THE HOME

The Islamic Social order recognises Equal partnership of Man and Woman

By MAULANA MUHAMMAD ALI

A right solution of the sex problem is as essential for a well-built social order as that of the economic question. The home is the unit of human society. The sum total of human happiness under ordinary circumstances is determined by the happiness which prevails in the home, and the stability of the home is an index of the stability of society and of its civilisation. As the male and the female together make a home, it is on a right understanding of their position and relations that the happiness and stability of the home depends.

Humanity has taken a very long time to understand the true position of woman. For long ages she was looked upon as a slave, as the property of her husband, not as his equal. A person was one who could own property but a woman could not own any property or carry on any transaction in her own name, and she was not therefore a person in the real sense of the word. She had very few rights as a mother. As a daughter she was the property of her father; as a wife, that of her husband. Half the human race - the very half that was responsible for bringing up the human race - was relegated to the position of slavery. If woman was thus deprived even of the material benefits of life, how could she be deemed fit to receive spiritual benefits? Marriage itself was considered to be a hindrance in the spiritual progress of man even by Christianity.

With the slackening of the hold of Christianity, and the advancement of material civilisation, woman started a fight for her rights, and in this she has been successful to some extent. But along with this gain in the temporal field, there has been a set-back so far as the happiness and stability of home-life are concerned. Materialism weakened the controlling force of religion and led to loose ideas about the relationship between the sexes. The result is that Europe is leaning more and more to "free love", and marriage is discarded, not on account of any inherent defect in it, but because it entails certain responsibilities on the two partners who are required to build up the home. The materialistic outlook on life makes man selfish, and while he runs after every enjoyment, he shirks the serious responsibilities of life, so that he may be able to lead a carefree life. But life has its cares and sorrows as well as its pleasures, and marriage, while strengthening the ties of the mutual love between the male and the female, thereby increasing their happiness, requires them to share each other's cares and sorrows as well. "Free love" makes each of the mates selfish in the extreme, because while the male and the female become each other's partners in pleasure, each is free to leave the other uncared for in his or her sorrow.

Woman equal partner of man

The social system of Islam brought about revolution in stabilising the relations between the two sexes. It started with the strengthening of the foundations by recognising woman as a free person who had the legal right to own property and to dispose of it as she liked. In this regard, she was the equal of man in all respects. She was no more the property of the male but his partner and his equal having the same rights to earn and own property as the male. The foundation was thus laid of removing the bondage of half the human race. From being a property woman became a person whose status was not in any way inferior to that of man. She could earn money; she could do any work which she liked and she was entitled to the fruit of her labour just as man was. This revolution regarding the position of woman was brought about thirteen hundred years ago in the following words:

"Men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn" (iv.32).

Woman could thus earn and own property just as man could. The social system of Islam recognised no difference between the two sexes in this respect. She could buy or sell as a man could; she could even give it as a free gift to anyone she liked:

"But if they (the women) of themselves be pleased to give to you a portion of it, then eat it with enjoyment and with whole-some result" (iv.4).

Islam, however, did not stop at this reform which was in itself a marvel. It also made woman inherit property just like the male. The Arabs had a very strong tradition that only he could inherit who was able to defend the tribe against the onslaughts of an enemy, a work for which nature
had not designed woman. The principle, however, with which Islam started equality of the status of woman with that of man was worked out in all details of life. If she could earn and own property, if she could dispose of it as she liked, she could not be deprived of inheriting property, and the general rule is thus laid down:

"Men shall have a portion of what the parents and the near relatives leave, and women shall have a portion of what the parents and the near relatives leave" (4:7).

Such was the change brought about by the social system of Islam in the temporal position of woman. The same principle was applied in the spiritual domain; woman was on a par with man spiritually too:

"I (God) will not waste the work of a worker from among you, whether male or female, the one of you being from the other" (3:194).

"And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, and he (or she) is a believer - these shall enter the Garden" (40:40).

"Whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, and he (or she) is a believer, We will make him (or her) live a happy life" (16:97).

The Holy Qur'an speaks of women even receiving Divine revelation. God's greatest gift to man (3:41: 28:7). Hence marriage, according to Islam, is not a hindrance in the spiritual progress of man; it is rather a help, a means leading to the development of the spiritual faculties of man. "God created mates that they may find 'quiet of mind' in each other" (30:21); "The women are an apparel for you and you are an apparel for them" (2:187).

Mutual love between husband and wife - a love based not on passionate lust but on a life-long connection - and the consequent love for the offspring - leads to a very high development of the feeling of love of man for man as such, and this in its turn leads to the service of humanity. The natural inclination of the male to the female and of the female to the male finds expression through marriage, and is developed, first, into a love for the children, then into a love for one's kith and kin, and ultimately into a disinterested love for the whole of humanity. The home is in fact the first training ground of love and service. Here a man finds real pleasure in suffering for the sake of others, and the sense of service is then gradually developed and broadened.

Marriage is thus regarded by Islam as a means to the moral uplift of man. A means for the development of those feelings of love and service which are the pride of humanity to-day. Hence, according to the social code of Islam, marriage is the normal condition in which every man and woman ought to live. The Holy Quran enjoins upon all its followers to live in a married state: "And marry those among you who are single" (24:32). The Holy Prophet is reported to have said to certain young men, on noticing monkish inclinations in them. "I am married; whoever inclines to any way other than my way, is not of me" (B.

67:1). And on another occasion: "O assembly of young people! whoever of you has the means to support a wife, he should get married, for this is the best means of keeping the looks cast down and guarding chastity" (B. 67:2). According to another of his sayings, "The man who marries perfects half his religion".

According to the Islamic social system, marriage is a contract (4:21), and it is entered into by mutual consent expressed by the two parties, the man and the woman, in the presence of witnesses. This again shows that the male and the female in the Islamic home are two partners standing on the same level and having both their rights and obligations. Being, however, the basis on which human society is built, the marriage contract is not like an ordinary contract. It is necessary that publicity should be given to it. The one fact that distinguishes marriage from fornication is its publicity (4:24, 5:5). Every contract of marriage must be made publicly known, even with the beat of drums, and it must be made in a public place. "Make public this marriage and perform it in the mosques and beat drums for it" (Msh. 13:4).

In addition to its publicity, the marriage contract is given a sacred character by the delivery of a sermon, before the announcement of marriage is made. In the sermon, certain verses of the Holy Qur'an (3:111; 4:1; 33:70, 71) are recited. These verses call attention to the one great need of life, its central fact, that there is a God above Whom both the male and the female are responsible. The contract, therefore, must not be taken lightly. Every right which the parties have, and every obligation which they owe to each other, is a duty imposed by God. Whose Law is the greatest of all the laws. A dowry is also settled on the woman at the time of the marriage. The settling of a dowry which amounts to making her owner of some property shows that on accepting her position as wife, the woman, instead of losing any of her rights as an individual, acquires a full and independent status as a person.

The individuality of the wife is not merged into that of her husband in the social system of Islam. While she loses none of her rights which she possesses as an individual member of society, her new life brings with it new responsibilities which carry with them new rights: "They (the wives) have rights similar to their obligations in a just manner" (2:228). The broad rule is laid down in the Hadith: "Everyone of you is a ruler and everyone shall be questioned about those entrusted to his ruler, and the man is a ruler over the people of his house, and the woman is a ruler over the house of her husband and his children" (B. 67:91). The home is a unit in the greater organization, and just as in the vaster national organisation, there must be somebody to exercise the final authority, the smaller organisation of the home needs a similar arrangement. The husband is first spoken of as being "a ruler over the people of his house," and the wife is then described as "a ruler over the house of her husband and his children." The home is thus a State in miniature, where authority is exercised by both the husband and wife. But unless one of them is given a higher authority, there would be chaos in this kingdom. The reason for giving the higher authority to the husband is thus stated in the Holy Qur'an: "Men are the maintainers of
women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property" (4:34). The husband provides maintenance for the wife and has the final charge of the affairs of the home, thus exercising authority over the wife when there is need for it. It is the man who can be entrusted with the maintenance of the family, and therefore it is he who must hold the higher authority.

