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A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY



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Discovery of God

Everything in the universe – the sun, the moon, the stars – have all completely subjugated themselves to God’s will; they cannot make the slightest deviation from the path He has ordained for them. Similarly, all other elements in nature function in obedience to the laws of nature laid down for them by the Creator. The entire universe has surrendered to God, the Lord of the Universe.



But there is a difference between the status of man and that of the physical world. The physical world has been given no option but to submit to God, whereas man has been given free will, so that he may opt for either good or bad ways. To this end he has been given a thinking faculty, and a conscience with which to make moral judgements for himself. He has the ability to accept and reject in order to follow certain principles in life. He is not bound by fixed laws like all other created beings. He has been given freedom of thought, option and action.

It is through this liberty of choice that man is being tested. But after being given a thinking faculty, a conscience and an ability to judge between good and bad ways, he was not just left to his own resources. God did not just leave man in a world where there was no way to find the truth. Divine provision for him went much further than that. To see how God gave His guidelines to mankind, we have to go right back to the beginning of creation. He took Adam, the first man – whom He had made not just an ordinary mortal but also a prophet – and taught him everything that He wanted from man, so that human beings would not be left without proper direction or guidance. From time to time thereafter, He sent large numbers of prophets to the world – the last of these being the Prophet Muhammad – so that human beings, who tended to stray, could be recalled to the path of virtue.

Belief in God

Suppose we placed a pebble on a potter's wheel, and then spun the wheel around very fast. The pebble would, of course, fly off, even although a potter's wheel can hardly reach a speed of 25

“Islam” is an Arabic word which means “submission, surrender and obedience to God.”

miles an hour. Now, just think for a moment that the earth we live on is also revolving but at a much faster rate than the potter’s wheel. Yet we do not fly off. The earth spins continuously on its axis at a speed of 1000 miles an hour – much faster than the average passenger plane – yet we move around on its surface, and live our daily lives without any fear of being thrown off like the pebble from the potter’s wheel. What a miracle this is. The explanation scientists give us is that the earth pulls us with great force from underneath, while the pressure of the atmosphere from above pushes us firmly to the ground. A force attracting us from below, and a five-hundred mile thick blanket of air enveloping us from above are miracles enough in themselves, and to say that they explain our not flying off into space is to lend even greater credence to the miraculous nature of our entire world.

Everything in this world, is, in fact, a miracle. Just think what happens when we put tiny seeds into the ground. The soil in which they are planted is uniform in constitution, but they bring forth a vast array of plants radishes, carrots, turnips, guavas, mangoes, mustard plants- everything indeed from the humblest blade of grass to the mightiest oak. Each plant has its own distinct appearance, taste and fragrance, and, according to its species, gives certain benefits to mankind.

On all sides of us, a whole world of miraculous diversity and proportions stretches out before our eyes. Moreover, at every instant, a great variety of life forms are continually coming into

existence, quite unaided by man. Yet if all of the human beings in this world were to come together, they would not be able to create even one tiny grain of sand. This all amounts to a miracle of such amazing proportions, that words fail us when we have to describe it. When we try to do so, we only degrade it, for we are unable to do justice to it with mere human words. All we can do is look on in wonder, and ask ourselves: “Besides God, who could have made manifest such a miracle?”

Miracles all around us

Everything in this world is made up of atoms. In its final analysis, every object is a collection of these tiny particles. Yet by some strange miracle, when these atoms come together in certain proportions, they form the dazzling globe of the sun,



and when the same atoms accumulate elsewhere in different proportions they flow in cascades: in yet other places, they take the form of subtle breezes or are fashioned into fertile soil. All these things may be made up of the same atoms, but the nature and properties of each separate object are widely different.

This miraculous world provides man with endless resources which he puts to good use whenever he learns how to tap them. Massive supplies of whatever he needs in life are constantly being accumulated, and man himself has to do very little in order to avail of them. Take, for instance, the food that he eats. He has but to stretch out his hand for the huge quantities of valuable nourishment which, as part of the order of the cosmos, has been made available to him.

