’moon (rule: 813 to 832 CE). With the

² Genesis 32:24-30.

³ John R. Hinnells, *Dictionary of Religions*, (England: Penguin Books, 1984), pp.67-8.

⁴ *Collier’s Encyclopedia*, vol.12, p.130. See Santha Rama Rau’s article “Banaras: India’s City of Light”, *National Geographic*, February 1986, p.235, “A dual natured deity, Siva destroys but also creates. Lingams, usually shaped from stone, are phallic symbols representing the god’s regenerative powers. Huge Lingams are a common feature of temples. The Lingam typically appears on a circular base, called a Yoni (female organ), that represents Shakti, the god’s female half and a source of divine energy. In the broadest sense, the Lingam symbolizes the entirety of the Hindu universe... In a common Hindu ceremony, a priest bedecks a Lingam with flowers, anoints it with clarified butter, and washes it with milk and water!”

blessing of the Caliph, they vigorously propagated this belief along with the other distortions contained in their school of philosophy. Inquisition courts were set up throughout the empire and many scholars were killed, jailed and tortured for their opposition to the philosophy of the *Mu'tazilites*.

It was not until Imaam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (778-855 CE) stood his ground and defended the beliefs of early Muslim scholars and the *Sahaabah*, (companions of the Prophet), that the tide was eventually turned. During the reign of Caliph al-Mutawakkil (rule 847-861), the *Mu'tazilite* philosophers were removed from sensitive administrative posts in the government and their philosophy was officially condemned. Although most of their ideas died out in time, that of Allaah being everywhere (i.e. immanent) has remained to this day among followers of the *Ash'arite* school.⁵ This school was founded by scholars who left the *Mu'tazilite* philosophy and attempted to to refute the excesses of *Mu'tazilite* thought from a philosophical basis.

Danger of the Immanence Concept

On the basis of the false attribute of divine immanence (i.e. the “God is everywhere” belief) some claimed that God was more in humans than in animals, vegetation, minerals, etc. From that theory it was only a matter of time before some claimed that God was more in them than in the rest of humans, either by *Hulool* (indwelling of Allaah in man) or by *Ittihaad* (complete unification of the human soul with Allaah’s “soul). Among Muslim people of the ninth century, a deranged mystic and so-called saint, al-Hallaaj (858-992 CE), openly declared that he and Allaah were one.⁶ The *Nusayrites*, a breakaway *Shi'ite* sect of the

⁵ This school of scholastic theology takes its name from Abul-Hasan 'Alee al-Ash'aree (873-935 CE) a theologian born in Basrah who until his fortieth year was a zealous pupil of the *Mu'tazilite* theologian al-Jubbaa'ee. After a study of *Hadeeth* elucidated for him the contradiction between *Mu'tazilite* views and the spirit of Islaam, he began to champion the orthodox views. He is considered the found of orthodox scholasticism (*Kalaam*) and his mot famous works are *al-Ibaanah 'an Usool ad-Diyaanah* (translated by W.C. Klein (New Haven, 1940) and *Maqaalaat al-Islaameeyeen*, (Cairo: Maktabh an-Nahdah al-Misreeyah, 2nd ed., 1969). Towards the end to his life al-Ash'aree abandoned scholasticism altogether and relied solely on *Hadeeth*. However, other theologians especially of the *Shaafi'ite* school of law adopted his earlier views and the *Ash'arite* school took on a life of its own. Al-Baaqillaanee (d. 1013 CE) reduced asl-Ash'aree's refutation to a system, established the intellectual basis and arranged the arguments. Among the leading *Ash'arite* scholars following him were Imaam al-Haramayn (al-Juwaynee [d. 1086]), al-Ghazzaalee (d. 1112) and ar-Raazee (d. 1210). (*Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*), pp.46-7 and pp.210-15).

⁶ A.J. Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976) pp.266-71.

tenth century, claimed that the Prophet's son-in-law, 'Alee ibn Abee Taalib, was manifestation of Allaah⁷ and another breakaway *Shi'ite* sect of the eleventh century called the *Druze*, claimed that the Fatimid *Shi'ite* caliph, al-Haakim bi Amrillaah (996-1021 CE) was the last incarnation of God among men.⁸ Ibn 'Arabee (1165-1240 CE), another so-called *Sufi* saint of the twelfth century, exhorted his followers in his poetry to pray to themselves and not to anything outside of themselves because he believed the God was inside man.⁹ This same theory was the essence of Elijah Muhammad's (d. 1975) claim in America that black people were "Allaah" and that his mentor, Fard Muhammad, was the supreme Allaah himself.¹⁰ Reverend Jim Jones, who killed himself and 900 of his followers in Guyana in 1979, is one of the most recent example of man claiming to be God and people accepting it. In fact, Jim Jones learned his philosophy and psychological techniques for manipulating the innocent from another American who called himself Father Divine. Father Divine, whose real name was George Baker, appeared during the early depression years of the 1920's and opened restaurants for the poor. After capturing their stomachs, he projected on them the claim that he was god incarnate. In time he married and named his Canadian wife, Mother Divine. By the mid-thirties his followers numbered in the millions and were to be found all across the U.S.A. and even in Europe.¹¹

Thus, these claims of divinity were not limited to any particular place or religious group. They simply took root wherever the soil was fertile. If minds were already prepared by the belief in God's immanence in His creation to accept the man-god concept, then those who claimed divinity could easily find followers.

It may be concluded that the belief that "Allaah is everywhere" is extremely dangerous primarily because it encourages, defends and rationalizes the greatest sin in Allaah's sight, the worship of His creation. It is also an aspect of *Shirk* in *Tawheed al-Asmaa was-Sifaat* as it claims for God an attribute which does not belong to Him. Neither in the Qur'aan nor on the tongue of the Prophet (ﷺ) can such a description of Allaah be found. In fact, both the Qur'aan and the *Sunnah* confirm the opposite.

⁷ *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islaam*, pp.454-55.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp.94-5.

⁹ Ibn 'Arabee described Allaah as follows, "Glory be to He, who made all things appear while being their essence." (See, Ibn 'Arabee, *al-Futoohaat al-makkeeyah*, vol.2, p.604, quoted in *Haadhihee Heya as-Soofeeyah* by 'Abdur-Rahmaan al-Wakeel, (Makkah: Daar al-Kutub al-'Ilmeeyah, 3rd ed., 1979), p.35.

¹⁰ Elijah Muhammad, *Our Saviour Has Arrived* (Chicago: Muhammad's Temple of Islam, no.2, 1974), pp.25, 56-7 and 39-46.

¹¹ E.U., Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p.32.

Clear Proofs:

Since the greatest sin in God's sight is the worship of others besides Him or along with Him, and everything besides Him is His creation, the principles of Islaam are all either directly or indirectly opposed to the worship of creation. The fundamental tenets of the Faith make a very clear distinction between the Creator and what He has created.

There are a number of proofs based on the essential elements of the Islamic creed which have been used by orthodox Muslim scholars to establish the fact that Allaah is totally separate from, and above His creation. The following are seven such proofs:

1. A Natural Proof:

Man, from the Islamic viewpoint, is born with certain natural tendencies and is not merely a product of his environment. This fact is based on the Qur'anic passage in which Allaah explained that when He created Aadam, He extracted from him all of his descendents and made them bear witness to His unity.¹² This concept is further emphasised by the Prophet's (r) statement that every new born child is born with an inclination to worship Allaah, but its parents make it a Jew, a Magian or a Christian.¹³ Therefore, man's natural reaction to the implications of the "god is everywhere belief" may be used, to some degree, as a measure of its accuracy. If Allaah exists everywhere and is present in everything, it would imply that His essence could be found in filth and filthy places.. When confronted with this implication, most people are naturally unable to accept any statement which points to the fact that Allaah, the Creator of the Universe, is present in man's excrements or in any other items or places not befitting His majesty. Therefore, it may be concluded that since man's natural instincts, placed in him by Allaah, reject the claim that Allaah is everywhere, it is highly unlikely that such a claim would be correct. Those unwilling to give up the "God is everywhere belief", however, might argue that man's repulsion towards this concept is a result of upbringing and conditioning, and not really a result of natural instincts. But, the vast majority of young children automatically reject this concept without any hesitation or contemplation, even though most of them were previously indoctrinated with the idea that Allaah is everywhere.

¹² Soorah al-A'raaf, (7):172.

¹³ Reported by Abu Hurayrah and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.8, pp.369-90, no.597) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.4, p.1399, no.6429).

2. The Prayer Proof:

According to the rules and regulations governing prayer in Islaam, places of worship must be completely free from statues or pictorial representation of God or His creation and the various positions of worship used in formal prayer (bowing, prostrating, etc.) are prohibited from being directed to anyone or anything besides God. If God were present everywhere; in every thing and in every individual, it would be perfectly acceptable for people to direct worship towards each other or even to direct worship towards themselves as the infamous *Sufi* “saint”, Ibn ‘Arabee, suggested in some of his writings. It would also not be possible to logically convince an idol worshipper or one who worships trees or animals that his method of worship is wrong and that he should only worship the unseen God, Allaah, who is alone without partners. The idolater would merely answer that he is not worshipping the object would merely answer that he is not worshipping the object itself but the part of God which is inside of these objects or God who incarnated Himself in human or animal forms. Yet Islaam classifies anyone who does such an act as a *Kaafir* (disbeliever) regardless of the rationale. The fact is that such an individual is prostrating before God’s creation. Islaam came to take man away from the worship of man and other created beings, and lead them to the worship of the Creator alone. Therefore, the commandments in Islaam concerning worship clearly indicate that Allaah is not be found in created things; He is totally separate from them. This position is further strengthened by a **total** ban in Islaam on any pictorial representation of God or any other living being from the animal world.

3. The Mi‘raaj Proof:

Two years prior to his migration to Madeenah, the Prophet (ﷺ) made a miraculous night journey (*Israa*) from Makkah to Jerusalem where he (r) too the *Mi‘raaj*¹⁴ up through the seven skies to the pinnacle of creation. This miraculous journey was bestowed on him in order that he be in the direct presence of Allaah. It was there, above the seventh heaven, that *Salaah* (formal prayer) was made compulsory five times per day, Allaah spoke directly to the Prophet (ﷺ), and Allaah revealed to him the last verses of Soorah al-Baqarah (Second Chapter of

¹⁴ The noun of instrument *Mi‘raaj* (Lit. stairs or ladder) is actually the vehicle which took the (r) up through the heavens. However, the ascension itself is commonly referred to by this name. (See Lane’s, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol.2, pp.1966-7).

the Qur'aan).¹⁵ If Allaah were everywhere there would have been no need for the Prophet (ﷺ) to go anywhere. He could have been in the direct presence to Allaah on the earth in his own house. Therefore, the incident of the miraculous ascension of the Prophet (ﷺ) up through the heavens contains within it a subtle implication that Allaah is above His Creation and not a part of it.

4. Qur'anic Proof:

The number of verses in the Qur'aan which state that Allaah is above His creation are too numerous to count. They are found in almost every chapter of the Qur'aan, either directly or indirectly. Among the indirect references are those which refer to things rising up to God or descending from Him. For example, in Soorah al-Ikhlāas, Allaah calls Himself “*As Samad*”¹⁶ which means: that to which things rise. Such references are sometimes literal, as in the case of the angels about whom Allaah said,

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ

“The angels and the Spirit (Gabriel) ascend up to Him in a day whose length is like fifty thousand years.”¹⁷

and sometimes spiritual, as in the case of prayer and *Dhikr* about which Allaah said,

إِلَيْهِ يَصْعَدُ الْكَلِمُ الطَّيِّبُ

“Every good saying goes up to Him.”¹⁸

Even in the following verse

وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ يَا هَامَانَ ابْنِ لِي صَرْحًا لَعَلِّي أَبْلُغُ الْأَسْبَابَ وَإِنِّي لَأَظُنُّهُ كَاذِبًا

“Pharaoh said, ‘Oh Haamaan, build a lofty place for me that I may attain the ways. The ways of (reaching) the heavens for me to behold the God of Moses, for I certainly believe he is a liar.”¹⁹

An example of descent from God can be found in the following verse:

¹⁵ See *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.9, pp.449-50, no.608 and *Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.1, pp.103-4, no.313 for the Prophet’s (r) account of the incident.

¹⁶ Soorah al-Ikhlāas, 112:2

¹⁷ Soorah al-Ma‘aarij, (70):4.

¹⁸ Soorah Faatir, (35):10.

¹⁹ Soorah Ghaafir, (40):36-7.

قُلْ نَزَّلَهُ رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ مِنْ رَبِّكَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيُثَبِّتَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ

“Say, the Holy Spirit has brought it (the revelation) down from your Lord in truth, in order to strengthen those who believe, and as a guide and glad tidings to Muslims.”²⁰

Direct references can be found in both the divine names of God as well as in His explicit statements. For example, Allaah calls Himself by the names “Al-‘Alee” and “Al-A‘laa” both of which mean the highest, above which there is nothing. For example, “Al-‘Alee Al-‘AdHeem.”²¹ “Rabbikal-A‘laa”²² He also explicitly, referred to Himself as being above His servants saying,

وَهُوَ الْقَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِ

“He is *al-Qaahir* (the irresistible) above His worshippers.”²³

and He also described His worshippers as,

يَخَافُونَ رَبَّهُمْ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ

“Those, who fear their Lord who is above them.”²⁴

Therefore, the Qur’aan itself clearly points out for those who contemplate its meanings, that Allaah is high above His creation and not within it or surrounded by it in any way.²⁵

5. Hadeethic Proof:

There is also ample evidence in the statements of the Prophet (ﷺ) which clearly establish that Allaah is not on the earth or within His Creation. Like the Qur’anic verses, some *Hadeeths* contain indirect references while others are direct. Among the indirect or implied references are those which refer to the angels ascending up to Allaah as in the *Hadeeth* of Abu Hurayrah in which he narrated that Allaah’s messenger said, “(A group of) angels stay with you at night and (another group of) angels by daytime, and both groups gather at the time of ‘Asr (evening) and Fajr (dawn) prayers. Then those angels who have stayed with you overnight,

²⁰ Soorah an-Nahl, (16):102.

²¹ Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):225

²² Soorah al-A‘laa, (87):1.

²³ Soorah Al-An‘aam, (6):18 and 61.

²⁴ Soorah an-Nahl, (16):50.

²⁵ *al-‘Aqeedah at Tahaaweeyah*, pp.285-6.

*ascend (to Heaven) and Allaah asks them (about you) - though He knows all about you...*²⁶

Included among the indirect references are those which refer to Allaah being above his throne which is itself above all creation. An example of this type can be found in Abu Hurayrah's report that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "When Allaah completed creation, He wrote in a Book (which He kept) with Him above His throne, 'Verily My mercy will precede my anger.'²⁷

An example of a direct reference is the narration about the Prophet's wife Zaynab bint Jahsh who used to boast to the other wives of the Prophet (ﷺ) that their families gave them away in marriage to the Prophet (ﷺ) while Allaah from above the seven heavens gave her away in marriage.²⁸

Another may be found in the *Du'aa* (prayer) by which the Prophet (ﷺ) taught the sick to pray for themselves,

((ربنا الله الذي في السماء تقدس اسمك))

"*Rabbanaa Allaah alladhee fis-Samaa'e Taqaddasasmuka.* (Our Lord Allaah who is above the heavens, may Your name be Holy...)"²⁹

The following *Hadeeth* is perhaps the most explicit of the direct references:

Mu'aawiyah ibn al-Hakam said, "I had a servant girl who used to tend to my sheep in the area of Mount Uhud, near a place called al-Jawwaareeyah. One day I came to see them only to find that a wolf had made off with a sheep from her flock. Since I, like the rest of Adam's descendants, am prone to do regrettable acts, I gave her a terrible slap in her face. When I came to Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) with the story, he considered it a grave thing for me to have done. I said, 'Oh Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) couldn't I free her?'³⁰ He replied, 'Bring her to me', so I brought her. He (r) then asked her, 'Where is Allaah?' and she replied, 'Above

²⁶ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.9, pp.386-7, no.525), Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.1, pp.306-7, no.1320) and an-Nasaa'ee.

²⁷ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.9, pp.382-3, no.518) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.4, p.1437, no.6628).

²⁸ Narrated by Anas and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.9, p.382, no.517).

²⁹ Collected by Abu Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud* (English Trans.), vol.3, p.109, no.3883).

³⁰ Al-Bukhaaree, Muslim And Abu Daawood collected a *Hadeeth* transmitted by Abu Hurayrah in which he reported that Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "When you hit (others), avoid the face." (See *Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.4, p.1378, nos.6321-6 and *Sunan Abu Dawud*, (English Trans.), vol.3, p.1256, no.4478). He was reported to have said, "The expiation for slapping a slave or beating him is to set him free" (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.3, pp.882-3, no.4078).

the sky.’ Then He asked her, ‘Who am I?’ and she replied, ‘You are Allaah’s Messenger.’ So he said, ‘Free her, for verily she is a true believer.’”³¹

When testing the faith of others, the logical question to ask would be “Do you believe in Allaah?” The Prophet (ﷺ) did not ask that question, because most people at that time believed in Allaah, as the Qur’aan frequently mentions,

وَلَكِنْ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَسَخَّرَ الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ لِيَقُولَنَّ اللَّهُ

“And if you ask them who created the heavens and the earth and controls the sun and the moon, they will certainly say, ‘Allaah.’”³²

Because the pagan Makkans of that time believed that Allaah was somehow present in their idols and thereby a part of creation, the Prophet (ﷺ) wanted to determine if her belief was confused and paganistic like other Makkans or clearly unitarian and according to the divine teachings. Hence, he asked a question which would determine whether she knew that Allaah was not a part of His creation or whether she believed that God could be worshipped in creation. Her answer that Allaah is above the heavens has to be considered by true Muslims as the only valid answer to the question “Where is Allaah?” because the Prophet (ﷺ) ruled that she was a true believer on the basis of it. If Allaah is everywhere as some Muslims today still contend, the Prophet (ﷺ) would have had to correct her answer, “Above the sky”, since whatever was said in his presence which he did not reject is considered, according to Islamic Law, Prophet (ﷺ) not only accepted her statement, but he also used it as a basis for judge her to be a true believer.

6. The Logical Proof:

Logically speaking, it is obvious that in a case where two things exist, one of those things must either be a part of the other and dependent on it like its attributes, or it must exist by itself, distinct from the other. Thus, when God created the world, He either created it inside Himself or outside of Himself. The first possibility is unacceptable because it would mean that Allaah, the infinite Supreme Being, has within Himself finite attributes of deficiency and weakness. Therefore, He must have created the world outside of Himself as an entity distinct from Himself yet depending on Him. Having created the world outside of Himself, He either created it above Himself or below Himself. Since human experience nowhere confirms prayer downwards, and being below creation

³¹ Collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.1, pp.271-2, no.1094).

