

the Messenger of God." This marked the beginning of his Prophethood. From this time, at frequent intervals until his passing, he received revelation -- that is, verbal messages that he believed came directly from God. Sometimes these were kept in memory by Muhammad and his followers, and sometimes they were written down. About 650 AD they were collected and written in the form that has endured.

For a detailed study of the life of Prophet Muhammad, reader is referred to *Muhammad and the Course of Islám*, by Hasan Balyuzi. This book is one of the best scholarly-researched and authentic narratives on the history of Islám.

1. Sources of Islámic doctrinal and social views

Islámic doctrine, law, and thinking in general are based on 4 fundamental principles (Usul):

1. the Qur'án
2. the traditions (sunnah)
3. consensus (ijma')
4. individual thought (ijtihad)

1.1. The Qur'án. This book is regarded by Muslims as the Word of God revealed to Muhammad through angel Gabriel. It is divided into 114 chapters (surahs) of unequal length, and is the fundamental source of Islámic teaching. The surahs revealed at Mecca during the earliest part of Muhammad's Life are concerned with ethical and spiritual teachings and the Day of Judgment. The surahs revealed at Medina at a later period are concerned with social legislation and the politico-moral principles for constituting and ordering the community.

1.2. The traditions. The "sunnahs" means the example of Prophet: that is, His words and deeds as recorded in compilations known as Hadith. Six of these collections, compiled in the 3rd century AH (9th century AD) came to be regarded as especially authoritative by Sunnies. Shi'is continued to add to this collection the words of Imams and other holy figures as well.

1.3. Consensus. The doctrine of ijma' was introduced in the 2nd century AH in order to standardize legal theory and practice and to overcome individual and regional differences of opinion. From the 3rd century AH "ijma'" has amounted to a principle of rigidity in thinking; points on which consensus was reached in practice were considered closed and further substantial questioning of them prohibited. Accepted interpretations of the Qur'án and the actual content of Hadith all rest finally on the ijma'.

1.4. Individual thought (ijtihad). In the early period of Islám, because of "ijtihad", (meaning "to endeavor" to find the legal or doctrinal solution to a new problem), there was a wide range of conflicting opinions on matters of laws. In the 2nd century AH, ijtihad was replaced by "qiyas" (reasoning by strict analogy) a formal procedure of deduction bases on the tests of the Qur'án and the Hadith. On the whole, with the transformation of ijma' into a

conservative mechanism and the acceptance of a definitive body of Hadith virtually the gate of ijtimah was closed. (There are some notable exceptions though most notably the Shaykhi school of thought is a direct consequence of the doctrine of ijtihad.)

2. The Qur'án (Koran)

The holy book of the Islámic Dispensation is Qur'án, which is regarded as the word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. In its written form it is accepted as the earthly reproduction of an uncreated and eternal heavenly original, according to the general view referred to in the Qur'án itself as "the well-preserved tablet" (Qur'án 75:22). The word "Qur'án" is derived from the verb 'to read', 'to recite'. In the Qur'án itself the word is not used with reference to the book as a whole but only as a term for separate revelations or for the divine revelation in general.

The Qur'án is held in high esteem by Muslims as the ultimate authority in all matters legal and religious and is regarded as infallible in all respects. Its Arabic language is thought to be unsurpassed in purity and beauty and to represent the highest ideal of style.

To imitate the style of the Qur'án is considered a sacrilege. (Recall that one of the earliest objections against the Bab, in the Fatwa issued in Baghdad, was that He "imitated the language of Qur'án.")

3. The Qur'anic Form

In length the Qur'án is approximately comparable with the New Testament. For purposes of recitation during the holy month of Ramadan it is divided into 30 'portions' (juz'), one for each day of the month.

Its main division, however, is into 114 chapters, called surahs, of very unequal length. With the exception of the first surah, the so-called fátiyah ("opening" of the book), which is a short prayer, the surahs are arranged roughly according to length, surah 2 being the longest and the last two or three the shortest. Because the longest surahs generally derive from the latter part of Muhammad's Life, the consequence of this arrangement is that the oldest surahs are generally to be found toward the end of the book and the youngest appear at its beginning.

In the accepted version of the Qur'án now in use, each surah has a heading containing the following elements:

- (1) a title, which is usually derived from some conspicuous word in the surah. such as "The Cow", "The Bee", "The Poets", but is usually not an indication of the contents of the whole chapter;
- (2) the Bismillah, i.e.. the formula "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate";
- (3) an indication of whether the surah was revealed at Mecca or at Medina and of the number of its verses;

(4) in some cases one or more detached letters (e.g., tá sín, tá' sín mím), or "alif lám mím", the meaning of which were concealed until this the Bábí and Bahá'í Dispensations. (The Central Figures of the Cause have revealed extensively on the meaning of the detached letters of Qur'án.)

The verses in the Qur'án are called "áyáh" (plural "áyát", literally 'signs') and vary considerably in length. The shortest verses generally occur in the earliest surahs, in which the style of Muhammad's revelation comes very close to the rhymed prose (saj) used by soothsayers of his time. As the verses get progressively longer and more circumstantial, the rhymes come farther and farther apart. There is also a change of linguistic style: the earlier surahs are characterized by short sentences, vivid expressions, and poetic force: and the later ones become more and more detailed, complicated and, at times, rather prosaic in outlook and language. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether or not a rhyme is intended to indicate the end of a verse: and consequently, there are variations in the numbering of verses.