Once he has it in his possession, all he has to move are his hands and his jaws so that the food should reach his stomach. Then without any further effort on his part, the food is absorbed by the body and is turned into flesh, blood, bones, nails, hair and other parts of the human body. Where food keeps the human body going, petroleum, another great earthly phenomenon, keeps his activities going. All man has to do is to extract it from the ground, refine it, put it into his machines and, astonishingly, this liquid fuel keeps the entire mechanism of his civilization running smoothly. Countless resources of this type have been created in this world, and there is enough of everything to meet man's needs. Man's part in bringing these things into being, or in changing them into some useful form, is a relatively small one. Therefore, with the minimum of effort, he has his clothes, houses, furniture, machines, vehicles and all the other components and accessories of his civilization. Are such

occurrences not sufficient to prove that there is indeed a Maker and a Master of this world?

The earth rotates unceasingly in two ways – on its own axis and in orbit around the sun. But it does not create any noise in the process. A tree goes to work in the way of a great factory, but it does not emit any smoke. Daily, innumerable creatures are dying in the sea, but they do not pollute the water. The universe has been running in accordance with the divine order for billions of years, without ever having to reorganize itself, for everything about the way it is organized is so perfect. There are countless stars and planets moving around in space: they keep to the same speed, never lagging behind, and never exceeding their set pace. All these are miracles of the highest order. They are far more wonderful than anything that man can create, and they happen every instant in this world of ours. What further proof do we need that the power of a Great God lies behind this world?

The Signs of God

When we look at the different life forms, we witness an astonishing spectacle. Certain material objects come together in one body, and there comes into being a creature like a fish swimming through water, or a bird soaring in the skies. Of the great variety of creatures which abound on the earth, the one of greatest interest to us is Man. In ways that are a mystery to us, he is moulded into a well-proportioned form. The bones within him take on the meaningful shape of the skeleton, which is covered with flesh and sealed in by a layer of skin, out of which sprout hair and nails. With blood coursing



through channels within this frame, all of this adds up to a human being who walks about, holds things in his hands, who hears, smells, tastes, who has a mind which remembers things, accumulates information, analyses it and then expresses it in speech and in writing.

The formation of such an amazing being from inert matter is more than a miracle. The particles of which a man is composed are the same as that of earth and stone. But have we ever heard a piece of earth talking, or seen a piece of stone walking around? The word miraculous is barely adequate to describe the capabilities of man. But what else is there to this walking, talking, thinking, feeling man which distinguishes him from earth and stone? This factor life- is still a mystery to us: there

must indeed be a superior Being who has imbued inert matter with this quality, thus accomplishing a unique feat of creation.

Man has only to think of the nature of his own being to understand the nature of God. The self, the ego in man, has an individuality of its own, which is quite distinct from that of others of his kind living here on this earth. The ego in man is absolutely sure of its own existence. It is the part of man which thinks, feels, forms opinions, has intentions and puts them into practice. It also decides for itself which course of action to take. Every human being is thus a separate personality with a will and power of his own. Since our experience of such a being is an every day matter, what is astonishing about the existence of God, who also is a being wielding personal power, although on a scale far greater than ourselves? Believing in God is a very similar mental process to believing in one's own self. That is why the Quran says that man himself is ample evidence for himself, however much he may excuse himself. (75: 14-15)

People demand some miraculous proof before they will believe in the truth of God and His message. But what further proof do they require when they have the miracle of the whole of the universe which has been functioning perfectly for millions of years on the vastest of scales? If the doubter is not prepared to accept such a great miracle, then how is he going to shed his doubts when he sees lesser miracles? In truth, man has been provided with everything he needs to enable him to believe in God, and then to place himself at His service. If, in spite of this, he does not believe in God, and fails to acknowledge God's power and perfection, then it is he himself and not anyone else who is to blame.