³² Soorah al-‘Ankaboot, (29):61.

contradicts God's majesty and supremacy, God must therefore be above His creation and distinct from it.

As to the contradictory descriptive statements that God is neither connected to the world nor separate from it, or that He is neither in the world nor outside of it,³³ such words are not only illogical but they, in fact, deny God's actual existence.³⁴ Such claims relegate God to the surrealistic realm of human thought where opposite can co-exist and the impossible exist (like three gods in one).

7. The Consensus of Early Scholars:

The statements of the early scholars of Islaam confirming God's transcendence are too numerous to mention in this concise work. The 15th century *Hadeeth* scholar, adh-Dhababee, wrote a book entitled *al-'Uloo lil-'Alee al-'AdHeem* in which he gathered the statements of over 200 major scholars of the past confirming Allaah's transcendency.³⁵

A good example of such statements can be found in Mutee' al-Bukhaaree's report that he asked Abu Haneefah his opinion of a person who says he does not know whether his Lord is in the heavens or on earth. Abu Haneefah replied, 'He has disbelieved, because Allaah has said, "**The Most Merciful is above the throne** (Soorah Taahaa 20:5)', and His throne is above His seven heavens." He (al-Balakhee) then said, "What if he said that He is above the throne but he does not know whether the throne is in the heavens or on earth?" He (Abu Haneefah) replied, "He has disbelieved because he has denied that He (Allaah) is above the heavens and whoever denies that He is above the heavens has disbelieved."³⁶ Though many who follow the *Hanafee* school of law today claim that Allaah is everywhere, the early followers did not hold that position. The incident in which Abu Haneefah's main student, Abu Yousuf, told Bishr al-

³³ See *Haashiyah al-Beejooree 'alaa al-Jawharah*, p.58.

³⁴ *al-'Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah*, pp.290-1. See also Ahmad ibn Hanbal's *ar-Radd 'Alaa al-Jahmeeyah*.

³⁵ *Mukhtasar al-'Uloo*, p.5.

³⁶ Narrated by Abu Islaa'eel al-Ansaaree in his book *al-Faarooq* and quoted in *al-'Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah*, p.288.

mareesee³⁷ to repent when he denied that Allaah is above the throne, was recorded in a number of books written during and about that era.³⁸

Summary:

Therefore, it can be safely said that according to Islaam and its key principle of *Tawheed*,

1. Allaah is completely separate from His creation.
2. Creation neither surrounds Him nor is above Him in any way.
3. He, Allaah is above all things.

This is the classical conception of Allaah according to the sources of Islaam. It is very simple and firm, and leaves no room for the type of misconceptions which often lead to the worship of creation.

This vies, however, does not deny that Allaah's attributes operate throughout His creation. Nothing escapes His sight, His knowledge and His power. But just as it is considered a major advance to technology to be able to sit in the comfort of our homes and watch events taking place half-way around the world, Allaah sees, hears and knows all that happens in the universe without having to be inside of it. Ibn 'Abbaas was reported to have said, "In Allaah's hand, the seven heavens, seven earths. their contents as well as what is between them, is like a mustard seed in one of your hands"³⁹ And, just as remote-control T.V. is considered a great technological improvement over manual control, Allaah's power operates unhindered within the smallest elements of creation without Him having to be there. In fact, the concept that Allaah is within His creation is really a form of *Shirk* in *Tawheed al-Asmaa was-Sifaat* where in Allaah is given some of a man's weaknesses. It is man who has to be present in the world for him to see, hear, know and affect what takes place in it.

Allaah's knowledge and power, on the other hand, has no bounds. Man's very thoughts are totally exposed to Allaah, and even the emotional workings of his heart are subject to Allaah's control. This is the light in which the few verses which allude to Allaah's closeness should be understood. For example, Allaah said,

³⁷ Bishr (d. 833 CE) from Baghdad was a *Mu'tazilite* scholar of Jurisprudence and philosophy. (See *al-A'laam*, (Beirut: al-'Ilm lil-Malaayeen, 7th ed., 1984) vol.2, p.55 by Khairuddeen az-Ziriklee).

³⁸ Narrated by 'Abdur-Rahmaan ibn Abee Haatim and others. See *al-'Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah*, p.288.

³⁹ *al-'Aqeedah at-Tahaaweeyah*, p.281.

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ

“Verily, We created man and know what his soul whispers, for We are closer to him than his jugular vein.”⁴⁰

He also said,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَجِيبُوا لِلَّهِ وَلِلرَّسُولِ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ لِمَا يُحْيِيكُمْ وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَحُولُ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَقَلْبِهِ وَأَنَّهُ إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ

“O believers, respond to Allaah and His messenger when they call you that which will give you life. And know well that Allaah comes between a man and his heart. And to Him you will be gathered.”⁴¹

These verse should not be taken to mean that Allaah is inside man at a point closer than his jugular vein or that He is inside man’s heart changing its states. They simply mean that nothing escapes Allaah’s knowledge, even the innermost thoughts of man, and nothing is beyond His power to control and change, even the emotions of the heart. As Allaah said,

أَوَلَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ

“Don’t they realize that Allaah knows what they hide and what they expose.”⁴²

وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا

“(Remembers) when you were enemies and He put love between your hearts and by His blessings you became brothers.”⁴³

and the Prophet (ﷺ) often used to pray saying,

((يا مقلب القلوب ثبت قلبي على دينك))

“*Yaa muqallib al-Quloob (O, Changer of hearts) Thabbit Qalbee ‘alaa Deenik (steady my heart in Your Religion).*”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Soorah Qaaf, (50):16.

⁴¹ Soorah al-Anfaal, (8):24.

⁴² Soorah al-Baqarah, (2):77.

⁴³ Soorah Aal‘Imraan, (3):103.

Similarly, verse like

مَا يَكُونُ مِنْ نَجْوَى ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ رَابِعُهُمْ وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ سَادِسُهُمْ وَلَا أَدْنَى مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْثَرَ إِلَّا هُوَ مَعَهُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كَانُوا

“There is not a secret consultation between three, but He is their fourth, nor between five but He is the sixth, nor between fewer nor more but He is in their midst wheresoever they may be...”⁴⁵

should be understood according to their context. By reading the preceding segment of the same verse,

“Can you not see that Allaah knows all that is in the heavens and on earth?”

and the concluding segment of the verse,

“In the end He will tell them the truth of their conduct, on the Day of Judgement for Allaah has full knowledge of all things.”

It becomes clear that Allaah is here referring to His knowledge and not the fact that His Supreme Being is present among men, for He is above and beyond His creation.⁴⁶

As for the following statement which has been attributed to the Prophet (ﷺ), “The heavens and earth cannot contain Allaah, but the heart of the true believer contains Him,” it is inauthentic. But, even if it were taken at face value, there is no way that a logical person could deduce from it that Allaah is in min. If a believer’s heart literally contains Allaah, and the believer is contained within the heavens and earth, then Allaah is contained by the heavens and earth. Because, if A is inside of B, and B is inside of C, then A must also be inside of C.

Therefore, according to the classical Islamic outlook based on the Qur’aan and the Prophet’s *Sunnah*, Allaah is above the universe and its contents in a way which befits His majesty and He is not in anyway contained within His creation nor is it within Him, but His finite knowledge, mercy and power operate on every particle within it without any hindrance whatsoever.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Collected by at-Tirmithi and authenticated by Muhammad Naasirud-Deen al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmithi* (Riyadh: Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, 1st. ed., 1988), vol.3, p.171, no.2792.

⁴⁵ Soorah al-Mujaadalah, (58):7.

⁴⁶ Ahmad ibn al-Husain al-Bayhaqee, *Kitaab al-Asmaa was-Sifaat*, (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmeeyah, 1st ed., 1984), pp.541-2.

⁴⁷ ‘Umar al-Ashqar, *al-Aqeedah fee Allaah*, (Kuwait: Maktabah al-Falaah, 2nd ed., 1979), p.171.

1.5 THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

THE PURPOSE OF CREATION IS A TOPIC THAT puzzles every human being at some point in his or her lifetime. Everybody at some time or another asks themselves the question “Why do I exist?” or “For what purpose am I here on earth?”

The variety and complexity of the intricate systems which constitute the fabric of both human beings and the world in which they exist indicate that there must have been a Supreme Being who created them. Design indicates a designer.

The Answer

To answer the question “Why did God create man?” it must first be determined from which perspective the question is being asked. From the point of view of God it would mean, “What caused God to create human beings?” while from the human point of view it would mean “For what purpose did God create humans?” Both points of view represent aspects of the intriguing question “Why do I exist?”

This is not a topic for human speculation, because human guesswork cannot possibly produce the whole truth in this matter. How can human beings intellectually deduce the reality of their existence when they can hardly understand how their own brain or its higher entity, the mind, functions? Consequently, the many philosophers who have speculated on this question down through the ages have come up with innumerable answers, all of which are based on assumptions which cannot be proven. Questions on this topic have even led a number of philosophers to claim that we do not really exist and that the whole world is imaginary. For example, the Greek philosopher Plato (428-348 BC) argued that the everyday world of changeable things, which man comes to know by the use of his senses, is not the primary reality, but is a shadow world of appearances.¹ Many others, as was previously mentioned, claimed and continue to claim that there is no purpose for the creation of humans at all. According to them, Human existence is merely a product of chance. There can be no purpose if life evolved from inanimate matter which only became animate by pure luck.

¹ This view was expressed in his book *The Republic* through his well known metaphor of the cave, where the changing physical world is compared to shadows cast on the wall of a cave by graven images (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 25, p. 552).

Humankind's supposed 'cousins,' the monkey and apes are not bothered with questions of existence, so why should human beings be bothered with them?

Although most people put the question of why we are created aside after occasional brief reflection, it is extremely critical for human beings to know the answer. Without knowledge of the correct answer, human beings become indistinguishable from the other animals around them. The animal necessities and desires of eating, drinking and pro-creating become the purpose of human existence by default, and human effort is then focused in this limited sphere. When material satisfaction develops into the most important goal in life, human existence becomes even more degraded than that of the lowest of animals. Human beings will consistently misuse their God-given intelligence when they lack knowledge of their purpose of existence. The degraded human mind uses its abilities to create drugs and bombs and becomes engrossed in fornication, pornography, homosexuality, fortunetelling, suicide, etc. Without knowledge of the purpose of life, human existence loses all meaning and is consequently wasted, and the reward of an eternal life of happiness in the hereafter is completely destroyed. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that human beings correctly answer the question "Why are we here?"

Humans most often turn to other human beings like themselves for the answers. However, the only place that clear and precise answers to these questions can be found is in the books of divine revelation. It was necessary that God reveal the purpose to man through His prophets, because human beings are incapable of arriving at the correct answers by themselves. All of the prophets of God taught their followers the answers to the question "Why did God create man?"

Judeo-Christian Scriptures

A survey of the Bible leaves the honest seeker of truth lost. The Old Testament seems more concerned with laws and the history of early man and the Jewish people than with answering the vital question concerning humanity's creation.²

The Incarnation of God

² In Isaiah the Israelites are created for God's glory, "1 But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ...⁶ 'I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth,⁷ every one who is called by my name, **whom I created for my glory**, whom I formed and made.' "

(Revised Standard Version, Isaiah 43:1, 6-7.)

Perhaps the only common concept to most Christian sects regarding the purpose of mankind's creation is that God became man so that He could die at the hands of men to cleanse them of sin inherited from Adam and his descendants. According to them, this sin had become so great that no human act of atonement or repentance could erase it. God is so good that sinful man cannot stand before Him. Consequently, only God's sacrifice of Himself could save humankind from sin.

Belief in this man-made myth became the only source for salvation, according to the Church. Consequently, the Christian purpose of creation became the recognition of the 'divine sacrifice' and the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Lord God. This may be deduced from the following words attributed to Jesus in the Gospel according to John, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*"³

Everything is God

The Hindu scriptures teach that there are many gods, incarnations of gods, persons of God and that everything is God, *Brahman*. In spite of the belief that the self (*atman*) of all living beings is actually *Brahman*, an oppressive caste system evolved in which the Brahmins, the priestly caste, possess spiritual supremacy by birth. They are the teachers of the *Vedas*⁴ and represent the ideal of ritual purity and social prestige. On the other hand, the Sudra caste are excluded from religious status and their sole duty in life is "to serve meekly"⁵ the other three castes and their thousands of subcastes.

According to Hindu monist philosophers, humankind's purpose is the realization of their divinity and—following a path (*marga*) to emancipation (*moksha*) from the wheel of rebirth—the reabsorption of the human soul (*atman*) into the ultimate reality, *Brahman*. For those following the *bhakti* path,⁶ the purpose is to love God because God created humankind to "enjoy a relationship— as a father enjoys his children" (*Srimad Bhagwatam*). For the ordinary Hindu,

³ John, 3:16 (RSV).

⁴ The *Veda*, meaning "Knowledge," is a collective term for revealed (*sruti*; heard) sacred scriptures of the Hindus. All other works—in which the actual doctrines and practises of Hindus are encoded—are recognized as having been composed by human authors and are thus classed as *smriti* (remembered). (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 20, p. 530.)

⁵ *Manava Dharmasastra* 1.91 (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 20, p. 553.)

⁶ The path of devotion to a personal God in which *murtis* (idols) are worshipped with the hope of going to *krishnaloka* (a spiritual planet) in their next lives.

the main aim of worldly life lies in conforming to social and ritual duties, to the traditional rules of conduct for one's caste — the *karma* path.⁷

In that final scripture, the Qur'aan (Koran), God revealed His purpose for creating mankind and, through His last prophet, He clarified all of the details which man could comprehend.

⁷ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 20, p. 520.

Why Did God Create?

FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF GOD, AN EVEN more fundamental question needs to be asked, “Why did God create?” This question should be asked because humankind is not, in fact, the greatest creation. God says in Chapter *Ghaafir* of the final revelation:

لَخَلْقُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ خَلْقِ النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“Indeed, the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than the creation of mankind, but most of mankind do not realize it.”

Qur’aan, 40:57

The composition of human beings is far less complex than the composition of the universe in which they exist. However, very few people reflect on this reality.

The Creator

Creation is fundamentally the consequence of the divine attribute of being the Creator. A creator who does not create is something of a contradiction in terms. This is not to say that God needs His creation. God is free from all needs. It is creation which needs Him. But, as the greatness of a writer becomes apparent in his writings, the perfection of the divine creative attribute is manifest in creation. Creation in the true sense is unique to God alone.

Some ancient as well as modern philosophers, who could not comprehend how God could create from nothing, claimed that the created world and its contents are all originally a part of God.⁸ That is, according to them, God took a part of Himself and made the universe. This conclusion is based on comparing God to man, who can only ‘create’ by modifying what already exists. However, God denies any such comparisons which would give Him human limitations. In Chapter *ash-Shooraa* of the final revelation, He states:

⁸ This is also Hindu belief regarding the supreme reality, *Brahman*. In the last (10th) book of the *Rigveda*: in the “Hymn of the Cosmic Man” (*Purusasukta*), it is said that the universe was created out of the parts of the body of a single cosmic man (*Purusa*) when his body was burned and dismembered at the primordial sacrifice. The four castes emerge from his body: the priest (*Brahman*) from the mouth, the warrior (*Rajanya*) from the arms, the peasant (*Vaisya*) from the thighs, and the servant (*Sudra*) from the legs. (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 20, p. 531).

... لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ

“There is nothing like Him and He is hearer and seer of all.”Qur’aan, 42:11

Thus, the act of creation is a consequence of the divine attribute of being the Creator. God describes Himself as the Creator in a variety of verses throughout the final revelation to emphasize to humankind that everything belongs to Him alone.

اللَّهُ خَالِقُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ

“Allaah created all things and He is the agent on which all things depend.”Qur’aan, 39:62

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

“And Allaah created you all and whatever you do.”Qur’aan, 37:96

Man needs to realize that nothing takes place in this universe without the permission of God. To seek protection from evil or to seek to acquire good from any source other than God is a major mistake. Due to ignorance, many people attempt to avoid misfortune and to gain good fortune through a variety of charms and amulets, astrology, palmistry, etc. Consequently, in the final revelation, Chapter *al-Falaq*, God informs human beings to seek refuge in God from evil:

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ

“Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn, from the evil of what He has created.”Qur’aan, 113:1-2

Allaah, God Almighty, is not evil; He is good. He created a world in which evil or good can be done by beings to whom He gave this ability. However, no evil or

good can take place in this world without the permission of God. This is why it is futile to turn to others besides God for help and protection.

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ

“No calamity strikes except by Allaah’s permission” Qur’aan, 64:11

The final prophet of God, Muḥammad (ﷺ), further elaborated on this concept, saying, *“Be aware that if the whole of mankind gathered together to do something to help you, they would only be able to do something for you which Allaah had already written for you. Likewise, if the whole of mankind gathered together to harm you, they would only be able to do something to harm you which Allaah had already written to happen to you.”*⁹

The Merciful, The Forgiving

In the creation of humankind, the divine attributes of forgiveness, mercy and kindness are also manifested. Human beings were created good and pure with a natural awareness of good and evil. The Almighty also created in humans desires, and gave them an ability to control those desires according to divine law or to turn them loose and follow them blindly. God created mankind knowing that they would disobey Him. Consequently, He taught human beings, beginning with Adam, how to repent and thereby purify themselves of their sins. Adam and Eve represent a pattern for all mankind to follow. They forgot the commandment of God, and Satan played on their desires. After they had disobeyed God, they turned back to Him in repentance, and He forgave them. In humankind’s disobedience and turning back to God in repentance, the divine attributes of total forgiveness and infinite mercy become manifest. The final Prophet (ﷺ) informed his followers of this reality, saying, *“If you did not commit sins and turn to Allaah, seeking His forgiveness, He would have replaced you with another people who would sin, ask Allaah’s forgiveness and He would forgive them.”*¹⁰ Every one of the 114 Chapters of the final revelation, except one, begins with the prayer, *“In the name of Allaah, the Beneficent the Most Merciful.”* Allaah’s attributes of mercy and forgiveness are stressed to encourage humans not to fall into despair.

⁹ Reported by ‘Abbaas and collected by at-Tirmithi and authenticated in *Saḥeeḥ Sunan at-Tirmithi*, vol. 2, pp. 308-9, no. 2043.

¹⁰ *Saḥih Muslim*, vol. 4, pp. 1435-6, no. 6621, reported by Aboo Ayyoob al-Anṣaaree.