To Muslims, the Qur'án generally appears as the speech of God, who mostly speaks in the first person plural ("we"). When Muhammad is speaking to His companions, His words are introduced by the command, "Say", thus emphasizing that He is speaking on divine injunction only.

It is important to note that from the Bahá'í doctrinal point of view, the Qur'án in its entirety is a composition of saying of Muhammad. In other words, Muhammad, as well as other Manifestations of God, use the available language medium to educate people. Bahá'ís do not differentiate between the saying of God and His Manifestation.

In the Qur'án, at times the form is also dramatic, bringing in objections by Muhammad's opponents and answering them by counter-arguments. Narrative passages are mostly brief. Stories of prophets and biblical persons are often alluded to as though they are known to the audience. The stress is not on the narrative but on its didactic uses.

On closer analysis very few of the surahs turn out to be uniform in style or content. The longest text dealing with one subject is surah 12, which tells the story of Joseph differing from the biblical account in a great many details most of which seem to outside historians to have been drawn from Jewish sources. This surah is the only place in Qur'án where a story (in this case story of Joseph) is told in its entirety. The other stories are scattered throughout the Book.

(Note: The Bab's first Book after His declaration was a commentary on this surah of Joseph.)

The longer surahs are composed of several brief sections dealing with a variety of topics. Thus to an uninitiated reader the Qur'án does not give the appearance of a planned, organized, or systematic treatise. This impression is further heightened by the fact that certain favorite phrases such as "but God is forgiving, compassionate", "God is knowing, wise", "most of them know

nothing" often have little or no apparent connection with the immediate context. In fact, some skeptics (mostly Western scholars) claim that these additions served only to produce a needed rhyme.

It is often emphasized that Muhammad brought to his people "an Arabic Qur'án"; that is, a book or set of recitations in the Arabs' own language comparable to those of Judaism and Christianity. Also the vocabulary of the Qur'án is overwhelmingly of Arabic origin, but there are, nevertheless, borrowed words, mostly from Hebrew and Syriac. These borrowed words are primarily technical terms such as "injl" (gospel - Greek); "taurat" (the law, or Torah - Judaism); Iblis (the Devil - Greek); or adaptation of theological terms such as "salat" (prayer - Syriac). Such explanations are usually regarded with suspicion by Muslims, since orthodox doctrine holds that the language of the Qur'án is the purest Arabic.

4. Doctrines of the Qur'án

The key doctrines of Islám are enshrined in Qur'án are examined below.

4.1. God

The doctrine about God in the Qur'án is rigorously monotheistic: God is one and unique; he has no partner and no equal. Trinitarianism, the Christian belief that God is three persons (Father, son and holy spirit), in one substance, is vigorously repudiated. Muslims believe that there are no intermediaries between God and the creation that he brought into being by his sheer command: "Be". Although his presence is believed to be everywhere, he does not inhere in anything. He is the sole Creator and sustainer of the universe, wherein every creature bears witness to his unity and lordship. But he is also just and merciful: his justice ensures order in his creation, in which nothing is believed to be out of place, and his mercy is unbounded and encompasses everything. His creating and ordering the universe is viewed as the act of prime mercy for which all things sing his glories.

The God of the Qur'án, described as majestic and sovereign, is also a personal God: he is viewed as being nearer to man than man's jugular vein, and, whenever a person in need or distress calls him, he responds. Above all, he is the God of guidance and shows everything, particularly man, the right way, "the straight path".

This picture of God -- wherein the attributes of power, justice, and mercy interplay -- is related to the Judeo-Christian tradition, whence it is derived with certain modifications. However, this concept is at variance with the Bahá'í doctrine of God where no attributes are assigned to Him, being an unknowable essence beyond the reach and understanding of the created world.

4.2. The Universe

In order to prove the unity of God, the Qur'án lays frequent stress on the design and order in the universe. There are no gaps or dislocations in nature. Order is explained by the fact that every created thing is endowed with a

definite and defined nature whereby it falls into a pattern. This nature, though it allows every created thing to function in a whole, sets limits: and this idea of the limitedness of everything is one of the most fixed points in both the cosmology and theology of the Qur'án. The universe is viewed, therefore, as autonomous, in the sense that everything has its own inherent laws of behavior, but not as autocratic. because the patterns of behavior have been endowed by God and are strictly limited. "Everything has been created by us according to a measure." Though every creature is thus limited and "measured out" and hence depends upon God, God alone, who reigns unchallenged in the heavens and the earth, is unlimited, independent, and self-sufficient.

4.3. Man

According to the Qur'án, God created two apparently parallel species of creatures, man and jinn, the one from clay and the other from fire. About the jinn, however, the Qur'án says little, although it is implied that the jinn are endowed with reason and responsibility but are more prone to evil than man. It is with man that the Qur'án, which describes itself as a guide for the human race, is centrally concerned.