Finally, the Discovery of God

One who has found God has found everything. After the discovery of God, no further discovery remains to be made. Thus, when a man has discovered God, his entire attention is focussed upon Him. God, for him, becomes a treasure which he cherishes, and it is to Him then that he has recourse for all his worldly and eternal needs.

God's world is a collection of atoms. In its elemental form, it all consists of one and the same type of inert matter; but God has moulded this matter into countless diverse forms: light, heat, greenery, flowing water. He has also invested lifeless matter with the properties of colour, taste and smell; and everywhere, He has set things in motion, having carefully controlled this motion by gravity. Discovering the God who has made such a world is much more than just acquiring a dry creed; it means filling one's



Man has been created under the plan of creation.
Man is the most noble creature of this entire universe. The existence of man is such a unique existence that no other example can be found in this vast universe.

heart and soul with the radiant glow of divine light and opening one's mind to incredible beauty and delicacy.

When we eat delicious fruits, this gives us a great sense of enjoyment. When we hear beautiful music we are quite entranced by it. When a handsome child is born to a couple, their joy knows no bounds. Then what of our experience of God, who is the source of all beauty, joy and virtue? On discovering Him, can one remain unmoved? This is something which is hardly imaginable, for such a sublime experience – like coming close to a source of dazzling radiance – must surely leave its mark on one.

Having endowed things with their unique qualities, God Himself must have qualities that His discoverers may savour. To discover Him, therefore, is to experience Him like a fragrance in the nostrils, a taste which excites the palate, a texture which is a joy to caress, a melody which touches the heart. To come close to Him is to live in an everlasting garden of brilliant colours and delicate fragrances. It is to hear such music that one might wish its enchantment to last forever.

The Creator of all light, God Himself is the most resplendent of all beings. He is the light of the Heavens and of the earth, shedding His radiance on the personalities of all who discover

Him. His is the greatest treasure house of all true wisdom. He is the greatest repository of all true strength. His discoverers are so fortified by His strength and so enlightened by His wisdom that no flood or hurricane can carry them away. They cannot, once having known Him, do other than evolve into superior human beings.

The Creation Plan of God

A western philosopher has written that it appears that man is a strange creature in this vast universe. It seems that neither man is made for this world, nor this world is made for man. Man and the Universe both seem to be a mismatch for each other.

Man is born with unlimited potentials. But in this present world, he finds only a very limited use of his potentials. Man, according to his nature desires to have an eternal life but very soon death arrives without his permission and finishes him off on a unilateral basis. Man carries unlimited desires within him, but these desires of his are never fulfilled.

World of dream is cherished by every man but these dreams are never realized. In this matter, there is no difference between the poor or rich, the big or the small. In the words of the philosopher mentioned above it seems that man has come to a world which was not made for him.

Why is man and the present world, are not in accord with each other? To find the answer of this question, we have to know the Creation Plan of God. This question arose due to unawareness of the creation plan only by knowing the creation plan of God we can arrive at a convincing answer.

The reality is that God – the Creator of man, has created man according to His plan. To become acquainted with this plan is necessary for a man to have a thorough understanding of himself – just as the workings of a machine can only be understood when we study the drawings of the engineer who made it. Without the knowledge of engineer’s plan, nothing else can clarify the significance of that machine. Same is the case with man. The creator of the man has created him under a special plan. The plan is that man has to spend a trial period in this present unidealistic world, and after this, according to his deeds, he earns his right to inhabit the ideal world, another name of which is “Paradise”.

The present world is a trial world. Here, any man and woman, to prove their worthiness for an entry into paradise, has two great parts: to acknowledge the truth and a disciplined life. Any man or woman who qualify themselves fully in this test, shall find a place in the ideal world of paradise. And those who fail in this test shall spent their lives in eternal deprivation.

Are we Completely Free?