No matter how great the sins of human beings may be, God can forgive them if man turns back to Him in sincere repentance. The Messenger (ﷺ) was quoted as saying, “*When Allaah created the universe, He made an obligation on Himself [recorded] in a document kept by Him: My mercy supersedes my wrath.*”¹¹ He was also reported to have said, “[Allaah created] *mercy with one hundred parts, one of which was sent down upon the jinn, human beings and other living beings. It is out of this one part that they love each other, show kindness to each other and even the animals treat their offspring with affection. Allaah has reserved the remaining ninety-nine parts for His true worshippers on the Day of Resurrection.*”¹²

Had Allaah wished, He could have created mankind like angels, incapable of committing sin. However, that was not His wish, as He had already created angels. Human beings were created capable of making mistakes and when they realize their errors and seek God’s forgiveness, the divine attributes of mercy and forgiveness become manifest.

Supreme Justice

In the judgment of mankind at the end of this world, God’s attributes of supreme justice and fairness also become manifest. Based on His infinite knowledge, God could have created all members of the human race who were to live on earth and immediately placed some of them in paradise and the remainder in hell. Before creating man, Allaah already knew what choices they would make in this life, what provision and opportunities

If God had immediately placed those headed for paradise in paradise, they would not question God’s decision. Those in paradise would happily accept an everlasting life of bliss and be thankful that they were not placed in hell. However, those immediately placed in hell would ask why. They would feel a sense of unfairness due to their ignorance of what they would have done had they lived on earth. Those in hell would relentlessly argue that had they been given a chance to live out their lives on earth, they would have believed and done righteous deeds. Consequently, Allaah allows human beings to live out their lives on earth and make all the choices they would have made, so that everyone who enters hell will know that they chose hell by themselves. They will recognize God’s mercy in their lives and acknowledge their sin in rejecting His signs and guidance. And they will accept His judgment as being just and beyond reproach.

¹¹ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1437, no. 6628, reported by Aboo Hurayrah.

¹² *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 1437, no. 6631, reported by Aboo Hurayrah.

However, they will still beg for another chance to do good in this world, as God says in Chapter *as-Sajdah* of the Qur'aan:

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الْمُجْرِمُونَ نَاكِسُوا رُءُوسِهِمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ رَبَّنَا أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا فَارْجِعْنَا
نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ

“If only you could see [the time] when the sinners will bow their heads before their Lord, [saying], ‘Our Lord! We have now seen and heard, so send us back and we will do righteous deeds. Verily, we now believe with certainty.’” Qur'aan, 32:12

However, if Allaah were to send them back to this world having forgotten what they had seen of hell, they would again choose evil and end up in hell as before. God spoke about this in Chapter *al-An'aam*,

وَلَوْ رُدُّوْا لَعَادُوْا لِمَا نُهُوْا عَنْهُ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُوْنَ

“But if they were returned [to this world], they would certainly go back to what was forbidden to them. Indeed they are liars.”Qur'aan, 6:28

Divine Love

God's love is manifest in beings brought into existence, whether believer or disbeliever, to enjoy life, if only for a brief moment. It is also realized in the creation of paradise for those who choose righteousness over evil. Allaah states in the final revelation that He loves those who do good (5:13), those who are just (5:42), those who are pious (9:4), those who are patient (3:146), those who put their trust in Him (3:159), those who frequently turn to Him in repentance and those who purify themselves (2:222). However, it is He who has defined for human beings through the scriptures and the prophets what is good, just and pious. Consequently, those who follow the prophets are most beloved to God. In Chapter *Aal 'Imraan*, Allaah instructed Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) to say the following to the believers:

إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ

“If you really love Allaah, follow me and Allaah will love you and forgive your sins.”Qur’aan, 3:31

The prophets should be followed not only in the compulsory acts ordained by God, but also in their eagerness to do acts of voluntary worship.

The love of God is also manifest in His mercy and blessings which He grants to those who deserve them as well as those who do not. But, it is particularly manifest in His willingness to forgive the sins of whomsoever turns to Him in sincere repentance. From the creation of Adam and Eve, repentance was granted to them to erase their sins as an example to all human beings who would follow them into this world. No matter how great human sins may become, the door for sincere repentance remains open until the last day of this world. Anas quoted Allaah’s Messenger (ﷺ) as saying, *“Allaah, the Almighty, has said: O son of Adam, as long as you call on Me and ask of Me, I will forgive what you have done, and I do not mind. O son of Adam, even if your sins reached the clouds and you asked My forgiveness, I will forgive you. O son of Adam, if you came to Me with sins nearly as great as the earth and you met Me without giving Me partners, I will give you a similar amount of forgiveness.”*¹³

Divine Grace

As for those in paradise, they will not enter it solely based on their good deeds. It is the grace of God which will ultimately carry them there. The final Prophet of Allaah (ﷺ) said in this regard, *“Try your best to do right, and be happy. For none will enter paradise only because of his deeds.”* His companions said, *“O Messenger of Allaah! Not even you?”* He replied, *“Not even I, unless Allaah envelops me in His mercy and grace.”*¹⁴ *And bear in mind that the deed most loved by Allaah is one done constantly, even though it is small.”*¹⁵ However, God’s grace is not arbitrary. It is based on both correct faith and righteous deeds. In Chapter Aal ‘Imraan, Allaah says:

¹³ Collected by at-Tirmithi and authenticated in *Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmithi*, vol. 3, pp. 175-6, no. 2805.

¹⁴ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1473, no. 6765, reported by Aboo Hurayrah.

¹⁵ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, pp. 1473-4, no. 6770, reported by ‘Aa’ishah.

مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا وَ مَنْ جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَى إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا وَ هُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

“Whoever brings a good deed, will have [the value of] ten like it, and whoever brings an evil deed will only be punished with one like it, and they will not be wronged.”Qur’aan, 6:160

Were God to hold humankind to account strictly, no one’s good deeds would outweigh their evil deeds. However, God has manifested His grace by multiplying the value of good deeds, while keeping evil deeds at their face value. It is by the grace of God that the true believers enter Paradise. This does not mean that deeds have no role. Deeds have a major role, but they are not the deciding factor. God’s grace outweighs them.

Consequently, the creation of human beings, the errors that they make and the good that they do are all circumstances for the manifestation of God’s attributes of mercy and forgive-ness, His attribute of justice and His attribute of grace.

Humankind should not question why God chose to manifest His attributes in this way. It can only be assumed that this was the best way, because Allaah describes Himself as being the Most Wise and the Most Knowledgeable. Humans can only understand what Allaah chooses to reveal to them.

وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ

“They will only encompass of His knowledge what He wishes.”Qur’aan, 2:255

Thus, they should not try to equate themselves with God. If He has told humankind why He decided to do something, it is not for them to question why He decided to decide. Such questions are without end and thus beyond human scope. It is they who will be questioned on the Day of Judgment about their actions and intentions and not He. In Chapter *al-Ambiyaa*, Allaah addresses this point:

لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ

“He cannot be questioned as to what He does, while they will be questioned.” Qur’aan, 21:23

In this regard Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was reported by Ibn ‘Abbaas to have said, *“Reflect on the creation of Allaah but do not reflect on Allaah.”*¹⁶ To reflect on the reality of Allaah is to reflect on the infinite. And, as the mind boggles when it reflects on the limits of the finite universe and the galaxies and stars within it, it will be more confounded when it attempts to understand the uncreated. The Prophet (ﷺ) warned that the satanic forces would seek to introduce doubts in the hearts of the believers by raising unanswerable questions about God. Aboo Hurayrah related that Allaah’s Messenger (ﷺ) said, *“Satan will come to everyone of you and ask: Who created this and that?—until he questions: Who created your Lord? When he comes to that, one should seek refuge in Allaah [say: I affirm my faith in Allaah and His prophets]”*¹⁷ and avoid [such thoughts].”¹⁸

Why Did God Create Mankind?

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HUMANKIND, THE QUESTION “Why did God create man?” implies “For what purpose was man created?” In the final revelation, this question is answered without any ambiguity. Humans are first informed by God that every human being is born with an innate consciousness of God. In Chapter *al-A‘raaf*, Allaah said:

وَ إِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ أَوْ تَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ أَفَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

“[Remember] when your Lord extracted from the loins of Adam’s children their descendants and made them testify [saying]: ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said: ‘Yes, we testify to it.’ [This was] in case you say on the Day of Judgment: ‘We were unaware of this.’ Or you say: ‘It was our ancestors who worshipped others besides God and we are

¹⁶ Collected by Aboo Nu‘aym in *al-Hilyah* and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Silsilah al-Ahaadeeth as-Saheehah*, vol. 4, p. 12, no. 1788. There is also a similar narration from Ibn ‘Umar collected by at-Tabaraanee in *al-Awsat* and al-Bayhaqee in *Shu‘ab al-Eemaan*.

¹⁷ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 77, nos. 242 & 243.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 77, no. 244 and *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 4, p. 320, no. 496.

only their descendants. Will you then destroy us for what those liars did?’ ”Qur’aan, 7:172-3

Consequently, every human being is responsible for belief in God, which is imprinted on each and every soul. It is based on this inborn belief that Allaah defined the purpose of humankind’s creation in Chapter *ath-Thaariyaat* :

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

“I have created the *jinn*¹⁹ and humankind only for My worship.”Qur’aan, 51:56

Thus, the essential purpose for which humankind was created is the worship of God. However, the Almighty is not in need of human worship. He did not create human beings out of a need on His part. If not a single human worshipped God, it would not diminish His glory in any way, and if all of mankind worshipped Him, it would not increase His glory in any way. God is perfect. He alone exists without any needs. All created beings have needs. Consequently, it is humankind that needs to worship God.

The Meaning of Worship

To understand why human beings need to worship God, one must first understand what is meant by the term ‘worship.’ The English term ‘worship’ comes from the Old English *weorthscipe* meaning ‘honor.’ Consequently, worship in the English language is defined as ‘the performance of devotional acts in honor of a deity.’²⁰ According to this meaning, man is instructed to show gratitude to God by glorifying Him. In Chapter *an-Nasr* of the final revelation, Allaah says:

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ

“Glorify the praises of your Lord.” Qur’aan, 110:3

¹⁹ The *jinn* are a class of invisible rational beings created by God from the elements of fire. They were endowed by God with free will, like mankind. Consequently, some of them are righteous believers and others are evil disbelievers. The evil among them are commonly called demons, evil spirits, devils, etc.

²⁰ *The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary*, p. 1148.

In glorifying God, man chooses to be in harmony with the rest of creation which naturally glorifies its Creator. Allaah addresses this phenomenon in many chapters of the Qur'aan. For example, in Chapter *al-Israa*, Allaah states:

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ
وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ

“The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them glorify Him and there is nothing which does not glorify His praise.²¹ However, you do not understand their glorification.” Qur'aan, 17:44

However, in Arabic, the language of the final revelation, worship is called *'ibaadah*, which is closely related to the noun *'abd*, meaning 'a slave.' A slave is one who is expected to do whatever his master wills. Consequently, worship, according to the final revelation, means 'obedient submission to the will of God.' This was the essence of the message of all the prophets sent by God to humankind. For example, this understanding of worship was emphatically expressed by Prophet Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew, 7:21, *“None of those who call me 'Lord' will enter the kingdom of God, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”* It should be noted that 'will' in this quote means 'what God wants human beings to do' and not 'what God permits humans to do,' because nothing happens in creation without the will (permission) of God. The 'Will of God' is contained in the divinely revealed laws which the prophets taught their followers. Consequently, obedience to divine law is the foundation of worship. In this sense, glorification also becomes worship when humans choose to obey God's instructions regarding His glorification.

The Need for Worship

Why do human beings need to worship and glorify God by obeying the divinely revealed laws? Because obedience to divine law is the key to success in this life and the next. The first human beings, Adam and Eve, were created in paradise and later expelled from paradise for disobeying the divine law. The only way for human beings to return to paradise is by obedience to the law. Jesus, the Messiah, was reported in the Gospel according to Matthew to have made

²¹ The thunder is described as glorifying God in 13:13, the day and night in 21:20 and the mountains in 38:18.

obedience to the divine laws the key to paradise: *Now behold, one came and said to him, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So he said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments."*²² Also in Matthew 5:19, Jesus Christ was reported to have insisted on strict obedience to the commandments, saying, *"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."*

Remembrance of God

All of the various acts of worship contained in the divine laws are designed to help humans remember God.

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي

“Verily, I am Allaah, there is no god beside Me, so worship Me and establish regular prayer for My remembrance.”Qur’aan, 20:14

Regarding fasting, Allaah stated in Chapter *al-Baqarah*:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

“O you who believe! Fasting has been prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you that you may become God-conscious.”

Qur’aan, 2:183

The believers are encouraged to remember God as much as possible.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا

²² Matthew 19:16-17 (RSV).

“O believers! Remember Allaah often.”

Qur’aan, 33:41

Remembrance of God is stressed because sin is generally committed when God is forgotten. The final revelation, the Qur’aan, addresses this phenomenon in Chapter *al-Mujaadalah* as follows:

اسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَأَنسَاهُمْ ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ الشَّيْطَانِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ
الشَّيْطَانِ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

“Satan got the better of them and caused them to forget Allaah. Those are the party of Satan. Truly the party of Satan are the real losers”Qur’aan, 58:19

God, through Divine law, has prohibited intoxicants and gambling primarily because they cause human beings to forget God.

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمْ
عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلَاةِ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُونَ

“Satan’s plan is to incite enmity and hatred among you with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allaah and regular prayer. Will you not then abstain?”Qur’aan, 5:91

Consequently, humankind need to remember God for their own salvation and growth.

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ ...

“Those who, having done something shameful or having wronged their own souls, remember Allaah and immediately ask forgiveness for their sins...”Qur’aan, 3:135

The Religion of Islaam

The most complete system of worship available to human beings today is the system found in the religion of Islaam. The very name ‘Islaam’ means ‘submission to the will of God.’ Although it is commonly referred to as ‘the third of the three monotheistic faiths,’ it is not a new religion at all. It is the religion brought by all of the prophets of God for humankind. Islaam was the religion of Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. God addresses this issue in the final revelation with regard to Prophet Abraham, saying:

مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ
الْمُشْرِكِينَ

“Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was an upright Muslim who did not worship others besides God.” Qur’aan, 3:67

Since there is only One God, and humankind are one species, the religion which God has ordained for human beings is one. He did not prescribe one religion for the Jews, another for Indians, yet another for Europeans, etc. Human spiritual and social needs are uniform, and human nature has not changed since the first man and woman were created. Consequently, no other religion is acceptable to God besides Islaam, as He clearly states in Chapter *Aal ‘Imraan* of the final revelation:

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ

“Surely Allaah’s religion is Islaam.” Qur’aan, 3:19

وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

“And whoever desires a religion besides Islaam will not have it accepted, and he will be among the losers in the hereafter.” Qur’aan, 3:85

Every Act Is Worship

In the Islamic system, each and every human act can be transformed into an act of worship. In fact, God commands the believers to dedicate their whole lives to Him. In Chapter *al-An‘aam*, Allaah says:

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

“Say: ‘Surely my prayer, my sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allaah, the Lord of all the worlds.’ ” Qur’aan, 6:162

However, for that dedication to be acceptable to Allaah, each act must fulfill two basic conditions:

FIRST, THE ACT MUST BE DONE SINCERELY FOR the pleasure of God and not for the recognition and praise of human beings. The believer also has to be conscious of God while doing the deed to insure that it is not something forbidden by Allaah or the last Messenger (ﷺ).

THE SECOND CONDITION IS THAT THE ACT BE done in accordance with the *prophetic way*, called in Arabic the *Sunnah*. All of the prophets instructed their followers to follow their way because they were guided by God. What they taught were divinely revealed truths, and only those who followed their way and accepted the truths would inherit eternal life in paradise. It is in this context that Prophet Jesus, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, was reported in the Gospel according to John 14:6, as saying, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*” Similarly, ‘Abdullaah ibn Mas‘ood related that one day Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) drew a line in the dust for them and said, “*This is Allaah’s path.*” He then drew several lines [branching off] to the right and to the left and said, “*These are the paths [of misguidance] on each of which is a devil inviting people to follow it.*” He then recited the verse: “**Verily, this is my path, leading straight, so follow it. And do not follow the [other] paths for they will scatter you about from Allaah’s path. That is His command to you in order that you may be conscious of Allaah.**”^{23,24} Thus, the only acceptable way to worship God is according to the way of the prophets. That being the case, innovation in religious affairs would be considered by God among the worst of all evils. Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) was reported to have said, “*The worst of all affairs is innovation in religion, for every religious innovation is a cursed, misleading innovation leading to the hellfire.*”²⁵ Innovation in the religion

²³ Soorah *al-An‘aam* (6):153.

²⁴ Collected by Aḥmad, an-Nasaa‘ee and ad-Daarimee, and authenticated by Aḥmad Shaakir in *al-Musnad*, vol. 6, pp. 89-90, no. 4142.

²⁵ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 2, p. 410, no. 1885.

is forbidden and unacceptable to God. The Prophet (ﷺ) was also reported by his wife, ‘Aa’ishah, to have said, “*He who innovates something in this matter of ours, that is not of it, will have it rejected.*”²⁶

The Best of Creation

Those who believe in One Unique God, without partners or offspring, and do righteous deeds [according to the above-mentioned principles] become the crown of creation. That is, although humankind is not the greatest creation of Allaah, they have the potential to become the best of His creation. In Chapter *al-Bayyinah*, Allaah states this fact as follows:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ

“Surely, those who believe and do righteous deeds are the best of creation.”Qur’aan, 98:6

The Gravest Sin

To contradict the purpose of one’s creation is then the greatest evil that a human being can commit. ‘Abdullaah reported that he asked Allaah’s Messenger (ﷺ) which sin is the gravest in Allaah’s sight and he replied, “*To give Allaah a partner, even though He created you.*”²⁷ Worshipping others besides God, called *shirk* in Arabic, is the only unforgivable sin. If a human being dies without repenting from his or her sins, Allaah may forgive all their sins except *shirk*. In this regard, God stated the following in Chapter *an-Nisaa*:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ

“Surely Allaah will not forgive the worship of others besides Him, but He forgives sins less than that to whomever He wishes.”Qur’aan, 4:48

وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ ظُلْمًا وَعُلُوًّا

²⁶ *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 3, pp. 535-6, no. 861, and *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 931, no. 4266.

²⁷ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 50-1, no. 156.

“And they denied [the signs] wrongfully and arrogantly, though within themselves they were convinced of them.”Qur’aan, 27:14

To atheists and materialists, life has no purpose beyond the fulfillment of their desires. Consequently, their desires also become the god which they obey and submit to instead of the One True God. In Chapter *al-Furqaan* of the final revelation, Allaah said:

أَرَأَيْتَ مَنِ اتَّخَذَ إِلَهَهُ هَوَاهُ

“Have you seen the one who takes his desires as his god?”Qur’aan, 25:43

Love of God

Shirk also occurs when human beings love, trust or fear the creation more than Allaah. In Chapter *al-Baqarah* of the last revelation, God said:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَندَادًا يُحِبُّونَهُمْ كَحُبِّ اللَّهِ وَالَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ

“There are among men those who worship others besides Allaah as equals to Him. They love them as only Allaah should be loved. But those who believe have a stronger love for Allaah.”Qur’aan, 2:165

Anas ibn Maalik narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Whoever possesses [the following] three characteristics has tasted the sweetness of faith: **he who loves Allaah and His Messenger above all else; he who loves another human being for Allaah’s sake alone; and he who hates to return to disbelief after Allaah has rescued him as he hates to be thrown into a fire.**”²⁸

وَإِن تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا

“If you try to count Allaah’s blessings, you will not be able to add them up.”Qur’aan, 14:34

²⁸ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 30, no. 67.