The Judeo-Christian story of the Fall of Adam (the first man) is accepted, but the Qur'án states that God forgave Adam his act of disobedience, which is not viewed in the Qur'án (in contradistinction to its understanding in the Christian doctrine) as original sin.

In the story of man's creation, angels, who protested to God against the creation of man, who "would sow mischief on earth," lost in a competition of knowledge against Adam. The Qur'án, therefore, declares man to be the noblest of all creation, the created being who bore the trust (of responsibility) that the rest of the creation refused to accept. The Qur'án thus reiterates that all nature has been made subservient to man: nothing in all creation has been made without a purpose, and man himself has not been created "in sport," his purpose being service and obedience to God's will.

(Note: 'Abdu'l-Bahá discuss this aspect of Islámic doctrine in a extensive work written during Baghdad, titled "A Commentary on the Tradition 'I was a Hidden Treasure....'" .)

Despite this lofty station, however, the Qur'án describes human nature as frail and faltering. Whereas everything in the universe has a limited nature, and every creature recognizes its limitation and insufficiency, man is viewed as rebellious and full of pride, arrogating to himself the attributes of self-sufficiency. Pride, thus, is viewed as the cardinal sin of man, because by not recognizing in himself his essential creaturely limitations he becomes guilty of ascribing to himself partnership with God and of violating the unity of God. True faith (iman), thus, consists of belief in the immaculate Divine Unity and in one's submission to the Divine Will.

4.4. Satan, Sin and Repentance

In order to communicate the truth of the Divine Unity, God has sent messengers

or prophets to men, whose weakness of nature makes them ever prone to forget or even willfully reject the Divine Unity under the prompting of Satan. According to the Qur'anic teaching, the being who became Satan had previously occupied a high station but fell from divine grace by his act of disobedience in refusing to honor Adam when he, along with other angels, was ordered to do so. Since then, his work has been to beguile man into error and sin. Satan is, therefore, the contemporary of man, and Satan's own act of disobedience is construed by the Qur'án as the sin of pride. Satan's machinations will cease only on the Last Day.

Judging from the accounts of the Qur'án, the record of man's accepting the prophets' messages has been rather dismal. The whole universe is replete with signs of God; the human soul itself is viewed as a witness of the unity and grace of God. The messengers of God have, throughout history, been calling man back to God. Yet very few men have accepted the truth: most of them have rejected it and become disbelievers and as such their hearts are sealed by God. Nevertheless, it is always possible for a sinner to repent and redeem himself by a genuine conversion to the truth. There is no point of no return, and God is always willing and ready to pardon. Genuine repentance has the effect of removing all sins and restoring a person to the state of sinlessness with which he started his life.

4.5. Prophecy

Prophets are men specially elected by God to be his messengers. Prophethood is indivisible, and the Qur'án requires recognition of all prophets as such without discrimination. Yet they are not all equal, some of them being particularly outstanding in qualities of steadfastness and patience under trial. Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus were such great prophets. As vindication of the truth of their mission, God often vests them with miracles: Abraham was saved from fire, Noah from the deluge, and Moses from the Pharaoh. Not only was Jesus born from the Virgin Mary, but God also saved him from crucifixion at the hands of the Jews. The conviction that God's messengers are ultimately vindicated and saved is an integral part of the Qur'anic doctrine.

All prophets are human and never part of divinity: they are simply recipients of revelation from God. God never speaks directly to a human: he either sends an angel messenger to him or makes him hear a voice or inspires him. Muhammad is accepted as the prophet in this series, for in him all the messages of earlier prophets were consummated. He had no miracles except the Qur'án, the like of which no human can produce. (Soon after the Prophet's death, however, a plethora of miracles was attributed to him by Muslims.) The angel Gabriel brought the Qur'án down to the Prophet's "heart". Gabriel is represented by the Qur'án as a spirit, but Muhammad could sometimes see and hear him. According to early traditions, the Prophet's revelations occurred in a state of trance when his normal consciousness was in abeyance. This state was accompanied by heavy sweating. The Qur'án itself makes it clear that the revelations brought with them a sense of extraordinary weight: "If we were to send this Qur'án down on a mountain, you would see it split asunder out of

fear of God".

This phenomenon at the same time was accompanied by an unshakable conviction that the message was from God, and the Qur'án describes itself as the transcript of a heavenly "Mother Book" written on a "Preserved Tablet". The conviction was of such an intensity that the Qur'án categorically denies that it is from any earthly source, for in that case it would be liable to "manifold doubts and oscillations".

4.6. Eschatology

In Islámic doctrine, on the Last Day, when the world will come to an end, the dead will be resurrected and a judgment will be pronounced on every person in accordance with his deeds. Although the Qur'án in the main speaks of a personal judgment, there are several verses that speak of the resurrection of distinct communities that will be judged according to "their own book". In conformity with this, the Qur'án also speaks in several passages of the "death of communities", each one of which has a definite term of life. The actual evaluation, however, will be for every individual, whatever the terms of reference of his performance. In order to prove that the resurrection will occur, the Qur'án uses a moral and a physical argument. Because not all requital is meted out in this life, a final judgment is necessary to bring it to completion. Physically, God, who is all-powerful, has the ability to destroy and bring back to life all creatures, who are limited and are, therefore, subject to God's limitless power.