Man finds himself completely free in this present world, but this freedom is not as his right instead it is a test paper for every one. What Man has to do is that without any pressure applied to him he acknowledges the truth. Without any compulsion he surrenders before the truth. He restricts his freedom by his own choice. To surrender oneself before the truth is without doubt the greatest sacrifice for any man. To acknowledge the truth is, apparently, to make oneself smaller as compared to others but



this is the thing which shall give man the highest position. It will guarantee his entrance into paradise.

In this connection, the second important thing is a disciplined life. Generally, man's character is moulded by his emotions – anger, revenge, jealousy, hatred, rivalry etc. These are negative perceptions which shape up the personality of a man. But a man should opt for a life of principle. He should not build his character under the influence of external incentives, rather his character should be based on principles. He, of his own will power must shape up his personality in the light of sublime principles. This is the thing which is known as heavenly character. Man has been created under the plan of creation. Man is the most noble creature of this entire universe. The existence of man is such a unique existence that no other example can be found in this vast universe. Man is rightly called as the most superior of

the created beings. That is, the best and most meaningful being among all the created things.

The Hereafter

Those huge masses of ice, which we know as icebergs, found floating in the seas of the North and South poles, number amongst the most deceptive and, therefore, the most dangerous phenomena to be found in nature. Their deceptiveness lies in the fact that no matter how huge, or wonderful in configuration, what we see of them amounts to only one tenth of their enormous bulk. What lies below the surface of the ocean spreading far and beyond the visible perimeter, poses tremendous hazards to the unwary. In some ways, our lives are like those floating mountains of ice. The part we spend in this world – about a hundred years, or less – is like the part of the iceberg which is visible above the surface. We can see it, touch it, feel it. We can take its measure and deal with it effectively. But the part which comes after death is like the submerged part – vast, unfathomable and fraught with peril. It is something which defies the imagination, but which we must nevertheless try to comprehend, for that is the part of human life which God has decreed should be eternal and, as such, ineluctable.

We are all familiar with the facts of our origin and the course which life takes from the womb until death. But at the end of our lifespan, whether it terminates in youth or in old age, our familiarity with the nature of things comes to an end. It has been surmised that death means total and final annihilation. But this is not so. Death is simply a means of consigning us to a new womb, to the womb of the universe itself. From that

point, we are ushered into another world: the Hereafter. While the present, physical world as we know it has a finite time-frame, the Hereafter stretches away from us into infinity. We fondly imagine that there is some parallel between the pleasures and pains of this world and those of the next, but, in truth, nothing that we can experience in this world will ever match the extremes of agony and bliss of the life after death. Those who merit punishment in the Hereafter will be condemned to suffer the most horrific pain for all time to come. But those who merit God's blessings in the Hereafter shall know the most wonderful joy and contentment.

It is because life in this world is intended to be a testing-ground that the world of the Hereafter remains beyond our reach. But all around us, we have innumerable signs which can help us, by analogy, to understand and appreciate the nature of the world to come. Imagine a room which ostensibly consists of four walls, furniture, a few material objects and some human occupants. To all outward appearances, that is what the room adds up to. But the moment we switch on the TV set, we are introduced to a hitherto unsuspected world of colour, movement, and highly vocal human activity. This world, with its scenery and very alive human beings, had existed all along. It had only needed the flip of a switch to make us aware of it. Similarly, our terrestrial

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What we understand by suffering and solace in this world cannot be compared with the suffering and solace of the Hereafter.

existence is made up of a world within a world. The world we know is concrete, visible, audible, tangible. The 'other' world, the world within it, or rather, beyond it, is not, however, one which can be apprehended through any of the normal human senses; no switch can be turned on to make us understand what it is really like. Only death can do this for us. And, when we reopen our eyes after death, we find that what had formerly been impalpable, and quite beyond human comprehension, is now a stark, overwhelming reality. It is then that we grasp what had hitherto existed, but had remained invisible.

What is Success?

