



# THE UNIVERSALITY OF ISLAM

by

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## Foreword

The universality of Islam is an undeniable fact, a characteristic peculiar to Islam, the Righteous Religion. Almighty Allah has assigned Muhammad Ben Abdullah as Prophet and Messenger to the entire mankind, revealing to him His Holy Book to serve as a means of guidance and a reminder to all humanity. It was the will of Almighty Allah to make the Islamic Message the seal of revealed messages, which thus gave form and substance to the Righteous Religion. Being the final incarnation of the divine ordinance to mankind, this universal Righteous Religion makes no distinction among humans as to gender, race, colour, language, economic level or social caste. Islam has made all humans equal in terms of duty assignment and the legal capacity as well as in terms of rights and duties. Hence the universal, perennial character of the Islamic Message, a Message unbound by the constraints of time and space. It is a divine Message addressed to mankind wherever they are and in whichever epoch they live, a beacon that invariably guides them to the right path in this world and in the Hereafter, the path of dignified, blissful life.

The full, permanent legitimacy of the universality of Islam stems not only from the perennial and comprehensive character of the Islamic Message, which is always relevant in all time and place, but also from the fact that the principles enshrined in the Holy Quran and the authentic *Hadiths* all underline fraternity among humans on the basis of unity of human origin and fate.

To shed ample light on the truths embedded in Islam and disseminate the latter's authentic teachings have always ranked high in the priorities of action of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and the Abu Dhabi Welfare Organization. In their books, conferences and ongoing activities under their competence, the two institutions have been working actively to spread far and wide the Islamic culture, which is founded on these very truths and teachings. In so doing, they seek to enlighten minds to the glory, tolerance and universality of Islam.

One of the valuable books published recently in Arabic on the topic of universality of the Islamic Message is the *Universality of Islam*, by the author Dr. Shawqi Dayf, Chairman of the Arabic Language Academy, Cairo. Tackling this theme in an in-depth way, the book focuses on the characteristics of universality of Islam, expounding its advantages and showing its basic principles and goals. In this connection, the Islamic Organization and Abu Dhabi Welfare Organization requested the authorization of this distinguished scholar to have his

excellent book translated into English and French in order to generalize benefit therefrom through its large-scale distribution in these two languages, in a way to enable the Muslims speaking these languages to take advantage of its contents, and to give an opportunity to non-Muslims to gain insight into the essence of the Righteous Religion and take stock of its guiding call and tolerant *Shariah*. The author of the book has generously advised approval, expressing his responsiveness to the goal pursued by ISESCO and Abu Dhabi Welfare Organization, and authorizing the two institutions to translate his book *Universality of Islam*.

We, therefore, take pleasure to present this translation to the reader, commending the academic value of the book, and inviting readers to ponder over its contents in view of its intrinsic value and useful knowledge. The book is tantamount to a call to Islam, based on vast knowledge and culture to the best interest of mankind, the type of culture which leaves an everlasting impact. Our action aims to fulfill one of the most important duties required for promoting the Islamic culture and showing its crystal-clear image to public opinion worldwide.

May Almighty Allah guide our steps to the Right Path, the Path leading to the promotion of our Ummah and the dissemination of its radiance far and wide.

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## Introduction

These are brief remarks regarding the universal character of Islam, the great religion which God has chosen -as stated in the Holy Quran and the Prophetic traditions (*sunna*)- to be the seal of all heavenly religions, that humanity may find in it happiness in this life and in the hereafter. God Almighty has, through this religion, promulgated an international law valid for Muslims as well as others: that religious freedom should be guaranteed to all people, so that no coercion or oppression against anyone in matters of religion be permitted. These norms have been observed by the Prophet (peace be upon him), by the Righteous Caliphs and by all Muslims since the early Muslim conquests. Islam is thus the only religion in the lands of which people of all religions, heavenly or pagan, lived freely, with their temples and possessions protected, and enjoyed the services of special courts of their own, whether these be church-based tribunals or otherwise, headed by leaders from their own ranks.

Among the most important signs of Islam's universality is the fact that it had opened its lands to protect minorities (*Ahl al-Dhimma*, or people of the covenant) and permitted them to join the Muslims on equal footing in all areas of economic endeavour, whether in agriculture, industry or commerce. Many amongst them consequently attained great wealth, symbolised by the status of "Maria the Copt," the lady who hosted the Caliph al-Mamoun and his entourage when they passed by her estate during a visit to Egypt. Even official posts were open to minorities from the time of the Caliph Mu'awiya and his son Yazid. The Abbasids widened the opportunities of employment in the state for minorities, leading many to attain the highest posts up to that of vizier or chief minister, as happened in Iran and Iraq during the Buwayhid era, and in Egypt during the Fatimid and Tolounid periods. Coexistence was strengthened by the participation of Muslims in the festivals and holidays of non-Muslims, especially those of Christians and Magians. The protected minorities did pay *jizyah*, which was not a "religious tax" as is often thought, but a defence tax, paid solely by able-bodied men in lieu of military service, since they were exempt from joining the Muslim armies. This tax never exceeded one dinar per year in any case.

This fruitful coexistence and cooperation in the economic sphere was strengthened by another and higher form of coexistence in the intellectual sphere, where non-Muslims transferred the treasures of science and philosophy from Greek, Persian and Indian sources into Arabic. The Muslims quickly assimilated these sciences and made outstanding contributions of their own to them, producing scientists of international standing in the areas of chemistry, mathematics and

medicine, as well as internationally recognized philosophers who laid the foundations of Islamic philosophy. As a result the Muslim world continued - alone- in the leadership of world civilisation in the realms of science and philosophy for six centuries, from the second to the eighth hijri<sup>(1)</sup> centuries (8<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> AD). This international leadership role in all fields of civilisation has been the subject of large volumes written by Western scholars. During these periods, extensive intellectual and theological debates between Muslims and scholars from the protected minorities were quite frequent. Muslim theologians welcomed the intellectual challenge and continued to promote debates in their discussions, meetings, which shows the highest level of religious tolerance and respect for intellectual freedom, due to the universality of Islam which treated all equally.

God has willed Islam to be a rational religion, and thus its claim to truth was not backed -as was the case with earlier revelations- with observable miracles. Muslims were, instead, asked to employ their intellect and reason to contemplate the signs of God's power in the universe, and to reflect on the intricate and wise laws which the Almighty has manifested therein, so that they may bear witness, rationally and knowingly, that this universe was the work of a Lord who had created and perfected it. God also urged the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the Muslims to invite others to Islam through wisdom, good preaching and considerate debate, all of which were employed by the Almighty himself in the Quran. Wisdom here refers to rational proofs and arguments demonstrating the existence and unity of God. God has also made ample use of good preaching through relating the stories of earlier prophets and warning of punishment in the hereafter. He also used gentle debate and argument often. God and His Prophet made reason an arbiter in *Shari'a* (Islamic Law) and a major principle -after Quran and *sunna*- for deriving and elaborating its many subsidiary rules. God and His Prophet have also unequivocally commanded the believers to shun all superstition, magic, astrology and soothsayers' practices, so that human reason could be purified from belief in falsehoods. This emphasis on reason ensured that Islamic *Shari'a*, revealed to direct the whole of humanity, was built on firm foundations of lofty reason.

Islam embraced learning from the first verses of the Quran revealed to the Prophet, and God exalted the pursuit of learning above the angels' constant glorification the Almighty, while the Prophet praised learning extensively. The Holy Quran, through its repeated references to the scientific truths in the realms of the natural sciences, astronomy and medicine, had directed the attention of

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1) The Muslim calendar starts from the date of the Prophet's *hijrah* (migration) from Makkah to Madinah in the year 622AD. When dual dates are used in the text, we will put the hijri date first, e.g. 1/622.

Muslims to these sciences and led them to seek after them from foreign sources once they managed to settle in the newly Islamised lands. As a result, they had the available scientific knowledge translated faithfully from its Persian, Indian and Greek sources, just as they availed themselves of Greek philosophical heritage. A great public library was established during the reigns of the caliphs al-Rashid and al-Mamoun. Religious sciences prospered, as did linguistic and ancient sciences, helped by the proliferation of private, public and mosque libraries and the existence of numerous translators, copyists and booksellers in every Arab country. Philosophy and scientific knowledge were disseminated among all classes, even among the lower classes, while universities and schools proliferated. Women were also prominent participants in this scientific renaissance. Some of our intellectuals have read in Western sources about the intense conflict between church and state in Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries because of the Church's stance against science and scientists, so they mistakenly applied these concepts to Islam. However, Islam does not have a church and it has not -as we have seen- opposed science; quite the contrary, it pushed the Muslims to take a leading international role in the promotion of science and learning.

God enjoins His Prophet and the Muslims to adhere to justice without which humanity as a whole cannot attain to the good life. God says in the Quran that He has created the whole universe, its creatures and everything in it in conformity with the principles of justice, that people may emulate His works. He commands them to adhere to justice in weights and measures, amongst themselves, in their worship of Him, in their relations with family members, relatives and neighbours and in all that they say or do. God informs the Muslims that: ***“Thus have We made you an Ummah justly balanced”***<sup>(2)</sup> (*Al-Baqarah*: 143) meaning that they are fair, inclining to the just mean in everything, not going to excess nor falling short, even in charity and worship, since Islam does not condone monasticism and similar excesses. God and His Prophet continuously emphasised justice in judging between litigants, while God calls repeatedly for social justice between rich and poor through alms and *zakah* (mandatory contribution prescribed in Islam, to be collected from the rich and distributed to the poor and needy) and regards this as an act of worship on par with prayer. Thus Islam has resolved for humanity this perennial problem: the problem of poverty, while

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2) **Translator's note:**

We have adopted here and in all subsequent translations of Quranic verses the translation of ‘Abdullah Yusuf ‘Ali, (New Revised Edition, Amana Corporation, Brentwood, Md., USA, 1989). The term used in this verse to describe the Muslim community is actually *Ummat-an Wasat-an* (a community of the middle, or a median community, signifying moderation and the approximation to the just mean, as the author explains).

Communism attempted to resolve it through oppression and depriving man of his wealth and freedom, together with the advocacy of atheism and rebellion against God and His religions, and it was therefore inevitable that it should collapse.

God has also ordained -in His *Shari'a*- equality for all human beings in duties and rights, so that no one could lord it over others. Islam has also abolished the status of an ecclesiastical class and did not condone the rise of a special "holy class" of people to place itself as an intermediary between man and God, since all humans are equal in the eyes of their Lord, regardless of race, origin or colour. The Prophet has set a high example by maintaining equality between himself and his Companions. Equality between Muslims develops into intimate brotherhood, the most prominent example of which was the brotherhood between the *Muhajirun* ("emigrants" from Makkah to Madinah) and *Ansar* ("supporters," the local Muslims of Madinah) in early Islam. The Prophet also adhered to strict equality when implementing legal punishments, countenancing no exceptions. Because of this spirit of equality, no form of class divisions ever emerged in Muslim societies, while Islam abolished the class and caste systems that existed in some of its lands, as was the case in Iran and India. God has made tolerance -in His Islamic *Shari'a*- a fundamental principle. God also commands the Muslims to be tolerant towards pagans and give charity to their poor, and forgive the oppressors and tyrants among them who had tortured and abused the Muslims. The Prophet had set a fine example in forgiveness when he pardoned his bitterest enemies after the conquest of Makkah. In compliance with the injunctions of God, Muslims exemplified tolerance in their conduct with those who lived with them in their lands. A spirit of friendliness and cooperation prevailed between them and their Christian neighbours, while the Jews enjoyed excellent treatment in the lands of Islam, especially in Muslim Spain and the Maghreb, for century after century. However, we regretfully see them today drive Muslim Palestinians from their lands and subject them to vicious treatment.

God has also enjoined the strengthening of family bonds so that they may never fray, starting with the kindness enjoined between parents and children. Among the many bonds decreed to cement family relations is the bond of inheritance, in which God awarded the male twice the share of the female in recognition of his greater responsibilities. Marriage was also consecrated as a holy bond, entered into in front of God, who had created love and kindness between man and woman, and by His will, God has also made it the man's duty to support the family. Islam also decreed equality between men and women in social and political responsibility, and in the right to work, which enabled women -in the present age- to take up all positions, including ministries, and even occupy the position of Prime Minister in some Muslim countries. Islam also guaranteed

economic independence for women in a manner not known in the West until today. The contribution of women in the fields of learning and literature had been considerable from very early on in Islam, and I have no doubt that Western awareness of the position enjoyed by women in Muslim Spain was the main incentive for people there to try to raise the status of women in their lands, and it is only appropriate for the West today to emulate the achievements of Muslim societies in strengthening family bonds.

God enjoins all humanity to adhere to a great range of virtues, including -as mentioned above- the exercise of rational judgement, the love of learning, equality between all men and women and tolerance with all religious communities. These virtues are connected to others which contribute to human happiness in this life and the next: the virtue of work, so that a person will not have to be dependent on others; keeping promises and covenants; kindness to man and all creatures, to the extent that Islam is called the “religion of mercy”; truthfulness, humility, modesty, civility, patience, chastity, forgiveness, care for the orphans. God also called on the believers to shun a range of sinful activities, such as adultery, partaking of alcohol, gambling, usury, arrogance, false testimony, injustice, lying, envy, cheating, abusing of man or beast, defamation, ridicule, false accusations, suspicion, spying, back-biting, spreading evil and gloating over the misfortune of others.

God and His Prophet also prescribe an etiquette governing conduct at gatherings and discussion or learning sessions. Among these is the requirement to make room for newcomers and the prohibition against the rising of people already seated in honour of a new arrival. When visiting someone, a person must ask permission to enter, and when people meet, they are to greet each other. The recommended salutation is to wish the person peace, and the same form of greeting is also used in obligatory daily prayers. “Peace” is also one of God’s Holy Names, thus signifying God’s desire to impel all to spread peace on earth, that nations may incline to it and love and compassion prevail among all. Islam has thus been leading the call for peace for fourteen centuries.

I have no doubt that the early generation of Muslims in the first century after *hijrah* were acutely aware of these aspects of the universal dimension of Islam, and that is why they laboured to propagate it with diligence, managing to reach with it half the world population of their time with its message. They have taken it as far as Tropical Africa, Central Asia, reaching the lands of Turks and Mongols, China, India, Malaysia, Indonesia and Southern Philippines. There is hardly a country in Central Africa which does not count tens of thousands of Muslims among its inhabitants, and it is the same with Latin America, the United

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States, Canada and Europe. Muslims today number more than seven hundred millions, and it is their duty to make other nations aware of the teachings of Islam and its values, enjoined by God for the benefit of humanity as a whole, to help it achieve its aspirations of happiness in this life and the next.

It is hoped that -with this introduction- I have been able to give a brief overview of the topics to be covered in this work on the universality of Islam: this great divine religion. And I doubt not that it is going to be followed by works that are more comprehensive and much more accurate and profound. And it is to God alone that I appeal for guidance and success.

**Shawqi Dayf**

Cairo, Rajab, AH 1417

## Chapter I

### The Universality of Islam in the Holy Quran and the Noble *Hadith*

The Holy Quran repeatedly affirms that every one among God's messengers had been sent to his people alone, except for Muhammad -peace be upon him. Noah was sent to his people to invite them to worship God and adhere to piety, as mentioned at the start of the *sura* bearing his name (*Sura* 71). So was Abraham, as related in *Sura* 29: "***And Remember Abraham: behold, he said to his people: 'Serve Allah and fear Him'***" (*Al-'Ankabut*: 16). Lot as well as the Almighty related in *Sura* 26: "***The people of Lot gave the lie to the Messengers'***" (*Al-Shu'ara'*: 160). And similarly Hud as mentioned in *Sura* 11: "***And to the Ad People [We sent] Hud, one of their own brethren. He said: 'O my people! Worship Allah! ye have no other god but Him'***" (*Hud*: 50). And Salih was also sent to his people, as in *Sura* 7: "***To the Thamud people (We sent) Salih, one of their own brethren'***" (*Al-A'raf*: 72). Shu'ayb was dispatched to the people of Madyan, as related in the same *sura*, "***To the Madyan people (We sent) Shu'ayb, one of their own brethren'***" (*Al-A'raf*: 85). Jesus was similarly sent to the Israelites as related in *Sura* 61: "***And remember Jesus the son of Mary said : O Children of Israel, I am the messenger of Allah (sent) to you'***" (*Al-Saff*: 6).

Muhammad (peace be upon him) was, however, sent to all mankind. God Almighty says in *Sura* 7, addressing His Prophet: "***Say: 'O men, I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of Allah'***" (*Al-A'raf*: 158). It was mentioned in books of *tafsir* (commentaries on the Quran) that this verse had been revealed on an occasion when a group of Jews admitted that Muhammad was a prophet, but argued that he was a prophet sent to the Arabs only. God thus rebuked these people on account of this claim and command in the same verse that they should believe in Him and in His Messenger, saying: "***So believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet who believes in Allah and His Words; follow him that (so) you may be guided.'***" In this verse, God bears witness to the fact that His messenger had been sent to all mankind, Arab and non-Arab. The Almighty also says in *suras* (*Yusuf*, *Sad* and *Al-Takwir*): Describing Qur'an : "***It is no less than a message (dhikr) for all creatures (al-'alamin)***" (*Yusuf*: 104). And in *Sura* 68: "***But it is nothing less than a message to all the worlds'***" (*Al-Qalam*: 52). Ibn Manzur explained the term *dhikr* (reminder) as referring to the fact that the Quran contains a detailed elaboration of religion. It is thus as if God -hallowed be His name- is saying that the Quran is but a law to the worlds. The

term *al-'alamin* is plural of '*alam* (world), and thus the meaning is that the Quran is a law for the world with all its peoples and races. The use of the plural is an indication of an all-inclusive intent, meaning that this law is for the whole world, East and West, North and South.

This verse has been repeated as a rejoinder to the polytheists who alleged that the Quran is but a collection of ancient myths, as related in *Sura 6*: "***The unbelievers say: 'These are nothing but tales of the ancients'***" (*Al-An'am*: 25), (meaning their myths and stories which they used to relate for their nightly entertainment). They also claimed that the Quran was a work of magic, as related in *Sura 37*: "***And they say: 'this is nothing but evident sorcery'***" (*Al-Saffat*: 15). They also claimed it to be poetry, as related in this verse of *Sura 69* which refutes their claim: "***It is not the word of a poet'***" (*Al-Haqqah*: 41). They also said that it was lies and fabrication. "***But the misbelievers say: 'Naught is this but a lie which he has forged'***" (*Al Furqan*: 4). But God replies to all these claims by affirming that the Quran is a reminder and a law to the worlds and the whole of mankind.

God addresses His Prophet in *Sura 21* saying: "***We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all creatures'***" (*Al Anbiya'*: 107). He is thus a mercy sent as a gift to mankind, as related in a prophetic saying (*hadith*): mercy in his temperament and all his characteristics and conduct; and mercy through his *Shari'a* which was presented as a gift to the world, since it was built on benevolence and easiness for people. The Prophet (peace be upon him) always manifested a tendency towards mercy, leniency and a concern to lighten the burden on people when legislating, inspired in this by the Almighty's assertion in *Sura 2*: "***Allah intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties'***" (*Al-Baqarah*: 185). Some of the Companions used to shun the lighter provisions indicated by the Prophet hoping, by taking the harder option, to better please God. But the Prophet was not happy with this, and used to preach to them, counselling them not to refrain from taking the easy options provided for them, since *Shari'a* was based on the principles of mercy and kindness towards people. God addressed the Prophet in *Sura 34*: "***And we have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings and warning them'***" (*Saba'*: 28). God did not thus send Muhammad to Quraysh only, nor to the Arabs alone, but to the whole of mankind in all the corners of the earth, to deliver to them his universal message. He was to give good tidings to those who believed in it, worshipped God alone, embraced His Islamic *Shari'a* and observed its provisions, that they will be admitted to paradise where they would encounter everlasting happiness; he was also to warn to those worshipped deities other than the One True God and rejected His message and law that they will be condemned to hell and its everlasting torment on the Day of Judgement.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) reaffirms repeatedly that he had been sent to the whole of mankind. Ibn Kathir mentions in his **Tafsir** that the prophetic sayings reported to this effect were too numerous to count, and that this tenet is one of the basic principles of Islam. Muslim relates in his **Sahih** (compendium of authentic traditions) on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet had said: *“I have been favoured over other prophets with six [favours].”* Among these he enumerates: *“that I have been sent to the whole of mankind.”* Muslim also relates on the authority of Jabir ibn Abdillah that the Prophet (peace be upon him) had said: *“I was given five things no one before me had been given,”* and he mentions as one of them: *“Every prophet was sent to his people specifically, but I have been sent to every black and red [person].”* (This is Arabic idiom for saying that he had been sent to everybody, since “red” is used in Arabic speech to denote “white”.)

The Prophet (peace be upon him) was keenly aware of this universal mission, to the extent that he sent epistles to all tribes urging them to embrace God’s religion. Biographers of the Prophet write chapters about these missions since the first year of hijrah, usually calling them *ghazawat* (expeditions or raids), but in truth they were missions to deliver the Islamic message to these tribes. The Prophet continued to send emissaries in this manner until the eighth year of hijrah, when Makkah was conquered and the influential tribe of Thaqif embraced Islam. From then on, delegations from every Arab tribe started arriving in Madinah, declaring their intention to embrace Islam. It is due to the belief in the universal nature of his mission that the Prophet sent an army to Mu’atah in Northern Arabia to apprise the Byzantines of his mission. The Muslim army was met by a Byzantine army and could not attain victory. In the ninth year of hijrah, missives sent by him to princes and kings inviting them to embrace Islam followed each other in close succession. He invited the Negus, the Christian monarch of Abyssinia, and Khosrau, the pagan King of Persia and his governors in Eastern Arabia, as well as Heraclius, the Christian Emperor of Byzantium, to embrace Islam. He also invited the princes and bishops of Syria and the ruler of Egypt. In all of this, he had been inspired by the Quranic revelation which instructed him to convey his religious message to all the world. He travelled to Syria at the head of an expedition he led personally, reaching as far as Tabuk, from whence he chose to go back. He died soon after that, but his successors, Abu Bakr and Omar completed the mission of propagating Islam far and wide. In their reign, Islam reached Iraq, Iran, Syria, Egypt and parts of the Maghreb as far as Tunisia.



## **Chapter II**

### **Religious Freedom**

God Almighty (glory be to Him) has laid down in the Holy Quran a general law which has been observed by the Prophet (peace be upon him) and by Muslims in all their lands at all times. This law is the injunction: “***Let there be no compulsion in religion***” (*Al-Baqarah*: 256). Therefore, Islam has always guaranteed religious freedom in its lands for all people, from East and West, regardless of their religious beliefs. No one was ever forced to embrace Islam. On the contrary, people were left to choose freely what religion to adopt. God admonishes His Prophet in *Sura* 10 for his eagerness to guide all the pagans of Makkah to Islam: “***If it had been the Lord’s Will, they would all have believed - all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!***” (*Yunus*: 99). God informs His Messenger that, had He so willed, he could have made all people equal in their intellectual faculties and in their correct perception of His guidance, and belief in His unity. However, He has chosen to create them different in their levels of understanding regarding the truth of guidance and belief. The Almighty therefore, rebukes His Prophet for his over-eagerness to guide the people of Makkah to Islam, and his striving to achieve this with all the means available to him, thus causing God (glory be to Him) to equate him with those who would try to force the people of Makkah to become believers in God. This is an implicit praise for the Prophet’s keenness to deliver his message, and an explanation of the heavenly reason why the Makkans failed to respond to him.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) adhered to this divine command, never forcing anyone to embrace Islam. Whoever was guided by his own reason and insight, and found his heart receptive to the new faith, was free to embrace it in full consciousness; and whoever his reason misguided him and failed to see the signs of guidance, turned away. Ibn Abbas reported that the verse “***Let there be no compulsion in religion,***” has been revealed in the case of a Muslim from among the *ansar* named al-Husayni, who hailed from the clan of Salim ibn Auf in Madina. This man, who had two Christian sons, said to the Prophet (peace be upon him) : “*Could I force [these two sons of mine] to become Muslims, for they have insisted on holding on to their Christian beliefs ?*” God then revealed this verse, which became a sacred law for the Prophet and the Muslims. It was also related on the authority of Attab ibn Shumayr that he once said to the Prophet (peace be upon him) : “*O Messenger of God, I have an ageing father and some*

brothers. Would you like me to go to them, perhaps they could embrace Islam, and then I could bring them over?" The Prophet then answered: "If they embrace Islam, it is better for them. But if they stayed [with their old religion], then Islam is broad and all inclusive." This advice meant that the men should be left to choose freely. The historical record does not tell of any person, whether a pagan or a believer in a heavenly religion, who had been forced to become a Muslim. Anyone desiring to become a Muslim was required to declare his conversion in front of a judge and witnesses to prove that he had voluntarily chosen Islam. Ibn al-Attar al-Andalusi relates that, in fourth century Muslim Spain, any Jew or Christian embracing Islam was required to present to a judge a document bearing the testimony of witnesses confirming that he had accepted Islam without coercion, was not fleeing from something nor expecting reward, and that he had chosen Islam after fully understanding its laws and recognising that it had abrogated all earlier religions, being the only religion acceptable to God, and that he had embraced Islam in the presence of judge so and so, in front of the chief of police, the head of the town or the market regulator.

Muslims regard the treaty with the Christian population of Najran in Yemen as a binding legal precedent regulating the treatment of all religions, heavenly or pagan, guaranteeing them freedom of worship, protection for their possessions, the sanctity of their places of worship and the safety of their men of religion. The text of the treaty includes the following provisions:

*"For Najran and its environs [is hereby given] the protection of God and the pledge and covenant (dhimma) of the Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of God, for their possessions, their persons and their religion; for those present and those absent, for their kin and for their churches, and what they possess, little or much. No bishop should be removed from his bishopric, nor a monk from his monastery, nor a priest from his priesthood."*

It is in the light of this treaty that the Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab agreed a similar treaty with the people of Jerusalem, which says:

*"This is what the servant of God, Omar ibn al-Khattab, has conceded to the people of Ilya [Jerusalem] by way of guarantee and safe conduct: protection for themselves and their possessions; for their churches and crosses; for their sick and healthy, and that their churches may not be inhabited or destroyed, nor could their churches suffer to be diminished in any way, neither in their grounds nor their crosses, and nothing of what they own [is to be touched]. Nor may they be coerced in their religion, nor may any among them be persecuted. This agreement is guaranteed by God's covenant, the covenant and pledge of His Prophet and that of the caliphs and that of the believers."*

Omar has followed in this treaty the example of the Prophet's covenant with the people of Najran, adding some details, like stipulating that the churches may not be inhabited or pulled down, nor could any part of them be taken down or their area reduced. Omar and the Muslims adhered to this provision not only with regards to Christian churches and temples, but also for Jewish temples and those of Magians in Persia who worshipped fire, and the Sabians in Northern Iraq who worshipped the planets. The Chief of the Jews in Baghdad used to be called Ra's al-Jalut while the chief of the Christians there was known as al-Jathliq. Successive caliphs consistently gave them written pledges and guarantees of protection for their religious followers and all their places of worship.