According to strict Qur'ánic doctrine, there is no intercession, although God himself, in his mercy, may forgive certain sinners. Those condemned will burn in hellfire, and those who are saved will enjoy the abiding pleasures of paradise. Hell and heaven are both spiritual and physical. Besides suffering in physical fire, the damned will also experience fire "in their hearts"; similarly, the blessed, besides physical enjoyment, will experience the greatest happiness of divine pleasure. Quite early, however, Islámic tradition developed the notion of intercession, probably in answer to the Christian doctrine of redemption.

4.7. Social Service

Because the purpose of the existence of man, as of every other creature is submission to the Divine Will, God's role in relation to man is that of the commander. Whereas the rest of nature obeys God automatically, man alone possesses the choice to obey or disobey. With the deep-seated belief in Satan's existence, man's fundamental role becomes one of moral struggle, which constitutes the essence of human endeavor. Recognition of the unity of God does not simply rest in the intellect but entails consequences in terms of the moral struggle, which consists primarily in freeing oneself of narrowness of mind and smallness of heart. One must go out of oneself and expend one's best possessions for the sake of others.

The doctrine of social service, in terms of alleviating suffering and helping

the needy, constitutes an integral part of the Islámic teaching. Praying to God and other religious acts are deemed to be a pure facade in the absence of active welfare service to the needy. In regard to this matter, the Qur'ánic criticisms of human nature become very sharp: "Man is by nature timid: when evil befalls him, he panics, but when good things come to him he prevents them from reaching others". It is Satan who whispers into man's ears that by spending for others he will become poor. God, on the contrary, promises prosperity in exchange for such expenditure, which constitutes a credit with God and grows much more than the money people invest in usury. Hoarding of wealth without recognizing the rights of the poor is threatened with the direst punishment in the hereafter and is declared to be one of the main causes of the decay of societies in this world. The practice of usury is forbidden.

With this socio-economic doctrine cementing the bond of faith, the idea of a closely knit community of the faithful who are declared to be "brothers unto each other" emerges. Muslims are described as "the middle community bearing witness on mankind", "the best community produced for mankind", whose function it is "to enjoin good and forbid evil" (Qur'án). Cooperation and "good advice" within the community are emphasized, and a person who deliberately tries to harm the interests of the community is to be given exemplary punishment. Opponents from within the community are to be fought and reduced with armed force, if issues cannot be settled by persuasion and arbitration.

Because the mission of the community is to "enjoin good and forbid evil" so that "there is no mischief and corruption" on earth, the doctrine of "jihad", in view of the constitution of the community as the power base, is the logical outcome. For the early community it was a basic religious concept. Jihad, or holy war, means an active struggle using armed force whenever necessary. The object of jihad is not the conversion of individuals to Islám but rather the gaining of political control over the collective affairs of societies to run them in accordance with the principles of Islám. Individual conversions occur as a by-product of this process when the power structure passes into the hands of the Muslim community. In fact, according to strict Muslim doctrine, conversions "by force" are forbidden, because after the revelation of the Qur'án "good and evil have become distinct", so that one may follow whichever one may prefer (Qur'án), and it is also strictly prohibited to wage wars for the sake of acquiring worldly glory, power, and rule. With the establishment of the Muslim empire, however, the doctrine of the jihad was modified by the corrupt leaders. Their main concern had become the consolidation of the empire and its administration, and thus they interpreted the teaching in a defensive rather than in an expansive sense.

Besides a measure of economic justice and the creation of a strong community ideal, Muhammad effected a general reform of the Arab society, in particular protecting its weaker segments -- the poor, the orphans, women, and slaves. Slavery was not legally abolished, but emancipation of slaves was religiously encouraged as an act of merit. Slaves were given legal rights, including the right of acquiring their freedom against payment, in installments, of a sum

agreed upon by the slave and his master out of his earnings. A slave woman who bore a child by her master became automatically free after her master's death. The infanticide of girls that was practiced among certain tribes (out of fear of poverty or a sense of shame) was forbidden.

Distinction and privileges based on tribal rank or race were repudiated in the Qur'án and in the celebrated "Farewell Pilgrimage Address" of Muhammad shortly before His Ascension. All men are therein declared to be "equal children of Adam", and the only distinction recognized in the sight of God is to be based on piety and good acts. The pre-Islámic ethical ideal of manliness was modified and replaced by a more humane ideal of moral virtue and piety.

5. Compilation of the Qur'án

According to Muslim tradition the Qur'án was revealed to Muhammad in separate pieces over some 23 years. On such occasions, Muhammad, it is said, was in a kind of trance or ecstasy, during which the revelations were brought to him by the angel Gabriel, On His return to normal consciousness he recited the words of revelation to those present. There are many traditions about the occasions on which a certain surah or part of a surah was revealed. Thus the revelation of the Qur'án is connected with events in Muhammad's life. Even the traditional versions of the Qur'án itself classifies the surahs as Meccan or Medinan.