The functions of the husband and the wife are quite distinct. and each is entrusted with the functions which are best suited for his or her nature. Man excels woman in physique and constitution; he is capable of bearing greater hardships and facing greater dangers. On the other hand, woman excels man in the qualities of love and affection. Nature, for her own purpose of helping the growth of creation, has endowed the female among mankind as well as the lower animals, with the quality of love to a much higher degree than the male. Hence there is a natural division as between man and woman of the main work which is to be carried on for the good and progress of humanity. Man is suited to face the hard struggles of life on account of his stronger physique; woman is suited to bring up children because of the preponderance of the quality of love in her. The duty of the maintenance of the family has, therefore, been entrusted to man, and the duty of bringing up the children to woman. And each is vested with the authority suited to the function with which he or she is entrusted.

This division of work is only the general rule; it does not mean that woman has entirely been excluded from other kinds of activity. Notwithstanding her rightful position in the home, as the manager of the household and the up-bringer of children, woman took interest in all the national activities of the Muslim community. The care of the children did not prevent her from repairing to the mosque to join the congregation prayer (B. 10:162); nor was this care an obstacle in her way to join the soldiers in the field of battle to perform a large number of duties, such as the carrying of provisions (B. 56:66), taking care of the sick and the wounded (B. 56:67), removing the wounded and the slain from the battle-field (B. 56:68), etc. She could do any work she liked. Woman helped their husbands in the labour of the field (B. 67:108); they could carry on business (B. 11:40); they could sell to and purchase from men, and men could sell to and purchase from them (B. 34:67). Similarly, men would help their wives in the household work.

Great stress is laid on good and kindly treatment towards the wife in the Islamic social order. "Keep them in good fellowship," "Treat them kindly" are the oft-recurring orders (2:229, 231; 4:19). Kindness to the wife is recommended even when a man dislikes her, for "it may be that you dislike a thing while Allah has placed abundant good in it" (4:19). The Hadith lays equally great stress upon good treatment of the wife. There is a most famous saying of the Holy Prophet: "The most excellent of you is he who is best in his treatment of his wife" (13:11). In his famous address at the Farewell Pilgrimage, he again laid stress on the good treatment of women: "O my people! you have certain rights over your wives and so have your wives over you... They are the trust of Allah in your hands. So you must treat them with all kindness" (M. 15:19).

Though marriage, according to Islam, is only a social contract, yet the rights and responsibilities consequent upon it are of such importance to the welfare of humanity that a high degree of sanctity is attached to it. But in spite of the sacredness of its character, Islam recognises the necessity, in exceptional circumstances, of keeping the way open for the dissolution of the marriage tie. Before Islam, people went generally to one or the other extreme in the matter of divorce. According to the Hindu law, marriage once performed can never be dissolved. The right of divorce, according to the Jewish law, belongs to the husband who can exercise it at his will. The Christian law recognises the right of divorce only when there is faithlessness on the part of either of the parties, but the divorced parties are precluded from marrying again. Islam adopts a middle course among all these extremes. It allows divorce but considers it a hateful thing; it requires the exploration of all possible ways of reconciliation, and while recognising the wife's right to divorce for any sufficient reason, restricts the husband's right to it.

ROLE OF THE AHMADIYYA MOVEMENT IN ISLAM


It is a comprehensive subject. It will not be possible for me to go into the details within the limited time at my disposal. However, I will deal presently only with the main points of the subject. (a) How the Movement came into being, (b) What are its objectives and (c) its work among the Muslims and non-Muslims. Before I start with, I would like to draw your attention to a verse of the Holy Quran:

"And the term of Allah's favour was prolonged for them so that their hearts were hardened and most of them became disobedient. Keep in mind that Allah quickens the earth after its death. We have made the signs manifest to you that you may understand." (57:17-18). In this verse Allah has stated His eternal law of reviving spiritual life when it has become extinct with the lapse of time. Before the advent of the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) the entire world became a spiritual wilderness. The Holy Prophet's spiritual revolution which manifested itself in all spheres of human life, worked a miracle in regard to the moral resurgence. As there was to be no prophet after the Holy Prophet till the end of the world, there was all the greater need for revitalizing the Ummat. According to the Divine Plan, this great task was destined to be fulfilled by the Great Renovators, who rekindled the flame of faith.

The Divine promise of spiritual regeneration is contained in the following Quranic verse: "Allah has promised those among you who believe and act rightly that He will surely make them successors in the earth, as He
made those successors who were before them; and He will surely establish for them their religion and convert their state of fear into peace." (24:55)

The verse contains a radiant reference to the appearance of Renovators (Mujaddids) who will be spiritual caliphs. They will inculcate new vigour and vitality in the Ummat and jamp the rolling wheels of heresy and infidelity by their irresistible spiritual dynamism. There is a Hadith to this effect: "Surely Allah will send an ordained personage at the turn of every century who will revive the Ummat and its faith." This is the Holy Prophet's own elucidation of the Quranic verse quoted in the beginning. This Hadith irrefutably points to the appearance of a Mujaddid (Renovator) at the turn of every century. This is further pragmatically proved by the claims of Hazrat Shah Wali Ullah, Hazrat Sheikh Ahmad Sarhandi, Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jeelani, Imam Ghazali, and others in every century who accomplished the colossal task of spiritual renaissance against heavy odds.

In continuation of this spiritual renovation Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad proclaimed in 1885 that he had been the ordained Mujaddid for the 14th century of the Islamic era. By his marvellous spiritual force, he made a break through the opposition and vindicated his claim by routing the enemies of Islam. He made Islam a force to reckon with.

In assessing his claim a serious mistake continues to be committed. People confuse the noble notion of establishing the kingdom on earth with sordid idea of mundane sovereignty. The prevailing notion about the Mahdi was that he would force his way through by the sword and would achieve secular ascendency and would carry sword and fire against the foes of Islam.

What happened in the case of Hazrat Mirza Sahib was just a repetition of history. The Jews opposed Jesus Christ because he did not hold vain promises of worldly glory. His notion of the kingdom of God on earth did not chime in with the humour of the Jews. From time immemorial, the messengers of Allah have been opposed because they projected great contempt to the worldly glory.

The notion of a warrior Madhi is repugnant to the spirit of Islam. As wrong notions die hard, misguided people fiercely opposed the purely spiritual revitalist movement which Hazrat Mirza Sahib under the Divine Command had launched to cut away the ground from under the feet of age-old enemies such as Christians and Arya Samaj Hindus.

Islam means submission to Allah in thought, word and deed. It admits of no deviation in the direction of worldly ambition of mundane supremacy. Islam's role lies in placing a depraved society on the pedestal of piety and righteousness. When a nation is endowed with the unique moral and spiritual qualities, the world kingdom soon falls at its feet. This is stated in the Quranic verse: "My righteous servants shall inherit earth" (21:105)

The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad got guidelines from the life and works of the Holy Prophet. In ringing tones he proclaimed that the God of Islam is alive and His servants by their devotion and piety can commune with Him. I quote: "I am a witness to the fact that by following the Islamic Religion, I have found a Living God, Who responds to my prayers and directly communes with me. If any follower of any other religion can attain this spiritual contact with God, let him come forward to establish his claim vis-a-vis his own claim. 'The impact of this claim was that people enriched their lives by achieving a sense of mission and a sense of direction. This worked a miracle in them. They were head and shoulders above all those who stood aloof and turned deaf ear to the Divine call of the Imam. In short, his pious devotees were exemplars for others. Hazrat Mirza Sahib's ideal mission was to make Mussalmans stand on the bedrock of the love of Allah and the love of His Prophet, because then and there alone they can become "a strong wall cemented with molten lead".

The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam presented a strong front for the defence of Islam by advancing clear arguments and positive proofs, and became the author of nearly eighty books full of infinite perceptions in Urdu, Persian and Arabic. A number of these books have also been translated into English. These books are in addition to the numerous lectures, posters, debates and discussions carried out and published by him against the opponents of Islam. Not content with this, he challenged the opponents of Islam to get divine verdict by holding a prayer-duel (Mubahala). With his prayer-duel he challenged Mr Richard of England who claimed divinity and John Alexander Dowie of America who had also claimed to be a prophet. In accordance with Divine communications, he prophesied their death and destruction if they continued their false claim. But no one had the courage to come forward to meet his challenge. And ultimately both met their doom as prophesied by the ordained Reformer.