However, the supreme love which humans should feel for God must not be reduced to the common denominator of their emotional love for creation. Just as the love humans feel for animals should not be the same as what they feel for other humans,²⁹ the love of Allaah should transcend the love humans feel towards each other. Human love of God should be, fundamentally, a love manifest in complete obedience to the laws of God, as stated in Chapter *Aal 'Imraan*, “**If you love Allaah, then follow me [the Prophet] and Allaah will love you.**”³⁰ This is not an abstract concept, because human love of other humans also implies obedience. That is, if a loved one requests that something be done, humans will strive to do it according to the level of their love for that person.

The love of God should also be expressed in the love of those whom God loves. It is inconceivable that one who loves Allaah could hate those whom Allaah loves and love those whom He hates. The Prophet (ﷺ) was quoted by Aboo Umaamah as saying, “*He who loves for Allaah and hates for Allaah, gives for Allaah and withholds for Allaah, has perfected his faith.*”³¹ Consequently, those whose faith is proper will love all those who love God. In Chapter *Maryam*, Allaah indicates that He puts love in the hearts of the believers for those who are righteous.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا

“Surely, Allaah will bestow love [in the hearts of the believers for] those who believe and do righteous deeds.” Qur’aan, 19:96

Prayers

Prayers should only be directed to God alone, for only He can answer prayers. He is accessible as long as He is called upon sincerely.

وَإِذَا سَأَلَكَ عِبَادِي عَنِّي فَإِنِّي قَرِيبٌ أُجِيبُ دَعْوَةَ الدَّاعِي إِذَا دَعَانِ

²⁹ The huge sums of money currently being spent protecting endangered species of animals while humans are left to starve and die of disease is among the major crimes of the 20th century.

³⁰ Qur’aan, 3:31.

³¹ Collected by Ahmad, at-Tirmithi and Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 3, p. 1312, no. 3664, and authenticated in *Shaheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 3, p. 886, no. 3915).

“When My servants ask you [O Muḥammad] about Me, [tell them] that I am near, I answer the prayer of everyone who calls on Me.”Qur’aan, 2:186

The Prophet (ﷺ) emphasized this point, saying, “If you ask in prayer, ask only Allaah, and if you seek help, seek it only from Allaah.”³² Thus, prayer to human beings or through human beings, dead or living, is a form of *shirk*. The one to whom prayers are directed becomes an object of worship. An-Nu‘maan ibn Basheer reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Supplication is worship.”³³

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ عِبَادٌ أَمْثَلُكُمْ

“Surely, those whom you call on in prayer besides Allaah are servants like yourself.”Qur’aan, 7:194

Thus, the Catholic Christian practice of praying to saints is *shirk*. If something is lost, Saint Anthony of Thebes is prayed to in order to help find it.³⁴ St. Jude Thaddaeus is the patron saint of the impossible and is prayed to for intercession in incurable illnesses, unlikely marriages or the like.³⁵ And it used to be that when someone set out on a journey, Saint Christopher, the patron saint of travelers, was the object of prayers for protection. However, in 1969 St. Christopher was unceremoniously struck off the list of saints by papal decree, after it was confirmed that he was fictitious.³⁶ Prayers to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and to the angels, as on Michaelmas³⁷ are also *shirk*. Even Christians who shun saint worship commit *shirk* whenever they direct prayers to Prophet Jesus, through him or in his name. Likewise, any Muslim who prays to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ)

³² Reported by Ibn ‘Abbaas and collected by at-Tirmithi and authenticated in *Saḥeeḥ Sunan at-Tirmithi*, vol. 2, pp. 308-9, no. 2043. See *an-Nawawi’s Forty Hadith*, p. 68, no. 19 and *Mishkat Al-Masabih*, vol. 2, p. 1099.

³³ *Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 1, p. 387, no. 1474 and authenticated in *Saḥeeḥ Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 1, p. 277, no. 1312.

³⁴ *The World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, p. 509.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 146.

³⁶ *The World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, p. 417.

³⁷ The Christian feast of St. Michael the Archangel, celebrated in the western churches on September 29 and in the Eastern (Orthodox) Church on November 8. In the Roman Catholic Church, it is the Feast of SS. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, archangels; in the Anglican Church, its proper name is the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 8, p. 95).

commits *shirk*. Consequently, God commanded the Prophet (ﷺ) to inform his followers as follows in Chapter *al-A'raaf*:

قُلْ لَا أَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُ أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ لَاسْتَكْتَرْتُ
مِنَ الْخَيْرِ وَمَا مَسَّنِيَ السُّوءُ

“Say [O Muhammad]: ‘I have no power to bring good or avert harm even from myself, except if Allaah wills. If I had knowledge of the unseen, I would surely have accumulated only good and no evil would have befallen me.’”Qur’aan, 7:188

Abou Hurayrah reported that when the verse **“Warn your nearest relatives,”**³⁸ was revealed to the Prophet, he said the following to his relatives: *“O people of Quraysh, secure deliverance from Allaah [by doing good deeds], for I cannot avail you at all against Allaah...O Faatimah, daughter of Muhammad, ask me whatever you wish [in this life], but I have nothing which can avail you against Allaah.”*³⁹

Why Did God Create Mankind on Earth?

The question concerning the purpose of mankind’s creation may be expanded to include the world in which they live. The question would then be, “Why did God create human beings in this world?”

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْعَفُورُ

“[It is He] who created death and life to test which of you is best in conduct; and He is the Mighty, the Forgiving.”Qur’aan, 67:2

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَهَا لِنَبْلُوَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

“Surely I⁴⁰ have created all that is on earth as its ornaments that I may test which of them is best in conduct.”Qur’aan, 18:7

³⁸ Soorah *ash-Shooraa* (26):214.

³⁹ *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 4, pp. 478-9, nos. 727 & 728, and *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 136, no. 402.

⁴⁰ “We” in the original Arabic is the majestic ‘we,’ referring to God.

It should be noted, however, that the tests of conduct are not to inform God about humankind, for He knew everything there was to know about them before He created them. The tests serve to confirm on the Day of Judgment that those going to hell deserve it and those going to paradise only got there by God's grace. With regard to human beings in this life, the test of conduct serves two basic purposes: one, human spiritual growth, and the other, punishment or reward.

Spiritual Growth

Generosity and Contentment

For example, in all human societies the qualities of generosity and contentment are considered among the most noble characteristics. However, neither of these traits can develop if everyone has the same amount of wealth. Generosity can only be acquired when the human soul—aware that sharing with the needy is good—struggles against its desire to hoard its possessions. On the other hand, contentment is produced when the soul defeats the evils of envy and greed. The Creator wisely sets the stage for these spiritual struggles by unequally distributing wealth in this world. In Chapter *an-Nahl* of the final revelation, Allaah says:

وَاللَّهُ فَضَّلَ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ فِي الرِّزْقِ

“Allaah has favored some of you over others in sustenance.” Qur'aan, 16:71

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ

“Know that your wealth and children are a test.” Qur'aan, 8:28

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُلْهِكُمْ أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ

“O believers! Do not allow your wealth and children to divert you from the remembrance of Allaah.”

Qur'aan, 63:9

وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ دَرَجَاتٍ لِّيُبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ

“He raised some of you over others in rank to test you with what He granted you.”Qur’aan, 6:165

The desire to accumulate wealth cannot be satisfied in this life. The more human beings have, the more they want. The Prophet (ﷺ) stated, *“If a man had a valley of gold, he would desire another, for nothing will fill his mouth but the dirt [of his grave]. And Allaah forgives whoever sincerely repents.”*⁴¹

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا

“Take charity from their wealth to purify them and make them grow.”Qur’aan, 9:103

وَفِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ لِّلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ

“And in their wealth the beggars and needy have a right.”Qur’aan, 51:19

However, giving in charity should be done sincerely for the pleasure of God

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تُبْطِلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَىٰ

“O believers, do not destroy your acts of charity by reminders of your generosity and by injury.”

Qur’aan, 2:264

Craving for wealth is further enhanced by envy. Consequently, God also instructed us not to desire what He has given others.

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ

“Do not wish for that by which Allaah has favored some of you over others.”Qur’aan, 4:32

⁴¹ Sahih Al-Bukhari, vol. 8, pp. 297-8, no. 447.

The Prophet (ﷺ) reiterated this divine piece of advice, saying, “*Look to those less fortunate than you, and do not look to those above you; it is better for you, in order that you do not deny what Allaah has blessed you with.*”⁴² Aboo Hurayrah quoted the last Messenger (ﷺ) as saying, “*Wealth is not [measured] in property, but in contentment.*”⁴³

أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

“Indeed, it is in the remembrance of Allaah that hearts find rest.”Qur’aan, 13:28

Calamities

Tests of this life also come in the form of ‘misfortune’ and calamities which contribute to the spiritual growth of the true believers and purify them of sin. Conversely, life’s tests of misfortune remind errant believers to return to the correct path, and they punish disbelievers in this life before the next.

Patience

Calamities are the foundation on which the higher spiritual quality of patience is developed. Consequently, it is not surprising to find that the righteous are subject to many tragedies and difficulties in their lives. Sa’d reported that he asked the Prophet (ﷺ) who among mankind had the most trials, and he replied, “*The prophets, then those most like them and then those most like them. Man is tested according to the level of his faith. If his faith is firm, his trials increase in severity, and if there is weakness in his faith, he will be tried accordingly.*”⁴⁴

True patience is the product of complete trust in God at the time of calamity.

إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَعَلَيْهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ

⁴² *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 8, p. 328, no. 497, and *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1530, no. 7070.

⁴³ *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 8, p. 304, no. 453.

⁴⁴ Collected by at-Tirmithi and Ibn Maajah and authenticated in *Saheeh Sunan at-Tirmithi*, vol. 2, p. 286, no. 1956.

“The decision rests only with Allaah. I put my trust in Him alone, and all who trust should trust only in Him.”Qur’aan, 12:67

Allaah further assures humankind that if they put their complete trust in Him, He will be sufficient for them in their most trying times.

وَمَنْ يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ

“Whoever trusts in Allaah will find Him sufficient.”Qur’aan, 65:3

وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“Perhaps you may dislike something and it is good for you, and you may like something and it is bad for you. Allaah knows and you do not.”Qur’aan, 2:216

The trials by which Allaah tests human beings are specifically tailored to their own individual needs and circumstances.

وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا

“And your Lord does not oppress anyone.”Qur’aan, 18:49

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

“Allaah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity.”Qur’aan, 2:286

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

“For surely with difficulty comes [a period of] ease. Surely with the difficulty comes [another period of] ease.”Qur’aan, 94:5-6

Despair

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَحِيمًا

“Do not kill yourselves, for surely Allaah is merciful with you.”Qur’aan, 4:29

إِنَّهُ لَا يَيْئَسُ مِنْ رَوْحِ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

“Surely only a disbelieving people despair of Allaah’s mercy.”Qur’aan, 12:87

Consequently, God has informed humankind that the punishment for those who harbor evil thoughts about Him is the eternal torment of hell. In Chapter *al-Fat-h* Allaah says:

وَيُعَذِّبُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ وَالْمُشْرِكَاتِ الظَّالِمِينَ بِاللَّهِ ظَنَّ السَّوْءِ عَلَيْهِمْ دَائِرَةُ السَّوْءِ وَغَضِبَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَنَهُمْ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا

“That He may punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the idolaters, men and women, who harbor evil thoughts about Allaah. An evil torment will encompass them, for Allaah is angry with them and curses them. And He has prepared hell for them; an evil end.”Qur’aan, 48:6

Hope

On the other hand, the divine promises of justice and mercy fill the believers with the confidence necessary to patiently face the difficulties of this life. Consequently, hope in the mercy of God is an essential part of faith.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

“O believers, seek help in patience and prayer. Truly, Allaah is with those who are patient.”Qur’aan, 2:153

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَجَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ يَرْجُونَ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

“Surely those who believed, emigrated and strove for the sake of Allaah, hope for Allaah’s mercy, for Allaah is Oft-Forgiving Most-Merciful.” Qur’aan, 2:218

Of course, paradise is the reward for patience based on sincere belief in God. God informs the believers of their reward as follows:

وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

“...so announce glad tidings [of paradise] to those who are patient; those who, when afflicted with calamity, say: Truly we belong to Allaah and to Him we will return.” Qur’aan, 2:155-6

Patience is also based on the belief that whatever befalls mankind is fundamentally a consequence of their own evil deeds.⁴⁵

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُوا عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

“Whatever befalls you is a result of what your hands have earned. And He pardons much.”

Qur’aan, 42:30

The fact is, God has excused humans for much of their evil. Were He to punish them strictly according to their deeds, they and all on earth would be destroyed. God addresses this issue in Chapter *Faatir* as follows:

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَكَ عَلَى ظَهْرِهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ

“And if Allaah were to punish people for what they earned, He would not leave a living creature on the face of the earth.” Qur’aan, 35:45

Suhayb ibn Sinaan related that the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) said, “*The affair of the believer is amazing! The whole of his life is beneficial, and that is only in the case of the believer. When good times come to him, he is thankful and it is good*

⁴⁵ In fact, all of the corruption on earth is a product of human misdeeds. Allaah states that in Chapter *ar-Room* (30):41, quoted later in this booklet.

for him, and when bad times befall him, he is patient and it is also good for him.”⁴⁶ This is the state of one who has accepted God’s destiny. Consequently, belief in both the good and the apparent evil of what has been destined is the sixth pillar of faith in Islaam.

On the other hand, if the believers experience a life devoid of any problems, it should be taken as a sign that something is wrong. Under such circumstances, the true believer must take time out and reflect on the realities of his or her life. Either the tests are not obvious and they are unaware of them or they have deviated from the right path.

وَلَا تُعْجِبْكَ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَأَوْلَادُهُمْ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَنْ يُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَتَزْهَقَ
أَنْفُسُهُمْ وَهُمْ كَافِرُونَ

“Do not be awed by their wealth or their children. Allaah only wishes to punish them with these things in this life and allow their souls to die while they are in a state of disbelief.” Qur’aan, 9:85

This is not to say that the believers should yearn for problems and calamities in their lives, for Allaah has taught them to pray: **“Our Lord, do not put on us a burden like what you placed on those before us.”**⁴⁷ Instead, they should thank Allaah for whatever trials He has spared them. However, in times of ease they must remain vigilant and not become oblivious to tests, for success and happiness often blind people to the trials of life.

Reminder

Tests sometimes serve as a punishing reminder to those who have gone astray and an encouragement for them to return to the correct path. When people deviate, they seldom listen to the advice of those around them. However, when a calamity strikes them or those near and dear to them, it jolts those who still have some faith into recognizing their error.

وَلَنذِيقَنَّهُمْ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَدْنَىٰ دُونَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَكْبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

⁴⁶ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 4, p. 1541, no. 7138.

⁴⁷ *Soorah al-Baqarah* (2):286.

“I⁴⁸ will make them taste a lesser punishment before the greater punishment that perhaps they may return [to the right path].”
Qur’aan, 32:21

The test of calamities which remind humankind of their deviation may come in the form of man’s inhumanity to his fellow man, as in the case of the unspeakable atrocities unleashed by the Serbs against the Bosnian Muslims who had strayed far away from Islaam, or Saddam’s brutal invasion of Kuwait and America’s subsequent indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets in Iraq.

ظَهَرَ الْفَسَادُ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِي النَّاسِ لِيذِيقَهُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي عَمِلُوا
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

“Corruption has appeared on the land and in the sea because of what man’s hands have earned, in order that [Allaah] may make them taste a part of what they have done, and in order that they may return [to the right path].” Qur’aan, 30:41

Hypocrisy

Calamities also expose those who falsely claim faith, as well as show those who disbelieve that they choose hell by their own free will.

أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا ءَامَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ
فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الْكَاذِبِينَ

“Do people imagine that they will be left alone and not tested with affliction because they say, ‘We believe’? Indeed, I⁴⁹ have tested those before you. Allaah will know those who are truthful and those who lie.” Qur’aan, 29:2

⁴⁸ “We” in the original Arabic is the majestic ‘we,’ referring to God.

⁴⁹ “We” in the original Arabic is the majestic ‘we,’ referring to God.

Punishment

Those who transgress the limits set by God expose themselves to punishment in this life and the next. Throughout the Qur'aan, Allaah describes numerous past nations who rejected divine guidance and were subsequently destroyed. These stories serve as warnings to humanity of the consequences of rebellion against the commandments of God. In Chapter *an-Noor*, Allaah gives a general warning as follows:

فَلْيَحْذَرِ الَّذِينَ يُخَالِفُونَ عَنْ أَمْرِهِ أَنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ أَوْ يُصِيبَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

“Let those who contradict his command beware a trial or a severe punishment.” Qur'aan, 24:63

The punishment may come in a variety of different ways. Perhaps the most obvious punishment afflicting humankind in all countries today is the disease AIDS,⁵⁰ which appeared for the first time in medical history in the beginning of the '80's. However, medical statistics show that such cases are relatively few in comparison to the other categories. In any case, Allaah has warned in Chapter *al-Anfaal* of the final revelation that when His punishment comes it is not limited to the evil, but affects the society as a whole.

وَاتَّقُوا فِتْنَةً لَا تُصِيبَنَّ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْكُمْ خَاصَّةً وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

“Beware of a trial which will not afflict only the sinful among you, and know that Allaah is severe in punishment.” Qur'aan, 8:25

One thousand four hundred years ago Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) prophesied the coming of such a trial. Ibn 'Umar quoted him as saying, “*Whenever promiscuity is openly practiced among a people, a plague and anguish will spread among them which was unknown to their predecessors.*”⁵¹ However, AIDS is only one in a series of diseases. Before AIDS, a warning came in the form of another disease called herpes, which became widespread among the sexually promiscuous beginning in the 1960s and '70s

⁵⁰ Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) is a condition transmitted by a virus which attacks the body's system of defence against disease, leaving the sufferer extremely vulnerable to disease and likely to die eventually from any one that he or she catches. (*Chambers Pocket Dictionary*, p. 19.)

⁵¹ Collected by Ibn Maajah and authenticated in *Saheeh Sunan Ibn Maajah*, vol. 2, p. 370, no. 3246.