Many people learned the words of the revelation by heart, but there are indications that, at the time of their revelation, Muhammad had them written down on "pieces of paper, stones, palm-leaves, shoulderblades, ribs, and bits of leather". It is believed that Muhammad indicated to the scribes the context in which a certain passage should be placed. After His death, and especially after the battle of Yamámah (633), in which a great number of those who knew the Qur'án by heart had fallen, fear arose that the knowledge of the Qur'án might disappear. So it was decided to collect the revelations from all available written sources. A companion of the Prophet, Zayd ibn Thábit, is said to have copied on sheets whatever he could find and to have handed it over to the caliph 'Umar. After 'Umar's death the collection was left in the care of his daughter Hafsa. Other copies of the Qur'án appear to have been written later, and different versions were used in different parts of the Muslim empire. So that there would be no doubt about the correct reading of the Qur'án, the caliph 'Uthmán (644-656) is reported to have commissioned Zayd ibn Thábit and some other learned men to revise the Qur'án using the "sheets" of Hafsa, comparing them with whatever maternal was at hand, and consulting those who knew the Qur'án by heart. Thus an authoritative text of the Qur'án was established.

These traditions may have been reworked and changed to some extent to suit certain dogmatic theories concerning the Qur'án, but in the main they reflect historical truth. It is obvious that the description of the method of revelation has been somewhat simplified. The Qur'án itself states (42:50-52) that God spoke to Muhammad "by suggestion, or from behind a veil, or by sending

a messenger to suggest what he pleases". The Qur'án also uses a term meaning "it was sent down".

The chronology of the surahs is a much debated problem. The existing traditions concerning the occasions for the revelation of certain passages cannot always be controlled and may or may not be reliable. European scholars have applied the criteria of style and contents to establish the relative order of the surahs or parts of surahs. From about 1860, with publication of "History of the Qur'án", it has been common to arrange the surahs in four groups, deriving from three subsequent periods at Mecca and from Medina. The above exposition of the content of the Qur'án roughly follows this arrangement.

In the Muslim view, Muhammad received every word of the Qur'án directly from God. The Qur'án describes, and indignantly rejects, accusations that the Prophet had reproduced things that he had drawn from other sources. Western scholars who have analyzed the contents of the various revelations have shown that much of the narrative material concerning biblical persons and events differs from the biblical account and seems to have come from later Christian and, above all, from Jewish sources. The dependence need not, however, be of a literary kind, but might be due to influence from oral traditions.

6. Interpretations

The "readers" were the specialists of the text of the Qur'án. They were at the same time philologists, and it was to a great extent from their dealings with the language of the Qur'án that the science of Arabic grammar grew. Two schools developed, one at Basra (in present-day

Iraq

), which was especially interested in systematizing and ordering the material to set up the rules governing the language, and a rival one at Kufa (also in

Iraq

), which took more interest in the exceptional. It was theorized that several variant readings could be accepted only if they were based on the 'Uthmanic version. It was also important that a reading be based on the authority of some renowned reader.

There was also theological speculation as to the true nature of the Qur'án. In the discussions initiated by the Mu'tazilites (Seceders: literally, "those who stand apart"; a group that sought to introduce philosophical principles from Greek rationalism into Islámic thought) the question of the eternity of the Qur'án was one of the main points. The Mu'tazilites, who wanted to avoid everything that might compromise or encroach upon the oneness of God, denied the doctrine that the Qur'án was uncreated and eternal, because this would mean that something else besides the God of eternity would exist eternally and thus create an eternal and irreconcilable dualism. Consequently they asserted that the Qur'án was created by God. This doctrine, however, was rejected by orthodox adherents of Islám. In popular belief, the reverence for the Qur'án is often directed toward the visible, physical book or parts of it. Oaths are taken on it, and passages are sometimes copied out of it to be used for magical

or superstitious purposes.

In these and other doctrinal disputes the parties sought support for their opinions in the sayings of the Qur'án, since it was considered as the ultimate authority in all legal and religious questions. The correct interpretation of the Qur'án became the object of a special branch of learning, the so called "tafsir", or Qur'anic exegesis. All kinds of resources were utilized in order to elucidate the meaning of a Qur'anic passage. Traditions concerning the circumstances surrounding the revelation of certain passages or containing interpretative utterances of Muhammad that had been transmitted orally were recorded and collected, together with other traditions deriving from and concerning the Prophet (Hadith). At times, in order to provide authority for a certain theory, traditions were simply invented. Any interpretation of a Qur'anic passage that could not be supported by Hadith was originally rejected. The results of the study of grammar and lexicography were also utilized; examples from contemporary poetry were often quoted in order to elucidate the grammatical structure or the lexical meaning of a passage. Thus, work on the Qur'án, whose ultimate goal was the correct understanding and application of its teachings, went hand in hand with the development of Arabic grammar and lexicography.

Two works are especially renowned in the field of tafsir, namely the commentary of Tabari (839-923), a huge encyclopedic collection in 17 volumes that sums up everything that had been done so far in the field, and the "Kashshaf" of Zamakhshari (1075-1143), which has gained almost canonical reputation, though its author was a Mu'tazilite and began his work with the words, "Praise be to God who created the Qur'án".

The theological schools of medieval Islám all sought to support their doctrines with the aid of Qur'anic exegesis, and each of them produced their own commentaries. There are also examples of allegorical interpretation especially in Sufi (Islámic mystical) literature, in which the doctrines of mysticism are found to be hidden behind the literal sense of the Qur'anic word.