The Ahmadiyya Movement established to preach and propagite divine mission of Islam, received world-wide recognition for its services done. Before its advent, Islam had become the target of every type of on-slaughters. The Muslims were in the pitiable plight of a beleaguered nation. Thus the time called for divine intervention to rectify spiritual decay and decadence. The call of the time was heard and Allah sent His servant garbed in the lustrous role of a Great Mujaddid.

When Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam passed away, glowing tributes rained on his glorious achievements. Maulana Imnadi (who was not his follower) characterized him thus: "A great person with a magical pen. In his tongue also there lay a magic. His brain was a repository of marvellous things. In his voice the powers of universe rolled and thundered. His fingers manipulated the strings of revolutions. His fists were two powerful batteries. For thirty years he launched a thunder and shook the sleepers from their torpor. He departed but left lasting memories of his feats and triumphs. The world shall have to wait long and hard to find another Renovator of his spiritual calibre and intellectual eminence. His footprints on the sands of time may prove valuable guide to the seekers of truth and the future.
champions of Islam.” Similarly, tributes of Allama Iqbal, the National Poet of Islam, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a great scholar of Islam and ex-President of the Congress Party of India, bear testimony to that effect also.

It will not be out of place to mention one of Hazrat Mirza Sahib’s visions. In a Tradition regarding the sign of the proximity of Latter Days there is mention of the rise of Sun from the West. In this connection he writes as follows:

“This humble servant has been shown in a vision that the rising of the Sun from the West signifies that the Western world which has been involved of old in the darkness of unbelief and error shall be illumined with the sun of truth and those people shall have a light of Islam. In reality, the Western countries have up to this time shown very little aptitude for spiritual truths, as if spiritual wisdom had in its entirety been granted to Asia and material wisdom to Europe and America. Now Almighty God intends to cast on them the look of mercy."

“I saw that I was standing on a pulpit in the city of London and explaining the truth of Islam in a well reasoned address in the English language, and after this, I caught (a large) number of birds that were sitting on small trees and in colour they were white and their size was probably the size of the partridge. So I interpreted this dream as meaning that, though I may not personally go there, yet my writings would spread among these people and many righteous Englishmen would fall a prey to the truth."

“At this critical moment a man has been raised by God and he desires to manifest the beautiful face of Islam to the whole world and open its ways to the Western countries.”

As regards the literature produced by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib and his associates, the English Translation of the Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali attained world-wide recognition. This Translation of the Quran has played an immense role in defence and propagation of Islam. The publication of "Review of Religions", "Islamic Review," and other valuable literature in defence of Islam also fell to the lot of this small band of Lahore Ahmadiyya Jamaat. Equally important contribution has been made by Khwaja Kamalud-Din, the Founder of the Woking Muslim Mission and first Missionary of Islam in the West. Through his efforts many Western persons entered the fold of Islam, and valuable literature in English on Islam was published.

Need for Pledge of Fality

Hazrat Mirza Sahib organised this Jama’at in compliance with the Quranic injunction quoted earlier. As a rule, whenever an Organization is set up, whether for physical defence or spiritual security, here is always a need to exact a pledge of fality, which is called in Islamic terminology “Bai’at”. Every soldier of such an army has to take a pledge at the hands of the Commander or Imam and affirm that in order to fulfill the object for which the said Organization has been set up, he will sacrifice all, even his life, for the said cause. An event in the time of the Holy Prophet (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) can set an example to be followed. In the year 6 Hijra, the Holy Prophet set out from Madina to Mecca to perform ‘Umrah, but on reaching Hudabiya in the suburbs of Mecca, he came to know that the Meccan unbelievers were bent upon war. Since the Holy Prophet had not come for this purpose, he sent Hazrat Usman to Mecca with the message that they have not come to fight, but will return to Madina after performing ‘Umrah.” But soon after news went round that Hazrat Usman had been murdered. This was a most critical situation for Islam. So under Divine command, the Holy Prophet took a pledge from his followers for devotion to the cause of Islam, and the Companions of the Holy Prophet gave the pledge of fality gladly and eagerly to sacrifice their lives in defence of Islam. This pledge was of such paramount importance that the Holy Prophet did not like to keep out Hazrat Usman from this pledge, and he placed his other hand on behalf of Usman. In our times, Islam was hedged in on all sides so that it was in a similar critical state as at Hudabiya, and still the position continues to be critical. Hence it was Divinely ordained that in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet’s Companions, a Jama’at of hard workers and devotees of Islam, may be organised from whom the similar pledge of fality may be taken. So in accordance with a Divine instruction Hazrat Mirza Sahib began to take the pledge of fality from his followers that they will hold religion above the worldly affairs.

Lastly, I am grateful to all my sisters and brothers and the whole audience, who have heard my paper with patience. My particular thanks to the Organisers of this Convention with special reference to Maulana Muhammad Tufail whose devotion to the cause is always superb. Here I would like to appeal to you in respect of your Ahmadi brethren in Pakistan, which is the centre of this Movement, who are passing through most difficult and critical period. The Founder of the Movement has laid great stress on the effectiveness of prayers and has taught us to overcome the difficulties through prayer. I would, therefore, ask all of you to raise hands and pray, "O Allah Who knows what is in our hearts, forgive us our sins. We firmly stand by your religion, Islam and strongly affirm the finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad, on whom be peace and blessings of Allah. Grant us strength to fulfil the pledge we made with your Mujaddid, and help all our brethren who are passing through an ordeal and are in a critical state (Ameen)."

O Lord, let the banner of Islam raised by Hazrat Mirza Sahib and being carried by the Ahmadiyya Movement Lahore, always fly high (Ameen).

O Allah, we all Ahmadis present here do revive our pledge that all of us individually and collectively will uphold the work of propagation of Islam and will hold religion above our worldly affairs.

O Allah, grant us the strength to do so (Ameen)."

My sisters and brothers in faith who belong to the West, and particularly residents of the Western Hemisphere, I visualise that the metaphorical sunrise from the West, destined to occur through Hazrat Mirza Sahib has passed into day-light. O Ahmadis living in the West, it has perhaps fallen to your lot, so rise to your pledges and discharge your responsibilities with Unity, Discipline and Prayers.
ISLAMIC SOCIAL ORDER CONDEMONS WEALTH ACCUMULATION, PROMOTING ITS CIRCULATION THROUGH USURY PROHIBITION AND DIVISION OF DECEASED'S PROPERTIES

ISLAM POSITIVELY ENJOINS AND FAVOURS LABOUR AND SKILL

By Maulana Muhammad Ali

In addition to Zakat, there is the Islamic law of inheritance by which wealth is sought to be distributed among larger numbers, and the number of small capitalists is thus increased. Even after paying the Zakat, one-fortieth of his accumulated wealth every year, a man leaves some wealth at his death, as every diligent and hard worker must. This wealth, according to the Islamic social order, does not become the property of one person, as in the generally prevailing law of primogeniture. Islam introduced a twofold reform into the existing laws of inheritance, it made the female a co-sharer with the male, and it ordered the division of property among all the heirs on a democratic basis. One big capitalist is thus replaced on his death by many small capitalists. The general law is thus laid down in the Holy Qur'an: "Men shall have a portion of what the parents and the near relatives leave, and women shall have a portion of what the parents and the near relatives leave, whether there is little of it or much". (4:7)

Before the advent of Islam, the Arabs had a very strong and, to all appearance, a very sound, tradition that he alone should inherit who could smite with the spear, and therefore no portion of the inheritance was given to such of the heirs as were not capable of meeting the enemy and fighting in battles. This tradition strongly appealed to a people among whom tribal fighting was carried on day and night. Woman, as in the Jewish law, was looked upon as a part of the property of the deceased, to say nothing of her inheriting the property. And just when a defensive war against the whole of Arabia was being carried on by a handful of Muslims, the prevailing law of inheritance was declared to be unjust, and a new law given which put widows and orphans on a level of equality with those who fought for the defence of the tribe and the country. So great was the faith of Muslims in God that the new order was accepted without demur.