Monasteries in Iraq, Syria and Egypt proliferated and prospered a great deal, prompting many to write about them, especially since these places offered to poets and other lax Muslims who visited them excellent wines. These monasteries dotted the landscape on the outskirts of big towns, and it had been reported that there used to be fifteen monasteries in and around Baghdad alone, the most important among which was the Qina monastery East of Baghdad. This particular one was described by Shay'ishti in his book **al-Dayyarat** as *"a nice, well-frequented monastery in a beautiful location. It has a hundred cells for monks and worshippers, with one cell for each monk. Cells change hands in this monastery for sums ranging from fifty to one thousand dinars. Each cell has a garden with all sorts of fruit trees and date-palm and olive trees. The value of its harvest ranges from fifty to two hundred dinars. The monastery is surrounded by a big wall, and has a water canal running through it. People gather in it on the day of the Festival of the Cross."*

Egypt was full of monasteries, the most important among which was the monastery of Antanios to the east of the town of Itfih in Upper Egypt. It was endowed with vast lands and many possessions -according to the account of Abi Salih al-Armani- and was surrounded by a fortress. Inside, there was a big garden full of fruitful date palms and apple, pear and pomegranate trees. Its farmland was planted with legumes. Three springs, with continuously flowing water, supplied the garden and the monastery. The garden had one and a sixth acre of vineyards, and a thousand date palms. The monastery had a large palace in its midst, and a number of cells overlooking the garden.

I have only mentioned these two monasteries in Iraq and Egypt to demonstrate the kind of good treatment the Muslims of Egypt and Iraq had accorded to Christian monks and the extent of religious freedom they had enjoyed. All this while the orthodox Byzantine Church continued to persecute the Christian Monophysites and forced them to flee Antioch during the reign of

Emperor Necephorus I. The patriarchs of that denomination were then accused of being “more heretical and unbelieving than Pharaoh and Nebuchadrezzar.” When the Byzantines retook Malatya in Eastern Syria, they arrested its Monophysite Patriarch and six of its senior bishops and took them to Constantinople where they were imprisoned. They then exiled the Patriarch to Bulgaria where he died. Another bishop also died in exile, while a third was stoned to death in front of the Emperor’s palace. The rest were forced to recant and renounce their Monophysite faith, and were rebaptised into the Orthodox Church to escape death. Nothing similar ever happened in the history of Islam and that of its peoples and rulers. On the contrary, Muslim rulers worked to create harmony between different Christian sects. When the caliph al-Mamoun realised the amount of hostility existing between various Christian sects, he resolved to publish an edict guaranteeing for every Christian sect complete freedom to perform its rites and run its own churches, allowing even the smallest Christian sect, even if it had no more than ten adherents, to choose its own bishop and have the other sects recognise him. However, Christian leaders did not welcome this proposal, for fear that Christian sects might multiply endlessly. So al-Mamoun was persuaded to abandon his plan.

There were a few instances when a fanatical governor took charge in an area and started destroying churches, and other instances where mobs attacked churches. In all these cases, the state would quickly rebuild the damaged churches in compliance with the covenant of Omar with the people of Jerusalem, which assured them that none of their churches would be demolished or suffer reduction in size or area. It is reported that Ali ibn Sulayman, the governor appointed by the Caliph al-Rashid between 169-171H to rule Egypt ordered some newly built churches demolished. A complaint against him was lodged with al-Rashid, who sacked him and appointed a new governor. The latter permitted the Copts to rebuild the churches demolished by his predecessor after consulting the two most senior jurists in Egypt: al-Layth ibn Saad and Abdullahi ibn Luhay’a. They told him that the building of churches was a positive contribution to Egyptian life and to the development of the country, arguing that all Egyptian churches had actually been built during the Islamic era anyway.

An important aspect of the freedom enjoyed by the protected minorities among the Christians and Jews was that they did not have to appear in front of state courts which applied Islamic *Shari’a*, but were given the right to deal with their own religious courts, whether these be church courts or otherwise. The heads of these religious court were accorded the same status as senior judges in state courts. The sort of rulings and punishment handed by these courts were mainly spiritual in nature, like dismissing priests and bishops from their posts, or

banning secular individuals from attending church, imposing a fine, deprivation from religious sacraments or barring burials according to Christian rites. The traveller Petachia who wrote in the sixth hijri century relates that the heads of the Jewish community in Mosul were the ones who punished their followers in special courts headed by the Ra's al-Jalut mentioned earlier or their senior rabbis in different areas. Muslim Spain was similar in allowing Christians special courts run by church authorities to arbitrate in their disputes.



## Chapter III

### Coexistence with Followers of all Religions in the Economic Sphere

God and His Prophet have commanded Muslims, as we have seen, to coexist peacefully with people from all religions, divine or otherwise, in their lands. This meant that people from other religious communities had to be treated with dignity, looked after, assured protection for their possessions and churches and allowed the right to appeal for their own chosen courts and tribunals to resolve their disputes. A clear indication of the fact that non-Muslims have enjoyed living among the Muslims is the fact that none of them has, throughout the centuries, been driven out from their homes. They were known as *Ahl al-Dhimma* (People of the Covenant), a reference to the fact that they were within the sanctuary of the pledge or covenant (*dhimma*) of Islam. A quick look at the huge numbers of Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and Sabians in the lands of Islam will compel us to believe that Muslims continued to treat them all very well. It is said that Baghdad counted tens of thousands of Christians among its population, while the majority of the population of the towns of Takrit and al-Ruha in Iraq were Christians. Christians in Syria were -and still are- very numerous, and so were the number of Christian Copts in Egypt. When the governor of Ifriqiyya (North Africa) Hassan ibn al-Nu'man embarked on establishing a port in Tunisia in the first hijri century to replace Carthage, and resolved to build a large navy to protect the North African coast from the raids of the Romans, he brought a thousand Coptic families to help him set up a great industrial centre and to build the navy. Many Christians from among the Romans who were left behind after the Muslim conquest continued to live in all areas in the Maghreb. It was said that al-Mansour, the caliph of the Muwahhidun state the Maghreb in the 6<sup>th</sup> century (12<sup>th</sup> century AD) built a palace for his exclusively Christian guards corps, which were around five hundred strong, and used to ride in front of his procession. Muslim Spain also teemed with Christians.

Mitz writes that Jews were numerous in Iraq. Their number had been estimated by the traveller Petachia to run into the hundreds of thousands. He mentions that there were many of them in the towns and villages by the Tigris and Euphrates and also in cities like Mosul. There were two towns, one near Isfahan and another east of Marw, each named al-Yahudiyya (The Jewish town). Ten thousand Jews lived in Damascus and five thousand in Halab. Petachia said that only one Jew lived in Jerusalem, while his contemporary, Benjamin, says

there were four of them there. Seven thousand Jews lived in Cairo and three thousand in Alexandria, while comparable numbers could be found in the various towns of the Delta. In Muslim Spain, Jews prospered and enjoyed life under Arab rule, and when they were driven out of Spain and Portugal in the sixteenth century AD, the Maghreb became their main place of refuge.

Zoroastrians were quite numerous in Iraq and in their original home, Iran, in the first two hijri centuries. They were concentrated especially in the city of Shiraz and in the areas of southern Persia, while the city of al-Qarainayn in eastern Persia was exclusively Magian. Sabians lived in Harran and Raqqah, and they witnessed a period of prosperity towards the end of the second hijri century. An indication of this could be found in the report of a festival they held in Harran one year during that period, when fires burned in every street, and a huge procession featuring oxen adorned with expensive costumes and garlanded with flowers and sweet basil, with bells hanging from their horns. Behind the oxen marched men playing various wind instruments. The Sabians continued to live in prosperity, and in the middle of the fourth/tenth century, an edict was issued by the caliph ordering their protection, indicating that their numbers were beginning to dwindle because of the large numbers embracing Islam from among them. By the middle of the fifth century, Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus writes that “*they number scarcely forty individuals in the whole world.*”

All avenues of employment and economic activity were open to the covenanted minorities in the past. Al-Jahiz writes that the masses in Iraq trusted the Christians in particulars, preferring them over the Zoroastrians and judging them to be more open and straightforward than Jews. He says they used to engage in important professions, such as perfumeries and money-changing, while the doctors of the caliphs, viziers and upper classes, as well as hospital doctors, were from among them. So much so that people began to believe that a good doctor can only be a Christian. And we add that Christians were prominent among the senior translators of Greek writings, for which the Syrian translators were generously remunerated by the caliphs. Al-Jahiz also writes that Jews were only found working as dyers, tanners, butchers, potters or shoemakers. Al-Maqdisi writes in the fourth century that they included tailors, dyers, shoemakers and jewellers. Benjamin, writing in the sixth hijri century, mentions that he had found in Bethlehem twelve Jews engaged in the dyeing trade. Brookleman says in his book *The History of Muslim Peoples* that Europe had known in the tenth century AD a great boom in the slave trade, which was controlled by Jews from Muslim Spain.

Coptic Christians in Egypt relied for their livelihood -mostly- on agriculture, especially gardening, which made them extremely prosperous. They were also entrusted with financial supervision of taxes on land and produce, a task on

which they had a monopoly until the thirties of this century. This shows clearly how complete the harmony has been between the Muslims and Copts in Egypt throughout the Islamic era.

God has described Egypt as “*gardens and springs ... and cornfields and noble buildings*” (*Al-Dukhan*: 25-26), while the Arabs called it “the earthly paradise.” A story related by Maqrizi about the visit undertaken by Al-Mamoun to Egypt in the year 217H indicates clearly how the Copts in Egypt lived in prosperity, enjoying excellent treatment under the just Arab rule. He writes that Al-Mamoun, on his way to al-Fustat (Cairo) passed through a village in the Delta called Ta’ al-Naml, in which a Coptic lady named Maria had a large estate. The lady intercepted the party of the caliph and asked him to be her guest with all his entourage and accompanying soldiers. He accepted, and was then surprised at the amount and variety of foods she offered them. The next morning the lady visited him with ten of her maidservants, each carrying a plate. Al-Mamoun thought that they were bringing presents from local produce, but when the plates were placed in front of him, he discovered that each had a bag full of gold. He thanked the lady and asked for the money to be returned to her. But she would have nothing of it. Al-Mamoun then examined the gold, and found that it was all from the mint of one year, indicating that it had come from her profits during a single year. He exclaimed: “*This is even more remarkable!*” She insisted on him accepting the gift, but he declined, saying: “*Take your money back, may God bless it for you!*” She then took a piece of mud and said to him: “*O Commander of the Faithful! This bounty is from this piece of clay which I had taken, and from your just rule, O Commander of the Faithful! And I have plenty of this gold.*” Al-Mamoun then accepted her gift for the treasury, and awarded her a number of estates. This was an expression of the opinion (quite justified in this case) that it was not right to accept money from her without a reward.

I have related this story in full to show the great wealth the Egyptian Copts enjoyed, which was due to the fertility of the land and to the fact that Muslim rulers did not burden them with excessive taxes and that justice prevailed as was testified to by the assertions of the Coptic lady Maria in front of Al-Mamoun. Al-Mamoun did not accept the gold as a personal gift, but passed it instead to the state treasury. Copts and Muslims thus lived in peace and harmony throughout the Muslim era. Nothing happened to disturb this peace and harmony, and if some conflict arose between individuals on any occasion, peace and harmony were quickly restored due to the shared feeling that the two communities belonged to one national family in the great blessed land of Egypt.

An indication of the willingness of Muslims and their rulers to carry the social and economic coexistence with minorities to its utmost limit is found in

the opening up of opportunities for the covenanted communities to engage in managing the estates and finances of Muslims, employing them in the state bureaucracy or engaging them as advisers in their businesses. Mu'awiya, the founder of the Umayyad Dynasty, was known to have engaged Sargoun the Christian as his financial adviser, while Yuhanna of Damascus was financial manager under his son Yazid and he also served a number of other Umayyad caliphs. The numbers of non-Muslim individuals in the state bureaucracy expanded during the third hijri century (ninth AD) to the extent that Muslims complained to the Abbasid caliph al-Mutawakkil about their control over their financial affairs, prompting the caliph to issue an edict in the year 235H -according to al-Kindi in his book **al-Wulat** (Governors)- barring minority community members from jobs in the bureaucracy and positions of authority in which they might enjoy power over Muslims. However, this edict appeared to have been quickly relaxed, since we soon find al-Mutawakkil himself entrusting the financial management for the construction of his palace "al-Ja'afari" to Dulayl ibn Yaaqoub, a Christian. The employment of the covenanted minorities in the bureaucracy soon resumed. Muhammad ibn Tahir, the governor of Baghdad, engaged a Christian steward as treasurer and a private agent charged with controlling his income and expenses.

Towards the end of the third hijri century, the number of secretaries and clerks working in the bureaucracy from among the minorities far exceeded the number of Muslims working there, leading the caliph al-Muqtadir (295-320H) to follow the example of al-Mutawakkil and order them removed from the bureaucracy. He also commanded that Jews and Christians were only to be employed in the fields of medicine and money-changing. But this order was, in turn, soon relaxed, and we find al-Muqtadir's vizier, ibn al-Furat, employing four Christian secretaries in his office. He used to invite them to share his meals every day as well. When al-Muqtadir resolved to appoint al-Hussayn ibn al-Qasim as vizier in 319H (931AD), he ordered him to patch up his relations with his enemies from among the prominent courtiers and army commanders. To achieve this, ibn al-Qasim resorted to the Christian secretaries and clerks employed by these prominent individuals, saying to one of these (Istafan ibn Yaaqoub): "*If I get the post of vizier, it would be thanks to you.*" Istfan then became the overseer of the private treasury in the state bureaucracy. The Buwayhid state in Iran and Iraq expanded employment in the bureaucracy for minorities. The Buwayhid ruler, Imad al-Dawlah, employed a Christian as Chief Secretary overseeing state affairs. Izz al-Dawlah the Buwayhid appointed as his deputy in Baghdad, when he left it for Basrah, a Christian: Sa'id ibn Thabit. His cousin, Adud al-Dawlah, the chief Buwayhid ruler in Iran and Iraq, employed a Christian vizier, Nasr ibn Haroun.

Maskuwayh writes in his History that this vizier took care to support churches and monasteries, and asked permission from Adud al-Dawlah to extend state assistance to poor Christians, which was granted.

All this is a clear indication that no avenue of livelihood had been closed before the minorities, and not only in agriculture, trade and industry, but also in the state bureaucracy and the official financial institutions. Employees were given good salaries from the state which assured them a comfortable living, while the senior employees, like viziers, lived a life of luxury. Work in the bureaucracy was not restricted to Christian scribes and clerks, but was shared also by members from other minority communities. Ibn Ishaq the Sabian, for example, was in charge of the postal diwan in Baghdad from middle of the fourth century until his death in 384H.

In Egypt, on the other hand, the governor Khamarawayh (270-282H) appointed a Coptic vizier to oversee the administrative and financial affairs of the state. Copts had remained -as we have mentioned- from the beginning of the Islamic conquest and until the fourth decade of the present century, in sole charge of the affairs of land taxation in Egypt, a clear indication of the extent of the harmony and peaceful coexistence between them and the Muslims in the economic sphere throughout the Islamic era. The Fatimid state employed the covenanted minorities widely in its affairs. Their first caliph in Egypt, Al-Mu'iz, employed Yaaqoub ibn Kallas, a Jew who embraced Islam, as vizier. He had been accused of bias towards his former co-religionists, and it had been said that nothing could be decided in the court of Al-Mu'iz without his cooperation and that of the Jewish community. Al-Aziz, who succeeded his father Al-Mu'iz, married a Coptic lady, and during his reign the influence of the Copts rose considerably, especially after the appointment of one of their number, Isa ibn Nestorus, as vizier. Al-Aziz also appointed a Jew, Mansha, as his representative in Damascus, greatly increasing the influence of Jews there. Both men remained in their posts for three years. Al-Hakim, who succeeded his father Al-Aziz, used to appoint mostly Christians as his personal physicians and as clerks and secretaries in the first part of his reign. He also appointed a Christian, Mansour ibn Saadoun, as vizier. Another Fatimid ruler, al-Mustansir, appointed a former Jew who became a Muslim, Sadaq ibn Yusuf al-Filahi, as vizier for three years. His assistant, Abu Sa'ad al-Tasturi, was also a Jew.

It can thus be said that there had been no avenue of employment or livelihood available for Muslims, in which they did not permit the covenanted communities to participate, as the teachings of Islam had enjoined. They shared with them government employment in the bureaucracy and elsewhere, and raised them to the highest office, the viziership, which earned its occupants huge sums of

money\*. The Muslims, in addition, contributed to the upkeep of their temples, churches and monasteries. Public funds were also made available to the poor from these communities, as we have seen done by Nasr ibn Haroun with encouragement from the Buwayhid ruler Adud al-Dawlah. Was it, then, ever the case in human history for rulers other than Muslim rulers to care so much for their subjects who did not follow their religion in the same wonderful and kind manner?

A further aspect of this coexistence was that Muslims used to celebrate the religious festivals of minorities in the same way in which they celebrated their own festivals such as the New Hijri Year, *Ashura*, the Prophet's birthday, the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Rajab, the night of Sha'aban 14<sup>th</sup>, the start of Ramadan, *Eid al-Fitr* (end of Ramadan) and *Eid al-Adha*. They celebrated, for example, the Persian Magian festival of *Sadhqa*, the festival of fire (which was worshipped by Magians or Zoroastrians). In this festival, they used to light fires and sing and dance around them all night. Another festival was that of *Ahura Mazda*, the Supreme Deity and principle of goodness and light in Zoroastrianism. But the most important festival was that of *Noruz*, at the beginning of Spring, coinciding with the zodiac sign of Libra, when they used to hold boisterous celebrations. All Muslim lands used to celebrate this festival with them. Muslims also participated in numerous Christian festivals, including Christmas, Easter and Palm Sunday, which used to be an ancient tree festival, dedicated in particular olive trees. Christian maids used to celebrate this festivals even inside the palaces of Abbasid caliphs. The singer Ahmad ibn Sadaqa reports that he had been admitted into the presence of Al-Mamoun on one occasion which coincided with Palm Sunday, and found in his company twenty European maids performing a [ritual] dance. They were dressed in silk, wore golden crosses and belts and held palm fronds and olive branches as they danced. Muslims in Egypt used to celebrate with their Coptic brethren their religious festival -and they still do. These included Christmas and Epiphany in Winter; and Covenant Thursday, which arrives three days before Easter, and the Olive Festival (Palm Sunday). Churches used to be decorated with olive branches and palm fronds on this latter festival. Some of these festivals would turn into large carnivals in which Muslims and Christians joined together in fun and games. Al-Maqrizi writes: "*People in Egypt would go out during some festivals and parade the streets with puppets, statues and clowns.*"\*

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\* It is true that this happened in some Muslim countries, but to appoint non-Muslims viziers and governors in Islamic countries is forbidden, according to some scholars.

\* The author mentioned that Muslims used to participate in the festivals of the Christians, Magians, and Zoroastrians. If this was true (in some Islamic countries), it was out of ignorance and negligence of the Islamic commands, for the participation of the Muslims in these festivals is forbidden according to the Four Imams.

We need to stop here briefly to discuss the question of *jizyah*, or poll tax, which was levied from the covenanted communities. Some people regarded this as a “religious tax.” However, this levy has nothing to do with religion, and was really a defence tax, levied only from able-bodied men fit for military service from among the protected minorities. For these men did not join the Islamic army of the state which defended them and defended the country. This levy was thus only exacted from the covenanted individuals who were able to bear arms. Women and children were exempted, as were monks, the disabled, the elderly and the poor. It was also a puny sum, not exceeding one dinar a year, which used to be collected without any resort to cruelty or hardship, as the *Shari’a* has commanded. No one was tortured or burdened with what he could not pay. Payment by instalment was accepted. The ruler of Egypt during the early third hijri century agreed to take only half a dinar from Copts. The traveller Benjamin says that Jews in all Islamic lands paid only one dinar. The amount of *jizyah* levied from all covenanted minorities, whether Jews, Christians, Sabians or Zoroastrians, never exceeded one dinar a year, so as not to burden them unduly.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Intellectual Coexistence and Interaction**

The Arabs rushed out from their peninsula, spreading Islam in all corners of the earth, conquering many lands, from Central India and the Chinese borders, through Afghanistan, Persia, Iraq, and Syria to Egypt and the Maghreb. They crossed the Straits at Gibraltar to Spain, and raised their banners on the edge of the Pyrenees mountains in Southern France. These were vast lands, inhabited since ancient times by peoples of diverse races, languages and cultures. The peoples of all these lands accepted the authority of the Arabs when they found that they were not interested in expropriating the land or taking possession of its goods, but were more keen to win hearts and minds to the True Religion. Many among these peoples became curious about this new religion, and then embraced it en masse, attracted by the simplicity and uncomplicated nature of its creed, and by the equality and brotherhood advocated by the *Shari'a* among all peoples, Arab and non-Arab. They were also attracted by the Islamic *Shari'a* favouring, as it did, the removal of all forms of class and social discrimination, and calling for the liberation of peoples from all forms of slavery and servitude. No enmity arose between Muslims and the protected groups, since Islam requires the Muslims -as mentioned before- to treat non-Muslims well and to protect them and their possessions and temples. In addition, the Muslims opened all opportunities for the minorities in all walks of life, including official posts as we have seen.

Islam thus created a strong bond between Muslims and other religious communities, leading the bulk of the peoples of the newly conquered lands to embrace Islam. Those who kept their original beliefs also felt a strong bond of noble brotherhood towards the Muslims and their rulers, evidenced by the fact that they responded enthusiastically to the request from their Muslim compatriots to share with them not only their knowledge of applied sciences such as town planning, architecture, and agricultural production, but also higher theoretical knowledge. The Hellenistic culture, a blend of Greek culture and various eastern cultures, was prevalent throughout most of the conquered lands, particularly in Gondeshapur in Iran, and in Ruha, Harran, Qannasreen, Antioch, Alexandria, and some monasteries in Iraq, Egypt and Syria. When they settled in these new lands, the Arabs started, due to the fondness of knowledge implanted in them by Islam, to explore some aspects of this culture. A large section from among the bearers of this culture, including members of minority communities, have become

Arabised and were integrated into the Arabic cultural milieu. This generated an exchange in which these groups gained extensive knowledge of the Arabic literary heritage, while imparting their Hellenistic culture to the Arabs. And thus commenced the intellectual coexistence and interaction between the covenanted communities and the Muslims.

In the second half of the first hijri century, Muslims requested some individuals from among the minorities who knew Arabic well to translate some of the books containing foreign knowledge, following an earlier precedent involving Khalid son of the second Umayyad Caliph, Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, who had some works translated for him in the year 85H. Al-Jahiz recounts in his *al-Bayan wa'l-Tabyin* about Khalid: "*He was the first to have had books on astronomy, medicine and Alchemy translated for him.*" Ibn Khallakan, author of **Wafayat Al A'yan**, says of him that "*he had some elaborations on the sciences of Alchemy and medicine.*" Khalid was said to have been an expert in these sciences and to have authored several treatises on them. He was said to have been taught Alchemy by a Byzantine monk named Marianos. Khalid and Marianos offer a telling symbol of coexistence between Muslims and others, a coexistence that quickly turned into co-operation, when Khalid received a prompt response to his request to have books on astronomy, medicine and Alchemy in the possession of some minority groups translated. Not only that, but Marianos even went on to teach Khalid what he knew, as the latter mentions in one of his epistles.

Since that time, the Arabised elements among the minorities embarked on translating books of science and learning into Arabic in response to Arab demand. This included the translation by Masarjawayh of a book on medicine during the reign of Omar ibn Abdul-Aziz (99-101H). During the reign of Hisham ibn Abd al-Malik (105-125H) some of Aristotle's works were translated from Greek and some political tracts from Persian, including a book on the history of the Sassanians.

During the Abbasid era, this intellectual interaction intensified. Among the translators who stand out in this period was Abdullahi ibn al-Muqaffa', who translated Aristotle's **Logic** from Persian and also translated **Kulaylah and Dimnah**, a book of stories of Indian origin as well as a number of Persian history books. The Arabised elements among the Syrian Christians, who had already translated much of Greek philosophy and sciences into Syriac, actively engaged into translating these treasures into Arabic. Some of the books they translated during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansour (136-158H) included Ptolemy's work on astronomy, **Almagest**, Aristotle's **Logic**, Euclid's treatise on geometry, and medical works of Hippocrates and Galen. Some Arabised Persians translated

the books on astronomy and astrology which existed in their language, while Arabised Indians translated a well-known book on astronomy from their original language, which came to be known as **Sind Hind**.

This interaction with non-Muslims became more active during the reign of the Abbasid caliph Haroun al-Rashid and his Barmakid viziers. Al-Rashid set up a translation establishment which he called **Dar al-Hikma** (the House of Wisdom), where senior Syrian translators well-versed in Arabic, headed by Yuhanna ibn Masawayh, a Nestorian doctor, were employed. Ibn Masawayh was provided with a staff of skilled translators and supplied with Greek books of medicine brought from Ankara, Ammuriyyah and the Byzantine Empire, which he was asked to translate. Ibn Masawayh had himself written a number of books on medicine and pharmacology. Another prominent translator in this establishment was Jibril ibn Bakhtayshu', Al-Rashid's chief personal physician, who wrote several books on medicine. This meant that members of minority communities were active in translating and writing books for the benefit of their Arab brethren in all branches of learning.

Members of the Barmakid family, the renowned viziers of Al-Rashid, encouraged the translation of books of learning into Arabic from Latin, Greek, Persian and Indian. Yahya ibn Khalid Al-Barmaki asked the Patriarch of Alexandria to send to Baghdad a famous Latin book on agriculture (probably by the famous Phoenecian agriculturalist, Magon, which had been translated into Latin). The Barmakids -who were of Persian origin- took care to translate many works from the Persian heritage into Arabic. In their days, a number of books were translated, including **Buzurjamhar**, the will and testament of Ardashir I to his son Shapur I and **Javedan Khard**, a book on literature and ethics. Also translated was a book called **Hazar Afsateh**, a precursor of **The One Thousand and One Nights**. The Barmakids were also as keen to translate works of Indian heritage. Al-Jahiz writes that: "*Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki brought Indian doctors, such as Mankeh and Basiker who worked in the Main Hospital in Baghdad.*" They quickly became Arabised and contributed with other Arabised Indians to translating works of Indian heritage, especially on medicine and drugs. They also translated the tales of Sindbad and other fairy-tales which enthralled the masses.