2.1 COLLECTION OF THE QUR'AAN

The Arabic word *Tafseer* is used to mean “explanation of the Qur’aan.” The science of *Tafseer* is called *Uṣool at-Tafseer* which refers to the fundamental rules and information necessary for the correct understanding of the Qur’aan. In this section on the Fundamentals of *Tafseer* (*Uṣool at-Tafseer*), we will look at how the Qur’aan was written and compiled into one book, as well as the significance of the knowledge.

A. ERA OF THE PROPHET (ﷺ) 609-632 C.E.¹

The Qur’aan was revealed to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) in sections throughout the twenty-three years of his prophethood. Whenever a problem arose or whenever Allaah wanted to give the Prophet (ﷺ) and his followers special advice, Allaah would send angel Jibreel with a part of the Qur’aan which he would recite to the Prophet (ﷺ). Thus, the Qur’aan was not revealed all at once in its complete form, like the earlier books of revelation, but in parts over a period of time.

Preservation of the Qur’aan

When Jibreel first recited a part of the Qur’aan to the Prophet (ﷺ), the Prophet (ﷺ) tried to repeat it after him, word for word. Allaah later had Jibreel tell him not to do so. He was told instead to listen to the Qur’aan carefully. When the (ﷺ) did that Allaah caused him to be able to remember everything without any effort on his part. Allaah said in the Qur’aan:

لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ (16) إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ (17) فَإِذَا
قَرَأْتَهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ

“Do not move your tongue to hastily (learn) it. Surely we will collect it and recite it. So, when we recite it, follow its recital.”²

¹ C.E. (i.e. Christian Era) is used instead of A.D. (*Anno Domini*, lit. in the year of our Lord) because Muslims do not recognize Jesus, the son of Mary, as the Lord, but as a Prophet of the Lord God.

² Soorah al-Qiyaamah (75):16-8.

It was very important that the Prophet (ﷺ) remember all that was revealed to him, because he could neither read nor write.

The Prophet (ﷺ) passed on all of the Qur'aan to his companions before he died. He used a number of different ways to make sure that they memorized and recorded it exactly as he learned it.

1. The Prophet (ﷺ) used to recite aloud various parts of the Qur'aan in the *Salaahs* (Congregational Prayers). In that way, his followers used to hear parts of the Qur'aan daily.
2. Everyone who entered Islaam would be taught parts of the Qur'aan which they would have to use in their daily prayers. Thus, Muslims were always learning or teaching various parts of the Qur'aan.
3. The Prophet (ﷺ) informed his followers that the best of them were those who learned and taught the Qur'aan. This encouraged them to make even greater efforts to memorize the Qur'aan and teach it to others.
4. Those who were able to read and write were told by the Prophet (ﷺ) to write down the various sections of the Qur'aan as they were revealed. The Prophet (ﷺ) would tell them the order in which they record the verses.

Because there was no paper in Arabia at that time, the Qur'aan was written down on anything which was available. The companions wrote the verses of Qur'aan on date palm leaves, flat stones, tree bark, wood, dried animal skins and even the shoulder blades of sheep or camels. Thus, the verses of the Qur'aan were preserved in the hearts of the Muslims, as well as written down, during the lifetime of the Prophet (ﷺ). Since people entered Islaam at various points during the Prophet's (ﷺ) mission, only a few of them heard all of the Qur'aan directly from the Prophet (ﷺ). Also some companions were able to memorize better than others. So, even though all of them memorized portions of the Qur'aan, only a few were able to memorize all of the Qur'aan during the Prophet's (ﷺ) lifetime.

When the Prophet (ﷺ) died in the year 632 C.E., the whole of the Qur'aan was not written down one complete book. It was recorded on various pieces of writing material and kept in the possession of different followers of the Prophet (ﷺ). Each had sections but none of them had all. Because of the fact that the verses of the Qur'aan continued to be revealed up until a few months before the Prophet's (ﷺ) death, the companions were more concerned with recording and memorizing it than putting it all together in one book. Consequently, the gathering of the Qur'aan into one text was not done during the Prophet's (ﷺ) lifetime.

B. THE ERA OF ABU BAKR 632-634 C.E.

After the death of the Prophet (ﷺ), there arose three main groups opposed to Islaam in the Arabian peninsula.

1. The first group was made up of those who decided that they did not want to pay the Islamic tax, *Zakaah*, to anyone other than the Prophet (ﷺ). They did not feel that *Zakaah* was a pillar of Islaam just like Salaah, Sawm and Hajj. They instead looked at *Zakaah* as tribute; a kind of tax paid to the one who conquered them. So, when the Prophet (ﷺ) died, they felt that they were no longer required to pay it. When Abu Bakr became the leader of the Muslim state, this group refused to pay the *Zakaah* and sent armies to the capital, Madeenah, in order to topple the Muslim state. They demanded to be excused from paying *Zakaah* or else they would attack and destroy the centers of Islaam.
2. The first group was joined by those who had entered Islaam in order to escape defeat, as well as those who simply wanted to be on the winning side. This group did not believe in Allaah and His Messenger at all. They wanted to destroy Islaam so they could be free to do whatever they wanted to do. Since the armies of those who refused to pay *Zakaah* appeared strong, many of these hypocrites joined them.
3. The third group was the false prophets and prophetesses. In the Najd, in the region of Yamaamah, an Arab from the tribe of Haneefah called Mysaylima claimed prophethood. In the southern part of Arabia, another Arab from the tribe of 'Ans called al-Aswad, claimed prophethood and took over Najraan. To the north of Arabia an Arab woman called Sajaah from the Tameem tribe also claimed prophethood and rose in arms against

the Muslim state. These false prophets all invited people to leave Islaam by claiming that Allaah had revealed to them new laws making allowable most of the things which were forbidden by Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ).

True Muslims under the leadership of Caliph Abu Bakr, were forced to fight these three groups in order to re-establish Islaam throughout the Arabian peninsula.

The First Writing

During these wars known as the *Riddah* (apostasy), many of those who had memorized large portions of the Qur'aan were killed. Those Muslims who had a lot of Qur'aan in their hearts knew well the rewards which Allaah has promised those who fight for Islaam. So, they would always be in the front lines of all the battles.

'Umar ibn al-Khattaab realized the danger of what was happening and feared that if something was not done immediately, the Qur'aan would be lost to future generations of Muslims. So he went to Caliph Abu Bakr and advised him to have the whole Qur'aan written down in one book in order to preserve it from being lost. Abu Bakr at first refused to do so, because the Prophet (ﷺ) had not told men to do it. He was afraid of bringing anything new into the religion because the Prophet (ﷺ) had warned them about changing the religion. Christians had gone astray before them because they changed the religion which Prophet 'Eesaa brought after he left them. So Abu Bakr was very much against making any changes in the religion which Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) had not told them to do. However, after thinking over the situation very carefully, he came to realize that 'Umar's advice was right and that it was not really a change in the religion. The Prophet (ﷺ) had ordered them to write down the various verses and chapters of the Qur'aan, while it was being revealed, in order to help preserve it. Compiling all of what was written into one complete book was then only the completion of what the Prophet (ﷺ) had begun.

Caliph Abu Bakr asked Zayd ibn Thaabit to be in charge of collecting and writing down the whole Qur'aan. Zayd at first refused to do it for the same reasons that Abu Bakr had, but after some time he also came to realize that it was right. Zayd was chosen because he was:

- 1) One of the best reciters of the Qur'aan.

- 2) One of the few who had memorized the whole Qur'aan during the Prophet's (ﷺ) lifetime.
- 3) One of those whom the Prophet (ﷺ) asked to write down the Qur'aan.
- 4) One of the few who were present when the Prophet (ﷺ) recited the whole Qur'aan during the last Ramadaan of his life.

Zayd began the process by collecting all of the material on which the Qur'aan had been written. He then gathered around him all of those who had also memorized all of the Qur'aan or large portions of it. He then compared what was written down with what he and others had memorized. If all agreed, he would then write it down on pages of leather. In this way the whole Qur'aan was written down during the reign of the first Caliph. On its completion, Zayd turned it over to Caliph Abu Bakr who kept it until his death, two years after he had become Caliph. Just before his death, Abu Bakr turned over the Qur'aan to 'Umar whom he had chosen to be the second Caliph. 'Umar kept this copy of the Qur'aan with him until his death, ten years later, at the hand of an assassin named Abu Lu'lu.' The Qur'aan was then turned over to his daughter, Hafsa, who was also one of the Prophet's (ﷺ) wives. Hafsa kept the Qur'aan in her house in al-Madeenah, but she made it available to anyone who to make copies from it, or check the accuracy of what they had memorized.

C.THE ERA OF 'UTHMAAN 644-656 C.E.

After the death of the second Caliph, 'Umar, a committee made up of six of the most famous companions of the Prophet (ﷺ) chose 'Uthmaan ibn 'Affaan to be the third Caliph.

During the reign of Caliph 'Umar (634-644 C.E.), the Islamic state expanded beyond the borders of the Arabian peninsula into Egypt, Syria and Iraq. In the subsequent reign of Caliph 'Uthmaan, the expansion continued on into Persia, India, Russia, China, Turkey and across North Africa. Many of the people of these regions accepted Islaam and learned the recitation of Qur'aan from the early Muslims. The Qur'aan was revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ) in seven different Arabic dialects, and the early Muslims taught the Qur'aan in its different readings.

The Second Writing

In the Muslim provinces, some Arabs began to boast that their dialect was superior to that of others. Also, when new Muslims made mistakes in their recitation of the Qur'aan, it was sometimes difficult to tell whether it was really an error or whether it was one of the seven readings which were taught by the Prophet (ﷺ). These problems eventually became a source of confusion in the Muslim provinces outside of Arabia. One of the prophet's companions (*Sahaabah*) by the name of Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamaan noticed the confusion while he was in Itaq, and feared that it might lead to a breakup of the Muslim nation and the changing of the Qur'aan. On his return to the capital, he informed Caliph 'Uthmaan of what he had heard and seen. Caliph 'Uthmaan realized the seriousness of the situation and called the major *Sahaabah* together in order to find a solution to the problem. They decided to make official copies of the Qur'aan from the one compiled in Caliph Abu Bakr's time and limit the people to its recitation.

'Uthmaan asked Hafsah for the original copy of the Qur'aan and called on Zayd ibn Thaabit to head a committee of four Qur'anic scholars who would take on the task of making the official copies. When the copies were completed, the original was returned to Hafsah. A total of seven copies were made and one was sent to Makkah, another to Syria, one to Basrah, one to Kufah, one to Yemen, one to Bahrain and one was kept in the capital, al-Madeenah. Caliph 'Uthmaan sent an official reciter of the Qur'aan with each copy in order to clear up any problems which might later arise. He also ordered that all other copies of the Qur'aan be destroyed, as people had made notes in their personal copies and some copies were incomplete. All new copies were then made from the official copy called *Mus-haf Uthmaan*, and in that way the Qur'aan was saved from any kind of change or loss. This process was completed in the year 646 C.E., two years after 'Uthmaan became the new Caliph.

MEMORIZATION OF THE QUR'AAN

Although the total number of *Sahaabah* who had memorized all of the Qur'aan and read it back to the Prophet (ﷺ) before his death were only eight, many others memorized it after his death. In fact, with every succeeding generation of Muslims, the numbers of those who memorized all of the Qur'aan has increased. Today there are literally hundreds of thousands of Muslims throughout the world who have done so.

There is no other book, religious or otherwise, which has been memorized on this scale in recorded history. The Qur'aan is about four fifths the length of the New Testament of the Christians, yet not a single person in recorded history is known to have memorized the New Testament completely. In fact, if all of the books in the world were somehow to be destroyed, the only book which could be rewritten, word for word without a single mistake is the Glorious Qur'aan.

Significance Of The Qur'aan's Preservation

Allaah promised in the Qur'aan that He would take on the responsibility of protecting His final Word from loss. He said,

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

“Verily We have revealed the Reminder (Qur'aan) and verily We shall preserve it.”³

Thus, the Qur'aan has been preserved in both the oral as well written from the way no other religious book in history has been.

Why did Allaah preserve the Qur'aan and allow His earlier Books of Divine Revelation to be changed or lost? The answer to that question lies in the following three facts:

1. The earlier prophets and their Books were sent to particular people in particular periods of history. Once the period ended, a new prophet was sent with a new Book to replace the previous Book. So, it was not necessary that these Books be preserved by Allaah, Himself. The preservation of the earlier

³ Soorah al-Hijr (15):9.

Books was left up to the people as a test for them. Thus, when the people went astray, they changed what was written in the books which the prophets brought, in order to make allowable the things which were forbidden to them. In that way all of the earlier Books of Revelation became either changed or lost.

2. The Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) was the last prophet whom Allaah sent, and he was not sent to a particular people or a particular time. He was sent to all of mankind until the end of the world.

Allaah said in the Qur'aan:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“We have only sent you (Muhammad) as a giver of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind, but most men do not understand.”⁴

Thus, his Book of revelation, the Qur'aan, had to be specially preserved from any form of change or loss so that it would be available to all the generations of man until the last day of the world.

3. The Qur'aan was the main miracle which was given to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) to prove that he was a true prophet of God and not an imposter. So, the Qur'aan had to be saved to prove to the later generations that Muḥammad (ﷺ) was really the last prophet of God. All of the false prophets who came after Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) brought books which they claimed to be revealed from Allaah, but none of them have the miraculous ability to be memorized by thousands, nor have they improved on the message in the Qur'aan.

The significance of the Qur'aan's preservation is that Islaam has been kept in its original purity because of it. Man can always return to the sources of Islaam no matter what people may have added or forgotten in time. All of the essential principles of Islaam are to be found in the Qur'aan. Consequently, the preservation of the Qur'aan meant the preservation of Islaam in its final form. The loss of the Gospel of Jesus means that Christians can never return to the true teachings of Prophet Jesus except by accepting Islaam. Similarly, the original

⁴ Soorah Saba (34):28.

Torah was lost when Prophet Soloman's Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. Thus, the Jews can not return to the pure teachings of Prophet Moses except by following Islaam.

It is only in Islaam that the pure teachings of the prophets have been preserved without any change. That is why Allaah said in the Qur'aan,

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ

“Verily the only acceptable religion to Allaah is Islaam.”⁵

⁵ Soorah Aal 'Imraan, (3):19.

2.2 MAKKAN AND MADEENAN REVELATIONS

The Qur'aan was revealed in sections to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) from the beginning of his prophethood until shortly before his death. Thus, the Qur'aan came down continuously over a period of twenty-three years.

Many sections of the Qur'aan were generally revealed to solve the problems which existed among the Muslim communities in both Makkah and Madeenah. Since the problems and needs of Makkah were different from those of Madeenah, the revelations of Makkah and Madeenah have special characteristics of their own.

It is important to know the difference between the revelations of Makkah and Madeenah if the Qur'aan itself is to be clearly understood. Because of the great importance of the Qur'aan to Islaam, Muslim scholars from the time of the *Sahaabah* have devoted much time and effort in this area of study.

THE FEATURES OF MAKKAN REVELATIONS

Makkan revelations are defined as all verses and chapters of the Qur'aan which were brought by Jibreel to the Prophet (ﷺ) before the *Hijrah*¹ (622 C.E.). This includes verses which were revealed in Taa'if as well as those revealed in other areas outside of Makkah. These revelations represent the first stage of the Islamic movement in which its fundamentals were established.

1. Tawheed :

When Islaam was first presented to the people of Makkah, they were in a state of disbelief. Most of them believed in Allaah, but they had put between themselves and Allaah many intermediaries. They made idols to represent these intermediaries and worshipped them instead of Allaah. Thus, the early revelations taught the people about Allaah's unity and power over all things. They told the people that Allaah was without parents, offspring or any partner

¹ The emigration of the Prophet (ﷺ) to Madinah.

who shared His powers. They also pointed out that idols could neither bring good nor hold back evil. And they questioned the logic of worshipping things which could not even see or hear.

2. Salaah :

After the first verses of revelation came informing the Prophet (ﷺ) that he had been chosen for prophethood, Allaah sent Jibreel to teach him the correct method of prayer. This was necessary because the correct method of prayer could not be arrived at by logical reasoning. Therefore, even the Prophet (ﷺ) himself had to be taught the correct method of worshipping Allaah. Thus, the early verses called upon the Prophet (ﷺ) and his early band of followers to make their Salaah regularly.

Since the Makkans were in the habit of worshipping idols in the belief that these home-made gods would carry their prayers to Allaah for them, the early verses were also aimed at clarifying this misconception. The verses taught that Salaah should only be made for and to Allaah, as He is the only one who can answer them.

Great stress was placed on Salaah because of its relationship to Tawheed. Correct Salaah directed to Allaah alone is the most basic way of putting Tawheed into practice.

3. The Unseen :

Since there was no way that human beings could possibly come to know about the unseen world, the early verses taught them about its wonders, its mysteries, and its horrors. The verses described Paradise and its pleasures in order to encourage the believers to continue to do good deeds and to assure them of a reward. They also described the Hell -fire and its torments in order to encourage the believers to strive to avoid evil deeds. Descriptions of the fire and its inhabitants also reassured the believers that those who do wrong in this life will not escape Allaah's punishment. Such descriptions were also aimed at scaring the disbelievers into reconsidering their position before it became too late. Some of the verses also reasoned with those who could not accept the resurrection by giving them examples from nature, such as rain falling on dead earth bringing it back to life.

“And it is Allaah who sends the winds sturring the clouds and We drive them to the earth after its death. Likewise (will be) the Resurrection.” Soorah Faatir (35) : 9

Others pointed out logically that the recreation of life would be easier than its creation, although it is all the same to Allaah.

“And it is He who originates the creation, then recreates it (after it has perished) which is easier for Him...” Soorah ar-Room (30) : 27

4. Allaah’s Existence :

There were some individuals among the Makkans who were in doubt about Allaah’s very existence. Thus, some of the early verses presented logical arguments proving Allaah’s existence. Sometimes proofs were taken from nature and the creatures common to the society. Allaah asked the Makkans,

“Why didn’t they look at the camels and how they were created, and the sky and how it was raised, and the mountains and how they are firmly fixed and the earth and how it was spread out?” Soorah al-Ghaashiyah (88) : 17-20

At other times straight logic was used. Allaah asked them if they were created from nothing or if they created themselves:

“Were they created of nothing, or were they themselves the creators?” Soorah at-Toor (52) : 35

The answer had to be one or the other. Since they knew they had not created themselves, they had to realize that they were created. Even if they said that they came from their parents and their parents came from their parents and so on. The numbers eventually decrease to one who came from nothing. Thus, Allaah, the Creator, has to be accepted for our existence to make sense.