The new order divided heirs into two groups, the first group consisting of children, parents, and husband or wife, and the second consisting of brothers and sisters. All the persons mentioned in the first group are immediate sharers, and if all of them are living they have all of them a right in the property. The members of the second group only inherit if all or some of the members of the first group are wanting. Both groups are capable of further extension, grand-children, or still lower descendants, taking the place of children, grand-parents or still higher ascendants taking the place of parents, and uncles, aunts and other distant relatives taking the place of brothers and sisters.

Quranic Point of View, Social welfare aid and not money-making

There is yet a third phase of the Islamic social order which regulates a just distribution of wealth. It is the relation between the debtor and the lender. Whereas the debtor is required to be very faithful in repaying the debt - "Among the best of you are those who are good in payment of debt," according to a saying of the Holy Prophet - the lender is required to be very lenient, to have more regard for his fellowman than for his money. The basic outlook of Islam on human society is that one in distress must be helped. It is laid down in the Holy Qur'an: "If the debtor is in straitness, then there should be postponement until he is in ease; if you remit it as alms, it is better for you if you knew" (2:280). This principle was worked out most liberally by the Holy Prophet as the head of the Muslim State which came into existence towards the end of his life. "I am nearer to the believers," he said, "than themselves, so whoever of the believers dies and leaves a debt, its payment is on me, and whoever leaves property, it is for his heirs" (B.6:5). A debt contracted for a right cause was thus to be paid by the State if the debtor could not pay it.

It is for this reason too that the social order of Islam does not allow usury. The prohibition of usury is clearly associated in the Holy Qur'an with charity, for inasmuch as charity is the broad basis of human sympathy, usury annihilates all sympathetic affection. The usurer is likened to one whom the devil has prostrated by his touch so that he is unable to arise. Such is, in fact, the usurer who would not hesitate to reduce the debtor to the last straits if thereby he might add a penny to his millions. He grows in selfishness until he is divested of all sympathetic feelings, and greed rules his heart. Islam is basically opposed to this.

Development of nobler human qualities

Usury, moreover, promotes habits of idleness, since the usurer, instead of doing any hard work or manual labour, becomes like the parasite, living on the labour of others. In the great struggle that is going on between capital and labour, Islam sides with labour, and, by its prohibition of usury, tries to restore the balance between the two, not allowing capital to
enthral labour. It is in reference to the honourable place that Islam gives to labour that the Holy Qur'an says that "Allah has allowed trade and forbidden usury", for while trading requires the use of labour and skill and elevates the morals, usury promotes habits of indolence, cunning and oppression. To help the distressed one who is in straits is the object of the social structure of Islam, and to reduce him to further straits is the end of usury, hence usury is called "war with Allah and His Messenger" (2:279).

The prohibition is not limited to what may technically be called usury. It includes all kinds of interest, whether the rate be high or low, and whether the interest is or is not added to the principal after fixed periods. Indeed, all interest has a tendency to assume, ultimately, the form of usury, and becomes oppressive for the debtor, a fact which is borne out by the history of indebtedness in all countries. It is sometimes argued that the prohibition of interest would be a serious drawback in the carrying on of trade and business transactions and also in the execution of important national schemes. Even if this be a drawback, it would be more than compensated by making impossible the world wars which entail untold misery on the human race and which are due simply to usurious borrowings. But let us look at facts. Trade was actually carried on, on the vastest scale, and important national schemes were carried into effect, by the great Muslim nations of early days spread over vast territories, they being the vanguards of the great nations of the world in the march of civilization. True it is that the prohibition does not fit in with the modern world conditions which have been brought about by the material civilization of the West, but the high ideal which Islam sets before itself is not unworkable, and did practically work for centuries in early Islamic civilization.

Interest on the capital with which a business is run differs a little from interest on ordinary debts. It is, in fact, a case in which capital and labour are sharers. Such a partnership is not disallowed, but the social order of Islam requires that both capital and labour should be sharers in profit as well as in loss. The payment of interest at a fixed rate means that capital shall always have a profit even though the business may be running at a loss. It is sometimes urged that to make capital and labour share in profit as well as in loss is impracticable because it requires the keeping of an account. But the keeping of account is really a necessity of trade. Moreover, accounts have to be kept for purposes of taxation; they are also kept by all joint-stock companies which carry on trade on the largest scale. This method is more advantageous for the general welfare of the community than the method of charging interest on capital, which increases the evils of capitalism and is unjust to labour. Borrowings by a State or a company for the purpose of executing big projects, such as the building of railways and canals, etc., may follow the same principle, and the banking system generally, if moulded on a co-operative basis, such as the social system of Islam requires, would be a blessing for humanity.

There are some other arrangements too for minimising the evils of capitalism in the Islamic social order, but I would mention only one more. It is the injunction relating to bequests. According to the Holy Qur'an, everyone who leaves wealth after him is required to bequeath a certain amount of it - not more than one-third, according to a saying of the Holy Prophet - for charitable objects, among which the help of the poor, the widows and the orphans occupies a high place. This, according to the Holy Qur'an is obligatory:

"Bequest is prescribed for you when death approaches one of you, if he leaves behind wealth for parents and near relatives, according to usage, a duty incumbent upon those who guard against evil" (2:180).

The bequest, according to a saying of the Holy Prophet, was meant for charitable objects, and was not to exceed one-third of the property of a person, so that the heirs may not be left destitute. The bequest would be as profitable a source for the amelioration of the poor as the Zakat, and if the State makes it obligatory, it would be quite in consonance with the letter and spirit of the Holy Qur'an.

THE MUSLIM PRAYER

N.A. FARUQUI, LAHORE

Prayer to God is universal in all religions. In fact it is the most important article of faith and practice in all religions. Even in communities with no recognized faith, people turn to prayer especially in distress and crisis. Why is that so? The Holy Quran provides the answer:

"And when thy Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendents, and made them bear witness about themselves: Am I not your Lord? They said, yes we bear witness. Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection: We were unaware of this." (7:172).

Faith in God is thus inherent in every human nature. It is the same inborn faith which makes even an atheist call out to God in distress or in a crisis. Khruschev, Prime Minister of the Soviet Union, was once asked by the journalists as to why he referred to God sometimes in his speeches or utterances. "It is just a slip of the tongue", he said, "Otherwise I do not believe in God". It was not the slip of his tongue, for the tongue cannot speak of a thing which does not exist. It was the inborn faith in God which comes out when it is not wilfully suppressed.
2. It is alleged by the atheists that the concept of God comes to be instilled in the human mind by the surrounding faith in God in every society. If so, it should have disappeared completely from the Soviet Union after 60 years of atheism. However, it is interesting to relate that when Stalin's daughter Svetlana escaped to the United States, she was asked by the representative of the then universally-read "Life" magazine as to why she left the Soviet Union where she was living in comfort and respect as the daughter of Stalin. The chief reason she gave for leaving the Soviet Union was: "It is impossible to live without God in your heart". Here was a young woman born and brought up in the citadel of atheism, the Kremlin, where the concept, nay the name, of God was anathema. Though she was the pet child of Stalin, the father and biggest promoter of communism and ipso facto atheism, she found it impossible to live in that godless society because "it was impossible to live without God" in her heart, which faith she found it impossible to suppress. So faith in God is inherent in human nature.

3. The same faith, which is according to the verse of the Holy Quran quoted in para 1 above, a covenant between man and God, is re-affirmed by Divine revelation. Again, the Holy Quran enlightens us on this subject. The transgressors are described as those:

"Who break the covenant of Allah after its confirmation, and cut asunder what Allah has ordered to be joined, and make mischief in the land. These is it that are the losers" (2:27).

The covenant of Allah is the inborn faith in Allah and its confirmation is through Divine revelation. This link between man and God is "ordered to be joined" through prophets who come to invite man to God, and through prayer.

4. It is the same inborn link between man's nature and God which makes man turn to God in prayer in all religions and even in societies without a recognized religion. Islam has perfected this link-up with God through prayers five times a day. Because Allah is not visible, man is apt to forget that there is God. Reminder once a week, as in Christianity or Judaism, is not enough to give man a living faith in God for the rest of the week. The diversions of the worldly pursuits make one forget about God. In fact the demands of the human flesh and the requirements and attractions of physical life are so engrossing, and in most cases overwhelming, that the spiritual side of the man is completely neglected. The inborn faith in God is also lost in oblivion.