The climax of this drive to achieve coexistence and harmony between Muslims and the protected minorities was reached during the reign of the Abbasid caliph Al-Mamoun, son of Al-Rashid, who turned *Dar al-Hikma* into what resembled a great institution of learning, and attached to it a famous astronomical observatory. After the defeat of the Byzantine emperor in one of

their battles, Al-Mamoun wrote to him requesting him to permit a delegation to come to Constantinople, select a number of the ancient Greek books kept in his country and bring them back to Baghdad. The emperor acceded to the demand after some initial reluctance, so a mission was sent which transported what Greek books it could, back to Baghdad. Translators -from among the protected minorities- embarked on translating these. When Al-Mamoun agreed a truce with the ruler of Cyprus, he asked him to send what Greek books he had, which he did. The books he sent were mainly philosophical works. Scores of translators busied themselves with translating these books into Arabic. Most prominent among these was Yahya ibn Al-Batriq, who was well versed in Latin and Greek. He translated Plato's **Timaus**, a summary of Aristotle's **Psychology**, his **Book of Animals** and his **On the World**. He also translated Galen's **Antidotes**, and a book by Euclid on music was also translated at this time.

One rising star in this new atmosphere of fruitful intellectual cooperation among the Muslims and Syrian Christians during the reign of Al-Mamoun was Hunayn ibn Ishaq. He was renowned for the accuracy of his translations, and used to be paid the weight of every material he translated in gold. The caliph Al-Mutawakkil was so pleased with the beauty of his translated material that he presented him with three homes, together with all the exquisite item of furniture needed for them, including curtains and a large number of books. He also gave him a number of landed estates and paid him fifteen thousand dirhams a month. Hunayn was a Nestorian Christian who travelled to the Byzantine Empire where he learned Greek and became well-versed in it. He was also fluent in Syriac, Arabic and Persian. Al-Mutawakil appointed a number of translators under Hunayn, who would assign them translations tasks and later revise and check their work. He was fond of translating books of medicine, and translated tens of books by Galen. Hunayn and his disciples represent a distinct and important school of translation. Most prominent among his disciples was his son Ishaq and his nephew Hubaysh. Ishaq specialised in translating philosophical books, while Hubaysh, like his uncle, was keen on books of medicine. Another of Hunayn's disciples was Istafan, who was the first to translate Dioscorides' famous work on plants and Euripaseus's work on unique drugs. Beside this prominent school of translation, there were countless other translators, among them was Thabit ibn Qurrah, who translated Euclid's **Elements**, and Qosta ibn Luqa of Baalbek, who specialised in translating Greek philosophical works. The last great translator from Greek was Matta ibn Younus, a Greek in origin, who became famous for translating Aristotle's **Logic** and some of his other works.

In this commendable intellectual cooperation, the covenanted minorities, Syrian and others, did not only offer their Muslim brothers their love and

affection, but offered, on top of that, all their treasures of scientific learning and Greek philosophy, which they transmitted faithfully, without holding back, dissimulation, or any attempt to mislead. It is as if they saw in this an attempt to win the love of their brothers, so they performed this task with the utmost diligence and sincerity, whether in transmitting and translating, or in teaching and education. They persevered in this work of translating and teaching for three centuries, cementing the fruitful intellectual cooperation and friendship between the communities. The first generation of translators from among the protected minorities had at times made a literal translation of some of the books they worked on, and their work suffered from some ambiguity, confusion or stylistic lapses. This prompted later translators -especially from among the Syrians- from the time of the Barmakids onwards, to retranslate the most important works and make them more accessible to Muslims. Again they were prompted in this by the urge to win the love of their Muslim compatriots and cement the relation of amity they had developed with them.

The Muslims embarked eagerly on the study of the scientific heritage translated for them by members of the covenanted community, absorbing it and -very often- studying together with them the items of learning being transmitted. This was what had happened with Khalid ibn Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, for whom the monk Marianus had translated a book in Alchemy and then taught him the subject, as we have seen. Translators proceeded from the first hijri century onward to transmit their heritage into Arabic and teach it to those who required it from amongst their Muslim brethren. They taught them in particular how to philosophise. Their discussion circles filled with students of the sciences and students of philosophy, learning what was being offered. Among the most famous circles which emerged in the second hijri century was that of Yuhanna ibn Masawayh, the head of *Dar al-Hikmah* during the reign of Al-Rashid. It was said to have been "*the most frequented circle in Baghdad for a doctor, philosopher or theologian. His students read with him Aristotle's Logic and Galen's books on medicine.*" The circles of senior translators in the third and fourth centuries, such as Hunayn ibn Ishaq and Matta ibn Yunus, were equally popular.

Muslims started to assimilate, with unprecedented eagerness, the translated cultural materials the minorities had brought to their attention from Persian, Indian, Syriac and, specially, Greek sources, and the learning materials they incorporated. Soon, scientists of international stature emerged from among them in every discipline, like the chemist Jabir ibn Hayyan in the second/eighth century, who authored more than a hundred treatises, many of which had later been translated into Latin. We also soon encounter -during the reign of Al-

Mamoun- Al-Khawarzmi, who established the science of algebra and became the first link in a chain of international mathematicians. From the second/eighth to the eighth/fourteenth centuries, the Muslims launched a great scientific renaissance which continued to lead the world -on its own- in every field of learning for over six centuries. The West deferred to the leading figures of this renaissance, in particular in Sicily and Spain.

Due to the philosophical works, the Syrians translated and taught to Muslims, the latter succeeded in creating their own Islamic philosophy starting in the reign of Al-Mamoun. The first Muslim philosopher was Al-Kindi, who wrote tens, even hundreds of books and tracts discussing mathematics, astronomy, geometry, natural sciences, ethics, politics, logic, theology, disputation and medicine. He used to praise reason, and wrote that the soul was a light from God, arguing that it was attached to the body, but remains distinct from it in its essence. He was followed in the fourth hijri century by Al-Farabi, who tried to blend the spirituality of Islam with Greek philosophical theories. In the fifth/eleventh century Ibn Sina (Avicenna), the greatest of Muslim philosophers, rose to prominence. In his work, Greek philosophy was blended with oriental wisdom and Islamic spirituality. After him Andalusian philosophers appeared, the most famous among whom was Ibn Rushd (Averroes), the author of remarkable works in which he attempts to harmonise philosophy and the True Religion.

One aspect of this fruitful intellectual interaction was the rise of an intensive movement of debating between Muslims, covenanted communities and followers of different religions and schools. This demonstrates that the covenanted peoples were not only enjoying full freedom of worship as dictated by their religions, but also enjoyed the same right to publicly defend their beliefs which the Muslims had, including defending their beliefs against the dominant Islamic religion. These debates proliferated in Syria during the Umayyad era, and was joined by Muslim and Christian religious leaders. Among the most prominent participants in these debates was Yuhanna al-Dimashqi (John of Damascus) who, as we have mentioned previously, was the financial adviser to more than one Umayyad caliph. Yuhanna has written several books on theology, including one relating a dialogue with a Muslim on the divine nature of Christ, a guide to Christians on how to debate with Muslims and several polemics with Muslims on predestination and the freedom of man. Some of these debates actually took place at the courts of Umayyad caliphs.

This represents one of the bright sides of Islam's universal dimension, since we find the Umayyad caliphs here not only permitting the covenanted communities full economic and social rights, but also put the control of the state finances in

the hands of some of them and permitted them to debate freely with Muslims in matters of faith and theology. If we progress to the Abbasid era, then we find that intellectual interaction between Muslims and the covenanted communities in all areas of translation and teaching, had greatly intensified, reaching an unprecedented level. Debates and arguments flared in matters of religious beliefs between Muslim theologians and the adherents of other religions. We have various reports confirming the intensification of these debates in Iraq during the second/eighth century, as the author of **Al-Aghani** writes (in volume iii) that: *“There lived in Basrah six kalam (theology) adepts: Amr ibn Abid and Wasil ibn Ata’ (Mu’tazilites), Bashshar the Blind (a heretic), Salih ibn Abd Al-Quddus (a Manichean), Abd Al-Karim ibn Abi Al-’Awja’ (another heretic) and a man from the Azd tribe. The six used to meet in the home of the Azdi man and debate in his presence.”* Wasil ibn Ata’, the head of the Mu’tazilites, and his friend and fellow-Mu’tazilite, Amr ibn Abid, tried in vain to convince the other three of the error of their ways.

Another important text appears in **al-Nujum al-Zahira**, referring to the same city: *“There used to meet in Basra ten people in one circle the like of whom was never encountered: Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad, founder of prosody, a sunni; Al-Sayyid ibn Muhammad Al-Himyari, a shiite; Salih ibn Abd Al-Quddus, a Manichean; Sufyan ibn Mujashi’, a sufri [kharijite]; Bashshar ibn Burd, a dissolute poet; Hammad ‘Ajrada, a heretic; Ibn Ra’s Al-Jalut, a poet, a Jew; Ibn Nazir, a Christian, a theologian; Amr, nephew of Al-Mupith, a Magian and Ibn Sinan Al-Harrani, a poet, a Sabian.”* This text enumerates all religious beliefs and denomination in Iraq at the time. Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad, who founded the science of prosody, was a sunni Muslim who approved of the caliphate of Abu Bakr and Omar, while Al-Sayyid Al-Himyari was a shiite who condemned the two first caliphs and other senior Companions of the Prophets. Salih ibn Abd Al-Quddus was a Manichean who believed in the dualism of light and darkness; Sufyan ibn Mujashi’ belonged to the Sufri sect of the Kharijites, who used to advocate refraining from launching holy war against the Umayyad rulers, but later changed their stance and rose against them; Bashshar ibn Burd was a dissolute, fun-loving poet; the author of **al-Nujum al-Zahira** omitted to mention that he was also a heretic, like Hammad ‘Ajrada. Ibn Ra’s Al-Jalut was the Chief Rabbi and head of the Jewish community in Iraq, while Ibn Nazir was a Christian. Amr, nephew of Al-Mupith, was a Magian, and Ibn Sinan was a Sabian. It is obvious that each of these ten individuals represented a distinct faith in the early Abbasid era. Among them were Muslims: a sunni, a shiite and a kharijite; two were heretics; five belonged to separate religions: a Manichean, a Sabian, a Christian, a Jew and a Zoroastrian. They used to argue and discuss their beliefs,

while the poets recited their poetry. It is impossible for a gathering like this to materialise in any other community. However, it did within the Muslim community at the zenith of its power and the peak of the authority of its state during the second/eighth century, because of the universality of its religion and the freedom it had guaranteed for people from other faiths.

Muslim theologians during the Abbasid era continued to open their circles and debating sessions to people from different faiths and views, debating with them on all matters of religion. This is confirmed by the report given in **Jadhwat al-Muqtabis** by an Andalusian jurist and *hadith* expert named Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Saadi. He had visited Baghdad in the fourth/tenth century and arrived in al-Qayrawan in Tunisia, where he was asked by its Maliki jurists Ibn Abi-Zayd (d. 386H): “*Have you attended the circles of the people of kalam (theologians)?*” He answered: “*I have attended two. The first one I attended brought together all sects: Muslims orthodox and heterodox, unbelievers, Magians and Materialists; heretics; Jews and Christians. Each had a leader who spoke for his faith and defended it. When the head of each sect arrived, the assembly would rise to receive him, and would only sit down when he had taken his seat. When the meeting place was full, and they had concluded that no one else was awaited, a speaker from among the unbelievers would say: ‘You have gathered for debate, and we can only debate on the basis or arguments of reason, and with what reflection and analogy would permit.’ The rest would answer : ‘Yes, you are granted that.’*” Ibn Saadi adds: “*I was told that there was another circle of debate. I went to attend it and found it conducted in the same manner as the other one.*”

It is clear from the report of the Andalusian jurist that the circles of theological debates in the Abbasid era remained open to participants from various Islamic sects, even those regarded as heretical, as well from Magians, who worshipped fire, Manicheans who believed in the light-darkness duality, the Sabians who worshipped planets, atheists, materialists who did not believe in the hereafter, as well as Jews and Christians. These debates and discussions demonstrate a level of intellectual interaction and coexistence unprecedented in its harmonious nature, and which was only possible because of the universal character of Islam which encompassed in its lands all religions, heavenly and otherwise, treating them all as equals.

## **Chapter V**

### **The Rationality of Islam**

Before the advent of Islam, prophets used to be sent to their peoples inviting them -as did Muhammad (peace be upon him)- to worship God alone, and they regularly met strong opposition from many within their communities. Then God would come to their aid by enabling them to work miracles and observable extraordinary feats, so that their opponents may be overpowered and possibly led to heed the call of the messengers. However, the opponents usually obstinately persisted in their erroneous ways. God reminds us in *Sura 17 (Al-Isra')* that He had sent Moses to the Pharaoh and the Children of Israel with nine clear signs and miracles of incontrovertible import. These miraculous signs were mentioned in detail in *Sura 7 (Al-A'raf)*, verses 107, 108, 130, 133 and 134. These included Moses' turning of the rod into a snake, that swallowed up that which the Egyptian magicians faked, and causing his hand to turn "white for onlookers" when drawn out from his clothes, with astounding impact on observers. There was also the drought and famine which affected the Pharaoh and his people. God also mentions five other miracles: "***So We sent (plagues) on the: Floods, Locusts, Lice, Frogs and Blood.***" The flood referred to here was severe flooding of the Nile waters, destroying crops, while the locusts are insects which consume tree leaves, plants and crops. The lice mentioned here are a kind of flea which sucks the blood of animals, and is different from the regular lice which infect humans. As for the blood<sup>(1)</sup>. The ninth miracle was a plague referred to in the Quran as *al-Rijz*. When this affliction hit them, they turned to Moses and said to him if you lift this plague from us, we will believe in you and release the Children of Israel to go with you. So Moses prayed to the Lord to lift the plague. But when this happened, they went back on their promise and refused to let the Children of Israel go, leading Moses to flee with his people secretly at night. When the Pharaoh learned about their escape, he chased them at the head of his army. Moses had by then arrived with his people at the northern end of the Red Sea, where God then parted the water to enable Moses and his people to escape. The Pharaoh and his soldiers attempted to follow them and were all drowned in the sea for refusing to believe in the miracles which God had given to Moses, and for rejecting his call to believe in the One True God.

God had also sent Salih to his people, Thamud, who lived in the town of al-Hijr in Northern Arabia (known today as Mada'in Salih). His story has been

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1) It refers to the fact that water would turn to blood whenever the unbelievers wanted to use it.

given in detail in *Suras* 7 (*Al-A'raf*), 11 (*Hud*), 26 (*Al-Shu'ra'*) and 27 (*Al-Naml*), relating how, whenever he invited them to worship God and fear him, they became more obstinate and arrogant, except for a few who believed. In vain did the messenger try to draw their attention to blessings God had bestowed upon them, and how He had turned the land for them into beautiful gardens and farms, and enabled them to carve homes into the mountains, all of which were blessings that demanded they repay them with gratitude to God and belief in Him. But they refused, and continued to resist and oppose him, requesting him to produce a miracle to prove his veracity. The miracle they kept demanding was for him to produce a she-camel that would emerge from a rock they had pointed out to him, so that they might see it with their own eyes and touch it with their hands. Their prophet, Salih, then made them promise that if God did answer his prayers, then they would believe. He consequently prayed to God to answer their request, on which the rock split and the she-camel came out. Salih then told his people that this was God's she-camel, which they should permit to graze in the land freely and allow to have an agreed share of water to drink. But they maintained their position of unbelief, in spite of his warnings to them not touch the camel. A group among them plotted to kill Salih, and they persuaded an individual from among them named Qodar to kill the she-camel, which he did. In some verses of the Quran, God blames them all for killing the she-camel, because the man who killed it did so on their insistence and with their acquiescence. Salih warned them that they will have God's punishment visited on them after three days from the time of killing the camel. God then destroyed the whole lot of them by an earthquake, from which only Salih and those who believed in him were saved.

The life of Jesus, who had been sent by God as a messenger to the Israelites, was two continuous series of miracles. His immaculate conception and birth from a virgin mother was a great miracle, while his speech while still a baby was another great miracle. If the story about his turning water into wine at the wedding in Qana in Galilee is accurate, then that would be an additional miracle. Verse 49 of *Sura* 3 (*Al-Imran*) mentions five miracles performed by him. The first is that he would fashion birds out of clay and then blow into them, turning them into live birds, "**with God's permission.**" (This proviso is emphasised and repeated after the mention of each miracle, so that he would not harbour the illusion that he was God's equal or His partner, and to make it known that he only performs these miracles with God's Will and Power, not his own.) The second miracle was his ability to cure persons who have been born blind and to make them see. His third miracle was to cure lepers, whom modern medicine could still not cure, but Jesus did with God's power and permission. The fourth miracle is his raising the dead back to life, with God's permission, i.e., by appealing to God

and His Power. The fifth was his ability to tell any person from among the Israelites what that person had eaten or what he had stored in his home in anticipation of future of need.

All these miracles, which God caused to be wrought at Jesus's hands to convince the Israelites, did not have any effect on them. On the contrary, they made them more stubborn and determined to reject his message, just as Thamud had rejected the miracle Salih had performed when he brought to them a camel which they could all see with their own eyes, and just as the Pharaoh rejected Moses' message and the nine miracles he worked, arguing that those works were sheer magic. All these missions (those of Jesus, Salih and Moses) relied clearly on miracles which were material in nature, directed to the senses and perceptible through them. The Prophet's main opponents from amongst the chiefs of Quraysh demanded from him comparable miracles to prove his veracity. As related in verses 90-93 from *Sura 17 (Al-Isra')*, they had said to the Prophet that they will not believe him unless he could cause water to spring forth from the desert to create a spring like the famous Zamzam spring in Makkah; alternatively God could create for him a garden of vines and palms with running water; he could, they argued, cause chunks of the sky to fall upon the heads of the unbelievers [to show God's displeasure with them]; he could summon God and His angels so that the Makkans could see them; or he could ascend to heaven and bring back a book for his critics to read.

God affirms repeatedly in the Quran that, had He chosen to support His Messenger with miracles like those demanded by his people, then they would have still refused to believe him just as previous communities had refused to believe their messengers; they would have argued that what the Prophet did was magic or something like it. God -glory be to Him- says in *Sura 6 (Al-An'am: 7)*: ***"If We had sent unto thee a written (message) on parchment, so that they could touch it with their hands, the unbelievers would have been sure to say: this is nothing but obvious magic."*** The Almighty also says in the same *Sura*, addressing His Prophet: ***"Even if We did send unto them angels, and the dead did speak unto them, and We gathered together all things before their very eyes, they are not the one's to believe, unless it is in Allah's Plan"*** (*Al-An'am: 111*). This is why God has elected for the message of His final Prophet, Muhammad, not to rely in its force of conviction on material miracles and the logic of the senses, but to depend largely on reason and its logic for its appeal.

God called on mankind tens of times in the Quran to accept the jurisdiction of reason, and make it the arbiter in the question of belief in Him and His oneness. He commands of people to believe in Him not on the basis of blind

submission, but on the basis of reason and judicious reflection on the universe, which would then guide them to the existence of God and His unity. The Quran reiterates this exhortation scores, if not hundreds, of times in its various sura's. One example of this is this verse from Sura 2 (*Al-Baqarah*): ***“And your God is One God, there is no god but He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Behold! In the creation of the heavens (al-samawat) and the earth; in the alternation of the Night and the Day; in the sailing of the ships through the Ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies (al-sama’), and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth- (here) indeed are signs for people who are wise”*** (*Al-Baqarah*: 163-64).

In this verse, God affirms that He is the only deity, and marshals as proof of this, the universal signs which include the creation of heavens and earth and the creatures he had disseminated in them. When the term “heaven” (*sama’*) is used in the singular, as does occur in this verse, it refers to the “sky”, or the atmosphere above us, but when used in the plural (*samawat*), then it refers to the celestial bodies (planets, stars, galaxies, etc.). Some commentators believe that the “seven heavens” mentioned repeatedly in the Quran are the seven known planets (in the ancient world). God calls on people to reflect on His creation: the heavens and the planets which move according to a perfect pattern, and the earth and its varied creatures. The phenomena thus delineated do indicate to reason that there is a great Maker of this universe, who is God. Similarly the succession of night and day, with the darkness of night for rest and quiet, and the light of day for work and living. If either dark or light would last forever, then the whole order of human life on earth would be disrupted.

God clarifies this rational argument proving His existence and oneness, saying: ***“Say: See ye? if Allah were to make the Night perpetual over you to the Day of Judgement, what god is there other than Allah who can give you enlightenment? Will ye not then hearken? Say: if Allah were to make the Day perpetual over you to the Day of Judgement, what god is there other than Allah who can give you a Night in which you can rest? Will ye not then see?”*** (*Al-Qasas*: 71-72). In these verses, God calls on people to reflect rationally on the ships which ply the seas for the benefit of humanity, since this phenomenon involves several wonders: the creation of the sea on which the ships run; God's inspiration for man to make ships which navigate the waters; the wonder of the winds which God has fashioned to propel the ships to wherever men wanted them to, carrying goods and trade, or taking people on journeys to visits far away places, to wage war, or perform pilgrimage. God calls on people to reflect on the

water which He brings down from the sky. He -exalted be His name- ascribes the bringing down of rain to Himself, since He is the originator and the source of perfection for the causes which bring it down. It is He who had caused sea water to evaporate and condense again as sweet water to form clouds. Water from these clouds then falls on earth, creating rivers and springs, to water the earth and bring it back to life after having been barren, and causes its plants to grow and bear crops, as God says in *Sura 36 (Ya-Sin)*: **“A sign for them is the earth that is dead; We do give it life and produce grain therefrom, of which they do eat”** (*Ya-Sin*: 33).

God mentions that He had propagated all sorts of creatures on the face of the earth for people to enjoy looking at this variety and benefit from it for food or transport. God Almighty says in *Sura 11 (Hud)*: 6: **“There is no moving creature on earth but its sustenance depends on Allah; He knows the time and place of its definite abode and its temporary deposit.”** God also invites people to reflect on the movement of the wind and its distribution, as it blows or keeps still, moves gently in a breeze, or violently in a storm or tornado, cold or hot, dry or humid. God also invites reflection on the formation of clouds from the rising water vapours from the sea, which God then causes to condense and gather to become clouds. He also guides them from place to place, causing water to fall from them and give life to plants and crops as a great blessing to people. God concludes all the preceding exhortations to reflect by affirming that the wonders referred to above are signs “for people who understand”, or those who use their reason (*ya’qilun*), meaning they are clear signs and proofs for God’s unity which had been affirmed in the preceding verse. This amazing cosmological order and the laws of nature prevailing within it, symbolised by the succession of night and day; the fashioning of the seas so that man could run ships on them; the way rainwater was made to fall down from heaven to bring the earth back to life and propagate plants and crops in it; God’s way of taking care of the life of every creature; His undertaking to provide its sustenance and His awareness of its abode, and His control over the winds and His guiding the clouds- all these present clear indications to reason that this universe has a god who governs and oversees its order and maintains its laws. God invites people to use their reason and reflect on the organisation of the kingdom of heaven and earth, so that they may believe, in full awareness, that this universe has a Creator who had created and perfected it according to laws that hold it together for ever and ever.

The Almighty says in *Sura 36 (Ya-Sin)*: **“And a sign for them is the Night: we withdraw (*naslakh*) therefrom the Day, and behold they are plunged in darkness. And the Sun runs its course for a period determined for it (*Li mustaqarrin laha*); that is the decree of Him, the exalted in Might, the All-Knowing. And the moon- We have measured for it Mansions (to traverse) till it**

***returns like the old (and withered) lower part of the date stalk. It is not permitted to the Sun to catch up the Moon, nor can the Night outstrip the Day; each (just) swims in (its own) orbit (according to Law)***” (Ya-Sin: 37-40).

In these verses, God presents mankind with amazing signs of his creative power, evident in the universe and the perfect and immaculate order which He had caused to inhere in the succession of night and day, and in the sun and the moon. He started by the succession of day and night, stating that He “sloughs off” (*naslakh*) the “skin” of daylight from the night, causing darkness to descend when the light of day recedes from the horizon. Thus night and day, and dark and light, alternate, the one leaving as the other arrives: a superb divine disposition. The sun moves at great speed towards a predetermined “resting point” (*Li mustaqarrin laha*), spatially and temporally. This could mean that it hurtles towards the place and time of its daily setting; others say the meaning of this verse is that the sun keeps moving and traversing the points of the zodiac in its annual movement. Yet others say the reference is to the sun’s final resting place on the Day of Judgement. However, the first sense is the correct and more obvious one. God informs us that this is the planning and work of the Mighty, to whom the sun is subordinate, the All-Knowing, who is fully knowledgeable about its perfect and superb system. He also tells us that he had ordained for the moon a perfect path, prescribing for it stations, which number twenty eight divided along the twelve zodiac points. Both the sun and the moon follow regular orbits, as the Almighty affirms: “***And He had put the sun and the moon at your service, both diligently pursuing their courses***”<sup>(1)</sup> (*Ibrahim*: 33). The moon rises on the first night of the lunar month wan and thin, becoming brighter the following night, and continues to increase in brightness until it becomes a full moon on the fourteenth night. Then it starts to wane again, until it comes to resemble “an old date palm stalk.” God also informs us that each of the sun and the moon has its own orbit, so they never collide even though they may appear close. Neither the sun can overtake the moon, and catch up with it, thus appearing at night, nor can night precede and outpace day, but the two must follow and succeed each other. Each swims in “its own orbit,” never departing from its prescribed course.

All the phenomena man observes, like the alternation of day and night, or the movements of the sun and the moon, proceed according to a precise pattern which, if reflected upon, would lead man to the belief that this universe has a Wise Maker who had perfected its creation and laid down its order. God thus presents human reason with his universal signs, so that man may give a rational

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1) On this occasion, we have slightly diverged from Yusuf Ali’s translation, who renders the term *sakhkhara* (made subject to you), while we translate it: “put at your service”, since it is clear that the sun and the moon are not subject to man nor under his control. (trans).

testimony that these signs and superb order must be the work of a god who created them and laid down their order. God invites people repeatedly, as in the above-cited verse from *Sura 2 (Al-Baqarah)* to employ reason in reflecting on the phenomena of the universe and to contemplate them, so that they may attain to faith on the basis of clear insight and rational evidence. He censures the polytheists who shut off their minds and did not employ them to comprehend God's signs in the universe, in order to find in them guidance which could lead them to knowledge of the Creator of these phenomena and to belief in Him based on certain proofs. He says: "***They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle, nay more misguided; for they are heedless (of warning)***" (*Al-A'raf*: 179). Hearts here refers to minds. God is here informing us that these people had minds, but they had shut them off and did not make use of them, so they were unable to grasp what could be of benefit to them or what could guide them to salvation. They also have eyes, but they left these idle so they were unable to perceive the great wonders of the universe, and they have ears, but they have shut them off, unprepared to listen to the great Quran and the guidance it contained. God thus chastises them for becoming mindless, like animals, "and even more misguided" than beasts, since God had endowed these with instincts which protect them from danger, while to men God has given reason, which these people did not make use of. They have blocked their minds from achieving insight through reflection on the phenomena of the universe to protect themselves from polytheism which exposes them to the danger of Hell.