Once we have become clear in our minds that the afterlife truly exists, we realize that the sole aim of our earthly existence should be to strive for success in the life to come, for, unlike the present ephemeral world, the Hereafter is eternal and real. What we understand by suffering and solace in this world cannot be compared with the suffering and solace of the Hereafter.

Many individuals lead immoral, even criminal existences because they feel that we are free to do as we please in this world. Freedom we do have, but it exists only so that God may distinguish between the good and the evil, and determine who deserves a place of honour and dignity in the Hereafter and who should be condemned to eternal disgrace. While there is nothing

to prevent the good and the evil from living cheek by jowl in this world, they will be separated in the Hereafter like the wheat from the chaff, and will be judged in strict accordance with their record in this life. Some will be condemned to an eternal Hell of pain and distress, while others will be blessed with eternal bliss and pleasure. Each will ineluctably get his deserts.

Two men once brought a case before the Prophet for judgement. One had misappropriated the other's land, but because of certain legal quirks, it was difficult to pass a verdict against him. After due consideration, the Prophet warned him: "If the court gives a verdict in your favour, think of it as being fire and brimstone which you have been awarded." (*Musnad Ahmad*, Hadith No. 26717) The piece of land might, in terms of this world, have been a prized possession, but in the perspective of the Hereafter it would assume the terrible properties of fire and brimstone.

These two sides of human deeds have been beautifully described through allegories and symbols in the hadith of the mi'raj (The Prophet's Journey to the Heavens). When the Prophet reached *Sidrah al-Muntaha* (the lote tree at the end of the Seventh Heaven), he saw four rivers: two flowing inward and two flowing outward. It was explained to him by the angel Gabriel that the two inward-flowing were rivers of Paradise, and the outward-flowing were the Nile and the Euphrates. By analogy, the present world and the Hereafter are two sides of the same event. The worldly side is trivial and temporary, while the Hereafter side is substantive and permanent. It is to the latter side that we must face up after death. Here one has complete freedom to live out one's worldly existence as one wills; in the life-to-come, one will have no choice about the future course of one's life. One will

either be raised to eternal glory, or cast down into the pit of everlasting Hell.

Closeness to God

The Earth is the sun's satellite. It constantly orbits around the sun. It takes one year to complete such a rotation. This movement of the earth around the sun is essential for the healthy functioning of life on earth. If the earth did not revolve around the sun, its existence would have no meaning, and life would come to an end.

This is a practical example of how we should lead our lives in this world. This example is indeed a physical demonstration that shows how man must revolve around God, just as the earth revolves around the sun. It means that all of man's activities should be based on God.



The Quran is a revealed book: it is not authored by a human being. It is the actual word of God in human language.

The earth rotates as compelled to by the laws of nature. But man, of his own free will, should surrender to God. He should build a life, which is based on the concept of God. This consciousness is the real ascension of man. In this consciousness lies the secret of all success. A God-oriented life begins with the discovery of God. When individuals, whether men or women, discover God, it means that they have found the truth. And this truth pervades their whole being. This feeling of having discovered the truth becomes such a thrilling experience that it fills them with everlasting conviction. This everlasting conviction removes all frustrations from their lives. Therefore, losses are no longer such, for, in spite of them, they never lose the feeling that their greatest asset, i.e. God, is still with them.

Man experiences this realization by pondering upon God's creations. The present universe is an expression of God's attributes. It is a complete introduction to God. God is visible in His creations, just as clearly as a human being sees his own reflection in the mirror.

The vastness of space tells man that God, its Creator, is boundless. The observation of the sun and the stars shows us that God is all light. The heights of the mountains show us the greatness of God. The waves of the sea and the flow of the river tell us that God is a storehouse of boundless blessings. We see God's bounty in the greenery of the trees. Man's existence becomes a proof of

God's existence. In the waft of air he experiences a Divine touch. In the chirping of the birds, he hears God's songs.