5. Man, therefore, has to be reminded constantly that there is a God Who is watching him, hearing what he says and knowing the innermost secrets of his heart. The Muslim prayer serves that purpose when a Muslim turns to Allah five times a day. When he folds his arms respectfully and stands humbly, bows and prostrates before Allah, it should - if he is conscious of what he is doing - remind him that Allah is seeing him. The Muslim prayer can be said anywhere, which reminds man of what the Holy Quran says: "He (Allah) is with you wherever you may be".

Part of the Muslim prayer, when said in congregation, is said aloud to remind man that Allah hears what he says. The greater part of the Muslim prayer is said in one's heart, to teach man the most important thing that Allah knows what goes on in his heart.

6. The Holy Quran always speaks of "setting up the prayer", not saying it. Setting up means going through this audience with Allah with all the humility due to the Might and Majesty of Allah, with full consciousness of the complete dependence of man on his Creator and Master for whatever he is, wants to be and (what is more important) what his Creator wants him to be; with full consciousness of the man's default, shortcomings, forlornness, neglect, weaknesses and sins of commission and omission. That is why the devotee cries out to Allah in his prostration (which is a posture of complete submission and humility) Subhana rabbi al A'ala (O my fosterer unto perfection, you are free from any defect, so rid me also of all defects whether I am aware of them or not, for you being Faultless can best see the faults in me. You are 'Aala, Possessor of the highest good qualities: and as you are my fosterer unto perfection, inspire those good qualities in me too). This reminder of the need to purify one's self and to acquire a touch of the Divine attributes, which are spelt out in detail in the Holy Quran for man's guidance, five times a day, cannot but evolve man to higher and still higher state of purification and perfection.

And to bring that about, there is constant need to remind man of Allah Who is with him wherever he may be, watching him, hearing him and knowing the secrets of his heart. That is what the Muslim prayer, five times a day, seeks to do. But man must "set it up" and not merely utter it or go through the motions without being aware of what he is saying or doing. "Set up the prayer to remember Me", says Allah in the Holy Quran (20:14).

7. Another benefit of the institution of prayer, which is mentioned only in the Holy Quran and in no other revealed book, is that through prayer man's soul gets its spiritual food and nourishment. As man's physical body cannot survive or grow without physical nourishment, so does his soul need its nourishment which can be found only in the spiritual link-up between man and Allah during prayer. This all important revelation is contained in following verses of the Holy Quran:
"And strain not thine eyes toward that with which We have provided different classes of men, (of) the splendours of this world's life; that We may thereby try them. And the sustenance of thy Lord is better and more abiding. And enjoin prayer on thy family, and steadily adhere to it yourself. We ask not of thee a sustenance. We provide sustenance for thee."

(20:131-132)

In these two profound verses, the following sublime wisdom is stated:

(a) A Muslim should not look long and longingly towards (i.e. he should not make it the object of his life to seek) the splendours of this world's life, which are not in any case given equally to men who are thus made into different classes to serve different Divine and human purposes.

(b) The grant of the splendours of this life puts the recipients on trial (because they are accountable to Allah for them, the splendours are apt to make the recipients forgetful of Allah and to get lost in the life of this world etc. etc.)

(c) In any case worldly splendours are transient and short-lived, for man loses them on his death if not earlier.

(d) On the other hand, the spiritual sustenance of man's Rabb (fosterer unto perfection i.e. Allah) is better and everlasting. It is the human soul which lives for ever. The sustenance granted to the human soul is therefore far superior and much more desirable.

(e) That spiritual sustenance can be had only in prayer.

(f) As man gives priority to his family in the matter of physical sustenance inasmuch as he spends most of his earnings on them the provision of spiritual sustenance through prayer is first mentioned, and man is asked to enjoin prayer on his family.

(g) But he himself must set an example by adhering steadfastly to prayer.

(h) As Allah gives physical sustenance to man and He does not ask for physical sustenance from him, so does Allah call man to prayer to give him the all-important spiritual sustenance. Prayer is enjoined in man's interest, not in Allah's interest who is above want or need.

There are other benefits of prayer to Allah such as the peace of mind one gets through it when one needs it, and that he does most of the time, the fraternal feelings that it develops in a locality if its residents meet together five times a day in prayer, and so on. But that would prolong this article. The two all-important benefits mentioned above i.e. the realisation of God in man and the latter's all-important spiritual nourishment and growth for his ever-lasting benefit are enough to understand why turning to Allah in prayer often is the most important article of faith and practice in Islam.

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HAZRAT ABU BAKR
(God be pleased with him)

"The Conscience of Islam"
(from "The Light" - August 1, 1974)

One Christian orientalist in a moment of mental lucidity made a memorable observation about the Holy Prophet (Allah's peace and blessings be upon Him) and Hazrat Abu Bakr (God be pleased with him). He said: "Muhammad is the soul of Islam and Abu Bakr is the conscience of it." The sense of conscience is enshrined in the honorific title of Siddique. Hazrat Abu Bakr's heart and mind were so attuned to truth that he recognised and accepted the Truth at first sight. Then all his life, he by his precept and example testified to the Truth that shone in the person and message of the Holy Prophet (Allah's peace and blessings be upon Him). His supreme spiritual qualities as a passionately dedicated disciple were fully recognised by the Holy Prophet (Allah's peace and blessings be upon Him), who vouchsafed his blessings and reposed boundless trust in him. The Migration from Mecca under the divine command was a great secret. Not only was it divulged to Hazrat Abu Bakr (Allah be blessed with him), but he was chosen as a valued and trustworthy comrade in crisis which Allah wished to be a prelude to great shape of things to come. In this close comradeship Hazrat Abu Bakr witnessed how Allah showered His favours on His Messenger (Allah's peace and blessings upon Him) who firmly faced the dangers from his sworn enemies. When the pursuing party came to the very brink of the Cave where the two inseparable companions had taken refuge, Hazrat Abu Bakr showed signs of nervousness, not because of any risk to his own self, but because he was overcome with fear lest any harm should come to the Holy Prophet (Allah's peace and blessings be upon Him). He was completely indifferent to his own personal safety. His whole anxiety was for his Sublime Companion whose presence was the sunshine of his existence. His fear of the enemies was natural, because he could not divine supernatural intervention to foil the hostile designs of the relentless, ruthless and remorseless pursuers. But his Heavenly Comrade-in-the-Cave whose every fibre was energised by a flaming faith in Allah, had no anxiety. He was confident of such Providential Assistance "as no breath or pen can give expression to." In this tense moment Allah conveyed His enlivening solace to Abu Bakr through his messenger. There came a sonorous, soothing revelation: "If you help him not, then know that Allah helped him even when the disbeliefers drove him forth while he was one of the two when they both were in the cave, when he said to his Companion, 'Grieve not, for Allah is with us.' Then Allah
sent down His peace on him, and strengthened him with hosts which you did not see, and humbled the word of those who disbelieved and it is the Word of Allah alone which is supreme. And Allah is Mighty and Wise." (9:40) Out of His abundant blessings and favours, Allah conferred a rich reward on the Holy Prophet's comrade-in-the-Cave for his total identification with Allah's Messenger and for his rare resolve to stand with him in fair weather or foul. In that hour of apparently impending capture by the trekking foes, Hazrat Abu Bakr experienced with his blood the divine truth of the Holy Prophet's Mission and his close ties with Allah. Allah enabled him to keep company in the Flight and to witness the Great Experiment. In the divine revelation he was mentioned as inseparable from the Holy Prophet's personality. What honour can be greater than to be called mão أَنَّى أَرِنْنِهِ (one of the two) by Allah Himself. This spiritual integration was further rendered luminous by the verse:

لا تَحَزَّنَّ آنَّهُ مَعَنَا (Grieve not, Allah is with us). Some gifted commentators of the Holy Quran have penetratingly observed that the Revealed Word منا contained a reference to heavenly guarantee even of physical safety to Hazrat Abu Bakr till his departure from this world.