God -exalted be His name- urges the Prophet and the believers repeatedly to use their reason, not only to attain faith, but also when inviting people to the true religion, indicating the rational proofs upon which the call to Islam must be based; "***Invite all to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best***" (*Al-Nahl*: 125). The "way of God" referred to in this verse is the True Religion. God instructs the Prophet and the Muslims to resort to three approaches when inviting the polytheists to Islam: wisdom, considerate preaching, and exemplary argument. God Himself employs all these methods in urging the polytheists to embrace the True Religion. Wisdom in this verse means powerful rational proofs, like the one God marshals in *Sura 23 (Al-Mu'minun)* to prove that He was the One True God: "***Nor is there any god along with Him; (if there were many gods), behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have lorded it over others! Glory to Allah! (He is free) from the (sort of) things they attribute to Him***" (*Al-Mu'minun*: 91). This is a compelling divine argument, disproving the possibility of God having partners in His godhead, for were there to be other gods beside

Him, then they would all be equal in their divine attributes. And if that is the case, then each would take full control of his own creation, permitting none of the others to interfere in his domain. This would imply that all of them would be powerless to act in some spheres, which would contradict the essence of godhead. This is a rational proof supporting God's oneness. Another argument in the verse is that if the gods were many, then each would have his own creation, and they would try to dominate each other, leading to a struggle which would end in victory for some over others. Such a conflict would put the whole universe in jeopardy. But none of this happened, and the universe continues to be in perfect order, which rationally proves that God is the only deity.

The kind of exhortation which God recommended to His Prophet and the Muslims when preaching to the polytheists is abundantly demonstrated in the Quran, figuring within two broad themes. The first theme is the stories of earlier prophets and the opposition they had faced from their peoples, resulting in severe punishment for the unbelievers. Those who refused to heed the divine message were punished by floods, earthquakes or piercing cries from heaven that destroyed them. The form these punishments took was presented to the polytheists as a warning against disbelieving the Prophet and as an exhortation to follow him. The second theme of exhortation is the warning to the polytheists who reject the Prophet -peace be upon him- of punishment in Hell, the chastisement decreed for those among them who die without believing in God and abjuring any partners with Him. Scarcely a *Sura* in the Quran is devoid of the images of this severe chastisement.

God also instructs Muslims to resort to considerate and sensitive argument with the polytheists as we have seen in the verse just cited. The same attitude is also urged when dealing with followers of earlier revelations, as in the verse: "***And dispute ye not with the People of the Book except with means better***" (*Al-Ankabut*: 46). Good argument is where a gentle and considerate approach is adopted, on the model of what God had instructed Moses and Aaron to follow when He sent them to the Pharaoh saying: "***But speak to him mildly, perchance he may take warning or fear (Allah)***" (*Ta Ha*: 44). God also reports some of the Prophet's own conversations and arguments with the polytheists in Makkah, where he used to argue with them reasonably and, when they persisted in their disputations, to say to them as in *Sura* 46 (*Al-Ahqaf*): "***He knows best of that whereof ye talk***" (*Al-Ahqaf*: 8), meaning that God knows best the value of their claims that this Quran was magic or a fabrication not authorised by Him. The Prophet never resorted to acrimonious arguments with his opponents, and God instructs him to turn away from bitter disputations, as when he tells him in *Sura* 22 (*Al-Hajj*): "***If they do wrangle with thee, say Allah knows best what it is ye***

*are doing*” (*Al-Hajj*: 68). God’s kindness towards the Prophet and the polytheists in Makkah reaches such a level that He had instructed His Prophet to answer his detractors, when they bombard him with bitter arguments, by saying: “**and certain it is that either we or ye are on right guidance or manifest error**” (*Saba*: 24). This is the utmost divine kindness, since God teaches His Prophet to say to the polytheists that the two sides could not be both right or wrong, but one has of necessity to be right, the other in error [without explicitly naming the right side].

It is thus that God has called on the Prophet and the Muslims to use their intellect when preaching Islam, adopting the approach of gentle, considerate, rational arguments, and inclining to the use of effective exhortation based on compelling rational proofs and clear signs. God also invited all people to believe in Him on the authority of reason, through the reflection on God’s wondrous signs in the universe and His perfect laws governing it, so that they may be guided, through this reflection, to believe in God, the Creator and Maker of the universe.

In the same way, God, who had decreed reason to be an arbiter in matters of faith and in preaching Islam, also made it the arbiter in matters of *Shari’a*, the Islamic law. He says to His Prophet: “**We have sent down to thee the Book in truth, that thou mightest judge between men as guided by Allah (bi ma araka Allah)**”<sup>(2)</sup> (*An-Nisa*: 105). Exhortations addressed to the Prophet are, by implication, also addressed to his community, as shown in many verses in the Quran. In this verse, God is informing His Prophet and the Muslims that he had revealed His book to the Prophet so that they may judge between people in their disputes according to the right methods to which reason guides them. Al-Shafi’i and other Muslim leaders regarded this verse as endorsing the legitimacy of resort to rational *ijtihad*, or derivation of new rules, by the Prophet and Muslims in matters of Islamic law. *Ijtihad* was thus regarded by jurists as the fourth source of legislation in Islam, following, Quran, the Prophet’s example or *sunna* and the consensus of the Muslim community (*ijma*’).

A strong indication that rational *ijtihad* in matters of Islamic law had been decreed for the community -since the Prophet’s own lifetime- is found in the story related by Mu’adh ibn Jabal, whom the Prophet had appointed a judge in Yemen. On his departure, the Prophet asked him: “*On what [grounds] are you going to base your rulings?*” Mu’adh answered: “*On God’s Book [the Quran].*” The Prophet asked: “*And if you could not find [guidance therein?]*” He replied: “*I rule with what God’s Messenger had done.*” The Prophet asked: “*And if you*

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2) The subsequent commentary by the author makes better sense if the translation of the phrase “*bi ma araka Allah*” is rendered : “with what God has shown you”, or “with what God has made evident to you”. (trans.)

did not find [relevant precedents]?” Mu’adh replied: “I strive as hard as I can [to reach the correct judgement] based on my opinion.” The Prophet then said: “Praise be to God who had guided the envoy of God’s Messenger to what pleases God’s Messenger.”

The Righteous caliphs who succeeded the Prophet continued to use their judgement in all matters which presented themselves to the community. The first serious problem which confronted the first caliph, Abu Bakr, at the start of his reign was the refusal of many Arab tribes to pay *zakah* (the mandatory contribution decreed by God for the poor) to him. He therefore accused them of apostasy and urged the Companions to fight them. However, leaders of the community expressed reluctance to do so, with Omar ibn al-Khattab saying: “How could we fight these people when the Prophet -peace be upon him- had said: ‘I had been commanded to fight people until they say: “There is no deity but God.” If they say it, they protect their lives and possessions from me except for a rightful claim.’” Abu Bakr replied: “Did he not say: ‘except for a rightful claim?’ The performance of prayer and the payment of *zakah* are indeed rightful claims. I swear by God that if they were to hold back from me so much as a [camel’s] hobbling cord which they used to deliver the Prophet -peace be upon him- I will fight them for it. And if all people were to desert me, I would fight them by myself.” Then Omar and all the Companions deferred to Abu Bakr, and fought with him the apostates who withheld *zakah* and brought them back to the fold. This was a great achievement, since he had restored Islamic unity to the Arab Peninsula, and mobilised the community for the conquests of Syria, Iraq and Iran.

Abu-Bakr was succeeded by Omar, who had been the most outstanding among the caliphs and Companions in his resort to *ijtihad* in matters of *Shari’a*. One example of his use of rational judgement was his suspension of the penalty of hand amputation for theft during a year of drought and famine which hit Arabia in his reign. This in spite of a clear Quranic verse instructing: “**And to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands; a punishment by way of example, from Allah for their crime; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Full of Wisdom**” (*Al-Ma’idah*: 38). For Omar judged that people who resorted to stealing under those circumstances had probably no choice if they were to survive. The temporary suspension of a clear ruling like this is a bold exercise of judgement indeed.

Omar also made another major modification to Islamic law. God had decreed in *Sura 9 (Al-Tawbah)* that *zakah* was payable to eight categories: “**Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer (the funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to the Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah; and for the wayfarer; (thus is it)**

**ordained by Allah**” (*Al-Tawbah*: 60). The category of those “whose hearts have been reconciled referred to some prominent Arab leaders whom God has included among the beneficiaries of *zakah* to win them over and as an incentive to them to embrace Islam. When the Prophet -peace be upon him- divided the booty from the battle of Hunayn, he gave some prominent figures from Quraysh and others a hundred camels each, while he gave others a smaller number. Among those benefiting were al-Aqra’ ibn Habis, chief of the tribe of Tamim, and ‘Uyaynah ibn Hisn of Fazarah. The two men later came to Abu-Bakr and asked for their share of *zakah*, and Abu-Bakr sent them with a letter to his adviser, Omar, asking him to satisfy them. Omar said to the two men: “*God has made Islam strong and has no need of you any more. You either embrace Islam or it is war between you and us.*” Omar removed this category from among the beneficiaries of *zakah* and treated them like any other Muslim. Abu-Bakr endorsed Omar’s judgement, and from that time, this category of *zakah* beneficiaries did not exist, just as the category of slaves seeking to gain their liberty ceased to exist after the abolition of slavery all over the world. The category of fighters in the way of God continued to be provided for, as did that of heavily indebted persons and the wayfarers who do not have enough money to support them while away from home. Omar also exercised his own judgement on the issue of temporary marriage, in which a couple would contract to marry for a limited period agreed between them. This type of marriage was said to have been permitted in early Islam, although there are conflicting reports about whether the Prophet -peace be upon him- did approve of it. However, Omar banned it completely when he assumed the caliphate.

These three episodes involving Omar’s exercise of rational judgement in matters of law indicate that *ijtihad* had been widely used during early Islam. After the first wave of conquests, the senior Companions dispersed into the new lands, and there existed among them many who exercised *ijtihad* and advised Muslims about how to react to novel situations. *Ijtihad* in all branches of religion continued to grow until the main and best known [*sunni*] juristic schools of law (the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i and Hanbali) developed. *Ijtihad* continued to flourish until the ninth hijri century, when a period of stagnation descended on Muslim lands, especially under the Ottoman Empire. This lasted until Muhammad Abduh appeared towards the end of the last century, and *ijtihad* in Islamic law resumed, regaining its vitality among senior *ulama*.

And just as the place of reason in Islamic *Shari’a* opened the way for men of great minds to exercise their judgement and derive new laws to cater for new developments in human affairs, it did, by contrast, close the door firmly to all pre-Islamic superstitions among the Arabs and others. The Quran says about the

Jews in *Sura 2 (Al-Baqarah)*: ***“They followed what the evils ones gave out (falsely) against the power of Solomon: the blasphemers were, not Solomon, but the evil ones, teaching men magic”*** (*Al-Baqarah*: 102). A magician is thus branded as an unbeliever according to this verse. The Prophet -peace be upon him- says: *“The punishment of the magician is to be killed by the sword.”* A magician is someone who tricks people into believing that he could do them harm, claiming to have contacts with the souls of the stars and the souls of *jinn*. The Messenger of God tells us that believing in omens is tantamount to polytheism. Equally reprehensible are some forms of divination, such as those resorted to by some gypsy women, using pebbles or seashells, and reading indistinct incantations to create the illusion among listeners that their wishes were being granted. Similar also is the work of astrologers or soothsayers, who purport that, through looking at the stars, they could know things about people and future events of which God alone knows. And there were also those pagan priests and soothsayers who claim to have *jinn* who inform them about the future events or secrets hiding in the hearts of men. Many of these existed in pre-Islamic Arabia, and used to trick those seeking their help by mumbling confusing rhymes claiming that their *jinn* companions had brought it to them from on high. There are many stories concerning the works of these related by narrators during the pre-Islamic era, but most of these are fabrications. The Prophet -peace be upon him- says: *“Whoever goes to a soothsayer or a diviner, this person has disbelieved what had been revealed to Muhammad.”* For such a person had denied the Holy Quran and correct rational arguments on which it is based.

Islam, through all that I have indicated above, had made reason the arbiter in attaining belief in God through contemplating His laws governing the Universe, and also made reason the cornerstone of Islamic preaching with its three major methods: rational proofs, good preaching and considerate debating and argument. It also takes reason as a basic principle of Islamic law, through the exercise of rational judgement in matters of law. God and His Messenger have tried to elevate reason by rejecting all superstition, magic and divination. There is no doubt then, that God and His Prophet have built the *Shari'a*, which is the guide for all mankind, on a firm rational foundation.

## Chapter VI

### Islam's Embrace of Science

Islam embraced science and learning from the first verse revealed in the Quran, in which God addressed His Messenger saying: “**Read in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created. Created man, out of a (mere) clot of congealed blood. Read! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful. He Who taught (the use of) the Pen. Taught man that which he knew not**” (Al-‘Alaq: 1-5). Teaching “through the pen” (*bi'l-qalam*) in these verses refers to learning in the generic sense, and had not been tied to any particular branch of learning, thus covering all the sciences which God has bestowed knowledge of on man. Some of these forms of learning could be acquired through true reports (i.e. revelation), while some can be acquired through sense experience. Other forms of knowledge could be gained through intuition, and yet others could be acquired by reasoning, whether deduction or induction. God also honoured learning by swearing by the pen and the learning and knowledge written down by it, saying in *Sura 68 (Al-Qalam)*: “**By the pen, and by (the Record) which (men) write**” (Al-Qalam: 1). And God instructed His Prophet to pray to Him for more knowledge and learning: “**but say: ‘O my Lord! advance me in knowledge**” (*Ta Ha*: 114).

God also bestowed a great honour on men of learning, granting them equality with the angels in testifying to His oneness, as was affirmed in *Sura 3 (Al-Imran)*: “**There is no god but He: that is the witness of Allah, His angles, and those endued with knowledge**” (Al-Imran: 18). The esteemed worth of learning in the eyes of God was demonstrated by the conversation related in the first part of *Sura 2 (Al-Baqarah)*: 30-33) between God -exalted be His name- and His angels, when He decided to put Adam as a vicegerent on Earth. The angels then exclaimed in surprise: “**Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief and shed blood?- whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (name)?**” The gist of their argument was that whoever is prone to bloodshed and corruption could not be suitable to populate and develop the earth. The angels, therefore, were more worthy of this mission. But God said to them: “**I know what ye know not.**” And then: “**He taught Adam the names of all things,**” this happening either by direct instruction, through intuition or by disposing him by nature to know them and be able to recognise them if asked. Then God showed all the objects to the angels and said to them: “**Tell Me the names of these if ye are right.**” But the angels could not, whereupon God asked Adam to tell them their names, which he did. Thereupon God asked the angels to prostrate

themselves to Adam, **“and they bowed down.”** This episode symbolises the elevation of learning to the highest status, unmatched for anything else, since the Almighty had ordered the noble heavenly angels, who never cease to praise Him and glorify His name, to prostrate themselves before Adam, thus lifting his knowledge of names above the worship of the angels and their praise and glorification of God, which is honour beyond compare.

It is on the basis of this that the Prophet emphasised repeatedly that learning is exalted above the worship of God, and that a learned man is above the person dedicated to worship in status [in front of God]. In one famous *hadith* he says: *“The learned man shines above the person dedicated to worship in the same way the moon on a full moon night shines above all other planets and stars.”* He urged people repeatedly to pursue learning, saying that to seek learning is a duty on every Muslim man and woman. The angels, he told them, spread their wings over the seeker of learning. A man from the tribe of Murad once came to him at the Mosque and said to him: *“O Messenger of God, I came seeking knowledge.”* He replied: *“Welcome to the seeker of learning. Indeed the seeker of knowledge is surrounded by angels and they spread their wings over him.”* Just as the men of learning were exalted above the worshippers, the Prophet also exalted them above martyrs, saying: *“Learned men are one degree above martyrs.”*

The Holy Quran injected the spirit of learning into Muslims. The first indication of this is that the Quran had changed the customary meaning of some familiar terms and endowed these with new significance. Terms like “Islam” (submission or dedication [to God]) *Iman* (belief) *kufr* (unbelief) *shirk* (partnership), and even the word “Quran” itself, which God has employed to designate all the specifically designated body of revelation which He had transmitted to His Messenger during twenty three years and was written in the mushaf (the Book containing the Quranic text). The term “Islam” originally denoted “submission” or “yielding”. God used it to designate His True Religion, as in the verse: **“This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion”** (*Al-Ma'idah*: 3). The etymological root of the word “*Iman*” comes from “*amn*” (security and freedom from fear). In the Quran it came to denote belief in the unity of God, His Prophet and His law. *Kufr* originally meant “covering up” or “hiding,” and it came to signify in the Quran the worship of deities other than God. *Shirk* originally denoted partnership in any matter or form, but in the Quran it was used to refer to the adoption of deities and worshipping them together with God, as in the verse where Luqman, the Wise, says to his son: **“O my son! Join not in worship (others) with Allah : for false worship (shirk) is indeed the highest wrongdoing”** (*Luqman*: 13).

Some Quranic words were newly coined terms which had no origin in pre-Islamic linguistic usage, like the term *nifaaq* (hypocrisy). Linguists say that Arabs in pre-Islamic times did not use the word or the verb derived from it, and the word, which appears repeatedly in the Holy Quran, did not figure in pre-Islamic poetry. The word *nafiq* did exist, though, and it denoted the tunnel dug by the *jerboa*, which used to have a secret back entrance to be used in case of attack. The hypocrite was thus likened to this animal, since he accepts Islam (coming in through the “door”) but leaves it through a “secret entrance”, by continuing to be an unbeliever at heart. A similar word coined anew in the Quran is the term *fasiq* (a rebel against God). Ibn al-A’rabi, an authoritative linguist, says that this word has never been known in the language of pre-Islamic Arabs and did not occur in their poetry. This indicates that it had been coined anew in the Quran to refer to this act of rebellion or insubordination.

One of the first sciences to emerge in Islam was thus the science of *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis or commentary), in compliance with the verse: “***And We have sent down unto thee (also) the Message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them***” (*Al-Nahl*: 44). The Prophet thus began to explain and clarify for his Companions the rules contained in the verses of the Quran, and to elucidate the meaning of its verses. The Prophet -peace be upon him- could thus be considered the first interpreter of the Quran and its teachings. Says Ibn Mas’ud, one of the Prophet’s prominent companions: “*It used to be that if a man amongst us learned ten verses from the Quran, he would not go beyond them [to learn new ones] until he had understood their meanings and the practical injunctions included in them.*” After the death of the Prophet, the Companions began to explain the Quran to Muslims in the way they have learned from him. Al-Sayouti relates that he had been able to gather more than ten thousand reports containing interpretations of Quranic verses by the Prophet -peace be upon him- and his Companions, which he collected in a book of his named **Turjuman al-Qur’an**, (The Quran Interpreter) and later abridged in a book he called **al-Durr al-Manthour, fil-Tafsir bi’l-Ma’thour** (The Scattered Pearls in [Quranic] Exegises Using Traditions).

The science of *Hadith* (prophetic traditions) also arose quickly to make up for the fact that rules and teachings usually appeared in the Quran in general form, without much elaboration or detail. It was the Prophet (peace be upon him) who elaborated and explained these rules. For example, the Quran did not include much detail on how to perform prayer and *zakah*, two of the central pillars of Islam, but would give generalised commands like: “*perform prayer and pay zakah.*” It is the Prophet’s sayings (*hadith*) and practice (*sunna*) which explained how prayer could be performed, telling us that it starts with the

pronouncement of *takbir* ("God is greatest"), followed by the recitation of *sura* 1 (*Al-Fatihah*), then proceeding to *ruku'* (bowing down) and *sujud* (prostration) and the *tasbih* (glorification of God's name) to be recited during them. In the middle of each prayer (or the end for *fajr* (dawn) prayer), one recites *tashahhud* (witness to the unity of God according to a given formula) to be followed by one *raka'* (full sequence of reciting a *sura*, bowing and prostrating) in the *maghrib* (sunset) prayer and two in *zuhr* (midday), *'asr* (afternoon) and *'isha* (evening) prayers. Each prayer is concluded by reciting the *tashahhud* again. The *sunna* also instructs us of the times of these prayers, and the fact there are five of them. The Quran had spoken of the ablution needed as a preparation for prayers, and explained how it could be performed.

Similarly, *zakah* was mentioned in the Quran in a general form, but it was the Prophet who indicated the amounts that should be paid by every Muslim annually in cash, crops, cattle, camels, etc. Hundreds (even thousands if we count minor details) of *hadiths* have been reported which contained the Prophet's explanations and elaborations of matters of *Shari'a*. *Hadith* was thus regarded as complementary to the Quran in explaining *Shari'a*. God instructs the Muslims repeatedly in the Quran to adhere to every instruction the Prophet gives, obeying his commands and desisting from whatever he prohibits : "***So take what the Messenger assigns to you, and deny yourselves that which he withholds from you***" (*Al-Hashr*: 7). The Prophet called his sayings or *hadiths* his *sunna*, meaning the practice and policy he had adopted together with his Companions. He was reported to have said: "*I urge you to stick to my sunna, hold on tight to it [lit. 'bite on it with your teeth].*" Ibn Abbas said: "*The Messenger said: 'O God, please have mercy on my khulafa' (successors). We said: 'O Messenger of God, who are your successors?' He said: 'Those who relate my words and teach them to people.'*" He always asked delegations who came to see him to teach his sayings to their people when they go back. The Companions were keen to preserve, relate and study these sayings, and the next generation of Muslims learned it from them. This science of *hadith* was thus a discipline that had been, from the start, regarded with reverence.

A third science which began to emerge since the time of the Prophet is the science of *fiqh*, or jurisprudence, which concerns itself with all the acts of responsible adults, and whether they could be considered obligatory, prohibited, recommended or reprehensible. It covers all acts of worship, transactions, contracts, inheritance, etc. We concern ourselves here with just a reference to some of the terms relating to acts of worship, such as prayer, fasting, *zakah* and *hajj* (pilgrimage). The term *salah* in Arabic originally referred to "prayer" (as in praying to God), but the Quran used the term to refer the basic act of worship of

Islam, which is preceded by *wudu* (ablution, the Arabic term originally meant washing, but it came to refer to the prescribed ritual washing before each prayer), followed by standing up, pronouncing *takbir*, then *ruku'* and *sujud*. Linguistically, *ruku'* is “bending down”, but it came to mean bowing down in a prescribed manner while repeating words of glorification to God. *Sujud* originally meant humiliating oneself, but in the Quran it came to mean placing one’s forehead and hands on the ground in a prescribed way and reciting *tasbih*. If no water could be found for ablution, then *tayammum* could be performed instead. Originally, the term *tayammama* meant “to head towards” some known goal, but the term came to mean striking slightly one’s hands on earth and wiping his face with them, as a ritual substitute to ablution. The term *zakah* comes from a root which signifies growth, but the term was used in the Quran to mean the obligatory setting aside a portion of a person’s wealth which he must pay to the poor under certain conditions. Related to *zakah* is *sadaqa* (non-mandatory alms), which comes from a root signifying friendship, as if God -exalted be His name- wanted to indicate that this act of giving and generosity towards their poorer brethren promotes love and friendship between members of the community. The linguistic meaning of the term *siyam* (fasting) originally referred to abstinence, but it came to denote, in the Quran, the act of abstaining from food, drink and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset. *Hajj* (pilgrimage) comes from a term meaning to “head towards”, but it came to denote, in the Quran, heading towards the Holy Mosque in Makkah during a certain time of the year to perform prescribed rituals. The Quran mentions, in conjunction with *hajj*, the performance of *umrah* before it, as in the verse: “***If any one wishes to continue (tamatta’a) the Umrah on to Hajj***”<sup>(1)</sup> (*Al-Baqarah*: 196). *Umrah* derives linguistically from the term *i’timar* (visit), but in the Quran it denotes a ritual involving circumambulating the Holy *Ka’aba*, walking between (the two hills of) *Safa* and *Marwah*, with *tasbih* and certain restrictions on dress and conduct. This ritual can be performed at any time of the year. *Tamattu’* generally means “enjoyment” or “benefiting” by something. In the Quran, it denotes the interruption, after performing ‘*umrah* and while waiting to perform *hajj*, of *ihram*, or restrictions on dress and conduct obligatory for the pilgrim. A person who does this can then enjoy all the freedoms he had been restricted from enjoying during *ihram* until it is time for him to perform *hajj*. The rituals of *hajj* referred to in the Quran include circumambulating the *Ka’aba*, walking between *Safa* and *Marwah*, the advance from Mount ‘Arafah to Muzdalifa (*ifadah*).

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1) As can be seen from the elaboration below, the above translation of Yusuf Ali’s is not entirely accurate. A more faithful rendering of the verse would be: “***Whoever wished to enjoy [the interruption of ihram obligations] from umrah to hajj.***”

We content ourselves with this selection of terms from amongst scores of terms used in *fiqh*. We find God -glory be to Him- calling on the Muslims, immediately after commanding them to rise up and fight the enemies of Islam with the Prophet, to rush to His Messenger to learn from him the meaning of the Quran, his *sunna* and the provisions of *Shari'a*, so as to teach what they had learnt to their tribes and communities. **“Nor should the Believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them- that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil)”** (*Al-Tawbah*: 122). This is a remarkable injunction, calling on the Muslims to learn the law of Islam and its sciences and propagate them among the community. They responded to it with enthusiasm, turning Madinah into a great centre of study and the hub of a great movement of learning, where the main teacher was the Prophet, who was the Muslim community's greatest jurist, the interpreter of its lofty Quran, and where his Companions were the disciples.

It is well-known that Islamic *Shari'a* encompasses much more beside mere acts of worship, covering all aspects of life and legislating for the family, marriage, inheritance, etc. It commands the believers to honour their parents, and it regulates marital relations, divorce and care for the divorced wife. It also regulates commercial relations and transactions, borrowing and lending, trade, agriculture, mortgages and collection and distribution of *zakah*. It outlaws murder, theft, usury, adultery, alcohol consumption and gambling. It regulates war, tells of how holy war could be waged, details the rights of fighters and instructs on how to conclude treaties. It also tells how government must be conducted on the basis of justice, consultation and in conformity with the highest moral standards.