For man, a God-oriented life starts by his remembering God. He begins to feel the presence of God. Everything serves to remind him of God. God's remembrance is never absent from his heart and mind. His mornings and evenings are spent as if he is living in God's neighbourhood. Just as rain replenishes the crops, so does he remain ever immersed in the remembrance of God.

The Source of Spiritual Development

God is a spiritual focus for man. One whose heart is attached to God undergoes spiritual experiences at every moment. Belief in God becomes a source of spiritual development for him. Filled with the love of God, he does not need anything further. God becomes a vast ocean for him to continue to swim in without ever experiencing any limit. In the form of spiritual awakening, he receives such great wealth that he does not feel any need for anything else.

For one who discovers God, the entire universe becomes an open book of God for him. Every leaf of a tree becomes a page of the divine book.

When he sees the sun, he feels as if God is lighting His heavenly torch so that he may read His book clearly. The Universe becomes, as it were, a supernal university and he its student.

Finding God is to find his centre of Love. Man by birth is a seeker of a Supreme Being who is far above him, who is free from all limitations and who may form the centre of his feelings, in short, a Being after finding whom a grown man becomes as satisfied as a child after being held in the arms of his mother.

This discovery of God saves one from regarding something other than God as God and mistakenly and unrealistically thinking it to be the answer to the urge inherent in his nature. The discovery of God is to fulfill his or her real urge to find God. And the failure to discover God means failing to find that which is man's greatest need.

One who fails to find God is compelled by his natural urge to give the place of God to something other than God. This place is sometimes accorded to a certain human being, sometimes to a certain animal, sometimes to a phenomenon of nature, sometimes to a certain material power, sometimes to a certain supposed concept and sometimes just to the self.

Even if one fails to discover God, or he becomes a denier of God, it is not in his or her power to stifle the urge in his nature to find God. That is why those men and women who have not found God inevitably come to hold something other than God as God. And this supposed God is always some creature or the other of God. By nature, it is possible for man not to accept the real God as God, but it is not possible for anyone to save himself or herself from granting the status of divinity to something other than God. Making God one's object of worship raises man's position. On the contrary, regarding something other than God as God amounts to descending from the level of humanity. Submission to God is the only way of life for both man and the universe.

God's Prophets

The Islamic concept of prophethood is different from that of other religions. Some religions would have it that even God



Himself becomes incarnate in human shape, and that his prophets are in some way superhuman or other-worldly. But a prophet in the Islamic sense is no different from any other human being. His uniqueness lies simply in his being the chosen messenger of God.

God's prophets were born into this world just like any other human beings. They led their lives just as others did, thus demonstrating to their people how God's servants should, in practice, conduct themselves on earth, and showing them clearly what path they must tread in order to avert God's displeasure and make themselves worthy of His blessings.

Man has been placed on this earth by God in order that his obedience to his Creator may be put to the test. For this purpose he has been given complete freedom to tread the paths of both good and evil. He has a choice. But to follow the path desired for him by God, man is in need of guiding principles. The

true source of guidance, according to Islam, is to be found in prophethood. Throughout human history, God in His infinite mercy selected certain individuals to communicate His message to mankind, so that all human beings might be given an opportunity to follow the right path. These chosen people were called prophets, or messengers.

A prophet is a person chosen by God as His representative. When God appoints someone as His Prophet, He sends His angel to him to inform him of his new status. In that way, the individual can have no doubts about his appointment as God's Prophet. Later, God reveals His message to him through His angels, so that he may communicate the divine teachings to all his fellow men.

God has given man a mind so that he may be endowed with understanding. But this mind can only grasp things that are apparent. It cannot go below the surface, and there are many things to be apprehended, for which a superficial knowledge is insufficient. The deeper realities of this world are beyond the scope of the human mind, and so far as God and the next world are concerned, they must remain forever invisible – beyond the reach of human perception.

What the Prophet does is to enlighten people so that they may overcome this human inadequacy. He tells of the reality of things here and now, and also gives tidings of the next world. He thereby enables the individual to formulate a plan for his entire existence in the full light of knowledge and awareness so that he may carve out a successful life for himself.