Qur'anic exegesis gained new significance with the appearance of modernism toward the end of the 19th century -- mostly in response to Bábí and Bahá'í religions. The modernists, who sought to revive Islám from its degradation, set up the principle of returning to the pure and uncorrupted Islám of the "ancestors". As a consequence, the interpretation of the oldest and original source of Islám was regarded as imperative, and attempts were made to establish the principles necessary for a correct understanding of the Qur'án. Traditional exegesis was accused of having introduced Israelite legends and false traditions that had nothing to do with the original teachings of the Prophet. On the other hand, the authority of the Qur'án was never called in question.

Muhammad Abduh, the founder of modernism in Egypt, for several years published exegetical lectures which were later

published in a book by his disciple Rashid Rida. In them he uses much twisted interpretation to read into Qur'án modern concepts from the Western scientific tradition. Other modernistic interpreters of the Qur'án have continued along the same lines.

7. Translations

The Qur'án was revealed by Muhammad as "an Arabic book" or an Arabic reading (qur'an), to provide the Arabs with a holy book in their own language comparable with the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. As has been noted, Muslim regard the language of the Qur'án as surpassing everything that can be written in Arabic. They also consider the Qur'án to be a miracle and cannot be imitated by man.

As a consequence of this it is regarded as unfitting to translate the Qur'án. In countries in which other languages are spoken, the Qur'án is still recited in Arabic. There exist Muslim translations of the Qur'án; e.g.. into Turkish, Urdu, and English (the latter during the Ahmadiyah movement founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in the Punjab region of India

), but on principle these are regarded as paraphrases, not as translations that can be used for ritual purposes.

The Qur'án was first printed in Arabic at Rome in 1530, but the edition was never circulated. The first widely circulated publication was in 1694 in Hamburg. Since then several European editions have appeared. Several editions are today printed in Muslim countries and an official Egyptian edition is emerging as the most accepted printing.

The first Latin translation was made in 1143 at the request of an abbot and was published at Basle in 1543 and afterward rendered into Italian, German and Dutch. The first French translation was in 1647. It was translated into English by Alexander Ross (1619-88). G. Sale's English translation first appeared in 1734 and has passed through many new editions. It has become something of a classic and was used extensively by the beloved Guardian. A translation by J. M. Rodwell with the surahs arranged in chronological order appeared in 1861. Altogether, it has been translated into some 600 languages of the world.

8. Hadith, traditions of the Prophet

Hadith is the record of the traditions or sayings of Muhammad, revered and received as a major source of religious law and moral guidance, second only to the authority of the Qur'án. It might be defined as the biography of Muhammad perpetuated by the long memory of his community for their exemplification and obedience. The development of Hadith is a vital element during the first three centuries of Islámic history, as all the Imams also contributed extensively to the body of these traditions.

8.1. Nature and Origins

The term Hadith derives from the Arabic root "hdth", meaning "to happen", and

so, "to tell a happening", "to report", "to have, or give, as news". It means tradition seen as narrative and record. From it comes "sunnah" (literally, a "well-trodden path," ie. taken as precedent and authority or directive), to which the faithful conform in submission to the sanction that Hadith possesses. Tradition in Islám is thus both content and constraint. Hadith as the biographical ground of law and sunnah as the system of obligation derived from it. In and through Hadith, Muhammad may be said to have shaped and determined the behavior patterns of the household of Islám by the posthumous leadership his personality exercised. There were, broadly, two factors operating to this end. One was the unique status of Muhammad in the genesis of Islám; the other was the rapid geographical expansion of the new faith in the first two centuries of its history into various areas of cultural confrontation. Hadith cannot be rightly assessed unless the measure of these two elements and their interaction is properly taken.

The experience of Muslims in the conquered territories of west and middle Asia and of North Africa was related to their earlier tradition. Islámic tradition was firmly grounded in the sense of Muhammad's personal destiny as the Prophet -- the instrument of the Qur'án and the apostle of God. The clue to tradition as an institution in Islám may be seen in the recital of the "Shahadat" (witness -- "There is no god but God: Muhammad is the prophet of God"), with its twin items as inseparable convictions -- God and the messenger. Islámic tradition follows from the primary phenomenon of the Qur'án, received personally by Muhammad and thus inextricably bound up with his person and the agency of his vocation.

Acknowledgment of the Qur'án as scripture by the Islámic community was inseparable from acknowledgment of Muhammad as its appointed recipient. In that calling, he had no partners, for God, according to the Qur'án, spoke only to Muhammad. The Prophet's ascension was said to have coincided with the perfection of revelation. But the perfective closure of both the book and the Prophet's life, though in that sense triumphant, was also onerous, particularly in view of the new changing circumstances in the geographical expansion of Islám. In all the new pressures of historical circumstance, where was direction to be sought? Where, if not from the same source as the scriptural mouthpiece, who by virtue of that consummated status had become the revelatory instrument of the divine word and could therefore be taken as an everlasting index to the divine counsel? The instinct for and the growth of tradition are thus integral elements in the very nature of Islám, Muhammad and the Qur'án. Ongoing history and the extending dispersion of Muslim believers provided the occasion and spur for the compilation of Hadith.