It is clear from the above that Islam does not only embrace learning, but actually merges into it, creating new sciences of its own: *tafsir*, *fiqh* and *hadith*. In addition to these religious sciences, the Quran highly commends the natural sciences, including astronomy, mathematics and medicine. The Quran refers constantly to the blessings God has bestowed on man, creating for him the earth and endowing it with mountains to stabilise it, and running rivers feeding from rain water or from springs so that people could drink and water their crops and their trees bearing grapes, dates, olives and all sorts of wonderful fruits. God had also propagated on earth all types of animals, created and tamed camels, horses and other beasts of burden for man to use, provided the sea for man to navigate with ships for trade and other benefits, and populated the sky with birds of every colour. Every aspect of the universe is referred to in the Quran: the earth with its mountains, the sea, birds, plants, trees, animals, reptiles, snakes, insects, etc. If

we direct our attention to other sciences, such as astronomy and mathematics, we find God mentioning the sun and its *buruj* (positions) to demonstrate His power, as in the verse: **“By the Sky, (displaying) the Zodiacal Signs”** (*Al-Buruj*: 1). The term *buruj* (constellations or zodiacal signs) was used by the ancients to refer to the apparent positions of the sun and the planets known to them, indicated by the signs of the zodiac, which fall on a belt of heaven divided into twelve equal parts and named after the constellations these positions used to contain. The Almighty also says: **“It is He who had made the sun a shining glory and the moon to be a light (of beauty) and measured out stages for it; that ye might know the number of years and the count (of time)”** (*Yunus*: 5). The stages of the moon are the positions in which it appears every night, which are twenty-eight, divided along the zodiac belt and named in the books of astronomers. God also says in *Sura 6* (*Al-An’am*: 96): **“He makes the night for rest and tranquillity, and the sun and moon for the reckoning (of time)”**, meaning that He decreed them to move according to a certain pattern of days, nights, months and years so that you may regulate your livelihoods and transactions and know the date and time, which are a fundamental requisites of civilisation.

The Quran contains various references to the medical sciences, leading to numerous international conferences being convened to elaborate the references and miraculous revelations contained in it. One such is the reference in *Sura 23* (*Al-Mu’minun*: 12-16) to the creation of embryos inside the womb, where it is mentioned at the start of this sequences of verses that man has been created from “a quintessence of clay,” in reference to the creation of Adam out of clay. The verses then detail the phases of development of the embryo: **“Then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed”**; (meaning his mother’s womb) **“Then we made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (foetus) lump; then We made out of that lump bones, and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature.”** These Quranic verses contain a truly miraculous divine revelation, picturing with great accuracy the successive phases of the evolution of the embryo until it develops into a living human being.

All these references in the Quran to the earth sciences, astronomy and medical knowledge, together with the fusion of Islam with learning when it created its own religious sciences, filled Muslim hearts with the love of knowledge in all fields. Soon after the Prophet’s death, the Muslims applied themselves diligently to the study of the religious sciences, and -after the conquests- also tried to explore what sciences other Arabised communities possessed, including chemistry, astronomy, mathematics and medicine. Soon after that, an energetic movement of translation was launched, covering all these

sciences and others as we have mentioned in the preceding chapters. The Muslims assimilated these new sciences and created new ones, like grammar and language sciences to fulfil the demand of the newly Arabised communities who needed to perfect their knowledge of Arabic. A great renaissance resulted in all areas of learning, including religious sciences, linguistic sciences and the new foreign sciences. Muslims then -as mentioned earlier- assumed world leadership in all fields of science and civilisation for the next six centuries (until the eighth/fourteenth century).

God has truly made the Islamic community one of science and learning. Children usually started their education in Quranic schools (*kuttab*), where they learned reading and writing, some Quranic verses, a little math and grammar and some poetry and proverbs. For little girls, the preference was to teach them the Quran, especially *Sura 24 (Al-Nur)*. Muslims did not in the past have graduated stages of learning like we do today, but the *kuttab* occupied the place of present day elementary and intermediate schooling. Mosques were the great arena of learning, and the youth who wanted further education after *kuttab* had to frequent the learning circles in mosques. The mosques were not just places of worship, but centres for higher learning as well. Each prominent learned figure (*'alim*) in each branch of learning had a large circle in which students gather. He would normally sit with his back to one of the pillars in the mosque or on a high chair, and dictate his lectures to the students. If the students were too numerous and could not all hear his words, an aide would repeat his pronouncements for those further afield. The circles of jurists were the most popular, since mastering *fiqh* qualified the person to occupy such posts as market supervisor, police chief, judge and even governor. No qualifications were demanded from students wishing to attend except the desire to learn. This led to two significant developments: the first was the great number of learned men specialising in every discipline, to the extent that it had been related that when al-Nadr ibn Shumayl, a disciple of al-Khalil ibn Ahmad, left Basrah in Iraq for Khurasan, he was seen off by three thousand scholars, including *ulama* of *hadith*, grammarians, linguists, prosodists and historians. No doubt there were, in addition to this multitude of men of learning in the Basrah of the second hijri century, many more who chose not to see him off. And if Basrah had this many, Baghdad no doubt had several times this number of men of learning.

The second phenomenon which contrasts with the first is the appearance of certain class of scholars and men of letters who diversified their knowledge greatly, not satisfied with frequenting just one circle, or circles in one discipline. They would sit at most, if not all, the circles of learning available, learning something about everything. They tended to resemble journalists in our day,

being able to discuss most aspects of culture and knowledge and to write interestingly about them. Al-Jahiz called this class of people in his town of Basrah the *Masjidiyyin* (men of the mosque), and says that they used to have a circle of their own in mosques where they would debate anything they fancy. He related in his book *al-Bukhala'* (The Misers) samples of their debates on how to economise in expenditure and how best to cultivate and augment wealth. This group was popular at the courts of caliphs, viziers and notables because of their entertaining conversations.

The most important factor which ignited the learning movement in the Abbasid era and injected it with vigour was the proliferation of debates and contests in mosques and at the courts of rulers and notables. The youth used to attend the debates of jurists, theologians and linguists to learn the art of disputation and find out how to marshal arguments and overcome opponents. Yahya ibn Khalid, the Barmakid vizier of Al-Rashid, organised a debating circle where Muslim and non-Muslim theologians met to debate issues of philosophy and theology. Al-Mas'udi reported an interesting discussion in this circle on the nature of love. The court of Al-Mamoun used to be a great debating arena. The caliph was himself a cultured intellectual, well-versed in the religious and linguistic sciences, as well as philosophy and other branches of knowledge. His audiences at the seat of the caliphate in Baghdad regularly turned into colloquia discussing all branches of knowledge. In his book *Baghdad*, the author Tayfour presents a portrait of these gatherings and what was debated in them. Al-Mas'udi says that al-Mamoun's debating circles had taught people the art of disputation, investigation and reasoning. Some participants in these circles wrote books to outline and defend their positions. The circles of theologians were also the setting for frequent debates, and we have seen in chapter four how they used to organise large meetings attended by theologians from all faiths and sects. Many books written in the Abbasid era come with title "Rejoinder to..." or "Refutation of ..." as if debating had become the language of the age. Al-Jahiz would often write a treatise praising something or some group, and then he would write another treatise attacking the same thing. He had a book of "advantages and disadvantages", which is a compendium of a long list of qualities and dispositions. In it, he relates the good aspect of one quality, and then marshals its disadvantages and defects, supporting his arguments with stories and anecdotes drawing on Arab, Persian, Indian and Greek cultures.

An important factor contributing to the great Islamic renaissance in science and learning which took off in the last quarter of the second hijri century (eighth CE) was the establishment in Baghdad of a paper factory, set up by al-Fadl ibn Yahya al-Barmakid, the vizier of al-Rashid. People then shifted from writing on

parchments and papyrus sheets to writing on the much cheaper and lighter paper, this resulting in a large increase in the number of books and publications, with a corresponding increase in the number of copyists/booksellers (*warraqin*) who earned their livelihood copying and selling books. The many shops they set up were frequented by youth not only to buy, but to read books. Young scholars used to rent these shops for the night and spend it reading and copying works by lamplight. This had a great effect on the cultural renaissance, due to the availability of books for youth and students, from which they could learn at will, which was much easier than having to attend ulama circles in mosques.

Soon private and public libraries began to be set up as well. Al-Rashid established a big library which he named Dar al-Hikma, for which he employed a large number of translators as we have mentioned before. His son Al-Mamoun took even more care of it and expanded it further. Yahya ibn Khalid established a big library of his own, and it was said that it included three copies of every book it acquired. Learned men also set private libraries. That of Al-Waqidi, the historian, was reported to have contained six hundred boxes full of books, and he had too slaves he set to work copying books for him, working day and night. Some wealthy notables, who were themselves educated, took care to establish public libraries open to all who wanted to use them. One such was Ali ibn Yahya the astrologer, a contemporary of the caliph Al-Mutawakkil, who built a palace and turned it into a huge library where people used to come from far away places and live in while consulting the books it contained. Public and private libraries proliferated in all Muslim cities and towns, especially mosque libraries, which were open to the public. Famous public libraries in big cities included the library of the Fatimid ruler Al-Aziz in Egypt, which was said to have contained two hundred thousand volumes. In Qurtuba (Cordova) in Muslim Spain, the library of al-Hakam al-Mustansir attained wide fame. He employed booksellers in major Muslim capitals to procure books for him, and the index of his library was in forty volumes of twenty sheets each (fifty according to another report). From the end of the second century, copyists' shops proliferated in every city, and there were tens of them grouped in business districts of their own in each town.

Muslims applied themselves to reading and learning with a diligence unknown to a previous nation, due chiefly to the influence of Quran and *sunna* and their persistent urging to Muslims to apply themselves to learning. So much so that the Muslim community could be regarded the community of learning par excellence. The love of learning was manifested by all members of the community, with a great many among them dedicating themselves to the pursuit of learning in the sciences and literature. Many also wrote a large number of books, like Al-Jahiz who authored a huge library of volumes and treatises on his

own. Muhammad ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, the Quran exegisist, was determined to write every day a set number of pages which he had imposed on himself, as if it was a duty towards society. Some of his disciples made a tally of the sheets he had written, and found that he had continued to write forty sheets a day for forty years, with his total output averaging fourteen sheets for every day of his life since the day he was born. It is no wonder, therefore, to discover that Muhammad ibn Zakariyya Al-Razi (d. 320H), a contemporary of Al-Tabari's, has authored, according to al-Bayrouni, 56 books in medicine, 44 books in the natural sciences, ten books in mathematics, 17 books in philosophy, eight books in logic and 23 books in chemistry. One of Al-Razi's most famous books was al-Hawi, a medical encyclopedia. He also wrote a book on spiritual healing. His counterpart in Muslim Spain was Al-Zahrawi, who wrote a medical encyclopedia in thirty volumes. Not to mention Ibn Sina (Avicena) whose books treatises numbered several hundreds. His book of medicine **al-Qanun**, together with Al-Razi's works and Al-Zahrawi's encyclopedia, continued to be taught in western universities from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries. In every other science we also encounter huge encyclopaedic works in addition to hundreds of books. It is enough to point to the dictionary **Lisan al-Arab** (The Arab Tongue) which runs into twenty volumes.

An important phenomenon associated with learning among the Arabs since its inception was the fact that it had not confined to special categories, but was diffused amongst all classes. This was helped by the free access to teaching circles in mosques and the proliferation of copyists' shops and public libraries in all Islamic cities from the end of the second hijri century. Education was also free, and no fee was exacted for attending learning circles. The lower classes did take part, even a prominent part, in the learning movement. A glance at the biographies of learned men, literary figures, poets and writers will indicate that most of them had originated from the working classes. Their surnames were often something like the "Smith", "Taylor", "Silk Merchant", "Glass Maker" "Bow Maker", "Perfumer" "Arrow Maker" or "Embroiderer". Among the theologians we find names like Abu Ahmad al-Tammar (date seller) Shu'ayb al-Qallal (jar maker). The famous poet Abu Nawwas started as an apprentice with a perfumer, while another famous poet, Abu al-'Atahiyya, started his life peddling jars, which he carried on his back, on the streets of Kufa. Al-Jahiz starting his life selling fish and bread on the banks of Sihan, a stream near Basrah. Many sources testify to the fact that the masses had unrestricted access to learning and did acquire various degrees of cultural erudition. Al-Jahiz, writing in the third century, makes a remark such as this: "*And I have asked a perfumer who adhered to the Mu'tazilite doctrine...*", as if it was quite natural for

perfumers at that time belonged to different schools of theology, some following the Mu'tazilah, others to adhere to other schools of thought. No doubt other traders and journeymen were similarly aware of major trends of thought and actively involved in them. Thus every teacher or leader of a school had a follower, not only among the intellectuals, but among the general public as well.

We hope that what had been said demonstrates clearly that learning and the sciences have spread in all quarters, even among the masses and the lower classes. This assessment is supported by the resort of an Ismaelite shiite group to writing anonymous philosophical and scientific treatises to propagate its extremist shiites views among the masses. This group produced 52 treatises which it called **Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa** (The Epistles of the True Brothers). The authors kept their names secret, but disseminated these epistles through copyists' shops. They included 14 treatise on mathematics and logic, 17 on the natural sciences and psychology, 10 on Metaphysics and 11 on mysticism, astrology and magic. They sprinkled elements of Ismaelite shiite ideas throughout these texts so as to further the cause of the Ismaelite movement. The very fact that the "True Brothers" had elected -in order to propagate their shiite ideology among the masses- to publish philosophical and scientific tracts, is in itself an indication of the popularity of works of this type among the masses. One might be excused if he were to believe that all the inhabitants of Baghdad had attained some level of scientific or philosophical knowledge. This is supported by the portrayal of the chattering barber in *The Thousand and One Nights*, who is shown telling a young customer: "*God has blessed you with a barber who is also an astrologer, well-versed in Alchemy, natural magic, grammar, inflection, language, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, astronomy, geometry, jurisprudence, hadith and tafsir.*"

The preceding account about the flourishing of the sciences under Islam covers only the first four centuries of Islamic history. During this period, learned persons in Europe were scarce indeed, and books existed there only in monasteries. By contrast, books in the Islamic world were freely available in mosques, public libraries and copyists' shops. Schools began to be set up in Muslim lands from the fourth hijri century by notables who regarded themselves as protectors and sponsors of learning. Nizam al-Mulk, the vizier during the Seljuk era, started to establish a school or college in every major Iraqi or Iranian city. These schools were more like universities, since they used to teach all branches of knowledge, and were provided with residential quarters for teachers and students, who were all paid stipends. These schools began to proliferate all over the Muslim world, occasioning a fierce competition between learned men in all parts of the Muslim world, which was regarded as one unit from the perspective of learning and education. Many of the great mosques which had

been established in major cities evolved into universities in their own right, and all branches of religious and linguistic sciences were being taught there by prominent *ulama*. Among these were the Qarawiyyin Mosque in Fez, the ‘Uqbah Mosque in al-Qayrawan, al-Zaytouna Mosque in Tunis (both in Tunisia), the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo. The latter continues, to this day, to provide housing and pay an allowance to students from all over the Muslim world.

Muslims led the whole world for over six centuries in all branches of learning, attaining the summit of achievement in every field, whether this be their own religious and linguistic sciences, or the sciences which they had acquired from preceding nations, such as chemistry, physics, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, engineering and geometry. They also succeeded early in creating their own Islamic philosophy, which blended the spirit of Islam with the concepts of Greek philosophy. Over the ages, many Muslim philosophers were to excel and shine. All this scientific and cultural renaissance was a direct result of the love of science and learning instilled in all Muslims by the Holy Quran and the *sunna*, to the extent that this love of learning became almost an integral part of the Muslim faith.

In the eleventh century AD, Europe rose from its long slumber to be faced with this breathtaking Islamic scientific renaissance, and soon many of its young men started to explore it. Some of them travelled to Spain, seeking to partake of its learning. They learned Arabic, studied under Muslim professors, and then proceeded to translate the philosophical and scientific treasures of learning available in Arabic into Latin, their language of learning at the time. Aldo Amiele, in his book *Arabic Science and its Impact on the Development of International Science*, writes: “*Almost all the books of great Arab scientists had been translated into Latin in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.*” These books were then studied, comprehended and assimilated by western students, thus helping to illuminate the path to the modern scientific renaissance in the West.

It was only natural, with Quran and *hadith* calling on the whole community, men and women, to pursue learning, that women should assume an important role in the learning movement since the age of the Companions. Their leading teacher in this -throughout the ages- was Ayisha, who as wife of the Prophet, merits the title “Mother of the Faithful”. Ayisha reported over two thousand of the Prophet’s sayings (*hadiths*), containing many rules of *Shari’a* which are considered authoritative by leading jurists, together with many reports by other wives of the Prophet and women Companions. It is well known that the caliph Omar ibn Al-Khattab enlisted the help of al-Shaffa’ bint Abdillah, a woman from

Quraysh who had been among the early Muslim emigrants to Madinah, who he employed as market supervisor, monitoring trade and prices and arbitrating in disputes. Following the conquests, participation of women in learning became common in every country. Girls would be taught some *suras* of the Quran, some *hadiths* and some of the rules pertaining to their religious obligations. With the flourishing of the learning movement from the second century onwards, women made their presence felt in the circles of jurists, theologians and *hadith* scientists. In each Muslim country, some women gained prominence as reporters of *hadith*. Among these was Sayyida Nafisa, daughter of al-Husayn ibn Zaid, a descendant of the caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib. This lady, who died in 208H, used to dictate *hadith* to its Egyptian students, both men and women, in her mosque in al-Fustat (Cairo). Among those who used to attend her lessons was Imam al-Shafi'i, the leading jurists and founder of one of the four main sunni schools of jurisprudence.

Every Muslim country boasted a number of famous learned women, whether in the science of *hadith*, Quranic reading or Quranic interpretation. In his book **al-'Iqd al-Thamin fi Tarikh al-Balad al-Amin** (The Precious Necklace in the History of the Secure Town), which is a history of Makkah, dedicates the eighth chapter to biographies of women from Makkah who were experts on *hadith*, under whom many a great scholar of *hadith* studied. A slave girl owned by the mother of the caliph al-Muqtadir named Thamil was a famous jurist. She reportedly used to hold council in the year 306H to rule in disputes and petitions, with senior judges and scholars present. This occasioned a debate over whether it was lawful for a woman to become a judge. Al-Tabari, the greatest Quran interpreter of his time, said she could. This ruling is an indication of the high level of attainment achieved by women at the time in the fields of jurisprudence and in the sciences of Islamic *Shari'a*. Since the second hijri century, a large number of women became famous for dedicating themselves to worship. Most prominent among these was Rabi'a Al-Adawiyah, the mystic from Basrah. She is the author of wonderful poems and remarks about mystical love of God which transcends all feeling and senses. She is rightfully regarded as one of the founders of Islamic mysticism.

Many other women excelled in the various sciences. Part 8 of **al-Dhayl wa'l-Takmila** (The Addendum and the Supplement), a book by Abd Al-Malik Al-Marrakeshi, includes a long list of learned women in Muslim Spain. They hailed mostly from the families of rulers in Spain and Maghreb and from the families of viziers and *ulama*, as well from the common people. Some of them taught the seven authoritative readings of the Quran as well as the reading ascribed to Warsh, the Egyptian. Others taught *tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, language,

prosody or famous literary works, such as Al-Mubarrad's **al-Kamil**, or Ali Al-Qali's, **al-Amali**. Some propagated the Ash'arite theological doctrine in their towns. From the fifth/eleventh century, a number of Andalusian ladies gained fame as skilled doctors, and they in turn taught medicine to Maghrebi women. Throughout the centuries, a large number of Muslim women became famous for their asceticism and dedication to worship. The famous Andalusian mystic, Ibn al-'Arabi, admits that it had been his wife, Maryam, who had led him to adopt mysticism, due to her piety which he had observed, and to her persistent admonitions. Another influence in his life was a lady from Qurtuba, named Nuna Fatima, with whom he studied for two years. In Tunisia, a lady by the name of Ayisha Al-Manoubiyya, nicknamed "Lalla", a disciple of Abu Al-Hassan Al-Shadhli, founder of the famous sufi order bearing his name, became famous. A big *zawiya* (prayer and learning complex) is dedicated to her name there. Mosques and *zawiya*'s dedicated to these holy women are scattered throughout the Muslim world, most notably the Mosque of Sayyidah Zaynab in Cairo. Not to mention the active participation of women in propagating sufi mysticism in Sudan. Many participated in meetings of religious singing, and some even sang while men, standing in two lines facing each other, recited formulas in praise of God against the background of her singing. In all areas of the Maghreb, it was women who shouldered the burden of primary education for both boys and girls up to the age of twelve, teaching them reading and writing, mathematics and some basics of knowledge, as well as helping them to learn some *suras* of the Quran.

In spite of this intimate relationship between Islam and science, affirmed by the Quran and *sunna*, which turned the Muslim world into a universe of learning and light, we still find some of our intellectuals comparing our situation to what happened in the West in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, regarding the opposition of the Christian Church to modern western science. They seem to think that this state of affairs is also applicable to Islam. They read, for example, that the Church had tortured the Italian scientist, astronomer and mathematician, Galileo (1564-1642), and put him on trial for his writings on the shape of the earth, forcing him to retract his views. And on the basis of this, they argue that a similar conflict between religion and science had also occurred in Islam. But this is a clear error, since no conflict ever occurred between Islam and science. On the contrary, the two of them had embraced each other from the start. This had engendered, among Muslim men and women, an enduring love of learning and created the scientific renaissance which we discussed earlier.

As we have affirmed several times, it is inconceivable that this religion, which God had chosen to be the vehicle of happiness for mankind in this life and

the next, could be an obstacle in the way of the assimilation of science by the Muslims. It had, on the contrary, elevated learning above the worship and praise of the angels as a powerful incentive to Muslims to cherish and value learning. Similarly, the Prophet had encouraged the Muslims in this path, telling them, as mentioned above, that the angels spread their wings for the seeker of learning to carry him to wherever he wanted to go. This spurring of Muslims to learning by God and His Prophet caused them, every time they attained some knowledge in some area, to demand even more and more of it. They have started by applying themselves to religious learning, and then moved to linguistic sciences and from there to medicine and other foreign sciences. There is no doubt then that Islam does not just embrace the sciences known to Muslims, but will embrace any sciences which will be discovered in the future as well, for Islam and science are siblings, nay, even twins.

I could not here refer to the illustrious Muslim scholars in every discipline, for this would require many volumes. What I am discussing here is an overview of the relation between Islam and science and how Islam had ignited the flame of learning among the Muslims, and caused it to glow until the lands of Islam became resplendent with light, and to be blessed with religious, linguistic, natural, medical, mathematical and chemical sciences. Similarly, I could not mention the superb books and encyclopaedias authored by Muslims and the marvels which defied time and merited eternal recognition, for this would be difficult in any branch of learning, the titles being too numerous. It is enough to mention that we have inherited from our forefathers thousands of volumes in every discipline, of which we are truly proud, as we are truly proud of its authors from our illustrious scholars.

## Chapter VII

### Justice

One of the meanings of the term *'adl* (justice) in Arabic is "equalisation." An instance of such usage is the following verse from *Sura 6 (Al-An'am: 1)*: "***Yet those who reject Faith hold (others) as equals with their Guardian-Lord (bi-Rabbihim ya'dilun).***" The Quran applies this term to refer to the mean between excess and dereliction or laxity in any matter. God repeats that He had created the world and all that is in it "justly" (*bi'l-'adl*). The term *'adl* is used in alternation with its synonym *qist* (fairness), as in *Sura 6 (Al-An'am: 115)*: "***The Word of thy Lords does find fulfilment in truth and justice (Sidqan wa 'adl-an),***" as contrasted to *Sura 7 (Al-A'raf: 29)*: "***Say: My Lord hath commanded justice (bi'l-qist).***" At other times, the term "truth" (*haq*) is employed instead, as in *Sura 44 (Al-Dukhan: 38-39)*: "***And we created not the heavens, the earth and all between them in (idle) sport. We created them not except for just ends (bi'l-haq),***" meaning in full justice in their structure and the laws which God had caused to inhere in them to preserve them: to preserve the heavens and its galaxies, stars and planets and to preserve the earth and all that is on it, including human beings, mountains, oceans, seas, rivers, plants, crops and trees.

Justice in the Quran is symbolised by the *al-Mizan* (balance or scales), which God tells us is the foundation of the whole universe. God informs us in *Sura 55 (Al-Rahman: 7-9)* that He has "***set up the Balance (of justice). In order that ye may not transgress (due) balance. To establish weight with justice and fall not short in the balance.***" The "setting up of the balance" here denotes the fact of making justice the general law of the creation and of the whole universe. He also makes the scales a concomitant of all laws, affirming in *Sura 42 (Al-Shura: 17)*: "***It is Allah Who has sent down the Book in truth and the Balance.***" The "book" here refers to divine revelations, as we read in *Sura 57 (Al-Hadid: 25)*: "***We have sent aforetime Our messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance.***" God tells us here that He had sent the balance with the laws the Messengers brought to guide people to what assures their happiness in this life and the next, meaning he had combined these laws with justice without which man's worldly and religious existence cannot be sustained. Some interpreters said that the "balance" mentioned here denotes the actual (physical) scales, a view which was attacked by Imam al-Ghazali, who wrote: "*Do you think that the scales conjoined with the book is the one used to weigh wheat and barley or gold and silver? Or do you believe it is tayyar and*

*qabban (two types of scales)? This is far fetched indeed, and a great falsehood! So fear God and do not do violence to the terms, but know for certain that the balance in question is that of knowing God, His angels, His revelations, His messengers and His Kingdom and Power, so that you may learn how to apply these scales from His prophets.*" Al-Ghazali does not here mean knowledge as such, but its fruit, which is justice in all matters. And this can only be attained by the Muslim after thorough knowledge of all religious injunctions and prohibitions, after which he would conduct himself only according to justice, guided by the light of the True Religion.

God says in the above verse of *Sura 55 (Al-Rahman)*: "**that ye may not transgress (due) balance,**" meaning do not overstep the bounds and defeat the purpose of divine of justice. "**And establish weight with justice,**" meaning establish weights on the decreed pattern of justice in measures when buying or selling. God repeats the exhortation to men in the Quran to give full measure and full weight, that the seller may deliver what is due from him without omission, and that the buyer might receive what is due to him without surplus, as the Almighty has said in *Sura 6 (Al-An'am: 152)*: "**give measure and weigh with (full ) justice.**" God concludes the verses referred to above from *Sura 55 (Al-Rahman)* by the exhortation: "**and fall not short in the balance.**" Some interpreters say that the "scales" referred to here are the ordinary scales in everyday use. Others say it refers to justice, as the first verse we have looked at ("**He has set up the Balance (of Justice)**") suggests, since the reference in that context is to justice. On this understanding, the verses warn against laxity in observing justice which God wants the Muslims to adhere to in all firmness. Other interpreters hold that the reference is to the scales of justice on the Day of Judgement, on which the works of people, good and bad, will be weighed justly, without reduction or injustice. God -glory be to Him- affirms in *Sura 21 (Al-Anbiya': 47)*: "**We shall set up scales of justice for the Day of Judgement, so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least, and if there be (no more than) a weight of mustard seed, We will bring it to account.**" In this latter verse, the scales symbolise justice in recompense in the hereafter. The mention of the scales in all the above verses encourages a Muslim to seek justice in all his transactions, for justice is indispensable in the lives of nations and peoples.