The verse quoted above reveals that Hazrat Abu Bakr witnessed how Allah unfolded His love for the Holy Prophet (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon Him) and how Truth triumphed over untruth and how the invisible but irresistible aid from on High rolled the hostility of the unbelievers into dust and mud. The pursuing party ate the humble pie and returned in utter disgrace. It was quite natural that Hazrat Abu Bakr should make his life an inspiring sermon on service to and sacrifice for the Holy Prophet (Allah's peace and blessings be upon Him). For him there was not to reason why there was to do and die for the Holy Guide and his Holy Mission. His whole life is radiant evidence of the Holy Prophet's truthfulness. Sir William Muir writes: "Abu Bakr had no thought of personal aggrandizement. Endowed with sovereign power he used it simply for the interests of Islam and the people's good. But the grand secret of his strength was faith in Muhammad." "Call me not the Caliph of the Lord", he would say, "I am but the Caliph of the Prophet of the Lord." The question with him ever was, what did Muhammad command or "What would he have done?" From this he never swerved a hair's breadth. And so it was that he crushed Apostasy and laid secure the foundations of Islam. His reign was short, but after Muhammad there is no one to whom the Faith is more beholden.

For this reason and because his belief in the Prophet is itself a strong evidence of the sincerity of Muhammad himself. I have dwelt at some length upon his Life and Character. Had Muhammad begun his career as a conscious impostor, he could never have won the faith and friendship of a man who was not only sagacious and wise, but throughout his life simple, consistent and sincere. This is the glowing testimony of a hardened critic of Islam. In a way the critic has confessed his lack of proper comprehension in assessing the unique greatness of the Holy Prophet (Allah's peace and blessings be upon Him). It is Hazrat Abu Bakr's sincerity which forced him to make a veiled confession of his lack of understanding. Allama Iqbal has summed up Siddique Akbar's service to Islam and Ummat-i-Muhaddia thus:

"His indomitable courage was a fertilizing cloud for the Millat. He was 'one of the two' in Islam, in the Cave, in the Battle of Badr and in the Grave."

THE HOLY PROPHET
(Allah's Peace and Blessings be upon Him)

A Glowing Instance of His Being Mercy for all Peoples
(By Mustafa H.M. Leon, Ph.D., LL.D., F.S.P.)

Some there be who have their eye, and heed not what they say; Others think before they speak, and evil keep at bay;
To all of such, where'er they be, story old and true,
Of what God's Holy Prophet did and said, e'en now I'll tell to you.
It chanced among the "Ashab" there, one day the Holy Prophet sat:
Abu Huraira, too, was there, likewise his friend, the cat;
Umar and Usman, too, were there, ever their names be blest;
And Hazrat Abu-Bakr, wise and bold, sat there among the rest;
Ali, God's lion, foremost he, for ever in the fray,
Scholars and warriors, mighty men, were present on that day,
Attentive they, that in their minds, they thus could treasure well
The words they heard like precious pearls, which from the Prophet fell.
But while they sat with list'ning awe, lo! there across the square
With measured tread, some mourners came, it was a corpse they bore,
Straightway the Holy Prophet ca'sd his speech, his utterances so good
And as the bier did pass him by respectful, Ahmad Rasul-Allah stood! then one did say, "why dost thou stand so here?
Know not thou, it is but a Jew, whose corpse lies on yon bier?"
The Prophet turn'd, and as he turn'd, light flashing from his eye,
In accents clear, yet soft and low, 'twas thus he made reply:
"That 'tis the corpse of a poor Jew, brother, I know full well.
But what of that, a Jew's a man who on this earth doth dwell,
He hath a soul, immortal, that for eternal time,
Will still live on, to dwell for aye, in its appointed clime.
From that Jew's life, from that Jew's fate, we should example take,
And copy all was in him good, the evil e'er forsake,
As once liv'd he, so now we live, and in our time must die,
And stark and stiff, like yonder Jew, upon a bier must lie.
'Tis not for us, weak mortals we, the Jew's faith to deride; That is for Allah's wisdom and His mercy to decide.
For us it is, to follow that, Allah has pointed clear,
Our tariik is in Islam's fold, rest there and have no fear,
And judge ye not your fellow man, but to yourself be true,
And leave to Allah's mercy, thou, the Christian and the Jew."
ISLAM, BELIEF AND MORAL OBLIGATION
By PROF. HABIB-UR-RAHMAN, M.A.

What is Islam?

Islam consists in perfect and unquestionable obedience to the Supreme Creator and strict adherence to the sayings and actions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings of God be upon him). We must declare, believe and give evidence that there is no deity except God, who is wholly and solely capable of worship. We must implicitly believe and confirm that Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him) is His last Prophet.

Mere belief, is of no use, unless we put it into practice all the injunctions of God, and the Sunnah of His Prophet. God is One; there is no partner whatsoever in His illimitable sovereignty. He beget no son, nor He is begotten by any one. He is the absolute Master of His Will. He is Most Merciful, Most Beneficent, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, Most Nourishing, Most Forgiving, Most Just and Most Resourceful. In the dispensation of gifts and favours, in His Sovereignty, He has no equal; in the punishment of evil-doers, no one can share His Will. He knows the inmost secrets of all His creatures' hearts - the deeds they had done in the past, the deeds they are doing at present and the deeds they will do in future. He administers justice most sagaciously, while His Boons have no visible end. He is the indisputable Master of the Day of Resurrection.

The fulfilment of God's precepts are incumbent on us. We are ordained to say prayers five times a day, as offered by the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) with the fidelity of a passionate lover. It is only prayers which elevate human morality and cultivate spiritual excellence. We are also ordained to give ALMS to the poor and the needy. Alms-giving is the Vehicle of prayers.

Observance of fasts is indispensable for all those believers who possess good health. Prayers and fasts are intended for the purification of our souls. For without our soul's purification, our spiritual excellence is defective and incomplete. If we possess resources, we should perform pilgrimage by visiting Mecca - another means for the sublimation of our souls. To Almighty God our prayers, our fasts, our alms-giving or pilgrimage are immaterial. Our steadfast allegiance to God and the carrying out of His injunctions are sure to gain His good-will and to purify our soul.

What is the essence of belief?

God enjoins Muslims to have fullest trust and faith in God. His angels, His revealed Books, in all His Apostles, and finally in the Judgment Day. A true believer must have strong faith in the injunctions of God when He says in the Holy Quran:

"The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers. They will believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His messengers."

God created angels for man's service. They are Divine functionaries. For spiritual elevated persons, the angels are deputed by God to act as Guardian spirits for them, during the course of this life.

God sent down His Books from time to time, through His chosen Messengers. At present, four of these are known to us - Zabur, Taurat, Injil and the Quran. The first three books have been corrupted by man's interpolations, and hence their moral standard is either much lowered or invalidated. We Muslims must accept the teachings of the Holy Quran, for this revealed Book is completely uncorrupted and without the least innovation. It is a Guide-Book, for it is a complete code of laws which serves to direct us to follow the right path for the exaltation of our moral and spiritual excellences.

God sent many Apostles to reform men, in different climes and in different ages. But the mission of these Messengers were confined to a particular nation or place. Their instructions and precepts were not adjustable to all requirements. They did not constitute a complete whole, like the universal doctrines of the Holy Quran. The teachings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him) are comprehensive and universally potent and effective for all times to come.

Muslims, as a whole, are decreed to believe in the Judgment Day when justice will be done to all people belonging to all ages and regions. On the Doomsday every body would be handed a book of his or her deeds and misdeeds. Not a single bit of evil or good would be omitted in his or her book. No individual would dare to deny what he had done in life.

Similarly we must have firm faith in good and evil. Our fortunes during our march through life, have been vacillating between decencies and indecencies, between sins and virtues. A believer should always express heart-felt repentance before God.
Secret of moral obligations

In order to cleanse our souls, we must lie prostrate and adore our Creator. This proximity with God is only possible when the mad freaks of a furious, fantastic and cankered heart are totally subdued and discarded. If such caprices are not completely erased from our minds, we should then realistically feel in our prayers that God is desiring us. Mere exercise in our routine religious drill does not serve the real purpose. Thick crusts of dross, which settle on our morbid minds, cannot be deleted just by the formal prayers we offer, unless we put in real effort to ennoble our souls.