5. Challenges :

In order to prove to the Quraysh that the Qur'aan was from Allaah and that Muḥammad (ﷺ) was a prophet of Allaah, some of the Makkan verses challenged the Arabs to imitate the Qur'aan. Many of the chapters began with individual letters like "Alif, Laam and Meem," "Saad," or "Noon" in order to tease the Makkans with the same letters of the alphabet that they made their flowery speeches and poetry with. Allaah made the Qur'aan with the same letters, but they just could not imitate it. Since the Arabs were unable to produce even a chapter resembling the smallest chapter of the Qur'aan, the miraculous nature of the Qur'aan and its divine origin were clearly proven to the people at that time. However, many of them preferred to look at the Qur'aan as a magical spell, and the Prophet (ﷺ) as a master magician.

6. The People of Old :

The Makkan verses often mentioned historical examples of earlier civilizations, like the 'Aad and the Thamood. They were mentioned in order to warn those who had rejected the message of Islaam. The verses spoke about the wonders of the ancient civilizations. They listed the many blessings which Allaah had bestowed on the peoples of those civilizations. Then they recounted how the people disobeyed Allaah and denied His blessings, and how Allaah's punishment caught them when they were totally unaware of what could become of them if Allaah so willed. These examples were quite familiar to the Arabs because the ruins of such civilizations could still be seen. For example, the stone tombs of *Madaa' in Saalih* were directly on the trade route to Syria.

7. Eemaan :

Very few laws were revealed in the Makkan verses. Instead, the verses concentrated on principles which would build the *Eemaan* (faith) of the early Muslims. These verses spoke of the importance of fearing Allaah and being aware of His presence and knowledge of all things. They were often filled with advice about being patient, perseverant, truthful and trustworthy, in order to build the moral spiritual character of the early Muslims who were in a minority and under a lot of pressure from Makkan society.

8. Short Verses :

The Makkan *Soorahs* usually had short verses, catchy rhymes, and a very strong rhythm. These qualities were meant to catch the attention of listeners who were basically opposed to the message of Islaam. The verses had to be short because the audience would not be willing to listen to long, drawn-out statements. As soon as they heard any of the Qur'aan, they would stick their fingers in their ears and turn away. Thus, the verses often had to strike home immediately. They often resembled the chants of the oracles and fortunetellers, but their meanings were very clear, whereas the chants were mostly obscure and vague. For example, the oracle Zabraa warned her people about a disaster which would soon strike them as follows :

By the fluttering wind, and the falling night.
By the shining morn, and the piercing star.
By the rain-laden clouds,
Verily, the trees of the valley are really deceptive,
and teeth gnash until twisted.
Verily, the boulders of the mountain warn of mourning,
that you won't find any escape from.
The Fortuneteller Zabraa

THE FEATURES OF MADEENAN REVELATIONS

Madeenan revelations are all those verses and chapters of the Qur'aan which were revealed after the Hijrah. This includes verses which were revealed during the battles, as well as those revealed in Makkah and Minaa during and after the Farewell Pilgrimage. All of these verses are considered Madeenan because they represent the revelations of the second stage of the Islamic movement in which the consolidation of the Islamic state took place.

The following are some of the main characteristics of Madeenan verses :

1. Laws :

Once Madeenah had become the new center of the Islamic movement, the Islamic state was born. The Prophet (ﷺ) became ruler over the Muslims of Madeenah, as well as the Jews and the Arab idol worshippers who lived there. A constitution was drawn up and a system of justice was established. Thus, the verses during the Madeenan stage contained the many social, economic and spiritual laws which were necessary for the organization and development of an Islamic state. It was during this period that the last three pillars of Islaam, *Zakaah*, *Sawm* and *Hajj*, were revealed. Likewise, it was during this period that drinking alcohol, eating swine and gambling were all forbidden.

2. People of the Book :

In Madeenah, Muslims came in contact with the Jews for the first time. In order to try to shake the beliefs of the Muslims, the Jews used to ask the Prophet (ﷺ) various questions about Allaah, the earlier prophets, and the unseen. They asked questions about the origin of the soul and what it was made of. Thus, a number of Madeenan verses represented answers to the many questions raised by the Jews. The Muslims of Madeenah also came in contact with the Christians on a larger scale. As a result of that, we find a number of Madeenan verses clarifying Christian misconceptions about Prophet Jesus and Allaah. They pointed out that Jesus' birth was not greater than that of Aadam who had neither father nor mother.

“Surely the likeness of Jesus in Allaah’s sight is as the likeness of Aadam.. He created him from dust, then said to him, ‘Be !’ And he was.”

Soorah Aal - ‘Imraan (3) : 59

They also stressed that the miracles of Jesus, such as bringing the dead back to life, were only by Allaah’s permission. Thus, Jesus was not a god nor the son of Allaah, and Allaah was not the third of three.

3. The Munaafiqoon :

For the first time since the beginning of the final message we find people entering Islaam, yet not believing in it. In Makkah, Muslims were oppressed and attacked, so no one would enter Islaam unless he truly believed. On the other hand, the Muslims of Madeenah were strong and they ruled the city. Thus, we find some

people entering Islaam in order to benefit from its strength and to oppose it from within. ‘Abdullaah ibn Ubayy ibn Salool was about to be crowned King of Madeenah when the Prophet (ﷺ) arrived. The Prophet (ﷺ) was made the ruler of Madeenah and Ibn Salool’s hopes were ruined. Since the Muslims were strong and he could not openly oppose them, he accepted Islaam and worked against it from within. He eventually became the head of the *Munaafiqoon* (hypocrites). Thus, the verses of the Madeenan stage warned the Muslims about the dangers of the hypocrites and taught them how to deal effectively with them.

4. Jihaad :

The right of fight against the enemy was given for the first time in al-Madeenah. During the Makkan period, Muslims were forbidden to fight back. This was for two basic reasons : (1) The Muslims were a minority and could easily be completely wiped out, and (2) only the strong could survive this test. The Makkan period prepared the foundation of the Islamic movement to come. It was during the Madeenan stage that a series of battles were fought against the forces of disbelief until finally Makkah was conquered and the whole of the Arabian peninsula came under the rule of Islaam. Thus, a number of the Madeenan verses taught Muslims the Islamic principles of war. For example, they taught how to deal with prisoners of war and they forbade retreat during an attack except as a trick to trap the enemy. They also encouraged the Muslims to prepare themselves with the best weapons and battle gear they could find.

5. Long Verses :

The Madeenan verses tended to be longer than those of Makkah. In fact, there are a number of Madeenan verses which are longer than whole soorahs of the Makkan period. The longest verse of the Qur’aan is the verse on loans² in the Madeenan *Soorah, al-Baqarah*. This verse contains approximately 143 words. The shortest *Soorah* of the Qur’aan is the Makkan *Soorah al-Kawthar*,³ which contains a total of only 11 separate words in its three short verses. The need to catch the attention of unwilling listeners was no longer there because Islaam had become strong and its followers were many. Thus, the audience at this stage was quite willing to listen attentively to longer verses teaching the vital laws of Islam.

² Soorah al-Baqarah (2) : 292.

³ The *Soorah* 102.

6. Order of the Soorahs :

Although all of the Makkan verses were revealed during the same period, they were neither memorized nor written in the same order in which they were revealed. Verses from various *Soorahs* were revealed at once. Whenever single verses were revealed at once. Whenever single verses were revealed, the Prophet (ﷺ) would tell his scribes to write it in the *Soorah* to which it belonged. If a new *Soorah* was revealed, he would recite the *Soorah* in the order it was to be recorded. Once the Madeenan verses and *Soorahs* began to be revealed, the Prophet (ﷺ) would tell his companions to place them before or after certain Makkan *Soorahs* and verses. Thus, when the revelation of the Qur'aan was complete, Makkan verses could be found within Madeenan *Soorahs* and Madeenan verses within Makkan *Soorahs*. The Prophet (ﷺ) reordered the verses and *Soorahs* of the Qur'aan according to Allaah's command. the reason for that was that the verses were revealed according to the needs of a developing community, whereas the order for reading purposes needed to be varied so as not to make the Qur'aan seem one-sided in its presentation. The mixture of verses and chapters from the two stages gives the reader a more balanced picture of the message of Islaam.

THE IMPORTANCE

There are a number of reasons why a distinction needs to be made between Makkan and Madeenan *Soorahs* and verses. The following are only the three most important reasons :

1. Fiqh (Islamic Law)

The various laws of Islaam were revealed over a period of twenty-three years. Some laws canceled earlier laws and other laws were revealed bit by bit. Thus, it is necessary to know at which point in time the various laws were revealed in order to apply them properly. The laws of the later Madeenan period sometimes took the place of earlier laws. For example, alcohol was made forbidden in gradual stages. The first law concerning alcohol was simply a warning of its dangers. Allaah said,

“And, when they ask you about *Khamr* (alcohol) and *Maysir* (gambling), tell them that they contain benefit for some people, but the sin is greater than the benefit.” Soorah al-Baqarah (2):20

The second law which was revealed warned Muslims away from *Salaah* when they were intoxicated (drunk). Allaah said,

“Do not come to Salaah when you are intoxicated (drunk), until you know what you are saying.”

Soorah an-Nisaa’ (4) : 43

The third law, however, was a complete prohibition of even coming near any form of alcohol. Allaah said,

“Verily, alcohol, gambling and sacrificial altars are filth, as a result of Shaytaan’s work, so stay away from them.” Soorah al-Maa’idah (5) : 93

If one was unaware of the order in which these verses were revealed, he or she may mistakenly think that drinking alcohol is allowed as long as one doesn’t get drunk and come to Salaah. Or, it might be thought that benefitting from the sale of alcohol is permitted.

2. Da‘wah

By understanding the order in which the verses of the Qur’aan were revealed, one can learn the best method of teaching Islaam. For example, the Qur’aan taught the believers not to curse or make fun of the idols of the disbelievers in order not to drive them away and in order that they do not curse Allaah out of ignorance. Instead they were told to reason with the disbelievers and show them logically why the worship of idols was incorrect. Allaah said,

“Are you worshipping besides Allaah other gods which cannot benefit you at all nor harm you?”

Soorah al-Anbiyaa’ (21) : 66

3. Seerah

Many of the important events in the Prophet's life have been recorded in various of the Qur'aan. Thus, by knowing the order in which the verses were revealed, it is possible to piece together a large portion of the biography of the Prophet (ﷺ).

2.3 QUR'AAN: THE UNIQUE BOOK

The word Qur'aan, a verbal noun, is equivalent in meaning to *Qiraa'ah*, as both come from the verb *Qara'a*, which means to read. That is, Qur'aan literally means a reading or a recitation. However, the term Qur'aan has been historically used specifically to refer to the book which was revealed by Allaah to the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) through the angel Jibreel. The term Qur'aan is mentioned in a number of places throughout the book in reference to itself. For example,

“Verily, this Qur'aan guides (man) to that which is most just.”
(Soorah al-Israa' (17:9))

The name Qur'aan is used to refer to both the Qur'aan as a whole as in the previously quoted verse, as well as to each verse or group of verses:

“And if the Qur'aan is recited, you should listen to it quietly (and be silent).”
(Soorah al-Aa'raaf (7:38))

The Book has also been referred to by other names, for example, the *Furqaan* (The Distinction),

“Blessed is He Who revealed the *Furqaan* to His slave in order that he may be a warner to all worlds.” (Soorah al-Furqaan (25):1)

And, the *Dhikr* (The Reminder),

“Verily, We revealed the *Dhikr* and verily, We will preserve it.”
(Soorah al-Hijr (15:9))

The Qur'aan itself could be defined as Allaah's words which were revealed in Arabic in a rhythmical form to the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ). Its recitation is used in acts of worship and even its smallest chapter (*Soorah*) is of a miraculous nature.

The Prophet's divinely inspired statements which were recorded by his followers are generally referred to as *Hadeeths*.¹ For example, the Prophet's companion (*Sahaabee*), 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, reported that he once said, "*Verily, deeds are (judged) by their intentions.*"² However, in some of his statements, the Prophet (ﷺ) attributed what he said to Allaah. For example, another *Sahaabee*, Abu Hurayrah, reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*Allaah, Most High, said, 'I am as My slave thinks of Me, and I am with him when he remembers Me. So if he remembers Me to himself, I will remember him to Myself, and if he remembers Me in a group, I will remember him in a better group.'*"³ In order to distinguish this type of *hadeeth* from the previous type, it is referred to as *Hadeeth Qudsee* (Holy *Hadeeth*) and the former referred to as *Hadeeth Nabawee* (Prophetic *Hadeeth*).

The Qur'aan, however, is not considered the same as *Hadeeth Qudsee* for a number of reasons. First, the Qur'aan is from Allaah, both in its wording and in its meaning, while in the case of *Hadeeth Qudsee*, its meaning is from Allaah, but its wording was from the prophet (ﷺ). Second, Allaah challenged the Arabs and mankind in general to produce even one chapter equivalent to one of the Qur'aan's chapters and their inability to do so proves its miraculous nature. This is not so in the case of *Hadeeth Qudsee*. Third, the recitation of the Qur'aan is used in *Salaah* and is itself considered a form of worship. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*Whoever reads a letter from Allaah Most High's book will get a good deed (recorded for him) and each good deed is worth ten times its value. And, I am not only saying that **Alif Laam Meem** is a letter, but I am saying that **Alif** is a letter, **Laam** is a letter, and **Meem** is a letter.*"⁴ Whereas the recitation of *Hadeeth Qudsee* carries none of these properties.

The Mode of Presentation

¹ The Prophet's actions, silent approvals, and his physical characteristics are also referred to as *hadeeth*.

² Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.1, p.1, no.1) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.3, p.1056, no.4692).

³ Collected by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim* (English Trans.), vol.4, p.1408, no.6471).

⁴ Reported by Ibn Mas'ood and collected by at-Tirmidhee.

The Qur'aan is God's final communication of His divine will to human kind. It is the Creator speaking to human beings and it takes the form of human conversation. As humans change subjects randomly during conversation, the topics of the Qur'aan change in a seemingly random way. Consequently, the format of the Qur'aan is quite unique among books. As a whole is not a book in the usual sense of the word wherein there is an introduction and explanation of the subject followed by a conclusion. Neither is it restricted to only a presentation of historical events, problems of philosophy, facts of science, or social laws, though all may be found woven together in it without any apparent connection and links. Subjects are introduced without background information, historical events are not presented in chronological order, new topics sometimes crop up in the middle of another for no apparent reason, and the speaker and those spoken to change direction without the slightest forewarning. The reader who is unaware of the Qur'aan's uniqueness is often puzzled when he finds it contrary to his understanding of a book, especially a "religious" book. Hence, the Qur'aan may seem disorganized and haphazard to him. However, to those who understand its subject matter, aim, and its central theme, the Qur'aan is exactly the opposite.

The Main Theme

The subject matter of the Qur'aan is essentially man: man in relation to his Lord and Creator, Allaah, man in relation to himself, and man in relation to the rest of creation. The main theme that runs throughout the Qur'aan is that Allaah alone deserves worship and that man should submit to Allaah's laws in his personal life and in his relationship with creation in general. Or, in other words, the main theme is a call to the belief in Allaah and the doing of righteous deeds as defined by Allaah.

If the reader keeps in mind these basic facts, he will find that from the beginning to the end, the Qur'aan's basic topics are all closely connected to its main theme and that the whole book is a well-reasoned and cohesive argument for its theme. The Qur'aan keeps the same object in view, whether it is describing the creation of man and the universe, or events from human history. Since the aim of the Qur'aan is to guide man, it states or discusses things only to the extent relevant to this aim and leaves out unnecessary and irrelevant details. It also repeats its main theme over and over again in the presentation of each new topic.

The following four principles should be kept in mind by the new reader of the Qur'aan if he or she is to avoid unnecessary confusion and disorientation:

1. “The book is the only one of its type in the world.”
2. “Its literary style is quite different from all other books.”
3. “Its theme is unique.”
4. “Pre-conceived notions of a book are only a hindrance to the understanding of the Qur’aan.”⁵

THE MIRACLE OF THE QUR’AAN

The Miracles Given to the Prophets

Man has a natural distaste towards submitting to another human being unless he is forced to by physical strength or his mental superiority, or if he is shown feats far beyond the human. In the first two cases he yields reluctantly, while in the third he yields because of his belief in a higher force or power defying all human comparison. Because of this, Allaah favored His messengers not only with revelation, but also with miracles, clearly proving to the people the divine origin and truthfulness of their messages. The inability of the people to imitate the miracles of the prophets made them willingly bear witness to Allaah’s unity and obey the commandments of the prophets.

Due to the difficulties involved in communication and transportation, the early prophets were sent only to the people among whom they were raised. Therefore, the miracles which they brought were particularly suited to the areas of knowledge in which their people excelled in order for the miracles to have the maximum effect on them. For example, Prophet Moosaa (Moses) (ﷺ) was raised up among the Egyptians who were noted for their mastery of the occult arts, sorcery, and magic. Allaah gave him the miracle of being able to place in hand in his cloak and his hand. When sorcerers and magicians were gathered to challenge Prophet Moosaa (ﷺ), the staffs which they cast appeared to the audience as

⁵ Maududi, Abu Ala; *The Meaning of the Qur’aan* (Islamic Pub Ltd.), Pakistan, Second Edition, 1971, vol.2, p.7.

snakes. Then Allaah turned Prophet Moosaa's staff into a real snake which swallowed up the optical illusions of his opponents. That defeat was sufficient proof for the magicians and sorcerers who knew that no man could change the nature of a stick as Moosaa apparently had done. They fell on their faces in submission and sincere belief in the god of Moosaa, in spite of the threats on their lives uttered by their master, the Pharaoh. Another example is that of Prophet 'Eesaa (Jesus), who was chosen by Allaah from among the Jews. The Jews were especially noted for their exceptional abilities in the field of medicine. Jewish doctors were highly respected and revered for their seemingly magical ability to mend bones, heal wounds, and cure the sick. Thus, Allaah favored Prophet 'Eesaa (ﷺ) with the miraculous ability to make the blind see, the lame walk, and bring the dead back to life. These abilities were clearly beyond those of the Jewish doctors of that day and they knew well that no mere man could do feats. Yet, Allaah gave Prophet 'Eesaa (ﷺ) an even more dazzling miracle: he was able to mold birds out of clay, breathe on them, and they would fly away. Since the Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) was to be the last of the prophets, sent not only to a particular people, but to all of mankind, Allaah gave him a miracle which not only amazed the people among whom he was raised, but which would challenge and amaze the human mind until the last days of this world. Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), like the other prophets before him, was given a number of other miracles whose effects were basically limited to the people of his time; for example, the splitting of the moon at his tribe's request for a sign, the outpouring of water from his hands on one occasion when he and his companions were short of water, and the phenomenon of pebbles and rocks giving *Salaams* to him (greeting him with the phrase, "*Assalaamu 'alaykum*," which means "Peace be on you"), just to mention a few. However, the miracle of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) which was consistent with Allaah's aid to the prophets before him was a literary miracle.