In *Sura 16 (Al-Nahl: 90)* God issues a generalised injunction for the adherence to justice. The first duty of a Muslim in this regard is to be just towards himself. He must not expose himself to destruction or perdition, but must protect his person from illnesses, or else he would be unjust towards himself. He must also be fair with God, recognising Him as the only True God, and believing in his law (the *Shari'a*), fulfilling the religious obligations towards Him, following the

injunctions of *Shari'a* and desisting from what it prohibits. He must also be fair with his family, fulfilling the demands and rights of his wife and, if he was married to more than one wife, to treat all of them fairly and equally in matters of housing, clothing, co-habitation and kindness. God mentions in *Sura 4 (Al-Nisa': 3)* after granting men permission to marry more than one wife: "***But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one.***" Judge Abd Al-Aziz Fahmy, head of the Appeals Court in Egypt in 1935, if I remember right, wrote a paper in which he alleges that this verse prohibits marriage to more than one wife, since it was impossible -in his view- for a man married to more than one wife to be fair to all of them. In any case, this verse makes it obligatory on any man married to more than one wife to be fair to all.

A man must also be equally fair to his children, treating them equally in all his dealings: in the presents he gives them on their birthdays and the like, in inheritance, where he should not discriminate between them or when presenting some with his possessions and estates and in all other matters. It is reported in the two authoritative hadith compendia (*sahih's*) of Al-Bukhari and Muslim that Al-Nu'man ibn Bashir said: "*My father gave me a generous gift once, so my mother said to him: 'I will not approve of this gift until the Prophet -peace be upon him- witnesses it.'* So he went to ask the Prophet to witness his gift. The Prophet asked: '*Have you given all your other children a similar gift ?'* [My father] said: '*No.*' The Prophet -peace be upon him- then said: '*Fear God and be fair among your children.*' And he added: '*I will not witness an injustice.*' So my father returned and withdrew that gift." It is true that favouring some children over others creates endless problems between the children, in addition to creating friction with parents.

The Muslim is also required to be fair to his relatives and neighbours, and with all people. For justice is a central pillar of Islam, and it is the Muslim's duty to stick to it in all that he does, or says. The Almighty Lord says in *Sura 6 (Al-An'am: 152)*: "***Whenever ye speak, speak justly, even if a relative is concerned.***" A Muslim is thus required to make justice and fairness his guide in all that he says. If he were to praise someone, he should praise him only according to the truth, without exaggeration; if he was asked for advice, he should give fair and truthful advice; if he were to mediate between two disputing parties, he should be fair between them; if he was selling goods, he is required to describe his merchandise accurately and truthfully, not exaggerating the price he has paid for it, nor claiming falsely that he had been offered a higher price, but declined. He should also not say untruthful things to please his relatives. And just as God has decreed fairness with near ones, he also enjoined it with enemies, as when He commands in *Sura 5 (Al-Ma'ida: 8)*: "***And let not the hatred of others to you***

***make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety.***" This is a demand that Muslims should adhere to justice, whether with friend or foe.

In order to make the Islamic community (*Ummah*) love justice, and to adhere to it in all that they say or do, God told the Muslims that: "***Thus We have made of you an Ummah justly balanced (ummat-an wasat-an)***" (*Al-Baqarah*: 143). The description *ummat-an wasat-an* (a community of the middle way) signifies that all its members are fair, adhering to the just mean in everything, so that they do not go to excess or lapse into omission or negligence in their words or actions. It is as if this was a covenant established by God with the Muslims to adhere to justice in everything. We thus find God enjoining on the Muslims in *Sura 25 (Al-Furqan*: 67) to economise in their expenditure without being mean: "***Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes).***" The expenditure referred to here is the general expenditure on housing, food, etc. Extravagance is where one spends more than is normally necessary, while niggardliness is to spend less than is necessary. This theme is again elaborated in *Sura 17 (Al-Isra*: 29): "***Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard's) to thy neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that thou become blameworthy and destitute.***" The metaphor of the hand tied to one's neck signifies the inability to use it or benefit by it, and is thus a counsel against excessive miserliness. Extending the hand to the limit is a metaphor for immoderation. Thus Muslims are enjoined against both parsimony and immoderation or over-indulgence, but to adhere to the mean between these two extremes. God tells us that He is counselling the Muslims against these two types of excess so that they would not blame themselves or be blamed by others for detestable stinginess, nor regret the loss of their wealth due to wastefulness.

Even though God -exalted be His name- urges the rich repeatedly to spend from their money on needy relatives and on the poor and the wayfarers, He also gently enjoins the generous rich not to be immoderate in their generosity, saying in *Sura 17 (Al-Isra*': 26): "***And render to the kindred their due rights, and (also) to those in want, and to the wayfarer: but squander not (your wealth).***" The rights referred to are those in *zakah* and alms. God has decreed a right for needy relatives, so as to strengthen family bonds, and for the needy, to emphasise the value of coming to the aid of one's brother in the faith in time of need. The wayfarer is also accorded a right, since he is usually a stranger in need of food, and also of lodgings at night to protect him from thieves or beasts. God instructs whoever allocates some of his money to these categories not to go to excess or wastefulness, so that the spender would have enough left from his wealth to satisfy his own need. Similarly, God says in *Sura 6 (Al-An'am*: 141): "***It is He***

***who produceth gardens, with trellises or without, and dates, and tilth with produce of all kinds, and olives and pomegranates, similar (in kind) and different (in variety): eat of their fruit in their season, but render the dues that are proper on the day that harvest is gathered. But waste not by excess."***

And just as God enjoins Muslims to spend in moderation, so the Prophet -peace be upon him- counselled moderation in matters of worship and devotion to God, repeatedly warning against excess in worship. His advice to those who take a hardline stance in matters of religion and want to be too hard on themselves, is to say: *"This religion is solid, so proceed into it gently."* He likened extremists in matters of worship to a reckless traveller who drives his camel too hard, causing it to die, and thus losing his ride without getting anywhere. He was once informed that Abdullahi ibn Amr ibn al-As used to fast constantly and pray all night long. So he told him when they met: *"O Abdullahi, I have been informed that you fast (all) days and pray all night."* Abdullahi replied: *"Yes."* The Prophet then said: *"Your body has a right over you, your wife has a right over you and your visitors have a right over you. It is enough for you to fast three days in every month, since [the rewards for] a good deed is tenfold. Thus fasting three days is equivalent to fasting the whole month."* Ayisha, the Prophet's wife, reports that the Prophet -peace be upon him- entered her chambers once and found a woman with her, so he asked: *"Who is this woman?"* She told him: *"This is so and so (giving her name),"* and described to him how she prays constantly. The Prophet said: *"Stop this, stick to what you can do."* It is clear that he had admonished Ayisha when she praised the lady for her devotion to prayer, as if he was telling them to keep to the acts of worship which they can sustain, since a little worship that is constantly maintained is preferable to a great deal of it which a person could not keep up.

Another area in which God and His Prophet enjoin the adherence to justice is that of resolving disputes. God -exalted be His Power- says in *Sura 3 (Al-Nisa: 58)* : ***"Allah doth command you to render back your Trusts to those to whom they are due; and when ye judge between men, that ye judge with justice."*** Thus the Muslims are enjoined to return whatever possessions they have been entrusted with, without taking anything out of them or denying having received them, since such acts would deserve severe punishment. They are also instructed, when they sit in judgement between people, to base their rulings on justice. It is recognised that a judge is to refer to the sources of Islamic *Shari'a* when making his judgement, starting with the Holy Quran. If he could not find sufficient grounds there for a ruling, then he should refer to *sunna*. If no inspiration is found there, then he is to refer to the consensus of the Muslim community (*ijma'*), as the Prophet -peace be upon him- has said: *"My community will never agree on an*

*error.*" If he could not find a guiding precedent or principle in *ijma'*, then he should apply his own judgement on the basis of the general principles laid down in the Quran and *sunna*. We have already mentioned *ijtihad* (independent judgement) and how the Prophet -peace be upon him- has accepted it as a main source and principle of religion. His two immediate successors, Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and Omar ibn Al-Khattab, resorted to *ijtihad* in resolving problems that has arisen in their time. In succeeding generations, judges resorted to *ijtihad* constantly to resolve cases where no explicit ruling was found to cover them in Quran or *sunna*, nor was there a precedent of *ijma'* to guide them to the correct judgement. They would then apply their own judgement, in the light of Quran and *sunna*, to resolve the matter in question. The Prophet -peace be upon him- repeatedly commends just rulers and judges. Among his sayings in this regard is the following: "*Those who adhere to justice in ruling between Muslims [would be established] on rostrums of light on the day of judgement.*"

As God instructs rulers and judges to pursue justice in ruling between claimants, the same injunction is given to witnesses. God says in another verse in *Sura 4 (Al-Nisa: 135)*: "***O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even as against yourselves, your parents or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor: for Allah can best protect both. Follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest ye swerve, and if ye distort (justice) or decline to do justice, verily Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.***" God commands from Muslim in this verse to stand up for justice and to bear (true) witness for the sake of God, even if such testimony were damaging to themselves. For it is their duty to reveal the truth, no matter how hard it may be on them or damaging to their interests. They must also speak the truth, even if this were to be harmful to one's parents or relatives. Islam thus abolishes prejudice in favour of oneself, parents or relatives, and decrees that the Muslim's loyalty is to truth and justice above all. God says that it should not matter whether the relative or parent in question was rich or poor, and this must be no reason why testimony should be withheld or falsified, either in deference to a rich person or out of sympathy for a poor one, since God is well aware of their condition, and knows what is best for them. One is thus advised to stick to justice and not follow his own natural inclinations, like loyalty to parents or relations. God then warns those who either falsify, hide or withhold testimony that God is well aware of their actions. This injunction is repeated in *Sura 2 (Al-Baqarah: 283)*: "*Conceal not evidence; for whoever conceals it- his heart is tainted with sin.*"

The Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab has written an important epistle on the judiciary, detailing the principles that should govern the conduct of judges when dealing with people and litigants, and the rules to which he is to adhere when

making a judgement. At the beginning of his epistle, Omar writes: "*And know that the judicial function is a clear obligation and a path that had been trodden.*" This is an affirmation that this function had been ordained by religion and legislated for the good of the community, to resolve disputes that might arise between its members. Omar adds, addressing the judge: "*So do [try to fully] understand when you are presented with a case.*" This is an exhortation to the judge to listen carefully to the arguments of the litigants, so that he may comprehend the points made and find the truth after careful consideration. The epistle goes to instruct the judge to: "*treat people equally in [the way you seat them in] your court and in [the looks of] your face, so that no distinguished personage would expect injustice from you [in his favour], neither a weak person fear your unfairness [against him].*" This is a counsel for the judge to handle the seating in his court and even his facial gestures so that no one could be justified in suspecting bias in his manners, either from a noble personage who could hope that his status would bring him preference over his poorer adversary, or from a weaker party who may fear that he would suffer injustice because of his lowly status.

Omar then lays down two basic rules to which the judge must adhere strictly when dealing with litigants appearing before him: "*The burden of evidence is on the plaintiff, while the respondent who denies such claims must be prepared to swear an oath.*" The plaintiff who brings forth a suit must present sufficient evidence and witnesses to support his case. If he was unable to do so, and the respondent continued to deny the claim, then the judge must ask the respondent to back his denial by affirming on oath that he was saying the whole truth and hiding nothing. If the litigants agree between themselves on a reconciliation deal, Omar, instructs the judge to endorse such a deal, unless the deal is itself illegal, in that it permits what is prohibited, or prohibits what is permitted. Omar also opens the doors widely for the judge to revise his rulings if he were to realise later that there had been an error in judgement. He must then announce this to the litigants and adopt the correct ruling, since to revert to what is just and right is better than to persist in upholding an error.

Omar also puts before the judge the main sources on which he is to rely in his judgement and use as a reference, these being the Quran and the *sunna*. If he could not find in them what could guide him to the correct judgement, then he is to use his own judgement, referring to similar cases in the *Shari'a*. Omar also instructs the judge to grant the plaintiff an adjournment if he were to request it to enable him to call his witnesses. If he was able to produce his witnesses in time, and they managed to support his case with reliable testimony, then his claim should be upheld. If not, then he loses his case and it should be dropped. Omar

also states here a cardinal rule: that all Muslims are regarded as equally reliable witnesses, and that their testimony has to be accepted, except for someone who has been convicted and punished for a crime for which the punishment is flogging. False testimony must be rejected, as well the testimony of a relative of the person involved, since he is likely to be biased in favour of his relative. The plaintiff must not call as a witness a relative of his, to remove the suspicion of likely bias. Omar, finally, instructs the judge not to insult litigants or turn his face away from one of them, but he must be equally kind to all. This epistle of Omar's on the conduct of justice is an important document from the early Islamic period, indicating how the judiciary in Islam has been founded on firm principles of justice and fairness.

The question of relations between the rich and poor has, since ancient times, occupied the minds of many and prompted a constant search for an appropriate solution for it. With the advent of Islam, God -exalted be His name- offered a definitive solution for it, acceptable to both rich and poor, so that no one in the Muslim community may go hungry. This solution is the imposition of *zakah* on the rich and the repeated calls in the Quran for the rich to give alms, which God has honoured by describing as a loan to Him, saying *in Sura 57 (Al-Hadid: 11)*: "***Who is he that will loan to Allah a beautiful loan? For (Allah) will increase it manifold to his credit.***" Thus God did not consider the alms paid by the rich to the poor as merely a gesture of conceding some of their wealth to the poor, but it is also a loan to Him. The dispenser of charity is thus actually offering what he hands to his poorer brethren as a loan to his Lord.

With *zakah*, social justice ceased to be a utopian dream and turned into a reality, as a "recognised right" for the poor was decreed, to be collected from the better-off. It is as if the poor became partners to the rich in their wealth, to be paid annually, or at other intervals, their share from *zakah*. And this is not charity or a hand-out, but a right, as the Quran affirms, guaranteed to the poor and must be given by the wealthy. This protects the poor from the condescension of the rich and frees them from their whims, to say nothing of the humiliation associated with receiving hand-outs. It also makes the rich feel a bond of brotherhood with the poor, helping the needy among them and coming to the rescue of the distressed, offering food, even though they may crave it themselves, to the poor and disadvantaged in preference to themselves.

This scheme for the implementation of social justice has been elevated in Islam to the status of one of its central pillars, considered at par with prayer, with which God Almighty always associates it in the Quran. When some of the Arab tribes reneged on this obligation following the death of the Prophet, his successor,

Caliph Abu Bakr, did not hesitate in waging war on them, forcing them to revert to adherence to Islam and its pillars. This was a great achievement of Abu Bakr's, which has been remembered throughout the ages. Never since has any group rebelled against this great pillar of the Islamic faith, since they have discovered that it was a hedge against rebellion by the poor of the *umma*, who may turn their anger and frustration against the rich and their monopoly of wealth. The rich of the *umma* have, from very early on, been generous with their works of charity, and some of them even set aside some of their real estate as *waqf* (endowment) the proceeds of which going to specified acts of charity. On account of this, the Muslim world is today unique in boasting specialised ministries charged with administering these vast *waqfs* and distributing their proceeds towards appropriate charitable avenues.

God and His Prophet have established this system of social justice in the Muslim community on the basis of the prevalence of love, compassion and cooperation among members of the community, with the rich supplying the poor with their daily bread. This satisfied the poor classes in our lands throughout the Islamic ages. If we compare this divine justice to what was intended by the leaders of Communism in achieving justice between rich and poor, we find that divine justice respects the freedom of man to run his life and dispose of his wealth. A person's wealth remains his own property, but he is required to concede some of it each year as *zakah* for his poorer brethren, voluntarily and with real desire to please God and to merit his bountiful rewards which He had allocated from those who spend of their money on the poor. These rewards have been promised in verses such as the following: "***The parable of those who spend of their substance in the way of Allah is that of a grain of corn: it groweth seven ears, and each ear hath a hundred grains. Allah gives manifold increase to whom he pleaseth: and Allah careth for all and He knoweth all things***" (*Al-Baqarah*: 261). This is a promise to those who spend their money to please God, waging war on His enemies and maintaining peace with their brothers, of great rewards, equivalent to up to seven hundred fold. Who, among the Muslims, would listen to this astounding divine promise of generosity and not offer his *zakah* and alms willingly and happily in anticipation of God's rewards in this world and the next and in pursuit of His pleasure?

This is a fundamental difference between the Islamic conception of social justice and that for which Russian Communism has worked for seventy years or more, and which bore within it from the beginning the germ of its failure. This has been so for many reasons, one of which is that it was based on oppression and coercion, the deprivation of man of his freedom and wealth, in addition to his subjection to constant surveillance in all his conduct and all his material and

intellectual production. This causes man to lose all the blessings God has bestowed on him in his life, and succumb to excessive materialism and rebellious atheism against God and his heavenly religions in general.

Each of these causes, and in particular the loss of human freedom, was sufficient, on its own, to bring about the collapse of the communist system of social justice from its very early development. But more important is the loss of religion and the categorical denial of its truth. For it is incontrovertible that man does need to believe in his God Who controls his affairs, guides him to the path of righteousness, keeps him away from evil and mortal sins and guarantees for him a good and contented life. Islamic social justice does not involve any of the destructive defects of Communism: there is no coercion or domination of the human will in this system; on the contrary, man's freedom is protected to its utmost limit, whether in the intellectual sphere or in personal and economic affairs and the conduct of life in general. In the Islamic system of social justice, man is not denied the fruits of his efforts, nor is he denied the opportunity to excel and distinguish himself in any field, nor is his capital and possessions threatened. More important than all the preceding, the Islamic system of social justice is a divine system, prescribed by the Regulator of the universe and by His Messenger. It is, for this reason, a sound and judicious system, embodied in the Islamic *Shari'a* and the Islamic faith, being considered, as mentioned before, tantamount to an act of worship, equal in status with prayer, fasting and pilgrimage. And it is an act of worship that fills the hearts of Muslims with satisfaction, security and contentment.

## Chapter VIII

### Equality

The first remark to be made about the equality prevailing among Muslim individuals is perhaps to note the way in which equality is perceived as covering both rights and duties, as well as equality in front of God. No Muslim can claim that he is closer to God than any one else, since all are equal in the eyes of God on account of their belief in His unity and his *Shari'a*. In Islam, God has abolished the clergy and did not permit the rise of any priestly or "holy" class which extrapolates itself between God and men. Islam does not tolerate the existence of a clergy, whether priests, bishops or monks. God repeats many times in the Quran that He accepts the repentance of His servants and grants them forgiveness without need for intermediaries or intercessors. He extends His Hand day and night to accept the sinner's penitence and forgive him his past and future sins, no matter how grave they may be. Ahmad ibn Hanbal reports in his Musnad, on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, that the Prophet -peace be upon him- had said, addressing the Muslims: "*I swear by Him Who has power over my soul that, were you to sin until your sins fill the space between earth and heaven, and then ask God for forgiveness, He will forgive you.*"

Thus Islam had established the principle of complete religious equality among all Muslim individuals in front of God. One sign of this is the performance of the prayer, which they perform together, standing in line, the poor beside the rich and the strong beside the weak, glorifying God without any distinction between them, pronouncing *takbir* in unison and bowing and prostrating together. The Muslims also gather from all corners of the earth in one spot, the Holy Mosque in Makkah, to perform the duty of *hajj*. They all take off their individual clothes and dress in identical *ihram* habits, symbolising complete equality in a most magnificent way.

God calls in the Quran on Muslims -and the whole of mankind- to recognise the complete equality between them and all other humans. An instance where this command is made is the following verse from *Sura 4 (Al-Nisa: 1)*: "***O Mankind, reverence your Guardian-Lord, Who had created you from a single Person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women.***" God thus tells us that all men have one origin, having been created from one father, Adam. They should thus be conscious of this always, since they share one origin, one genealogy and one ancestor, with no distinction between one Muslim and another. The Prophet -peace be upon him-

was reported to have said: “*People are as equal as the teeth of a comb.*” God Almighty says in *Sura 49 (Al-Hujurat: 13)*: “***O mankind! We have created you from a single (pair) of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you.***” This tells that God has created mankind from one father, Adam, and one mother, Eve, and made them into peoples and tribes so that they may know each other, not so that they may bear enmity to each other and fight. And also not so that may boast of their origin or dominate each other, since this is contrary to their nature and to purpose of their creation. For God wanted a feeling of brotherhood to prevail between them, being all of one common father and one mother. Peoples and tribes need not compete and vie with each other for advantage. The idea of peoples, even individuals, treating other peoples and individuals as inferiors is the reverse of true brotherhood which binds them, and is certain to move them away from peaceful and secure life. The differences that matter between people are not those of one’s birth and genealogy, but their excellence in what Islam had advocated: belief in God and His Prophet, fearing God and worshipping Him as He deserves. These are the criteria of real advantage and superiority, and it is superiority in the eyes of God alone, and not in the eyes of men.

As God had decreed that the criterion of distinction between people is true piety, the Prophet announced this as the criterion of preferment and distinction between Arabs and non-Arabs. In his Farewell Sermon, the Prophet told the assembled audience: “*O people! Your God is one, and your father is one. You are all Adam’s children, and Adam has been created from dust. The most honourable among you in the eyes of God is the most pious. No Arab has an advantage over a non-Arab except on account of their piety.*” Thus the Prophet affirmed the equality of Arab and non-Arab Muslims, accepting distinctions among them, as did the preceding verse, only on account of their devotion to God. Another version of the same sermon reports him as saying: “*There is no advantage for a black man over a red (i.e. white) man, and no advantage for a red over a black, except in devotion to God.*” The Prophet has thus decreed as an eternal law among Muslims that all of them were equal: Arabs and non-Arabs, black and white. They are only distinguished by their devotion to God. Islam has, therefore, abolished forever distinctions on the basis of tribe, nationality or race. In other words, all distinctions were abolished except through the new paramount Islamic virtue: that of devotion to God.

The Prophet -peace be upon him- gave the highest example in affirming equality between himself and his Companions, and would categorically decline any attempt by them to elevate him above themselves. Once, on emerging from

his home and chancing upon a group of his Companions who then rose to greet him, he warned them severely against doing this, saying to them: *“Do not rise for me as non-Arabs do to show veneration by some to others.”* He then added: *“I am only a servant of God’s. I eat as a servant eats, and sit as a servant sits.”* A man once stood before him and started trembling violently, awed by the Prophet’s presence. The Prophet tried to calm him, addressing him in gentle tones, saying: *“Take it easy, brother. I am neither a king nor a tyrant. I am only the son of a lady from Quraysh who used to eat dried meat in Makkah.”* He wanted to assure the man that he has no distinction over him. The man calmed down and stopped trembling, feeling reassured enough to say what he came to say to the Prophet.

The Prophet -peace be upon him- used to sit with the poor from among his Companions, and also used to eat with them and visit the sick among them. He would accompany a slave girl, a widow or a poor person to any place they request him to go in Madinah to help them and see to their needs. He would sit in the midst of his Companions, and when arriving at a place where people were assembled, would sit in the nearest available space, never demanding to be seated in a distinctive place. His homes were built from mud-brick, like the homes of all his companions. His furniture was also as simple as theirs. He would never regard any of the chores within the home as beneath him, and he used to sew his clothes, mend his own shoes, sweep the floor, milk the goat or tie his camel himself.

He also used to eat with his servant, Anas ibn Malik, to set an example for his Companions, and to impress on them the fact that there is no distinction between servant and master. When being addressed, the Prophet would never interrupt the person talking to him, but would listen carefully until that person is finished. His wife, Ayisha, said of him: *“He had never been invited to the home of one of his Companions or by a family member, except he would say: ‘presently!’”* He always regarded himself as an equal to all his Companions, never seeing any distinction for him above them. If they went to war, he would be in the front line. When they embarked on building a mosque, he would participate fully, as when he helped carry the mud bricks for the first mosque of Madina. When the companions gathered to dig a ditch in the famous Ditch Battle at Madina, he was among the first to start digging. When they hit a hard rock, he took the axe and struck one blow at it, and it immediately split. Then he kept hitting it until it broke to pieces, and only then handed the job over to the Companions to continue digging the rest of the trench. It was also reported that, when a rumour spread in Madina one night that the pagans had raided one quarter of the city, and people rushed out to check the truth of this story, they encountered the Prophet -peace be upon him- riding a horse without a saddle, as a sign that he had come out in a hurry. He had rushed to the outskirts of Madina,

investigated the rumour, ascertaining that no raid has taken place, and was coming back to reassure the people, shouting: "*Fear not! Feat not!*"

It was also reported that he had been travelling with a party once and he said to them. "*Prepare a sheep for us for food.*" One of the party said: "*O Messenger of God, I undertake to kill it.*" Another said: "*O Messenger of God, I undertake to skin it.*" A third said: "*O Messenger of God, I undertake to cook it.*" The Prophet then said: "*And I undertake to gather the wood for cooking.*" They all said to him: "*O Messenger of God, we can save you the trouble.*" He said to them: "*I know you can, but I hate to set myself apart from you.*" The Prophet's sense of equality with his Companions is epitomised by his insistence that anyone who feels wronged by him should exact remedy from him, no matter how slight or unintended the offence may have been. Once, while he was distributing some money among a group of people, he poked a man who was jostling him with a twig. When he noticed that the man had been upset, he said to him: "*Come and exact your retribution.*" The man felt ashamed and smiled as he said to the Prophet: "*I have forgiven, O Messenger of God.*" It was reported that the Caliph Omar said in one of his speeches: "*Whoever has been wronged by his governor should complain to me, and I will make sure that he would exact his retribution.*" Amr ibn al-As, the then governor of Egypt, rose to object, saying: "*O Commander of the Faithful. If a man among us were to discipline his subjects, would you demand restitution from him [for this]?"* Omar said: "*Why shouldn't I when I had seen the Prophet -peace be upon him- allowing restitution against his own person?"*

This equality is solidified and strengthened by the affirmation of God and His Prophet of the brotherhood of all Muslims, as when God says in *Sura 49 (Al-Hujurat: 10)*: "***The Believers are but a single Brotherhood***", meaning that all Muslims are brothers in religion. This brotherhood imposes some obligations on the Muslim towards his Muslim brother similar to those imposed by the brotherhood of blood. In fact, this spiritual brotherhood is a much stronger bond, since the second is merely physical in origin, while the spiritual bond demands that the believer is to love for his brother what he loves for himself, as the Prophet had enjoined. He is not to do injustice to his brother or deprive him from his rights, but must treat him as he treats himself. If his brother demanded a service from him, he is to perform that service as best he could; and if his brother were to fall into trouble or suffer a misfortune, then he should rush to his rescue. The Prophet -peace be upon him- urges Muslims to do this, saying: "*Whoever rescues a Muslim from an ordeal, God will rescue him from an ordeal from those [that are faced] on the Day of Judgement.*" One of the duties of a Muslim towards his brother emphasised by the Prophet, is that of not publicising his

defects and slips. The Prophet says: “*Whoever protects a Muslim from scandal will be similarly protected by God on the Day of Judgement.*” The Prophet also urges Muslims continuously to ensure that love and amity is to prevail among them, so that they may become like one big family, as in the saying reported in Muslim’s **Sahih**: “*The example of Muslims, in their love for each other, and their compassion and kindness towards each other, is that of one body, if any limb of it were to suffer, the whole body would respond with fever and sleeplessness.*” This is a remarkable metaphor, since it shows Muslims, in all areas and places, as one body because of the love and compassion that binds them together. So much so that if any member of this body were to suffer, the whole body would respond and jump to the rescue, a reaction symbolised in the above saying by the sleepless eye which feels the same pain as the affected limb, and the body which is touched with fever because of the injury to one limb.