8.2. Historical Development

The appeal of the ordered recollection of Muhammad to the Islámic mind did not become immediately formalized.. On the contrary, there is evidence that the full development of Hadith was slow and uneven. Time and distance had to play their role before memory became stylized and official.

The first generation had its own immediacy of Islámic experience, both within the life span of the Prophet and in the first quarter century afterward. The proud history of which Muhammad was the crux was, naturally, the ardent theme, first of chronicle, and then of history writing. Both needed and stimulated the cherishing of tradition. While the Qur'án was being received, there had been reluctance and misgiving about recording the words and acts of the Prophet, lest they be confused with the uniquely constituted contents of the scripture. Knowledge of Muhammad's disapproval of the practice of recording his words is evidence enough that the practice existed. With the Qur'án complete and canonized, those considerations no longer relevant.

Within the first century of the Prophet's passing, tradition had come to be a central factor in the development of Islámic law. Association by Hadith with Muhammad's name became increasingly the ground of authority. The 2nd century brought the further elaboration of this relationship by increasing formalism in its processes. Traditions had to be sustained by an expert able to satisfy rigorous formal criteria of their connection with the person of Muhammad through his companions, by an unbroken sequence of reportage.

Qur'anic commentary, as it developed in the wake of these other factors of law and custom, also leaned heavily on traditional material, for the incidents of the Qur'anic narrative and the occasions of revelation could best be understood by what tradition had to say in its reporting of them. Hadith was a ready mine of word and story calculated to exemplify and reinforce what exhortation commended. Except in rare cases (Hadith Qudsi) these traditional factors in Qur'anic interpretation were only elucidatory, and the substance of tradition could in no way dispute or displace the essential, primary, authority of the Qur'anic text. For observations of Muhammad, though sacrosanct, lacked the hallmark of revelation, which belonged solely to the Qur'án.

By the end of the 3rd century AH it was sorely necessary to solidify Hadith into a stable corpus of material to which no new element could credibly be added and from which extravagances had been purged. The Hadith tradition within the various traditions had by then become a permanent and disciplined element in the authority structure of Islám -- the second great source of law and practice, complementary to the Qur'án and available for analogical handling (qiyas) and for consensus (ijtihád) as further sources of legislation, arguing from the Qur'án and the Sunnah as primary.

8.3. Significance of Hadith

Canonical collections of Hadith are an introduction to a world of faith, of behavior and authority, a world of almost encyclopedic inclusiveness. Provisions of law are the primary element, enlarging Qur'anic legislation. They contain a whole array of moral, social, commercial, and personal matters, as well as the themes of eschatology. All reaches of public and private conduct may be found there, from the disposal of a date stone to the crisis of the deathbed, from the manner of ablution to the duties of forgiveness, from the physical routines of digestion to the description of the Day of Judgment. There

is a Talmudic capacity for detail and scrupulousness in legal and ethical prescriptions and precepts.

9. Fundamental Practices and Institutions of Islám

9.1. The Five Pillars.

During the earliest decades after the death of the Prophet, five basic features of the religio-social organization of Islám were singled out to serve as anchoring points of the community's life and formulated as the "Pillars of Islám".

9.1.1. The Profession of Faith. The first pillar is the profession of faith: "There is no god but God: Muhammad is the prophet of God", upon which depends the membership in the community. The profession must be recited at least once in one's lifetime, aloud and correctly, with an understanding of its meaning and with an assent from the heart. From this fundamental belief are derived beliefs in (1) angels (particularly Gabriel, the Angel of Revelation), (2) the revealed Books (the Qur'án and the sacred books of Judeo-Christian revelation described in the Qur'án), (3) a series of prophets (among whom Judeo-Christian figures are particularly eminent -- although it is believed that God has sent messengers to every nation), and (4) the Last Day (Day of Judgment).

9.1.2. Prayer. The second pillar consists of five daily congregational prayers, which may, however, be offered individually if one is unable to go to the mosque. The first prayer is performed in the morning before sunrise, the second just after noon, the third in the later afternoon, the fourth immediately after sunset, and the fifth before retiring to bed (only three prayers are mentioned in the Qur'án: morning, evening, and the middle prayer in the afternoon). Before a prayer, ablutions are performed by washing the hands, face, and feet. The muezzin (one who gives the call for prayer) chants aloud from a raised place (such as a tower) in the mosque. When prayer starts, the imam, or leader (of the prayer), stands in the front facing Mecca, and the congregation stands behind him in rows, following him in various postures. Each prayer consists of two to four genuflection units (rak'at): each unit consists of a standing posture (during which verses from the Qur'án are recited, in certain prayers aloud, in others silently), as well as a genuflection and two prostrations. At every change in posture, "God is great" is recited. Tradition has fixed the materials to be recited in each posture.

Special congregational prayers are offered on Friday instead of the prayer just after noon. The Friday service consists of a sermon, part of which consists of preaching in the local language and part of recitation of certain formulas in Arabic. In the sermon, the preacher usually recites a verse of the Qur'án and builds his address on it, which can be of a moral, social, or political content. Friday sermons have usually considerable impact on public opinion regarding sociopolitical questions.