"MERAJ-UN-NABI
SPEECH OF MAULANA HAFIZ SHER MOHAMMAD

The literal meaning of the Arabic word 'Meraj' is the 'Ladder' but in Islamic terminology it stands for a particular occurrence on the 27th night of the Islamic month of Rajab which is narrated in hadith.

This word 'Meraj' is not mentioned in the Holy Quran but is found in many narrations of Hadith. In the Holy Quran, instead of Meraj the word 'Asra' is used in the first verse of 'Surah Bani Israil' (chapter 17) and commentators of the Holy Quran, in all ages, have interpreted this verse to be referring to that event which is commonly reported in the Hadith as MERAJ UN NABI.

MERAJ UN NABI has been mentioned in many reports of the Hadith, some of these being 'SAHIH' (authentic) others 'Hasan' and yet others 'ZAAEF' (weak). Nevertheless all the Muslim sects agree as to the occurrence of the event of MERAJ. Difference however, is found, since the early Caliphate, about the mode of Meraj as to whether it was a bodily ascension to heavens of the Holy Prophet or just a spiritual experience or manifest-vision. Before going into the details of these differences and their validity or otherwise, it seems useful to find an answer to some relevant questions for rendering possible the complete and unambiguous comprehension of the 'MERAJ'.

These questions are:-

1. Do we comprehend Allah in a material-physical form or spiritual form?
2. Can we see Allah with our physical eyes?
3. Allah's being closer to us in physical sense or spiritual sense?
4. Where is Allah? Is he seated in the skies only or is omni-present?
5. In the Holy Quran, word 'Sama'a' is used for skies.
   Does it always mean the physical space only or can it mean a spiritual elevation too?
6. How can a man get closer to Allah, through rockets and space planes or through good deeds?
7. Are human eyes the only means of one's vision or some other means for vision are possible?

Now we find that four variant opinions about the mode of 'Meraj' are prevalent in Muslims since the early days of Islam:-

1. That the Holy Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was carried bodily from the MASJID ALHARAM to MASJID ALAQSA and therefrom to heavens up to the skies.
2. That he was carried bodily from the MASJID ALHARAM to MASJID ALAQSA and therefrom only his spirit was allowed to rise to heavens i.e., they believe in partial physical, partial spiritual MERAJ.
3. That the whole event of carrying from MASJID ALHARAM to MASJID ALAQSA and then onward to heavens was simply a manifest vision, a spiritual experience in a state of being awake without involving the moving of the physical body from where it was.
4. That the whole event was shown in the form of a dream in a state of sleep.

Let it be very clear that believing in the truth of anyone of these four opinions and dispensing with the remaining three will not in anyway detract anything from one's IMAN (belief) as a Muslim, as the exponents of all these four opinions have drawn deductions from the Holy Quran, the Hadith and the reports of the companions of the Holy Prophet and each one of them is possessed of sound arguments in favour of his opinion. Nor does the difference of opinion as to the mode of MERAJ, reduce the significance of the event of MERAJ. By saying that Holy Prophet ascended to the heavens or that heavens descended to the presence of the Holy Prophet does not subtract anything from this great event of the human history. The idea of physical ascension in 'MERAJ' no doubt offers a very beautiful journey which human mind can visualize but stories of physical ascension to heavens of the founders and righteous men and prophets are commonly found in the mythology of Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and even Sikhism - in certain cases it goes to the extent of raising to heavens of a religious personage or a leader of a nation along with its horses and chariots. We know from our advanced state of knowledge and reasonings, today, that all these stories of physical ascensions are myths, simple myths. Thus any effort on anyone's part to insist on the belief of bodily ascension of the Holy Prophet does not in any manner help to prove the superiority of the Holy Prophet over other religious personages and rather amounts to pulling him down to the level of all other
mythological heroes of human history. I hope you will agree with me that this is a disservice to the Holy Prophet Mohammed (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Myth in all ages has nourished on ignorance, and it is more true about matters spiritual. When spiritual experiences reported in metaphor fall to interpretation at the hands of people devoid of any spiritual experience themselves, they always tend to interpret it in physical terms, as their own comprehension is limited to things apparent to our physical senses. Deeper metaphoric sense is beyond their capacity. If a person sees the sun, the moon, the stars and the skies daily then he does not think that the sight of these things carry any message of hope for him or have any special significance for him or there is a prophecy in it for him - but if the same person sees the sun, the moon, the stars or the skies in a dream or a vision then he tries to find the significance of the sight of these things in dream or vision and tries to dig the underlying meanings. Similar is the case of the 'MERAJ UN NABI' if at all we try to read and understand it in its true historical background.

The Background: and the Meanings of the 1st Verse of 'SURAH BANI ISRAEL'

'MERAJ' is an event of the early days of the Mission of the Holy Prophet. We know that the first verse of 'SURAH BANI ISRAIL' is one of the early revelations. Now this is a period full of afflictions, difficulties, adversities and miseries for the Holy Prophet and his companions. Those who have read the history of this period know fully well that the magnitude of the sufferings of the Holy Prophet and his companions was so great that it was not humanly possible to stand it without a rocklike conviction of faith found in men appointed by Allah. Reading through the verses appearing at the end of 'SURAH BANI ISRAIL' one finds that the opponents of the Holy Prophet were asking all sorts of questions and were raising all types of objections. We find them telling him:

"We will by no means believe in thee, till thou cause a spring to gush forth from the earth for us."

"Or thou have a garden of Palms and grapes in the midst of which thou cause rivers to flow forth abundantly."

"Or thou cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces, as thou thinkest. or bring Allah and the angels face to face, (with us)."

"Or thou have a house of gold, or thou ascend unto heaven. And we will not believe in thy ascending till thou bring down to us a book we can read."

Now apart from verse 60 of this Surah calling MERAJ a 'Roya', a manifest vision, in reply to the above demands the Holy Prophet tells them "Am I aught but a mortal messenger." Had the MERAJ been a physical ascension, his reply would have been very different than this.

Most naturally in such adverse circumstances what was required was something which could provide a ray of hope to the Holy Prophet and his companions on the one hand and a proof - a manifest proof - of the truthfulness of the mission of the Holy Prophet on the other hand. A physical ascension of the Holy Prophet on his journeys between the MASJID AL HARAM and MASJID AL AQSA, not witnessed by his opponents, if at all offered anything, then it was to the Holy Prophet himself and to none else. This will not suffice to establish the truthfulness of his mission. What was required was something greater than this, a clear proof of truth of Islam visible to all and sundry and that is what is contained in the first verse of the 'SURAH BANI ISRAEL'. This contained a message of success of the mission of the Holy Prophet as well as prophecies of innumerable achievements by the Holy Prophet and his Ummah.

The verse starts with the word 'Subhana' (praise be to) which indicates that this verse is in reply to the objections of the opponents of Islam because all Lexicons agree that the use of word 'Subhana' before Allah indicates that Allah is free from the matters or things attributed to him by the opponents.

The next word is 'Asra' which means walking during the night and if we consider it derived from the root "Sarraiya" and "Sarat", then it means vastness of piece of land.

Next come the words 'Be Abde hi' meaning 'his servant'.

Next is the word 'Lailan' - "lail" means the night and it is also written for the days of affliction and distress or for darkness - night - also is considered most suitable time for spiritual strides.

MASJID AL HARAM is Kaabah in MECCA and MASJID AL AQSA is the Mosque in Jerusalem (this is applied to MASJID-e-NABWI in Madina by some commentators).

In the next words 'Barakua Holahu' (We blessed its precincts) is an indication of gathering the material and spiritual good in the person of the Holy Prophet, as Palestine for its abundance of water resources and growth is considered an economically rich land while, on the other hand, it is spiritually rich, being the abode of many prophets of the past.
The purpose of the MERAJ has been explained in the words 'Le No Rayahu Min Ayatena' (that we might show him of our signs), thus, the MERAJ was for showing some signs and prophecies to the Holy Prophet, and through him, to other human beings. In fact in the verse relating to MERAJ, prophecies about the great success to be achieved by the Holy Prophet and about the heights spiritual as well as material success to be attained by him and his Ummah have been revealed. If by MASJID AL AQSA we mean MASJID-e NA-BWI then this verse predicts about an honourable migration to Madina wherefrom the blessings of Islam will reach the whole world.