The greatest manifestation of true Islamic brotherhood was the one which the Prophet -peace be upon him- had contracted between the early Makkan emigrants to Madinah (*al-Muhajirun*) and their hosts (known as *Ansar* or “supporters”) in Madinah. Soon after his arrival in Madinah, and after building in the Mosque was completed, he declared as “brothers” 45 pairs, each consisting of one from among the *Muhajirun* and one from *Ansar*. This brotherhood was contracted on the basis that the two brothers must support each other, share with each other and even inherit from each other like true brothers. Members of a pair of brothers actually used to take precedence in inheritance over other relatives, until the following verse of Sura 8 (*Al-Anfal*: 75) was revealed: “***But kindred by blood have prior rights against each other in the Book of Allah.***” After which the provision of inheritance in this bond of brotherhood was abolished. The *Ansar* have been praised for their sincerity in this remarkable brotherhood, saying in Sura 59 (*Al-Hashr*: 9): “***But those who before them, had homes (in Madinah) and had adopted the Faith- show their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their own lot.***” God here describes the *Ansar* as those who had resided in Madinah and adopted sincere faith in it before their brethren, and he conjoins residence in Madinah with adherence to faith as an honour to the town and its people. They are praised for loving their brothers dearly and sharing with them their worldly goods, like date palms; they do not, even though they may be in real need themselves, covet what their brothers had gained (like the booty awarded exclusively to them after the expulsion of the Jewish tribe of Bani al-Nadir from Madinah).

Exhortation to adhere to these lofty principles of complete equality and full brotherhood, which God had enjoined on the *Ansar* and the *Muhajirun*, and

which involved altruism and sharing, was not addressed exclusively to this group. On the contrary, these ideals were repeatedly emphasised by the Prophet and recommended to all his Companions, and were reflected in the conduct of many Muslims among those who conquered the Old World from Central Asia to the Atlantic Ocean and set up the great Islamic state. The best indication of this is the episode involving 'Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl and two of his comrades at the battle of Yarmuk in Syria. Hudhayfah Al-'Adawi relates that he was carrying water and looking for a cousin of his, whom he had believed to have been among the martyrs in that battle. He found the man among the wounded, however, and asked him if he wanted some water. The man nodded in ascent. But as his cousin was about to give him water, the wounded man heard 'Ikrimah groaning from his own wounds nearby, so he gestured with head to his cousin to take the water to 'Ikrimah first. When the man reached 'Ikrimah, he in turn heard another wounded man groaning, so 'Ikrimah gestured with his head for water to be taken to the third man first. When the narrator reached the third man, he discovered that he had died, so he returned to 'Ikrimah, to find him dead also. He went back to his cousin, and found that he in turn had died. This is remarkable tale of altruism and generosity.

One of the principles which the Prophet had emphasised strongly was equality before the law in matters of implementation hudud, the prescribed punishments for offences such as murder, theft, adultery, etc. He emphatically prohibited any intercession in this area for any one, no matter how elevated his status or how wealthy and prominent he may be. Al-Bukhari and Muslim both related the story of a Qurayshite woman from the clan of Banu Makhzum, who had been convicted of theft. The people of Quraysh were worried that a lady from such a prominent clan would be punished by the amputation of her hand according to the *Shari'a*. They tried to find someone who would be bold enough to intercede with the Prophet on the lady's behalf, and agreed that only Usama ibn Zayd, whom the Prophet loved dearly, could dare to address him on such an issue. When Usama raised the matter, the Prophet reprimanded him severely, saying: "*Do you intercede in a matter of God's law?*" Then he delivered a sermon to his Companions, saying: "*O People! Communities before you had been doomed because they used to let a distinguished person go free if he stole, but punish the weak person. I swear by God that if Fatimah, daughter of Muhammad, committed theft, then Muhammad would cut off her hand.*"

We hope that the preceding account is sufficient to demonstrate that absolute equality had always been the basis of Islamic societies, decreed as a binding principle in Islamic law, indispensable for the constitution of human society. It is a principle which abolishes all distinctions of race, colour, language, status,

wealth, descent or origin. It is a distinctive characteristic of Muslim societies that they are classless societies, for Islamic communities never developed into class-based societies or witnessed any sort of stratification. Caliphs and rulers also observed this principle, never regarding themselves as a class above the rest. This aspect of Islam had a powerful impact on societies which accepted it, leading to the abolition of all caste and class systems it encountered. This happened in Persia, where four castes used to exist: clergy, warriors, scribes and intellectuals and the class of workers and peasants. In addition, there was another high caste, which included the vizier, the chief priest and the chief scribe. All these classes were abolished by Islam, just as the high caste of Brahmin and the low caste of the untouchables were abolished in the areas Islam controlled in India. In an Islamic society, all people are equal, with no distinction of wealth or poverty affecting the human worth of an individual. The caliphs and rulers were expected to appear before the judge, just as commoners are if they were involved in disputes. This contrasts with the situation in feudal Europe, where the feudal lords and princes only appeared in special courts for them alone, to avoid mixing with the commoners or being seen as equal with them. The noblemen and aristocrats formed a high class of their own in these societies, giving themselves special titles such as Duke, Baron or Count, something unknown in Islam. Islam respected the humanity of all Muslims and all human beings, establishing equality between them in religious, social and moral rights and duties. No one was seen as superior to any one else, except in devotion to God.



## Chapter IX

### Tolerance

The term *tasamuh* (tolerance) in Arabic comes from a root that denotes leniency in all matters, whether in transactions, or in demanding one's rights. There is a saying of the Prophet which affirms: "*The religion most beloved by God is tolerant True Religion (al-Hanifiyyah al-Samha')*." *Hanifiyyah* or "True Religion" refers to Islam, the True Religion of Abraham and all the prophets up to Muhammad. The Prophet -peace be upon him- says that God loves this religion because it is tolerant and easy-going, not involving hardship or too many restrictions.

In several verses in the Quran, God commands the Muslims to be tolerant towards polytheists. When the Prophet -peace be upon him- banned the Muslims from giving alms to pagans, hoping thus to put pressure on them to adhere to Islam, God revealed this verse in *Sura 2 (Al-Baqarah: 272)*: "***It is not required of thee (O Messenger) to set them on the right path, but Allah sets on the right path whom He pleaseth. Whatever of good ye give benefits your own souls, and ye shall only do so seeking the "Face" of Allah. Whatever good ye give, shall be rendered back to you, and ye shall not be dealt with unjustly.***" Thus the Prophet was told that his duty was only to deliver the message, and leave it up to those who receive to believe if they chose. Whoever chooses the right path, it is for his own benefit, and whoever chooses error, it is his own problem. But guidance is for God alone, while the reward for what you Muslims spend in charity will come back to you. Whatever you spend, you must do so for God's sake alone, and not for vanity or for show, and whatever you give to Muslims or non-Muslims will be paid back to you in full. This admonition represents a remarkable demand for the Muslims to show tolerance towards the poor among the pagans of Makkah, even though they were in the company of many of the tyrants who were oppressing the Muslims. However, God insisted on the Muslims to show kindness towards their poor out of mercy towards them. More than that, God even commands the Muslims to show tolerance towards the tyrants who oppressed and tormented them, telling them in *Sura 45 (Al-Jathia: 14)*: "***Tell those who believe to forgive those who do not look forward to the Days of Allah: it is for Him to recompense (for good or ill) each People according to what they have earned.***"

The latter verse had been revealed when a group from among the Prophet's companions complained to him of vicious harassment from the Makkan pagans.

In reply, God commands them to overlook this offense and forgive their tormentors. The counsel was generally to be patient in the face of adversity and abuse, as God commanded in this verse in *Sura 3 (Al-Imran: 186)* : **“And ye shall certainly hear much that will grieve you from those who received the Book before you and from those who worship many gods. But if you persevere patiently, and guard against evil- then that will be a determining factor in all affairs.”** God here warns the Muslims that they will hear much abuse from Jews and Christians as well as polytheists, and counsels patience in the face of this abuse, since patience is the key to success.

In the above cited verse, from *Sura 45 (Al-Jathia)*, God tells the believers to forgive so that He **“may recompense each People according to what they have earned.”** The implication is that they should not seek revenge against those who wrong them, for it is God alone who will accord them the recompense they deserve on the Day of Judgement.

God also praises those Muslims who offer food, even though they need it themselves, to the poor, orphans and captives, saying in *Sura 76 (Al-Insan: 8)*: **“And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan and captive.”**<sup>(1)</sup> The captives the Muslims held were naturally pagans. The pagans of Quraysh, it is well-known, have suffered a heavy defeat in the battle of Badr, with seventy among their most prominent warriors killed and seventy captured. In spite of this, the Prophet instructed his Companions to treat them well. As a result, they used to feed them before they ate themselves. This was a remarkable show of tolerance from the Prophet and the Muslims towards their Makkian enemies, and an exemplary good treatment for them. God also tells the Muslims in *Sura 60 (Al-Mumtahana: 8)*: **“Allah forbids you not, with regards to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: For Allah loves those who are just.”** This was an indication to Muslims that God does not object to kindness, fairness and good treatment towards pagans who did not join the fight against Muslims, nor helped drive them out of their homes in Makkah. This kindness towards non-Muslims became a general rule observed by Muslims during the age of conquest and after, and had continued until today, in all their transactions and dealings with followers of other religions at peace with them. They treated them well and kindly, whether they were followers of earlier revelation, such as Jews and Christians, or pagans

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1) This is Yusuf Ali's rendering. Al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir and most interpreters support the view that the pronoun in the phrase *'ala hubbihi* (in spite of love for it) refers to the food, not to the love of God (for the love of Him). In this case, the more correct rendering is: “And they offer food, even though they crave it for themselves, the indigent ...” This would also accord better with the author's explanations. (trans.)

such as the Sabians, Zoroastrians or others in Asia and Africa. In this, God has laid down exemplary rules of tolerance for the Muslims with regards to followers of all religions and with regards to people from all races, nations and colours.

Just as God instructed His Prophet and the Muslims to show tolerance towards the followers of earlier revelation, He also enjoined them to forgive their wrongs and abuse, as when He said in *Sura 2 (Al-Baqarah: 109)*: “**but forgive and overlook till Allah accomplishes His purpose.**” The advice here is to forgive the wrong and also overlook it, not even blaming the wrongdoers or chiding them for it. This is indeed a sublime degree of tolerance which God has enjoined repeatedly on Muslims. The Prophet -peace be upon him- has set a fine example in tolerance. Whenever the men of Quraysh abused him or responded harshly to his reciting the Quran to them, he would raise his hands to heaven and pray to God, saying: “*Please God, forgive my people, for they know not what they are doing.*” He never committed revenge against anyone who had wronged him, nor even prayed to God to punish them. In the battle of Uhud, he was wounded in his face and one of his front teeth was broken, while part of his helmet was smashed and injured his head. He never punished any of the people responsible for these injuries and others when he conquered Makkah, but forgave them all. All the residents of Makkah surrendered to the Prophet's army, and they were thus technically prisoners of war who could be taken as slaves. However, the Prophet forgave them all and restored their freedom, telling them: “*Whoever enters the Ka'aba (the Holy Mosque) is safe, whoever enters his home and closes his door is safe, and whoever takes refuge in Abu Sufyan's home is safe.*”

Abu Sufyan, the chief of Makkah, had earlier seen the fires in the camp of the Prophet's army outside Makkah, and went to investigate the matter. He met Al Abbas, the Prophet's uncle, who said to him: “*What is the matter with you, Abu Sufyan? Here is the Prophet -peace be upon him- in a huge army which Makkah cannot resist!*” Abu Sufyan then asked: “*What can be done, then?*” Al-Abbas said: “*Rise with me and let us go to the Messenger of God.*” Omar saw them approaching and rushed after them to the Prophet saying: “*O Messenger of God, here is the enemy of God Abu Sufyan, whom God had delivered into our hands without a covenant or a treaty. So permit me to cut his head off.*” The Prophet declined, showing remarkable forgiveness for the chief of the infidels in Quraysh. He told Al-Abbas to take him with him to his encampment until the morning. On the following morning, Abu Sufyan announced his adherence to Islam, so the Prophet honoured him by making his home a safe haven, another gesture of tolerance towards the chief of Quraysh. The Prophet -peace be upon him- also showed even greater tolerance, as we have mentioned, towards the people of Quraysh, refraining from imposing slavery on them but, instead,

restoring their freedom. His pardon encompassed many of those who did great damage to the Muslims during the battle of Uhud, and even those who tried to resist the Prophet's army during its advance on Makkah. Among the latter was 'Ikrima ibn Abi Jahl, who fled to Yemen. His wife requested the Prophet to give him safe conduct, which he did. She then brought him over to the Prophet, where he announced his adherence to Islam, and later became a good Muslim. Thus not a single Qurayshite was left among those who waged war against the Prophet who was not forgiven by him as soon as he announced his Islam. He also addressed all the people of Makkah saying: "*Go, you are liberated.*"

The most remarkable example of the Prophet's tolerance and forgiveness was his pardon for Wahshiy, who killed his beloved uncle, Hamza ibn Abd Al-Muttalib, in the battle of Uhud. Hamza was the Prophet's "brother" in that they were suckled by the same woman, and was one of Quraysh's most distinguished warriors. He stood by the Prophet when he and his followers suffered persecution by Quraysh. In the battle of Uhud, Hamza was at the head of the Muslim fighters and distinguished himself admirably in battle. Wahshiy, an Abyssinian slave, was very good at spear-throwing and he used his spear to kill Hamza during that battle. The Prophet was immensely saddened by the loss. Wahshiy embraced Islam after the conquest of Makkah, and the Prophet did not blame him for what he had done. When the "Apostasy Wars" flared after the Prophet's death, Wahshiy joined the Muslim army of Khalid ibn Al-Walid, and succeeded in killing Musaylima, the False Prophet, with the same spear he had used to kill Hamza. The Prophet - peace be upon him- had continued to urge Muslims to be tolerant and generous in their forgiveness, saying: "*Whoever likes to see his status raised [in the eyes of God], let him forgive those who have wronged him, give to those who withhold from him and establish relations with those who turn away from him.*" The Prophet here requests the Muslim to forgive his brother even if he had done him an injustice, refused him help in time of need, or if he were a relative who did not respect the relationship between them.

Tolerance with followers of other religions prevailed in Muslim societies from the time of the Righteous Caliphs until this day. They accorded the star-worshipping Sabians the same treatment they did the followers of earlier revelations (Jews and Christians). They also treated the fire-worshipping Magians, followers of Zoroastra who says in his book the Avesta that the world has two gods, one for light and one of darkness. Zoroastrianism became almost extinct in the third/ninth century, while the Sabians continued to exist until the end of the fourth/tenth century. In each Muslim country, there has always existed a small or large minority of Christians and a small minority of Jews, who lived in complete peace and security, without any barriers separating them from

Muslims. Reports that Jews and Christians were required to wear distinctive belts refer to a brief episode during the reign of some rulers who did not understand the tolerance of the True Religion as they should. We have already seen, when we discussed material and intellectual coexistence between Muslims and the covenanted peoples, evidence that Jews and Christians in Iraq, Syria and Egypt have enjoyed a secure life and were treated with tolerance, leading them in the end to become Arabised in tongue and thought. They translated their holy books into Arabic, and used to conduct some of the liturgies and rites in their churches and synagogues in Arabic.

We have not, however, dwelt on the situation of Jews and Christians in the Maghreb and Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain), and the good life they have enjoyed there, or the Islamic tolerance they have experienced. Christians in Spain were guaranteed their religious freedom by Muslims, who permitted them to keep their religion of choice, and no one was ever forced to abandon his religion and embrace Islam. The Muslims protected the churches and possessions of those Christians. They never harassed a priest, a monk or a bishop, but respected them all, and they continued to treat the Christians well throughout their reign in Spain. This has been exemplified by the appointment of Arabised Spaniards to government posts by Ummayyad ruler there, Muhammad ibn Abd Rahman (238-273 H). He appointed Cumis ibn Antian, who had been in charge of collecting the poll tax from non-Muslims, as a secretary and administrator. When the man asked to be excused from working Sundays, the ruler excused him and excused all employees from working on that day so that Christian employees could attend church services. Many Spaniards embraced Islam because of its simplicity and tolerance, and those who did not embrace Islam dedicated themselves to learning Arabic, which they perfected and wrote both prose and poetry in this tongue. A relation of amity and cooperation had persisted between Muslims and Christians in Spain, which is evident in the influence exerted by the *Muwashshahat* (a style of Andalusian poetry) on Spanish literature, and the extension of this influence indirectly to France, England and Germany through Spanish music. It is also evident in the considerable help the Muslims of Spain gave to the translation movement from Arabic into Spanish during the reign of King Alfonso X, who turned Toledo into a great centre for the translation of the Quran and Arabic thought and science. He also established schools in Mercia and Seville in which he was assisted by Muslim scholars, impelled in this by the tolerance of their religion. They translated for him books like **Kulaylah wa Dimna**, various Arabic tales and numerous books on astronomy and science.

Due to the remarkable tolerance which God -exalted be His name- had imposed on the Muslims, they opened the doors of Spain to the Jews, who found

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in it a refuge and haven from the Western prosecution they had suffered everywhere. One Jew, a certain Hasdai ibn Shabrut, succeeded in the year 334/916 in becoming a vizier to Abd Rahman al-Nasir, the most important Umayyad ruler of Spain. He then sponsored a revival in Talmudic studies. Soon Spain became, with Muslim approval, a centre for Hebrew studies. When the Arabs were driven out of Spain after the fall of Grenada in 897/1492, the Spaniards started a campaign of persecution against the Jews who could no longer benefit from Arab protection. As the persecution intensified during the reign of Philip III, where could the Jews go then to escape it? They could not find a refuge except in the lands of Islam in the Maghreb. Groups of them migrated to the Maghreb, managed to ensconce themselves in most cities and lived there, enjoying remarkable tolerance for many long centuries, during which they grew rich and amassed great wealth. Any one aware of the history of Jews in the lands of Islam, their coexistence with Muslims throughout the Islamic era, and the way the Muslims protected them, especially in Spain and the Maghreb century after century, is completely amazed at the hostility which they have shown to Muslims in our era, especially to the Palestinians, whom they had driven out of their homes, and maltreated horribly.

## **Chapter X**

### **Family Bonds**

The family is the basic unit of Muslim society and God revealed to the Prophet rules and legislations which enhanced its solidarity and strengthened the bonds holding it together to this day. The first among these laws was the injunction “Honour thy parents”, which God made an obligation on all towards their parents, which they were required to fulfil as they do acts of worship to God. Thus we find God joining the command to be kind to parents with the command to worship Him on several occasions, as in this verse of *Sura 17 (Al-Isra’): 23-24*: ***“Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: ‘My Lord! bestow on them Thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood.’”*** Here God tells us that just He decreed He should be worshipped and made this an obligation on men, he also decreed kindness to parents in word and deed, and in all dealings with them. He also enjoined on people, if their parents were to reach old age, not to say a single malicious word to them, nor offend them in any way, but address them gently and kindly. People should also be extremely humble to their parents, in recognition of their care of them in infancy, and adulthood until they become strong enough to care for themselves. People were also commanded to pray for their parents and ask God to have mercy on them as a recompense for their care.

The Prophet -peace be upon him- repeatedly urges kindness to parents, and warns severely against unkindness to them. He was reported to have said to his Companions on one occasion: *“Shall I tell you what is the gravest of mortal sins?”* (repeating the question three times). They said: *“Yes, Messenger of God.”* He said: *“Worshipping deities beside God and unkindness to parents.”* He thus counted unkindness to parents among the deadly sins and associated it with worshipping other deities beside God, to emphasise how odious a crime it was, as well as to warn of the severe punishment it incurs on the Day of Judgement. He repeatedly counselled Muslims to honour their mothers, as when he said: *“Paradise is under the feet of mothers.”* God describes the hardship a mother goes through when bearing a child, saying in *Sura 31 (Luqman): 14*: ***“In travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning.”*** One man asked the Prophet -peace be upon him-: *“Who do you think deserves my good company and kindness best?”* The Prophet said: *“Your mother.”* He said: *“Then who?”* The

Prophet said: “*Your mother.*” He said: “*Then who?*” The Prophet said: “*Your mother.*” He said: “*Then who?*” The Prophet said: “*Your father.*” This was not meant to show preference for mothers over fathers, but to emphasise the duty of kindness to mothers. God also decreed that if a person dies while his parents were still alive, they should have a share in his inheritance so that they may be protected from need in their old age. God Almighty says in *Sura 5 (An-Nisa’*: 11): “***To parents, a sixth share of the inheritance to each, if the deceased left children; if no children, and the parents are the (only) heirs, the mother has a third.***”

The first right God has decreed for children was to outlaw female infanticide. Arabs used to bury their new-born daughters alive because of actual poverty, or for fear of impoverishment and the great expense girls may put them to. God condemned them for this, saying in *Sura 6 (Al-An’am*: 151): “***Kill not your children on a plea of want,***” and in *Sura 17 (Al-Isra*: 31): “***Kill not your children for fear of want.***” In both verses, God assures people that he would provide for them and their children, being the Provider, he had apportioned for girls, when he had created them, their share of sustenance. It is as if the perpetrators of infanticide seek to interfere with God’s Will by depriving their children from life. God prohibited this practice and warned those who do not desist of severe punishment in the hereafter. All Muslims adhered strictly to this injunction and abandoned this practice.

*Shari’a* defined many rights which children have over parents. They have to bring them up in the best possible manner, guide them to the best possible behaviour and direct them to virtue. Children have to be prepared, from their seventh year, to perform their religious duties and taught how to do so. A father is under obligation to support his sons while they are completing their education and until he is ready to earn a living on his own. Similarly, he must support his daughters until they complete their education and get married, when her support then becomes the duty of her husband. A daughter has a right to the same level of education as her brother, and also a right to a job from which to support herself. She can take whatever profession she chooses, and if what she earns was not enough for her needs, then her father or husband must undertake to support her.

God has decreed a share for children, both male and female, in the inheritance left by their parents. During the pre-Islamic era, girls (and women in general), as well as young boys, were not allowed to inherit, a custom which weakened family bonds. Only grown-up sons who could participate in the defence of the tribe were allowed to inherit. It was said that, when the verses detailing inheritance shares were revealed, some Arabs were dismayed at the way inheritance was distributed, saying: “*how come a share is given to the wife, the daughter and the*

little boy, while none of these can fight for his people or acquire booty?” However, it is clear that God has protected family bonds by this distribution, and protected women and little boys from abandonment or from becoming a burden on others. The relevant verse in *Sura 4 (An-Nisa’): 11* says: “**Allah (thus) directs you as regards your children’s (inheritance) to the male a portion equal to that of two females.**” The daughter was given half the son’s share because the latter was given many responsibilities, including protecting and defending the tribe, payment of bride money in marriage and the sole responsibility for supporting the family: his wife and children. The wife is not under obligation to contribute to this, no matter how wealthy she may be. A man is also required to support his parents, his sisters and his needy relatives, thus multiplying his financial responsibilities. The divine purpose of allocating half a share in inheritance to the female heiress is thus not discriminate against women in inheritance rights but to regulate these rights fairly.

God has also elevated marriage in Islam to the status of a holy bond. In pre-Islamic times, women were treated as mere possessions and had no rights vis-a-vis their husbands. But Islam restored the dignity of women and protected all their rights. In pre-Islamic Arabia, it was customary, when a husband dies, for his wife to be inherited against her will, just as the rest of deceased belongings were inherited. The heir to her husband would throw his garment over the widow and declare: “*I have inherited her!*” He would then dispose of her according to his wishes. If he wanted to, he could marry her without payment of bride money. He could marry her to someone else and collect her bride money or, if he so desired, he could ban her from marrying to inherit her wealth after her death. All these methods have been banned by God in this verse from *Sura 4 (An-Nisa): 19*: “**O ye who believe! ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will, nor should ye treat them with harshness, that you may take away part of the dower ye have given them.**” In following verse in the same *Sura*, God Almighty says: “**But if you decide to take one wife in place of another, even if ye have given the latter a whole treasure (qintaran) for dower, take not the least bit of it back; would ye take it by slander and manifest wrong? And how could ye take it when ye have gone unto each other, and they have taken from you a solemn covenant?**” Thus God -exalted be His name- protects the wife’s bride money if her husband chose to separate from her and marry another, even if she had been given a hundredweight of gold (*qintaran*). He admonishes men for such greed, especially since they had had intimate relations with their wives, who have received from them a solemn covenant in front of God. And here is a point the officials who supervise the contracting of marriage must recall, and remind the parties that this contract has been undertaken in love and mercy in front of God.

The Prophet says in his Farewell Sermon: *“Take good care of women, for you have taken them through God’s trust, and lived with them through God’s word”* It is clear, therefore, that God regards marriage as a sacred bond -as I have mentioned- contracted in front of Him, with His Will and His Wisdom.

Islam permits a man to marry more than one wife: two, three or four. This permission had been given in view of the fact that, in nations where wars were frequent, as was the case for Arabs before Islam, and where a great number of men die in these wars, serious corruption could ensue unless such a freedom was given. There are other reasons for this provision, including the possibility of a wife becoming sick. It is also notable that nations where monogamy is the rule have a great number of illegitimate children. For all these reasons, Islam permitted polygamy, provided fairness between wives is guaranteed, as we have mentioned before.

Some people might claim that Islam does not guarantee equality between men and women in the right of divorce, since it had been given to men only. But this is incorrect: the wife also has a right to demand a divorce or separation just like the husband if the relation deteriorates. However, women rarely seek to exercise this right because of their keenness to preserve the family, thus leading some to believe that this right is for the man alone.

The Prophet -peace be upon him- says: *“The thing that is most hateful to God among lawful things is divorce.”* A strong indication of God’s will for divorce to be avoided as much as possible is His advice to husbands in *Sura 4 (An-Nisa: 19)*: *“Live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye take dislike to them, it may be that ye dislike a thing and Allah brings through it a great deal of good.”* Kindness here refers to kind words and deeds. The Prophet -peace be upon him- says: *“The best among you is the kindest to his wife, and I am the kindest among you to my family.”* The Prophet was extremely kind to his wives, and he was reported on many occasions to have joked with them, while being always extremely courteous and generous with them. He often gathered them together in one of his homes and had dinner with them all, before allowing each to retire to her own apartment. He would chat with his wives every night before going to bed as a show of affection.