The Arabs had very little in the way of unique skills or accumulated knowledge, but they took great pride in their oratory and literary skills. Yearly contests were held in fairs like that of *'Ukkaadh*, in which many lines of speeches and poetry were recited from memory. Their language had reached development and eloquence and was considered the highest quality human being could possess. In fact, the ten most famous poems were so revered that they were etched in gold and hung in the *Ka'bah* for "*Alif Laam Meem*" or "*Qaaf*" or "*Noon*," tantalizing the Arab mind, as if they say "from these letters which you combine to form your daily conversations, as well as your great works of poetry and prose, is formed a book whose shortest chapter does not exceed three lines, yet you cannot imitate it no matter how hard you try!" The Prophet (ﷺ) stated, "*All Prophets were given something which would cause people to believe in them. The thing*

which I was given is none other than a revelation (the Qur'aan) which Allaah revealed to me. So I hope that I will have the most followers of them on the Day of Judgement."⁶

The Challenge

The Qur'aan is not only unique in the way in which it presents its subject matter, but it is also unique in that it is a miracle itself.

By the term miracle we mean the performance of supernatural or extraordinary even which cannot be duplicated. It has been documented that Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) challenged the Arabs to produce a literary work of a similar caliber as the Qur'aan, but they were unable to do so, in spite of their well-known eloquence and literary powers. The challenge to reproduce the Qur'aan was presented to the Arabs and mankind in three stages:

1. The Whole Qur'aan: In the Qur'aan, Allaah commanded the Prophet (ﷺ) to challenge all of creation to create a book of the stature of the Qur'aan,

“Say: even if all of mankind and the Jinn gather together to produce something like this Qur'aan, they will not be able to do so in spite of their cooperation with each other.”

(Soorah al-Israa' (17:88))⁷

2. Ten Soorahs (Chapters): Shortly after the previous challenge, Allaah again commanded His Messenger (ﷺ) to dare those of the Arabs who claimed that the Qur'aan was Muḥammad's invention to produce ten chapters like any ten of the *Soorahs* of the Qur'aan:

⁶ Reported by Abu Hurayrah and collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari* (Arabic-English), vol.6, p.474, no.504) and Muslim.

⁷ Soorah al-Israa' was the 50th *Soorah* revealed.

“Or if they say that he invented it, say (to them), ‘Bring ten invented Soorahs like it. And you may call on whosoever besides Allaah that you are able (to help you) if you are (really) truthful (in what you say). If they do not answer your (request for help), then know all of you that it was only revealed by Allaah’s knowledge.’”

(Soorah Hood (11:13-14)⁸)

3. One Soorah: In the very next *Soorah*, which was revealed, Allaah brought the challenge to its utmost peak by asking those who denied its divine origin to imitate even a single *Soorah*, the shortest of which consisted of only three verses, *Soorah al-Kawthar*.

“Or if they say that he has invented it, say (to them), ‘Bring a single Soorah like it.’”

(Soorah Yoonus (10:38)⁹)

This final challenge was repeated some time later as follows:

“And if you all are in doubt about what We have revealed to Our servant, bring a single *Soorah* like it.” (Soorah al-Baqarah (2:23)¹⁰)

These challenges were not just empty words with no one caring to prove them wrong. Prophet Muḥammad’s (ﷺ) call to monotheism, to the abolition of idolatry in all of its forms, and to the equality of slaves and their masters threatened the whole socio-economic framework of Makkah society in general, and the position of the ruling *Qurayshee* tribe, from which Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) came, in particular. Makkah, the trading center of Arabia, as well as its spiritual center, desperately wanted to stop the spread of Islaam. The challenge was straight forward, all that the Prophet’s opponents had to do to crush the movement was to make up a single *Soorah* like any one of those which the Prophet (ﷺ) and his followers were reciting to the people. A number of *Qurayshee* orators and poets

⁸ Soorah Hood was the 52nd *Soorah* revealed.

⁹ Soorah Yoonus was the 53rd *Soorah* revealed.

¹⁰ *Soorah al-Baqarah* was the 87th *Soorah* revealed.

tried to imitate the Qur'aan, but of course they failed. Unable to match the Prophet's challenge, the Quraysh looked for other methods of crushing the Islamic movements. They resorted to offering Prophet Muhammad vast amounts of wealth, the position of king over them, and the most noble and beautiful of their women in exchange for his promise to stop inviting people to Islaam. However, his only reply was that even if the sun were placed in his right hand and the moon in his left, he would not cease to call others to Islaam.¹¹ The *Quraysh* also resorted to torturing their slaves and relatives who had embraced Islaam in a vain attempt to cause them to revert to paganism. Later they organized an economic boycott against the Prophet (ﷺ) and the members of his clan, *Banoo Hashim*, in an attempt to starve them into submission. But even this plan eventually failed. Finally, they plotted to kill him in his home by sending armed young men from each of the clans of *Quraysh* in order that the guilt of his murder be shared by all and revenge by the Prophet's (ﷺ) clan be made impossible. However, Allaah enabled the Prophet (ﷺ) and his followers to flee Makkah and join a new band of converts who had arisen among the tribes of a city to the north called Yathrib.

Islaam spread rapidly through the calms of Yathrib, and within a year Muslims became the city's majority. The Prophet (ﷺ) was then made the ruler and the name of the city was changed to Madeenah. Over the next eight years the clans of Makkah and its neighboring lands mounted a series of unsuccessful battle campaigns against the emerging Muslim state in Madeenah, ending with the Muslim invasion of Makkah itself. All of this bloodshed could have been avoided if only the *Quraysh* and their allies had been able to produce a mere three lines of poetry or flowing prose similar to the shortest *Soorah* of the Qur'aan. Hence, there can be no doubt about the inimitability of the Qur'aan's literary style, about the miracle of its rhyme and the extraordinary nature of its rhythm.

It has been suggested that the inimitability of the Qur'aan is not necessarily unique, for great poets like Shakespeare, Chaucer, or great poets in any language tend to have distinctly different styles which set them apart from their contemporaries. However, if some leading poets of today were to make an in-depth study of Shakespeare's writings and write a sonnet in Shakespeare's style in old ink and on old paper, then claim that he had discovered a lost poem of Shakespeare's literary world, his claim would probably be accepted, even after

¹¹ ??? not noted in original text.

careful study. Even the greatest poets could be imitated, no matter how unique their style was, just as the famous painters have been imitated.¹²

The Qur'aan, however, is far above this level, as attempts to forge chapters have been made throughout the ages, yet none have withstood close scrutiny. And, as was mentioned before, the incentive to imitate the Qur'aan existed during the time of its revelation more so than at any other time at a time when literary skills were at their peak, yet there was no successful attempt.

¹² In fact, some English scholars consider much of what has been attributed to Shakespeare to have been written by his contemporary, Christopher Marlowe.

2.4 TAFSEER METHODOLOGY

The Qur'aan, God's final book of revelation to man, represents the primary source of the principles which constitute the way of life known as Islaam.

The passages of the Qur'aan contain advice and guidance in the form of laws, parables, stories, and arguments for those who choose to believe in God and the Day of Judgment. Hence, a believer's success and happiness in this life and the next largely depend on his understanding, internalization, and application of the concepts contained in the Book. However, the depth of comprehension of the Qur'aan's meanings will vary from individual to individual due to natural differences in intelligence. This variation existed even among the *sahaabah* (companions of the Prophet ﷺ), in spite of the Qur'aan's clarity of expression and its revelation in seven different dialects. Moreover, Allaah, the Most Wise, chose to place generalities in the Qur'aan, some of which He later explained in its other verses, while some he explained only to the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ knew and understood the Qur'aan completely because Allaah had chosen him as its vehicle and explained it all to him. Hence, Allaah said in one verse.

إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ 4 فَإِذَا قَرَأْنَاهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قَوْلَهُ 4 ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ

“Verily, collecting the Qur'aan (for you) and reciting it (to you) is Our responsibility, so when We read it to you, listen to it. Then it is upon Us to explain it.”¹

Therefore, it was the Prophet's job to explain the Qur'aan to his followers by his actions, as well as his statements. Allaah stated this in the Qur'aan:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ

“We have revealed the Reminder (Qur'aan) to you (O Muḥammad) so that you may explain to people what has been revealed to them.”²

¹ Soorah al-Qiyaamah (75):17-9.

² Soorah an-Nahl (16):44.

Consequently, the *sahaabah* all turned to the Prophet (ﷺ) whenever possible during his lifetime for the *tafseer* (explanation, understanding, interpretation) of the Qur’aan. For example, Ibn Mas’ood related that when the following verse was revealed:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الْأَمْنُ وَهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ

“Those who believe and do not obscure their faith with transgression (*thulm*), for them there is security, and they are rightly guided,”³

some of the companions became distressed, because the general linguistic meaning of *thulm* covers any kind of wrong, major or minor, and none of them were free from error. However, when they approached the Prophet (r) about it, he replied,

لَيْسَ هُوَ كَمَا تَظُنُّونَ إِنَّمَا هُوَ كَمَا قَالَ لُقْمَانُ لِابْنِهِ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّ الشِّرْكَ لَظُلْمٌ عَظِيمٌ

“It is not as you all think. It is no more than what Luqmaan said to his son, ‘Verily, *shirk* (associating partners with God) is the greatest form of *thulm*.’^{4,5}

Thus the Prophet (ﷺ) clarified for them that the broader meaning of *thulm* was not intended in the first verse; rather it was used to refer to *shirk*.

In this incident, the Prophet (ﷺ) explained the Qur’aan by the Qur’aan, demonstrating the first step in the divinely ordained method of understanding and interpretation of the Qur’aan that was established for all generations of Muslims until the Day of Resurrection. After the Prophet’s death, the *sahaabah* turned to those among themselves who were more gifted in understanding the Qur’aan and who had been able to spend more time with the Prophet (ﷺ) for interpretation and explanation of the Qur’aan.

Tafseer and Ta’weel

³ Soorah al-An’aam (6):82.

⁴ Soorah Luqmaan (31):3.

⁵ Sahih Muslim, vol. 1, p. 72, no. 226.

The words *tafseer* and *ta'weel* were considered synonyms by the early generations of Muslims; however, in the centuries following the era of the *taabi'oon* and their students (9th and 10th centuries CE/3rd and 4th centuries AH), the term *ta'weel* took on a new meaning with new and dangerous implications. Consequently, it is necessary for us to look at these terms in their original context, as well as their later usage.

The word *tafseer*, which comes from the verb *fassara*, literally means an explanation or an exposition, as in the verse,

وَلَا يَأْتُونَكَ بِمَثَلٍ إِلَّا جِئْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَأَحْسَنَ تَفْسِيرًا

“For any parable they bring, We will bring you the truth and a better explanation (*tafseeran*).”⁶

However, in Qur'aanic sciences, this term is defined as a branch of knowledge by which the Qur'aan is understood, its meanings explained, and its points of law and wisdom derived.⁷

On the other hand, the word *ta'weel*, which comes from the verb *awwala*, literally means interpretation. When the word *ta'weel* is used in the context of a command, it means its execution or implementation, as in the *hadeeth* reported by 'Aa'ishah in which she said, “Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) used to implement (*yata'awwal*) the Qur'aan by saying in *rukoo'* (bowing) and *sujood* (prostration) [during *salaah*],

(سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ رَبَّنَا وَبِحَمْدِكَ اللَّهُمَّ اغْفِرْ لِي)

‘Glory be to You, O Allaah, our Lord, and Praised are You. O Allaah, forgive me’.⁸

She was referring to the Prophet's execution of Allaah's command in the verse,

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْهُ، كَانَ تَوَّابًا

⁶ Soorah al-Furqaan (25):33.

⁷ Al-Itqaan fee 'Uloom al-Qur'aan, vol. 2, p. 174.

⁸ Collected by al-Bukhaaree (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 1, p. 434, no. 781) and Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, pp. 255-6, no. 981).

“Glorify Your Lord and ask His forgiveness, for verily, He is Oft-Forgiving.”⁹

When *ta'weel* is used in reference to news or information, it refers to its occurrence, as in the verse,

وَلَقَدْ جِئْنَاهُمْ بِكِتَابٍ فَصَّلْنَاهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ 4 هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ
إِلَّا تَأْوِيلَهُ

“Verily, We have brought them a book of knowledge—and explained it in detail—a guide and a mercy for the Believers. Are they only waiting for the occurrence (*ta'weelahu*) (of what is in the Book)?”¹⁰

That is, Allaah ridicules those who do not accept revelation by asking them if they are foolishly awaiting the occurrence of the final hour and its signs, the Judgment, Paradise, and the Hellfire, when it will be too late.

However, when the word *ta'weel* is used in reference to recorded speech, it refers to its explanation or interpretation, as in the verse:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخْرُ
مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ
تَأْوِيلِهِ

“It is He who revealed the Book to you. In it are clear verses which are the essence of the Book and others which are obscure. As for those whose hearts are twisted, they follow what is obscure seeking to sow discord and searching for its interpretation (*ta'weelahu*).”¹¹

Hence, the early scholars of *tafseer* used the words *tafseer* and *ta'weel* interchangeably. For example, Ibn Jareer at-Tabaree, in his *tafseer*, commonly

⁹ Soorah an-Nasr (110):3.

¹⁰ Soorah al-A'raaf (7):52-3.

¹¹ Soorah Aal 'Imraan (3):7.

introduced each section with the phrase, “The opinion concerning the *ta’weel* (explanation) of the statement of the Exalted.”¹²

In later centuries, when deviant and heretical explanations abounded, the term *ta’weel* was used by the scholars of that time to justify them and give them an air of legitimacy. They defined *ta’weel* as the shifting of an expression from its obvious meaning to one of its likely meanings due to its context;¹³ that is, the interpretation of a passage by other than its obvious meaning for whatever reason a scholar considered relevant. For example, scholars of this period under Mu‘tazilee (Rationalist) influence explained away the word ‘hand’ in the following verse, which refers to an oath taken by the *sahaabah*:

يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ

“Allaah’s hand is above their hands.”¹⁴

They interpreted it as being Allaah’s help and support for the simple reason that, as they put it, Allaah could not possibly have a hand. This ‘*ta’weel*’ was based on the false premise that the attribution of a hand to Allaah automatically implied conceptualizing Him in human form. However, in the same way that referring to Allaah as a living being (*al-Hayy*) does not in any way make Him humanlike, because His life is in no way like our life, referring to Allaah’s hand as a real hand does not make Him humanlike, for his hand is in no way like our hands. It should be noted that the affirmation by *Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jamaa‘ah* that Allaah has a real hand does not mean that they understand His hand to be a body part.

The Qur’aan is the last book of divine revelation sent to man, and Allaah has promised to protect it from any distortion or loss. He said in the Qur’aan:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

“Verily, We have revealed the Reminder (Qur’aan) and verily We will preserve it.”¹⁵

¹² *Lamaḥaat fee ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan*, pp.123-4.

¹³ *Mabaahith fee ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan*, p. 326.

¹⁴ *Soorah al-Fat-h* (48):10.

¹⁵ *Soorah al-Hijr* (15):9.

Its written and recited forms have been preserved without even the slightest change for over fourteen hundred years, as has been mentioned in previous chapters. This cannot be said about the Gospel of Prophet Jesus (ﷺ), nor the books of the Old Testament attributed to earlier prophets, nor any other scripture revealed by Allaah. However, Allaah's protection of the Qur'aan did not stop there; He also safeguarded the original meaning. If the protection of the Qur'aan's meaning had not taken place, deviants would have turned the Book of Allaah into a jumble of symbols, riddles and codes open to a multiplicity of interpretations, and its original meaning would have been lost. Allaah preserved the meaning of the Qur'aan by explaining some of its generalities within the Qur'aan itself and by entrusting the *tafseer* of the remainder to His Messenger, Muḥammad ibn Abdillaah (ﷺ)(570-632 CE).

The *sahaabah* (companions) were taught to seek their understanding of the Qur'aan first from the Qur'aan itself, then from the explanations and applications of the Prophet (ﷺ) and from their own intimate understanding of the language of the Qur'aan. After the Prophet's death, those who entered Islaam as new converts depended first upon the Qur'aan to explain itself, then they depended on the *sahaabah* to explain the Qur'aan to them. The *sahaabah* would inform their students among the *taabi'oon* of the circumstances in which the verses were revealed, the interpretation given by the Prophet's statements and his actions, and finally they would explain the meanings of some words which may not have been familiar or which may have had a different meaning to Arabs outside of the Arabian peninsula. With the passing of the era of the *sahaabah*, the scholars among the *taabi'oon* shouldered the grave responsibility of conveying the original meanings of the Qur'aan to the next generation of Muslims exactly as they had received them. It was the third generation which began the process of gathering and recording the various narrations of *tafseer* from the *taabi'oon*.

From the above-mentioned methodology of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions and that of the early generations of Muslim scholars which followed them, the following steps have been deduced by orthodox scholars as being the necessary conditions for making correct *tafseer* of the Qur'aan:

1. *Tafseer* of Qur'aan by Qur'aan

There are many places in the Qur'aan where questions are asked in order to catch the mind of the reader and subsequently answered to increase the impact of the concept in question. In other places, general statements are made and then

later explained in order to vary the modes of presentation and encourage readers and listeners to reflect more. This self-explanatory process is referred to as *tafseer* of the Qur’aan by Qur’aan. Allaah chose to clarify what He intended by revealing other explanatory verses. For example, Allaah asks,

وَالطَّارِقِ 4 وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ

“By *at-Taariq* (the Knocker or Night Approacher)— and what will make you understand what *at-Taariq* is?”

He then answers His question in the next verse:

النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ

“It is the piercing star (Venus).”¹⁶

Allaah also states in the Qur’aan:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ أُحِلَّتْ لَكُمْ بَهِيمَةُ الْأَنْعَامِ إِلَّا مَا يُتْلَى عَلَيْكُمْ

“O you who believe...beasts which are herded have been made *halaal* for you except what will be recited to you.”¹⁷

Two verses later he elaborates the exceptions to the general rule:

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمْ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالِدَمُّ وَلَحْمُ الْخَيْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهْلِيَ لغيرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ وَالْمُنْحَنَقَةُ
وَالْمَوْقُودَةُ وَالْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ وَالنَّطِيحَةُ وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبْعُ

“Animals that died without being slaughtered, blood, pork, animals sacrificed for other than Allaah, animals strangled to death, killed by

¹⁶ Soorah *at-Taariq* (86):1-3.