Although not ordained as an obligatory duty, nocturnal prayers (called

tahajjud) are encouraged, particularly during the latter half of the night. During the month of Ramadan, lengthy prayers are offered congregationally before retiring and are called "tarawih".

In strict doctrine, the five daily prayers cannot be waived even for the sick, who may pray in bed and, if necessary, lying down. When on a journey, it is recommended that the two afternoon prayers be combined into one and the sunset and late evening prayers into one prayer as well.

9.1.3. The Zakat. The third pillar is the obligatory tax called zakat (purification --indicating that such a payment makes the rest of one's wealth religiously and legally pure). This is the only permanent tax levied by the Qur'án and is payable annually on food grains, cattle, and cash after one year's possession. The amount varies for different categories. Thus, on grains and fruits it is 10% if land is watered by rain, 5% if land is watered artificially. On cash and precious metals it is 2.5%. Zakat is collectable by the state and is to be used primarily for the poor, but the Qur'án mentions other purposes: ransoming Muslim war captives, redeeming chronic debts of people, tax collectors' fees, jihad, education, health and creating facilities for travelers.

After the breakup of Muslim religio-political power, payment of zakat has become a matter of voluntary charity dependent on individual conscience. Some Muslim countries are seeking to reintroduce it, and in several Middle Eastern countries zakat is officially collected.

9.1.4. Fasting. Fasting during the month of Ramadan (ninth month of year, Qur'án 2:183-185), is the fourth pillar. Fasting begins at daybreak and ends at sunset, and during the day eating, drinking, and smoking are forbidden. The Qur'án (2:185) states that it was in the month of Ramadan that the Qur'án was revealed. Another verse of the Qur'án (97:1) states that it was revealed "on the night of determination" which Muslims generally observe on the night of 26-27 Ramadan. For a person who is sick or on a journey, fasting may be postponed until "another equal number of days." Daily feeding of one poor person is also prescribed "for those who can afford it".

9.1.5. The hajj. The fifth pillar is the annual pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca prescribed for every Muslim once in a lifetime -- "provided one can afford it" and provided a person has enough provisions to leave for his family in his absence. The pilgrimage rite begins every year on the 7th and ends on the 10th of the last month of the Muslim year. When the pilgrim is about six miles from the Holy City, he enters upon the state of ihram: he wears two seamless garments and neither shaves nor cuts his hair or nails until the ceremony ends. The principal activities consist of walking seven times around the Ka'bah, a shrine within the Sacred Mosque; the kissing and touching of the Black Stone; and the ascent of and running between Mt. Safa and Mt. Marwah (which are now, however, mere elevations) seven times.

At the second stage of the ritual, the pilgrim proceeds from Mecca to Mina, a few miles away; from there he goes to Arafat, where it is essential to hear a

sermon and to spend one afternoon. The last rites consist of spending the night at Muzdalifah (between 'Arafat and Mina) and offering sacrifice on the last day of ihram, which is the "festival of sacrifice".

At other times in the year, it is considered meritorious to perform the lesser pilgrimage, which is not, however, a substitute for the hajj pilgrimage.

9.2. Sacred Places and Days

9.2.1. The Ka'bah. The most sacred place for Muslims is the Ka'bah sanctuary at Mecca, the object of the annual pilgrimage. It is much more than a mosque: it is believed to be the place where the heavenly bliss and power touches the earth directly. According to Muslim tradition, the Ka'bah was built by Abraham. The Prophet's mosque in Medina is the next in sanctity. Jerusalem follows in third place in sanctity as the first qiblah (point of adoration), before Muhammad changed it to Ka'bah. For the Shi'ih, Karbala in Iraq (the place of martyrdom of Imam Husayn) and Mashhad in Iran (where Imam 'Ali-Rida is buried) constitute places of special veneration where the Shi'ih make pilgrimages.

9.2.2. Shrines of Sufi Saints. For the Muslim masses in general, shrines of Sufi saints are particular objects of reverence and even veneration. In Baghdad, the tomb of the greatest saint of all, Abd Qadir Jilani, is visited every year by large numbers of pilgrims from all over the Muslim world.

9.2.3. The Mosque. The general religious life of the Muslims is centered around the mosque, and in the days of the Prophet and early caliphs the mosque was the center of all community life. Small mosques are usually supervised by the imam (one who administers the prayer service) himself, although sometimes also a muezzin is appointed. In larger mosques, where Friday prayers are offered, a also function as religious schools and colleges. Mosque officials are appointed by the government in most countries,

9.2.4. Holy Days. The Muslim calendar (based on the lunar year) dates from the emigration (hijrah) of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina in AD 622. The two festive days in the year are the "ids" (festivals). Id-Fitr celebrating the end of the month of Ramadan and the other, id-Adha (the feast of sacrifice), marking the end of the pilgrimage. Because of the crowds, id prayers are offered either in very large mosques or on specially consecrated grounds. Other sacred times include the "night of determination" (believed to be the night in which God makes decisions about the destiny of individuals and the world as a whole) and the night of the ascension of the Prophet to heaven. The Shi'ih celebrate the 10th of Muharram (the first month of the Muslim year) to mark the day of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.

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