In the above verse, God advises Muslims to keep their wives and be kind to them, even if they come to dislike them, since this course of action may be the source of much good. Many benefits could accrue from this, including the possibility of the unloved wife producing children who would be a blessing to their parents. God -exalted be His name- portrays the intimate and close nature of the relation between man and wife in saying in *Sura 2 (Al-Baqarah: 187)*:

**“They are your garments, and ye are their garments.”** This describes a relation so intimate that the husband and wife are like one person, each protecting and “clothing” the other, keeping his secrets from others while making him or her privy to his most intimate secrets.

God describes the love and loyalty between couples, saying: **“Among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect”** (Al-Rum: 21). Here, God reminds people of what a blessing it is that He had created for them spouses from their own kind, meaning that he had made it their nature to turn to their husbands and find comfort in their company, since they are from their own. God therefore explains that he had done this so that men may “dwell in tranquillity” or find in their spouses a refuge and a haven of tranquillity, as well as contentment, good company and delight of the spirit. God also tells us that He has created love and fondness just as He has created mercy between spouses, making them compassionate and considerate towards each other. Any misfortune or hurt which touches one touches the other, and he or she would stand by their partners when in need and show them all love and kindness. These are indeed signs for those who reflect on the great blessings which provide couples with this haven of security, tranquillity, love and happiness.

While Islamic *Shari'a* makes it obligatory on the husband to support the family, with the wife having no obligations in this regard, everything he spends on his wife and family deserves reward in the hereafter. The Prophet -peace be upon him- says that the most worthy expenditure is that made on one's family, thus urging Muslims to support parents, wife and children. To protect the wife and shield her from want, God has decreed that the wife must have a fourth of the husband's estate in the case of death, and if the husband left no children. If the husband had left children, then she gets an eighth of his estate.

Many people allege that Islam did not ensure equality between men and women. This, again, is untrue. Islam has decreed equality between men and women in all aspects, except in the areas where physiological differences and the related demands of procreation and childbirth require otherwise. A woman bears a child for nine months and breast-feeds it for about a year and a half. Both of these experiences are specific to women. Man, by contrast, is characterised by being much stronger. It is thus an injustice to say that man and woman are identical in every way. And it is this distinction which had prompted the Quran and *hadith* to show a lot of kindness and compassion towards women and impose on men many obligations and rights regarding them. Islam has imposed equal

religious obligations on men and women in all acts of worship, such as prayer, fasting, *zakah*, *hajj*, etc., and also guaranteed them equal recompense in the hereafter. God says in *Sura 40 (Ghafir: 40)*: “***And he that works a righteous deed -whether man or woman- and is a believer- such will enter the Garden (of Bliss): therein will they have abundance without measure.***” This indicates that males and females are equal in the eyes of God with regards to good works and belief in God, and will be equally rewarded for it. Men and women are also equal in social and political responsibility, as God explains in *Sura 9 (Al-Tawbah: 71)*: “***The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another : they enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil.***” Believers, men and women, thus support each other and cooperate, as in the Prophetic saying: “*A believer to another is like [parts in one] structure, each part of it strengthens the other.*” They urge each other, men and women, to do good, and to adhere to whatever is closer to truth and justice and to perform what is in the best interest of the community. They also warn against evil, falsehood and what is harmful for the community and individuals.

We have already mentioned that a slave girl belonging to the mother of the Abbasid Caliph, Al-Muqtadir, became a judge in the early fourth hijri century. It is also well known that Shajart Al-Dur, wife of Al-Malik Al-Salih Najm Al-Din Ayyoub took charge of the Sultanate in Egypt after the death of her husband. Coinage was minted in her name and prayers were said for her in all mosques in the Sultanate. In the twentieth century, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk has given Turkish women the right to stand in elections, and many entered parliament. Women acquired this right in Egypt during the reign of Nasser (1952-1970). During the 1990s, governments in Pakistan, Turkey and Bangladesh were headed by women who enjoined virtue and spoke against vice. This is a clear refutation of the claims of those enemies who allege that Islam has held Muslim women back, since Islam has always accorded women enough freedoms to enable them to progress with the age. This has enabled women to become Prime Ministers, and enjoy the same rights women acquired elsewhere in the latest stage of progress.

God -hallowed be His name- says in *Sura 4 (An-Nisa: 32)*: “***To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn.***” God thus decrees that men and women are equal in all aspects of work and manners of earning a livelihood. A corollary of this is the guarantee of a woman’s economic independence vis-a-vis her father or husband. This right has been accorded to Muslim women for fourteen centuries now, while western women have yet to acquire it. According to Islamic *Shari’a*, a Muslim woman can buy and sell her property, trade or file suits, without asking her father or husband for permission. Because of all the rights she enjoys, a Muslim woman can only marry with her full consent, and does not lose

her name after marriage as western women do, a symbol of her full freedom to dispose of her property and conduct all her economic affairs.

Women have also participated fruitfully, and from very early on, in learning and the arts. In the West, they talk a lot about salons or literary clubs organised in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by French ladies with literary inclinations, where French intellectuals and men of letters met. The reader may be surprised to learn that Sukayna bint al-Husayn used to have a very respectable majlis (or salon) in the first/seventh century, which was frequented by the most prominent poets of her time. They would recite their poems to her, and she often criticised or commended their poetry, and often refereed their disputes and claims to excellence. In Spain, we encounter in the fifth/eleventh century, the club of Walladah, daughter of the last Umayyad caliph there. She was a poet in her own right, and her circle was attended by Ibn Zaydoon and other prominent poets in Cordova. Similar was the early eleventh century (AD) “salon” of Hawwa, wife of Sayr ibn Abi Bakr, the ruler of Seville for 27 years in the Murabitun state. Her circle used to meet in the ruler’s palace, and she used to lecture poets, writers and philosophers in it, or listen to their discussions and criticise poetry recited in her presence. The “salon” presided over by Hafsah al-Rukuniyya in Grenada in the twelfth century (AD) was also similar in its pursuits. These Muslim women have preceded French ladies by centuries to the organisation and conducting of “salons” and intellectual circles, another proof of the error of the claim that Muslim women have remained behind western women in making use of their freedoms to organise literary circles and contribute to cultural activities.

In truth, women have occupied a lofty position in Islamic societies, in particular wives, who were the ladies of the house, the managers of its affairs, the supreme authority within it and the venerated mothers of daughters and sons. All wives were educated as Islam has prescribed for them to be. Many have distinguished themselves in religious and linguistic sciences and in the sciences of the ancients (philosophy and other sciences). Many had the status of viziers for their husbands, like Arwa, the wife of the caliph al-Mansour, the real founder of the Abbasid dynasty. When her husband donated a large estate to her, she created out of it an endowment (*waqf*) for the widows or spinsters from among her descendants, to protect them from need and preserve their dignity. Al-Khayzaran, wife of al-Mansour’s son Al-Mahdi, was also an influential figure in the realm. It was on her advice that Al-Mahdi restored to the descendants of the Umayyads the properties confiscated from their fathers and ancestors. Zubaydah, the granddaughter of the above mentioned Arwa, and wife of Al-Mahdi’s son and heir, Haroun Al-Rashid, was famous for ordering the digging of a well in Makkah which came to be known as “The Zubaydah Spring.” Its water was used by

pilgrims and residents of Makkah. It is enough to mention these three ladies, but there were many virtuous ladies like them in the history of Islam, who had enjoyed the veneration and respect of their husbands in the East and West. I have no doubt that it had been the elevated status of Muslim women, which the Spaniards had observed in Al-Andalus, that prompted them to imitate the Muslims and try to bestow on their women what approached this status in their lands. It has perhaps now become clear the extent to which Islam has preserved the dignity and rights of the Muslim woman, a protection which has covered all family members: parents, spouses, children and relatives. It has strengthened bonds between them through guaranteeing them shares in inheritance and the institution of obligations to show kindness and love. This divine bonding has made the Muslim family an ideal one, and it is worthy of all humanity to try to emulate this ideal institution and benefit from it as Muslims had.

## **Chapter XI**

### **Virtuous Conduct**

The preceding account has shown us that God -exalted be His name- invites humanity as a whole, and the Muslims in particular, to adhere to certain virtues which, if adhered to, would bring happiness to humanity and ensure for Muslims bliss in this world and the next. Among these is the virtue of applying reason in all matters: religious or secular; also the virtue of learning, which allowed the Muslims -male and female- to love all forms of knowledge, religious and secular; the virtue of justice and fairness, without which the life of no community could be sustained; the virtue of equality between all races and nations; and the virtue of tolerance among followers of all religions, divine or otherwise.

There are many other virtues which Islam enjoins, among which is the virtue of work. God Almighty tells us in *Sura 9 (Al-Tawba: 105)*: “***And say: ‘work (righteousness): soon will Allah observe your work, and His Messenger and the Believers.’***” Islam is thus a religion of work, urging people to exert themselves in worship to God, whether it be prayer, *zakah*, fasting or *hajj*. Islam urges people also to apply themselves to earning a livelihood, whether working in the land to till it, plant it and tend it until it gives its fruits, or elsewhere. Occupations in agriculture vary, as do professions and trades. One could be a farmer or gardener, as one could be an auto worker, a grocer, a trader or in any of countless trades and professions. The Prophet -peace be upon him- urges Muslims to work to earn their livelihoods as if it were worship. A man must have a profession or occupation from which to satisfy his needs and protect himself from dependence on others or on society. Believers are rarely mentioned in the Quran unless mention is made also of their “good works,” meaning their good deeds both in worship and other areas. The Prophet -peace be upon him- constantly warned against idleness and staying without employment. Omar ibn Al-Khattab tells the Companions: “*None of you should sit back without work and say: ‘Please God, give me sustenance,’ knowing full well that the sky does not rain gold nor silver.*”

God also urges respect for promises and covenants, saying in *Sura 17 (Al-Isra’): 34*: “***And fulfil (every) engagement, for (every) engagement will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning).***” Engagement (or covenant) in this verse includes God’s covenant (which he had made inherent in human nature) to worship Him alone and to adhere to His religion and His *Shari’a*. It equally covers the covenants between a Muslim and his brother, which he must respect

and fulfil; similarly the covenant with a man's wife, his parents, children and relatives. Part of fulfilment of one's covenants is to fulfil one's contracts, as God Almighty advises in *Sura 5 (Al-Ma'ida: 1)*: "***O ye who believe, fulfil (all) obligations.***" This refers to all obligations contracted in transactions such as purchase or sale, rental of land or homes, deals of reconciliation between individuals or nations or treaties between Islamic and other states. The Prophet has warned severely against breaking promises or covenants, calling it "treachery" and saying: "*For every treacherous person, there is going to be a flag on the day of judgement, raised to match his treachery.*"

One virtue which God ascribed to the Muslims in their conduct with each other appears in a description of them in *Sura 48 (Al-Fath: 29)* as "***compassionate amongst each other,***" meaning that each of them shows mercy and compassion to the others, with the strong showing kindness towards the weak, the rich towards the poor and the healthy towards the sick. A Muslim cannot be harsh and hard-hearted towards his brother, but his heart fills with compassion and kindness towards him, and he will be gentle and considerate towards his brother. The Prophet -peace be upon him- requests Muslims to be extremely kind towards their servants, and commands that they should not deny the worker his wages or cheat him of part of it, nor impose on him tasks beyond his capacity.

There are also numerous hadiths urging kindness to beasts of burden, which are not to be overburdened or overworked in any manner. The Prophet warns against cruelty to animals as severely as he warns against cruelty to humans, according to a saying in Muslim's **sahih**, which affirms: "*A woman has been punished and went to hellfire for a cat which she imprisoned until it died, neither did she feed and water it, nor did she allow it to eat from what the earth throws out.*" He also urges kindness to animals in this *hadith* in al-Bukhari's **sahih**: "*While a man was walking on the highway, he felt extremely thirsty. Then he came across a well, and went down the well and had a drink. When he emerged from the well, he saw a dog panting and eating the mud from thirst. So the man said to himself: 'This dog must be suffering from thirst just as I had been.' And he went back down and filled his shoe with water, held it in his mouth and climbed out and gave the dog to drink. God thanked him for this, forgave him his sins and admitted him to paradise.*" This remarkable emphasis on mercy to animals, which equates it with mercy to humans, allows Islam to deserve the appellation: "the religion of mercy."

There are many other courses of honourable conduct which God and his Prophet urge the Muslims to observe: advising them to uphold their honour and dignity, to fear none other than God and to speak up and say the truth fearing no

admonition from any quarter. The Prophet -peace be upon him- was once asked: “*What type of jihad (struggle in the way of God) is most worthy?*” He answered: “*Speaking the truth in front of an unjust ruler.*” And he used to say constantly that a Muslim must not humiliate himself nor should he refrain from telling the truth for fear of anyone, for what he says will not bring him nearer his death nor deprive him from sustenance. God praises truthful men and women repeatedly and promises them great rewards in the hereafter. Truthfulness is exhibited in various forms and contexts: there is first truthfulness with God in believing in Him and believing in His angels, His revelations, His messengers and the Last Day, in addition to observing the religious obligations of prayer, *zakah*, fasting and *hajj*. There is also truthfulness with the wife in his relations with her and in honouring his duty to support and care for her, truthfulness with parents and children in fulfilling their requirements, truthfulness with relatives in assisting them and coming to their aid and truthfulness in all transactions with people and in respecting one’s obligations towards them. The Prophet -peace be upon him- says that a man who adheres to truthfulness continuously would, at some point, be counted among the saints (or the “sincere”) in the eyes of God because of this. This saying refers to the following verse in *Sura 4 (An-Nisa’): 69*: “***All who obey Allah and the Messenger are in the company of those to whom is the Grace of Allah- of the Prophets (who teach), the Sincere (lovers of truth), the Witnesses (who testify), and the Righteous (who do good): Ah! what a beautiful Fellowship!***”

God and His Prophet also urge humility towards believers, as in this verse of *Sura 26 (Al-Shu’ara’): 215*: “***And lower thy wing to the Believers who follow thee,***” meaning: treat them with gentleness and humility. The Prophet was extremely humble towards his companions. His wives and Companions relate many stories supporting this, some of which we have already narrated. He also urged Muslims to show humility, saying: “*Whoever humbles himself for the sake of God, God would elevate him to a high status.*” This means that whoever humbles himself to people and shows love and kindness towards them, will be amply rewarded in the hereafter. Humility towards God and His Prophet means venerating them and following their *Shari’a*, while humility towards men is of two kinds: a praiseworthy and acceptable form, and a blameworthy and unacceptable one. The acceptable is humility towards parents, relatives and friends, while the unacceptable form is humility towards arrogant and proud people, or towards unjust rulers.

The Prophet -peace be upon him- has always praised diffidence and the propensity to feel shame, saying that it is a branch of faith, since, like faith, it does hold a person back from committing sin. It is also one of the Prophet’s own

characteristics since he was, as an authentic *hadith* informs us, “*more bashful than a virgin girl in her chambers.*” It was reported that if he encountered something that upset him, he would not mention it, and his Companions would know it only from the look on his face. One saying ascribed to him is the following, as reported in Al-Bukhari’s *Sahih*: “***If you feel no shame, do what you will.***” Meaning if you did not shy from committing sin, or feel no shame from disgrace, then do whatever occurs to you, good or bad. This, of course, is a reproach for such a person.

God and His Prophet counsel Muslims to be patient and steadfast in adversity and misfortune. They must not panic or break down, but must control themselves and bear whatever befell them with steadfastness and fortitude, without any complaint or panic. Patience is mentioned countless times in the Quran and Muslims urged to show it in war and *jihad*, in restraining oneself from sinful desires or in bearing adversity with fortitude. God says in *Sura 39 (Al-Zumar: 10)*: “***Those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure!***”, a promise of limitless rewards from the Almighty. God -exalted be His name- also says in *Sura 2 (Al-Baqarah: 155-6)*: “***But give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere- who say, when afflicted with calamity: ‘To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return- They are those on whom (descend) blessings from their Lord, and Mercy, and they are the ones that receive guidance.’***” This category of people submit all their affairs, even themselves to their Lord, to do with them what He wills, and they will return to Him on the Day of Judgement and he will award them full recompense. God is giving them good tidings that, in return for their patience in the face of the pain and ordeals they endured, He will bestow on them blessings, mercy and guidance, which are indeed great rewards.

God also counsels Muslims to show *hilm*, or forgiveness and self-control, checking their rage when hearing insults or words that injure them. This quality of *hilm* means that a Muslim is not to utter word, no matter how angered he may be, and no abusive word is to issue from him when provoked. This shows an ability to control one’s impulses and to endure abuse or provocation to the limit. Many Muslims were renowned for their *hilm*, chief among whom was the Prophet -peace be upon him. Whenever he heard a harsh word from an uncouth bedouin, he would only smile and not respond. He always forgave and let go.

The Prophet also urges guardians and trustees of orphans to be kind and gentle in treating their charges. They are never to take anything from their wealth except what is equivalent to a salary for someone administering similar funds. When the orphan comes of age, the guardian is to hand his wealth back to him promptly. God warns those who misappropriate the property of orphans of severe punishment.

God and the Prophet urge courteousness and kindness towards neighbour and guest. The Prophet repeatedly urges the believers to visit the sick so as to strengthen the bonds of affection with the sick person and his family. Similarly, he urges the attendance of funerals and services for the dead to strengthen bonds among Muslims.

God knows that for the good of humanity and Muslim communities, it is better to banish from the realm of acceptable conduct all evil acts and abominable pronouncements. He, therefore, outlawed in the Quran and through the words of His Prophet, a number of harmful actions and forms of behaviour, foremost among which is adultery, the greatest sin of all. God says in *Sura (Al-Isra): 32*: “**Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils).**” It is an evil abomination, in view of what it leads to, including everlasting disgrace, the failure of the affected girl to find marriage and the separation of husband and wife; not to mention the heavy penalty. God also outlawed the consumption of alcohol and similar intoxicating drugs, such as opium, hashish or cocaine, since they represent a great waste of money and lead people astray. The Prophet -peace be upon him- says: “*Liquor is accursed [and with it the other substances mentioned above] and so is its drinker, the person who serves it, its seller, its buyer, its carrier, the person to whom it is carried, the person who presses it, the person for whom it is pressed and the person who benefits from its sale.*” Muslim scholars are unanimous that the consumption of a small amount of a substance of which causes intoxication in any amount is also outlawed. God also outlawed gambling, for the waste of money it causes and for the enmity and hate it creates between gamblers. He also outlawed usury, which is the excess charged by a lender on the principal sum borrowed when the borrower returns the money. This is extortion charged by the lender without any equivalent, and it puts an end to compassion and kind deeds between community members, thus defeating a primary purpose of *Shari’a*. Investing money in banks could not<sup>(1)</sup> be considered usury, since both the bank and the investor benefit from it and it involves no extortion. God also outlawed arrogance and haughtiness, since these are the antithesis of the feeling of brotherhood which Islam had enjoined on Muslims. This sense of brotherhood entails that no Muslim should regard himself as superior to his brother because of his wealth or status.

God also outlawed false testimony, and the Prophet -peace be upon him- equated it with the gravest of sins, which is worshipping other deities beside God, thus signifying that it merits the most severe punishment from God.

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1) It is the author’s point of view. The point is, however, controversial.

Injustice in all its forms was also outlawed by God, who says in *Sura 14 (Ibrahim: 42-43)*: ***“Think not that Allah doth not heed the deeds of the unjust. He but giveth them respite against a Day when the eyes will fixedly stare in horror. They are running forward with necks outstretched, their heads uplifted, their gaze returning not towards them, and their hearts a (gaping) void!”*** God is here telling us that He is not unaware of what the unjust and wrongdoers are perpetrating, but He is deferring their judgement until the Day of Reckoning, when the eyes will fixedly stare, not batting an eyelid from terror. On that day, the unjust will come rushing along their heads bowed in humiliation,<sup>2</sup> while their eyelids are frozen with fear and their hearts empty and devoid of comprehension in terror of the punishment awaiting them.

God and His Prophet outlawed lying whether this be lying in the name of God, by outlawing what He had permitted or permitting what He had outlawed, or lying in the name of His Prophet, by fabricating false reports and ascribing these to him, or lying to people in word or deed. Some people become accustomed to lying, and it is an ugly habit indeed, causing a person to become contemptible in the eyes of people. The Prophet was asked once: *“Could a believer be a coward?”* He answered: *“Yes.”* The questioner then asked: *“Could he be a niggard?”* He answered: *“Yes.”* The questioner then asked: *“Could he be a liar?”* He answered: *“No.”* God and his Prophet have emphasised the prohibition on false oath, which the Prophet counted among the gravest sins. The Prophet also prohibited the swearing in the name of anything other than God. People often swear by the life of their father, or his grave, but this is considered forbidden. A person is not, however, accountable for spontaneous phrases where oaths are habitually pronounced without any solemn intention.

God also outlawed envy, because it is as if the envious person is made unhappy by the blessings God has bestowed on another, and wishes for them to be taken away. He remains forever disturbed and pained, without rest. God and His Prophet also outlaw deceit and fraud, including dissimulation and deception in sales by hiding the defects of goods being sold. The Prophet -peace be upon him- says: *“Whoever tries to deceive us is not one of us.”*

The Prophet has warned severely against cursing or abusing another Muslim, and regarded this a grave sin. He also prohibited the cursing of animals. In *Sura 49 (Al-Hujurat: 11)*, God enumerates a series of prohibited acts which damage relations of love between Muslims, saying: ***“O ye who believe! Let not some***

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2. The author is here giving an interpretation of the term *muqni'i ru'usihim* which is the opposite of that given by Yusuf Ali above. He renders it as “their heads bowed”, as opposed to “their necks outstretched.” The author's rendering appears closer to the correct meaning.

***men among you laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor let some women laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other.***” God Almighty says: ***“O ye who believe! avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: and spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it”*** (Al-Hujurat: 12). God advises Muslims here not to think ill of each other, as may happen when they hear a word from someone which they misinterpret. They should, on the contrary, always put the best possible interpretation on the matter. As God warns against spying the Prophet -peace be upon him- spoke against spying or trying to find fault with Muslims, saying: ***“Whoever refrains from publicising the faults of a believer is like someone who brings a girl who had been buried alive back to life.”*** Likening backbiting and slander to eating the flesh of a dead brother is an indication of how disgusting this crime is, and how serious. The punishment for it is as severe as that for making fun of people, suspicion and spying. God also banned the spreading of stories and fomenting trouble that way. The Prophet -peace be upon him- said: ***“A stirrer will never enter paradise.”*** God and His Prophet also warned against gloating over the misfortune of other Muslims, for it is the duty of a Muslim to be compassionate towards his brother in his ordeal and to assist him until his crisis is over. The misfortune of a person might pass, and a similar ordeal strike the person who gloated over it.

We conclude our discussion by mentioning a number of codes of conduct prescribed by God for Muslims, among which is the code of conduct for meeting places, about which God says: ***“O ye who believe! When you are asked to make room in the assemblies, (spread out and ) make room: (ample) room will Allah provide for you”*** (Al-Mujadalah: 11). God here commands Muslims who are seated in a meeting place to make room for newcomers from among their brothers, whether the gathering is a preaching meeting or a learning circle. The Prophet -peace be upon him- says: ***“No man should cause a man to give up his seat for him, but make room and spread out.”*** This is because making room shows consideration and tact. Part of the etiquette of gatherings is that late-comers should not try to push their way to the front in order to occupy the centre of the circle or a prominent place in it. The Prophet also strictly warned against rising up by anybody for a new arrival, no matter who he may be. If someone addresses his brother, the latter is required to be attentive and listen without any interruption.

Of the codes of conduct obligatory on all Muslims is to ask for permission before entering a home. God Almighty says: ***“O ye who believe! enter not houses other than your own, until ye have asked permission and saluted those in them”***

(*An-Nur*: 27). This means that people must ask permission to enter, whether the occupants be relatives or not, so that the occupant may have time to prepare to receive them, as there may be something in the home the occupants do not like the visitors to see. Even if the visit is to a lady who need not cover herself to receive the visitor, being a close relative, she may need to change or something. There are many situations which could embarrass a person were he to receive visitors without being announced. This is therefore a remarkable and commendable piece of advice from God to visitors. There is an authentic *hadith* of the Prophet -peace be upon him- in which he said: “*You ask for permission three times. Either permission is given, or the visitor should turn back.*” He taught his Companions the formula for asking permission, which to say: “*Peace be upon you. May I come in?*” He admonished those who answer when asked “*Who is it ?*” by saying: “*It is me,*” without giving one's name. One story gives an indication of the Prophet's considerate attitude when it came to announcing himself when visiting someone. It is reported that he had once arrived at Madinah after one of his expeditions during the day, but asked his party to remain outside the city and not enter until the evening, saying to them: “*Be slow and wait so that we may enter Madinah in the evening, and so that the dishevelled lady would comb her hair and the lady whose husband had been away would do her make up.*” This is a touching show of consideration and courtesy from the Prophet, stopping, as he did, outside the city with his soldiers to give the women the time to be prepared to receive their men folks.

Among the codes of conduct imperative on the Muslim is to greet his brother by wishing him peace when they meet and to shake his hand. One of the Companions asked the Prophet: “*O Messenger of God, if one of us meets his brother, should he bow to him?*” The Prophet said: “*No.*” The man asked: “*Should he shake his hand?*” He said: “*Yes.*” God says in *Sura 4 (An-Nisa*: 86): “***When a (courteous) greeting is offered to you, meet it with a greeting still more courteous, or (at least) of equal courtesy.***” God thus makes it a duty upon a Muslim to return a greeting either with the same greeting or a better one. The greeting formula in Islam is: “*Peace be upon you.*” And the reply is: “*And peace be upon you too, and the Mercy of God.*” For a fuller response, one could say: “*And peace be upon you too, and the Mercy of God and His Blessings.*” If the person offering the greeting says: “*Peace be upon you and the Mercy of God,*” then the reply should be with addition of “*and His Blessings.*” But if someone offered the full greeting to start with, then the reply should be the same.

It is clear that this greeting formula of peace, used by Muslims in their daily encounters, is a call for the spreading of peace on earth for all people, since a Muslim is required to greet Muslims and non-Muslims with the same greeting of

peace. He is also required to repeat this same greeting several times a day in his daily prayers. With this daily greeting, Islam has been the first caller for peace on earth, urging men to peace for fourteen centuries or more. God has named paradise "the abode of peace," which is another incentive for men to seek peace on earth. He also mentioned that the inhabitants of paradise greet each other with the greeting of peace, and said in *Sura 13 (Al-Ra'd: 23-24)*: “***And angels shall enter unto them from every gate (with the salutation): ‘Peace be unto you.’***” Thus the angels greet the believers who have been successful in entering paradise with the same greeting of peace which Islam has propagated. God also made Peace one of His divine Sublime Names. All this represents an Islamic divine call for peace to prevail throughout the earth between Muslims and all nations on earth, so that all people will feel that the whole of earth is home to them, and live in it as loving brothers.



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