The Sacred Texts

The Quran

The Quran is a book of revelations from God. Today it exists in the form of a book consisting of 114 chapters. They were sent down by the angel Gabriel or Jibril, bit by bit according to the demand of circumstances. The Quran is a revealed book: it is not authored by a human being. It is the actual word of God in human language. The Quran began to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel, in A.D. 610, while the Prophet was sitting in seclusion in the cave of Hira at the top of the Mountain of Light, two miles from Makkah. Thus the scriptures were not revealed in book-form at one point of time.



Their various parts were revealed as the occasion demanded. It was later compiled in Madinah during the last days of the Prophet. The entire revelation was completed over a period of 23 years. The last passage was revealed to the Prophet while he was addressing a gathering at Mount Arafat after performing his last Hajj in A.D. 622.

Themes of the Quran

The main theme of the Quran is to make people aware of the Creation Plan of God. According to this divine plan, man was created as an eternal being. The Creator divided man's life into two parts, pre-death and post-death. The pre-death period is that in which man is put to the test. The post-death period is that in which he will be rewarded or punished. The former is temporary, while the latter will last for all eternity.

The Quran aims at bringing about an intellectual revolution in every human being. All its teachings are therefore spiritual in nature. All its verses address the human mind, their main thrust being to promote contemplation on nature, for which the Quranic words are *tafakkur*, *tadabbur* and *tawassum*. The Quran, in effect, strives to promote spiritual behaviour and peaceful conduct in national as well as international life.

According to Quranic teachings, violence has no place in human life. Although Islam gives freedom to all, this comes with the proviso that this freedom should be exercised without resorting to violence. If an individual is peaceful in intent and conduct, he is allowed to exercise his freedom as he wills.

All the basic tenets of spirituality, ethics, and peaceful behaviour are laid down in the Quran in very clear terms. But the Quran

is not a book of law; it is a book of reflection. Moreover, the Quran presents as a model of Quranic conduct the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet, who lived a full life, followed Quranic teachings in all aspects of his practical behaviour. If one wants, therefore, to have an understanding of the tenets of the Quran, he may refer to the Quran and one who wants to become acquainted with the model of this Quranic conduct may study the life of the Prophet Muhammad, which is known as sirah.

Regarding the multi-religious society, the Quran is very practical. It gives the following formula: For you your religion, for me mine. In other words: Follow one and respect all. This formula is based on the well-known principle of peaceful coexistence indeed, the only way of existence in this world.

Regarding social life, the essence of Islamic teaching is that God has granted freedom to everyone. This freedom in itself demands that people should lead their lives with restraint. Because, if freedom is exercised without restraint, it will inevitably result in clash and breakdown, destroying social life in their wake.

The most repeated invocation in the Quran is “In the name of God, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful.” The occurrence of this invocation 114 times in the Quran is in itself an indication of how important it is. Every piece of work must have a beginning. It is the Quran’s desire that when one initiates any undertaking one should begin by uttering the name of God. One is thus always reminded of God’s attributes of benevolence and compassion.

The teaching of the Quran can be summed up under two basic headings: (1) Oneness of God: believing in One God

and worshipping Him alone; (2) Brotherhood of Mankind: regarding all human beings as equal and according equal rights to all. These two kinds of precepts can be expressed as monotheism and justice.

Compassion for Humanity

The aim of the Quran – with its 6000-plus verses spread over 114 chapters – is to develop a man who would possess the two sublime qualities of being a worshipper of God and a well-wisher of mankind. According to Quranic philosophy, human life is intertwined with God and mankind. On the one hand is God, his Creator, and on the other are human beings among whom he has to lead his life from the moment of his birth until his death. The Quran encourages man to have sublime feelings for God and to reflect these sentiments in the way he worships Him. At the same time, it is made clear to him that in his heart he must also have feelings of benevolence and compassion for humanity at large. To be a true Muslim requires a combination of these two virtues.