¹⁷ Soorah *al-Maa'idah* (5):1.

a blow or by falling from a height, killed by goring, or partially eaten by wild animals are forbidden to you.”¹⁸

Another example can be seen in the verse in which Allaah describes Himself, saying:

لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ

“Sight cannot encompass Him.”¹⁹

This verse implies that Allaah will not be seen in either this world or the next. However, Allaah later describes the believers in the next life as:

إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

“Gazing at their Lord,”²⁰

and he says about the disbelievers:

كَأَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَمَحْجُوبُونَ

“Verily, they will be veiled from their Lord on that day.”²¹

Therefore, before seeking an explanation or interpretation elsewhere, the Qur’aan must be relied upon to explain itself, for Allaah knows best what He intended.

2. Tafseer of Qur’aan by the Sunnah

On many occasions, the Prophet (ﷺ) added further clarification to various verses of the Qur’aan. Allaah had entrusted the job of explaining the Qur’aan to the Prophet (ﷺ). This trust was expressed in the Qur’aan in no uncertain terms,

¹⁸ Soorah al-Maa’idah (5):3.

¹⁹ Soorah al-An’aam (6):103.

²⁰ Soorah al-Qiyaamah (75):23.

²¹ Soorah al-Mutaffifeen (83):15.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ

“We have revealed the Reminder (Qur’aan) to you (O Muḥammad) so that you may explain to the people what has been revealed to them.”²²

وَمَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا لِتُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ الَّذِي اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ

“We have only revealed the Book to you (O Muḥammad) in order that you clarify for them the things about which they differ.”²³

The *sahaabah* understood this clearly and always turned to the Prophet (ﷺ) for clarification whenever they were in doubt about the meaning of any of the Qur’aanic passages. In fact, most of the fine details of *salaah*, *zakaah*, *sawm*, *hajj*, inheritance laws, etc. were explained either by the Prophet’s statements or practical demonstrations and applications (the *Sunnah*). Thus, the Prophet’s explanations of Qur’aanic passages are referred to as the *tafseer* of the Qur’aan by the *Sunnah*. For example, in *Soorah al-Faatihah*, the Prophet (ﷺ) explained that “**al-maghdoobi ‘alayhim**” (those on whom is Allaah’s anger) are the Jews, and “**ad-daalleen**” (those astray) are the Christians.²⁴ On one occasion he recited the verse:

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ

“Prepare for them whatever force you are able to.”²⁵

He then said,

(أَلَا إِنَّ الْقُوَّةَ الرَّمِيَّ أَلَا إِنَّ الْقُوَّةَ الرَّمِيَّ أَلَا إِنَّ الْقُوَّةَ الرَّمِيَّ)

²² *Soorah an-Nahl* (16):44.

²³ *Soorah an-Nahl* (16):64.

²⁴ Reported by ‘Adee ibn Haatim and collected by at-Tirmithi and Ahmad. Rated *hasan* by al-Albaanee in *Saḥeeḥ Sunan at-Tirmithi*, vol. 3, pp. 19-20, no. 2353.

²⁵ *Soorah al-Anfaal* (8):60.

“Verily force is shooting.” He repeated it three times.²⁶

In another narration, he explained that the verse:

إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ

“Verily, We have given you *al-Kawthar*,”²⁷

referred to a river in Paradise which Allaah has given him.²⁸

Because the *Sunnah* was based on guidance from Allaah, it represents the second part of God’s promise to explain the Qur’aan:

ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ

“Then, verily, it is for Us to explain it.”²⁹

Ibn ‘Abbaas explained that the statement, “**Then it is for Us to explain it,**” means, “upon your tongue [O Muḥammad].”³⁰ Consequently, no other human interpretation can be given precedence over that of the Prophet (ﷺ).

3. Tafseer of Qur’aan by *Aathaar*

Whenever the *sahaabah* could not find the *tafseer* of a passage in the Qur’aan itself or in the *Sunnah*, they would use their own reasoning based on their knowledge of the contexts of the verses and the intricacies of the Arabic language in which the Qur’aan was revealed. Consequently, one of the greatest commentators of the Qur’aan, Ibn Katheer, wrote in the preface of his *tafseer*, “If we are unable to find a suitable *tafseer* in the Qur’aan or in the *Sunnah*, we go to the opinions of the *sahaabah*. For verily, they knew the Qur’aan better than

²⁶ Reported by ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Aamir and collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, p. 1060, no. 4711). The word used in the *hadeeth* is *ramy*, which could mean shooting an arrow or throwing a spear. It can also be applied to firing a gun or a rocket.

²⁷ *Soorah al-Kawthar* (108):1.

²⁸ Reported by Anas and collected by Muslim (*Sahih Muslim*, vol. 1, p. 220, no. 790) and Aḥmad.

²⁹ *Soorah al-Qiyaamah* (75):19

³⁰ *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, vol. 6, p. 422, no. 450.

anyone else due to their knowledge of the circumstances of its revelation, their complete and accurate understanding of it, and their righteous deeds.” These explanations of the sahaabah are known as *tafseer* by *aathaar* (the sayings of the sahaabah). For example, when Ibn ‘Abbaas was questioned about the verse:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا

“And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity and to only reveal from their adornment that which (normally) appears,”³¹

he replied, “It refers to the face and hands.”³² On another occasion, after reciting the verse,

وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ

“And whoever does not judge by what Allaah has revealed, is a *kaafir* (disbeliever).”³³

Ibn ‘Abbaas said, “It is a form of *kufir* (disbelief) less than real *kufir*.”³⁴

³¹ Soorah an-Noor (24): 31.

³² Collected by Ibn Abee Shaybah in *al-Musannaf*, vol. 4, p. 283, and al-Bayhaqee in *as-Sunan al-Kubraa*. Al-Albaanee ruled in *Jilbaab al-Mar’ah al-Muslimah*, pp. 59-60, that the *isnaad* of this statement is sahheeh.

³³ Soorah al-Maa’idah (5):44

³⁴ Collected by al-Haakim, vol. 2, p. 313. A similar statement was collected by Ibn Jareeer in his *Tafseer*, vol. 4, p. 597, no. 12068. This issue is one of the raging controversies of our time, the question being: Does Ibn ‘Abbaas’s statement apply to rulers in our time, who rule by mixtures of *Sharee’ah* law and man-made law. The position of most scholars seems to be that when the ruler believes that man-made laws are better than or as good as the *Sharee’ah*, or that even though they aren’t as good as the *Sharee’ah*, it is permissible to rule by them, then he is a *kaafir* who has left Islaam. If, however, he applies man-made laws while believing that he is sinful in doing so, his *kufir* is *kufir* of actions, which makes him a major sinner, but doesn’t place him out of the fold of Islaam. See *at-Tah-theer min Fitnah at-Takfeer* by Shaykh al-Albaanee, who provides copious documentation from the statements of classical and modern *salafee* scholars to support his position.

However, the *tafseer* transmitted from the Prophet (ﷺ) and the *sahaabah* did not cover all of the verses of the Qur'aan. The Prophet (ﷺ) explained only what was unclear to the *sahaabah*, and they, in turn, only explained what was unclear to the *taabi'oon*. But with each succeeding generation, more areas became unclear due to the evolution of the language. Hence, the *taabi'oon* had to make further explanations after the passing of the *sahaabah's* era. These explanations are considered a part of *tafseer* by *aathaar* and should be given precedence over personal opinions where there is unanimity among them. Where they differed, none of their opinions is given preference over the others unless it is supported by the language.

During the era of the *taabi'oon*, many Christians and Jews became Muslim. As a result, some of the *taabi'oon* narrated tales from Jewish and Christian sources in their explanations of the Qur'aan. Such narrations became known as *Israa'eleeya*. In later generations, the books of *tafseer* became filled with such narrations, many of which could not be traced to any reliable source.

4. *Tafseer* of Qur'aan by Language

With the passage of time, words took on new meanings and old meanings became lost, foreign words entered into the language, and vast sections of vocabulary fell into disuse. This natural process necessitated the explanation of some of the Qur'aanic words according to their literal and grammatical meanings. Consequently, this period witnessed the appearance of dictionaries written specifically to deal with Qur'aanic Arabic vocabulary and philology. In cases where words had more than one meaning, this step created differences of opinion which could only be solved by finding some support in the *Sunnah*. For example, “*laams*” literally means to touch, but figuratively it means sexual intercourse. Thus, the later scholars were of two basic opinions concerning the following verse,

أَوْ لَامَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا

“...or you (*laamastum*) women and cannot find water, then make *tayammum* (ritual purification with dust).”³⁵

³⁵ Soorah an-Nisaa' (4):43.

Imaams ash-Shaafi‘ee and Maalik held that it meant the touch of the hand, though each imaam added certain stipulations to it. On the other hand, Imaam Aboo Haneefah ruled that it meant sexual intercourse. However, the Prophet’s wives reported that he kissed them before performing *salaah*, which indicated that touching was not intended by this verse.³⁶

These four methods come under the general title of *tafseer bir-riwaayah* or *tafseer bil-ma’thoor* (*tafseer* based on narration) and, as such, leave little room for argument. Although the fourth step is oftentimes based on narrations from earlier generations, at other times it can be highly opinionated and controversial. For example, Yusuf Ali openly translates the word “*burooj*” used in the 85th *soorah* as “the Zodiacal signs,” while Pickthall translates it as “Mansions of the Stars,” but says in his introduction to the *soorah* that it “is applied to the signs of the zodiac.” Thus, according to them, Allaah is making an oath by the zodiacal signs. Some English-speaking Muslims have taken this to be indirect support for astrology. However, “*burooj*” originally only meant “star configuration,” and it was not until later times that it was used to refer to the imaginary figures of the zodiac, which pagan Babylonians and Greeks superimposed on them. Astrology has been forbidden by the Prophet (ﷺ) in no uncertain terms, as it falls under the general prohibition on visiting fortunetellers. The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

(مَنْ أَتَى ... كَاهِنًا فَقَدْ كَفَرَ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيَّ مُحَمَّدٌ)

“Whoever...visits a fortuneteller [and believes in what he says]³⁷ has disbelieved in what was revealed to Muhammad.”³⁸

5. *Tafseer* of Qur’aan by Opinion

Opinions based on a careful study of the first four steps can be considered valid as long as they do not contradict any of those steps. Likewise, the application of obvious meanings of the Qur’aan to existing situations and the

³⁶ The *hadeeth* is reported by ‘Aa’ishah and collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 1, p. 43, no. 179), at-Tirmithi, Ibn Maajah and Ahmad. Al-Albaanee authenticated it in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 1, p. 36, no. 165.

³⁷ The addition is from the version of Aboo Daawood.

³⁸ Collected by at-Tirmithi and Ibn Maajah. A similar *hadeeth* was collected by Aboo Daawood (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol. 3, p. 1095, no. 3895) and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Saheeh Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol. 2, p 739, no. 3304.

formation of conclusions based on their similarities are also allowed, as long as such interpretations do not clash with authentic classical explanations. But, free interpretation based on philosophical, scientific, or sectarian ideas is totally forbidden. The Prophet (ﷺ) was reported to have said,

(الْمِرَاءُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ كُفْرٌ .) ثَلَاثَ مَرَّاتٍ (فَمَا عَرَفْتُمْ مِنْهُ فَاعْمَلُوا وَمَا جَهِلْتُمْ مِنْهُ فَارْزُقُوهُ إِلَى عَالِمِهِ .)

“Opinion based argument about the Qur’aan is kufr.” He repeated it three times, then said, “What you know of it, act upon; and what you are ignorant of, refer it to one who knows.”³⁹

We can see from the above-mentioned *hadeeth* that the Prophet (ﷺ) sternly warned his companions and later generations of Muslims about interpretations of the Qur’aan based on speculation and unsubstantiated opinions. The reason is that the Qur’aan is the foundation of Islaam and, as such, it had to remain pure and untampered with. If free rein was given to any and everyone to interpret the Qur’aan as they wished, its value would be totally destroyed, and Islaam itself would be undermined from its base. Thus, the only acceptable *tafseer* is that which adheres to the following sequence: *tafseer* of Qur’aan by the Qur’aan, then by the *Sunnah*, then by the sayings of the *sahaabah*, then by language, and finally by opinion, as long as it is based on the preceding four methods and does not contradict any of them.

Deviant Tafseers

In order to clarify the potential danger and corruption inherent in *tafseer* by unsubstantiated opinion, the following examples of deviant *tafseers* have been collected from various movements, sects, and philosophical schools from the distant past to the present. From the tenth century CE (4th century AH), some *Soofees* have interpreted “Pharaoh” to mean the heart in Allaah’s command to Prophet Moosaa:

اذْهَبْ إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَى

³⁹ Reported by Aboo Hurayrah and collected by Ahmad, Ibn Jareer in his *Tafseer* and Aboo Ya’laa. Authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Silsilah al-Ahaadeeth as-Sahheehah*, vol. 4. pp. 26-8.

“Go to Pharaoh, for verily he has transgressed,”⁴⁰

as it is the heart which oppresses every man, causing him to transgress. Others interpreted Allaah’s command to Prophet Moosaa:

وَأَلْقِ عَصَاكَ

“Throw down your staff,”⁴¹

as a command to throw aside the material world and only depend on Allaah. These spiritualistic *tafseers* are indicative of the Soofee movement’s overemphasis of the spiritual over the material.

In the Mu‘tazilee (Rationalist) *tafseers* of the ‘Abbaasid era, revelation was interpreted according to human logic. Hence, the word “heart” in the following verse was given a new meaning:

وَ إِذْ قَالَ اِبْرٰهِيْمُ رَبِّ اَرِنِيْ كَيْفَ تُحْيِي الْمَوْتٰى قَالَ اَوَلَمْ تُؤْمِنْ قَالَ بَلٰى وَّلٰكِن لِّيَطْمَئِنَّ قَلْبِيْ

“And (remember) when Ibraaheem said, ‘My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead.’ [Allaah] replied, ‘Do you not believe?’ Ibraaheem said, ‘Yes, but (I am asking You) in order that my heart may be at rest.’”⁴²

It was claimed that Ibraaheem had a friend whom he referred to as his “heart” and, thus, the true meaning of the verse was, “Yes, but I am asking You in order that my friend may be at ease.”⁴³ This interpretation was considered necessary to explain away the doubt which Ibraaheem felt in his heart, as it seemed inconsistent with prophethood, according to the Rationalists.

The Shee‘ah *tafseers* of the late ‘Abbaasid era, under the influence of their inordinate obsession with the Prophet’s descendants, interpreted the verse:

⁴⁰ Soorah an-Naazi‘aat (79):17.

⁴¹ Soorah an-Naml (27):10.

⁴² Soorah al-Baqarah (2):260.

⁴³ This *tafseer* given by Ibn Fawrak is quoted in *Mabaahith fee ‘Uloom al-Qur’aan*, p. 358.

مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ يَلْتَقِيَانِ

“He has let the two seas flow freely and they meet,”⁴⁴

as a reference to ‘Alee, the Prophet’s son-in-law, and Faatimah, the Prophet’s daughter; and in a following verse:

يَخْرُجُ مِنْهُمَا اللُّؤْلُؤُ وَالْمَرْجَانُ

“Out of them come pearls and coral,”⁴⁵

they found a reference to the Prophet’s grandsons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn.⁴⁶

The Qaadiyanees sect, which appeared in India during the latter part of the nineteenth century, claimed that in the verse,

مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ

“Muhammad is not the father of any of you, but he is Allaah’s messenger and the seal (*khaatam*) of the Prophets,”⁴⁷

khaatam does not mean seal, as most translate it, but ring. Thus, they claimed that just as the ring beautifies the finger, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was the beautification of prophethood. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is that Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was the most superior of the prophets but not the last.⁴⁸ They also assert that even if the word *khaatam* were taken to mean “seal,” it would be like the seal placed on an envelope sealing its contents, but not limiting them. These interpretations were made to validate the claim of their founder, Ghulam Ahmad, to prophethood. They also distorted the following verse in reference to Prophet ‘Eesaa:

⁴⁴ Soorah ar-Rahmaan (55):19.

⁴⁵ Soorah ar-Rahmaan (55):22.

⁴⁶ Ibn Baabooyah in *al-Khisaal*. Quoted in *Bihaar al-Anwaar*, vol. 24, pp. 97-9, nos. 1-7.

⁴⁷ Soorah al-Ahzaab (33):40.

⁴⁸ *Qadiyaniyat*, p. 306.

وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَكَانَ شُبّهَ لَهُمْ ... بَل رَفَعَهُ اللهُ إِلَيْهِ

“They did not crucify him nor did they kill him, but it was made to seem so to them....But Allaah raised him up to Himself.”⁴⁹

They claimed that “raised him up” meant a figurative raising, as used in the verse:

وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ

“And We raised your esteem for you.”⁵⁰

This interpretation was necessary in order for them to prove their doctrine that ‘Eesaa died a natural death on earth after marrying and having children and being buried in Kashmir, and that Ghulam Ahmad was the promised messiah whose return was prophesied.⁵¹

Even more recently in America, Elijah Muhammad, founder of the Elijah sect and claimant to Prophethood (d. 1975), interpreted the verse,

يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ وَنَحْشُرُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ يَوْمَئِذٍ زُرْقًا

“On that day when the trumpet is blown, We will assemble the criminals blue-eyed,”⁵²

as proof that the inhabitants of the fire will all be white people. This interpretation was used to support the Elijah doctrine that Allaah, God, was a black man, that all black people were gods and that all white people were devils.⁵³ Although the word *zurq* literally means blue, it was used to refer to the clouding of the cornea due to certain eye diseases which gives the eye a bluish-grey tinge. Hence, a more accurate translation would have been “bleary-eyed.”

⁴⁹ Soorah an-Nisaa’ (4):157-8.

⁵⁰ Soorah al-Inshiraah (94):4.

⁵¹ Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islaam, p. 24.

⁵² Soorah Taa Haa (20):102.

⁵³ Message to the Black Man in America, p. 14.

According to Elijah, since the white man resembles the black man, he was referred to as “mankind” in the Qur’aan, that is, a kind of man!⁵⁴ Therefore, in the verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى

“O mankind, verily, We have created you from a male and a female,”⁵⁵

“We” was interpreted by Elijah to refer to the black men/gods who supposedly created the white race (mankind).⁵⁶

These few examples of *tafseers* based solely on sectarian opinions clearly show the incoherence and deception that result from the disregard for the correct method of *tafseer*. The Qur’aan becomes a voice for each sect’s deviant and heretical claims. The Qur’aan is manipulated mercilessly, as there are no logical boundaries nor coherent rules by which the founders of these sects abide; hence, the same verse may have a multiplicity of meanings for them. Whatever interpretation promotes their ideas become correct. For them, the Qur’aan is no longer a book of guidance, but a book containing the hidden secrets of their sect, which only their leaders and the specially initiated can unlock.

⁵⁴ I.e., quasi-human.

⁵⁵ *Soorah al-Hujuraat* (49):13.

⁵⁶ *Message to the Black Man in America*, p. 118.