Verses predicting and promising the establishing of the Rule of the prophet on Mecca, Madina and even Palestine, during that period of afflictions and miseries and the news of the great spiritual and material heights to be touched by the muslims, in those difficult days would have given a message of hope to the muslims and fulfilment of these prophecies would have served as the greatest evidence of the truthfulness of the mission of the prophet. Can there be a greater miracle than this?

Gist of Hadith Reports on MERAJ

The event of 'MERAJ' in detail has been reported in a number of Hadith. One finds mention of miracles and signs in all the great religions of the world. All prophets of Allah have wrought such miracles which appear supernatural to us and it is this part of the religion which has been the cause of a vast majority being led into what is called religiosity by today's thinker - philosophers, and 'MERAJ' being one of such events.

The philosophy underlying 'MERAJ' is simply this, that after the proclamation of Prophethood by the Holy Prophet - he was subjected to great afflictions and in such a distressed condition, glimpses of the success awaiting the Holy Prophet and his Ummah and the resultant elevation of the human race were manifested to the Holy Prophet. The Holy Prophet Mohammed (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) narrating the experience of 'MERAJ' states, "I was asleep in Hatcem that the roof of the house opened and Gabriel descended in the company of a few other angels. First of all they led me to Zam Zam (a fountain in MECCA) and opened my chest there, took out my heart and washed it with the water of Zam Zam. Thereafter a tray full of EMAN (belief) and wisdom was brought and Gabriel took EMAN and wisdom from the tray and placed it in my chest and closed it. After that an animal called "Burraq" was brought. It ran with great speed so that each of its step was touching the horizon. Riding on this 'Burraq' we first came to MASJID AL AQSA and offered two 'Rakkat' prayers and thereafter we set out on our journey through skies to heaven in the company of Gabriel. We met Adam on the 1st sky. There I was shown two rivers and on my asking, Gabriel told me that these were Euphrates and Nile. We met Prophet Joseph on second, Idrees on third, John and Jesus on fourth, Haroon on fifth, Moses on sixth and Abraham on the seventh sky. Then we passed through the garden where I saw a river on which palaces having domes of pearls and ground of 'MUSK' were built. Then we reached a place where the sound of the pen of the creator could be heard and then we proceeded to 'Sadratal Mantaha' (the farthest lote-tree) and then Allah drew nearer to me so that the distance was reduced to the extent of two ends of a bow, even less. Then I was given three gifts, (1) the last verses of the Surah 'Baqarah' (The Cow - chapter two), (2) good news of Allah's Mercy that Allah will forgive all except those who set equals with him and (3) Saying of prayers fifty times a day was enjoined.

I met Moses on my way back - then is the narration of the talk between Moses and the Holy prophet and the ultimate reduction of the prayer times to five. On his way back he returned to MASJID AL AQSA where all the prophets of the past had assembled and all of them offered their prayers led by the Holy Prophet, as one Hadith tells us (Fastaqazaa wa howa fil Masjidharam) and thereafter he awoke and he was in MASJID AL HARAM. This in brief is the gist of the story reported in the Books of Hadith. A beautiful fairy tale indeed, if one considers it a bodily journey and does not bother to dig the underlying meanings. It will not serve any useful purpose for a person and his companions who are suffering severe afflictions at the hands of their opponents, but if we believe in it as a manifest-vision and spiritual experience, then it contains prophecies and promises for the success of those who are passing through that period of hardships and misery. It paints a picture of the bright future for them. Let us try to dig out the hidden beauties of this vision - the spiritual MERAJ in this story:-

1. Gabriel's opening the prophet's chest and placing 'Eman' and 'wisdom' in it is an indication of the fact that the Holy Prophet's heart has been cleansed of all base sentiments and that the Holy Prophet and his Ummah has been bestowed with "Eman and wisdom" all prejudices being replaced with openmindedness, a natural element of wisdom.

2. Prophet's travelling on 'Burraq' is an indication that the religion of the Holy Prophet will spread with great speed, and, history bears witness that Islam spread much faster than any other religion. Secondly, the Holy Prophet's riding over the 'Burraq', which appeared in animal form, rather than something having wings to fly, is an indication that animal passions have been subjugated by the Holy Prophet, and that with the advent of Islam, animal passions will give way to the progress of humane rationalism.

3. Rising to the skies and meeting the prophets of the past is an indication of the great heights to be touched by muslims and along with them the whole human race and that all the prophets are the parts of one scheme and all
were raised to lead humanity to one goal - rising to the destined heights. All other prophets welcoming the Holy Prophet is a clear prophecy of the fact that the followers of all other religions will embrace Islam and that the welfare of human race lies in the unity of all believing people.

4. Holy Prophet's leading the prayers of all other prophets is a very significant indication of the finality of the Prophethood. This tells us that whatever good for the human race was possible had been done and they are offering their prayers led by a prophet who finalized the process, now none else will be raised as a prophet. In MASJID AL AQSA all the prophets handed over the spiritual as well as worldly Khulafat to the Holy Prophet by accepting him as their Imam and as a result of this BANI ISRAEL and Christians lost the succession to the prophets in favour of the Ummah of the Holy Prophet.

5. By showing Nile and Euphrates to the Holy Prophet it was prophesied that in near future not only BAITUL MAGADDAS will fall to muslim but Egypt, Iraq and Syria will also come under muslim's domain.

6. When Moses was shown to the Holy Prophet in a weeping condition and complaining about the hardness of heart of his followers, in it was drawn a complete picture of the state of hard-heartedness, thanklessness, crookedness, materialism and altering of the teachings of Torah by the Jews. Moses's shedding the tears indicates the grief on the low moral and spiritual state of his Ummah and what Moses tells the Holy Prophet about the prayers has an element of warning for the muslim nation in ignoring to discharge the duty of saying prayers regularly, which is evident to all today.

7. The Holy Prophet's reaching the farthest lote-tree and shedding of Allah's light on it and opening of the windows of the garden of heaven towards this tree is a prophecy of the establishment of a new world order which is known as Islam and bestowing the spiritual and worldly kingdom on the Holy Prophet. The tree stands for this new order - Islam and wisdom behind giving it the form of a tree instead of a man or any other animal form is that - teachings of Islam on various aspects of life are intertwined with each other in a very orderly manner just like the various parts of the tree are related to each other. Though orderliness is found even in the human body or in animal form, but due to freedom of will, at times this order changes into disorderliness, therefore, the parable of tree was offered. Secondly it was a custom in Arabia that when they had to select their Ruler or King they would assemble under a large lote-tree and select their King. Thus this tree indicates establishing the kingdom of the Holy Prophet in the world and was a message of hope during that period of distress, that notwithstanding all the present afflictions his kingdom will be established. Would not have this served as a miraculous symbol of the truthfulness of the mission of the Holy Prophet for those opponents who were demanding signs from him?

8. Shedding of the light and bringing the garden of heavens nearer to the Holy Prophet is an indication of Allah's mercy on the Prophet and a promise that the period of hardships was to come to an end soon.

9. The three gifts received by the Holy Prophet also have great significance.

   (1) Salat or the prayer which has been called the MERAJ of a believer is the greatest mode of spiritual elevation and in it all the believers were made to share the MERAJ with the Holy Prophet.

   (2) The promise of mercy and forgiveness to all except those who set equals with Allah is in fact the cornerstone of the Islamic dogma of 'Unity of Allah'. The wisdom of this unity of Allah is now dawning on the Christian thinkers of the west.

   (3) The third gift - the last verses of Surah 'Baqarah' (The Cow) - wherein is contained the promise of the triumph of Islam, its great future and coming to an end of the period of hardships, carry the message of completion of the Deen (religion) and principles of forgiveness and mercy. Thus the 'MERAJ UN NABI' in fact is the story of the MERAJ of the human race which has been told in a tale form, in parables and metaphor concealing in it the great message of hope for the suffering humanity. Hardly a few years had passed of the 'MERAJ' that the prophecies and promises contained in it started coming true, one after the other, and the opponents of Islam, inspite of all the might at their command, were startled and defeated at the hands of humble helpless sufferers - the Holy Prophet and his companions, and Allah's promise was fulfilled.
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