The Quran tells us that God has given innumerable blessings to humanity. Man, as he benefits from this divine bounty, is duty-bound to offer thanks to his Benefactor. He is bidden to love and fear God more than anyone or anything else, and ought to consider himself accountable.

The Quran emphasizes the formation of one's character through introspection and moulding oneself to the will of God. Nowhere does it enjoin the believer to engage in violence, leading to the destruction of fellow human beings.

The Quran tells us, moreover, that the present world is intended

to be a testing ground, specially designed for the trial of mankind, for God wants to see whether people are capable of leading their lives in accordance with His will. It is their conduct on earth that will determine whether or not they are deserving of Paradise in the next, eternal stage of life after death.

According to the Quran, Paradise is another name for God's neighbourhood, and in this neighbourhood only those who are sincere in their belief in God and have compassion and love for God's servants will find acceptance.

God has the same compassionate relationship with every man as a father has with all his children. Therefore, it is alien to the divine scheme of creation that this earthly plane should be marred by hatred, killing and violence. It is God's most cherished desire that love should be returned for hatred, and violence should be met with peace.

The Hadith and Sunnah

Hadith, meaning a "statement" or "report", is used as an Islamic term for the records kept of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad. Sunnah means the actions the Prophet himself performed, or actions he asked his followers to perform. The Hadith is a record of the Sunnah.

Hadith provides the second fundamental source of Islam, giving us a full account of the life of the Prophet, and serving as a commentary on the Quran.

The Quran principally deals with basics. It is the Hadith which gives the details and necessary explanations of Quranic injunctions. For instance, the Quran says: "Establish the service of worship." But it does not specify how the worship has to be

performed. Not even the timings and units of prayers (*rak'ahs*) are clearly mentioned. We need the traditions set forth in the Hadith to have full information on this.

Even after knowing the details, it might still not have been possible to follow the divine injunctions contained in the Quran. For not everything can be properly understood by words alone. Therefore, the Prophet demonstrated to the faithful how prayer was to be performed. He said to the believers: "Look at me, see how I worship, and follow me." (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Hadith No. 7246)

The Quran repeatedly reminds us of the importance of Hadith, enjoining us to strictly follow the Prophet:

"Obey God and obey the messenger." (4:59)

It is as if the Quran is the text and the Hadith the commentary, the Quran being the theory and the Hadith the practice. The Quran and Hadith are complementary to one another and are thus inseparable. Both are equally essential for the establishment of religion.

The contemporaries of the Prophet are known as the Companions, or *sahabah*. Because the Companions believed in the message of the Prophet, all his actions served as a precedent for them and every word falling from his lips became a commandment to them; and they were anxious to follow each one as faithfully as they could. During the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, many of his Companions learnt by heart whatever he said, and keenly observed whatever he did, all of which they shared with each other. They naturally thirsted after the knowledge of what he said or did, so that many, like Abu Hurayrah, Anas ibn Malik and Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, kept constant company



with him in order to observe and hear his every word and deed. Aishah, the Prophet's wife, was the first among women to tell of the Prophet's sayings and doings. She reported more than two thousand hadith, while Abu Hurayrah related more than five thousand hadith.

Later, the sayings were compiled by various collectors of hadith. In this regard, Bukhari and Muslim are the first to have applied the most rigorous measures to ascertain the reliability of each hadith. An unbroken chain of narrators was traced for each hadith and each transmitter's life was analysed from all angles to validate his trustworthiness.

Islam begins with discovering God and His creation plan. Its principles are not mere rituals but tools for cultivating noble character and exemplary conduct. *Islam: A Spiritual Journey* delves into these profound values, emphasizing submission to God, spiritual awakening, and inner peace. It portrays life as a journey of self-discovery and discipline, guided by divine wisdom. By aligning with eternal truths and higher moral purpose, individuals can navigate life meaningfully and strive for Paradise as the ultimate reward.

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