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ISLÀM

**Basic Principles and
Characteristics**

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PREFACE

The Islamic message is simple, straightforward, profound, and directly addressed to every human being: surrender yourself to your Creator—the God of all.

This simple truth is the main reason for the rise and spread of a fully mature culture and civilization, and an intellectual, political, social, economic and legal system. Its comprehensiveness is amazing and its relevance to all and every age is only indicative of its universality.

The present booklet, *Islam: Its Meaning and Characteristics* addresses itself to these issues. Its author, Professor Khurshid Ahmad, has written widely on Islamic economics, law, literature, and history in both English and Urdu. He has lectured in the universities in Pakistan and Europe. But what distinguishes him from many other writers and intellectuals is his association with Islamic work. He has been associated with the Islamic movement in Pakistan (Jama'at-Islami Pakistan and the Islami Jam'iat-e Talabah Pakistan) for about three decades. He has served in the way of Allah in prison (1964) as well as in public office (Federal Minister for Planning, 1979). We thank him for permitting us to print this booklet. We also thank the Islamic Foundation, Leicester for the cooperation in its production.

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*Islam: Basic Principles and Characteristics**

Khurshid Ahmad

ISLAM is the religion of truth. It is the embodiment of the code of life which Allah, the Creator and the Lord of the universe, has revealed for the guidance of mankind.

For the proper development of human life man needs two kinds of things, viz.: (a) resources to maintain life and fulfil the material needs of the individual and society, and (b) knowledge of the principles of individual and social behavior to enable man to have self-fulfilment and to maintain justice and tranquility in human life. The Lord of the universe has provided for both of these in full measure. To cater for the material needs of man He has provided nature with all kinds of resources, which lie at the disposal of man. To provide for his spiritual, social and cultural needs He raised His prophets from among men and revealed to them the code of life which can guide man's steps to the Right Path. This code of life is known as Islam, the religion preached by all the prophets of Allah.¹

Allah said: 'Say, we believe in God, and in the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes. We believe in the revelation that was sent to Moses, Jesus and all other Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between them, and unto Him we surrender.' (al-Qur'an, 3:83, See also 2:136).

Also: 'He has revealed to you (O Muhammad) the scripture with truth, confirming that which was revealed before it even as He revealed the Torah and the Gospel, before as a guide to mankind and has revealed the Criterion (of judging between right and wrong). (al-Qur'an, 3:3-4).

All of the prophets called humanity to the way of the Lord, the way of submission to Allah. All of them gave the same message; all of them stood for the same cause, Islam.

*This is a revised version of an earlier pamphlet published by the Islamic Publications Ltd., Lahore, Pakistan.

1. The Qur'an says: 'He has ordained for you (O Muhammad) that faith which He commended to Noah, and that which We commended to Abraham, Moses and Jesus, saying: "Establish the Faith, and be not divided therein."' (al-Qur'an, 42:13).

THE MEANING OF ISLAM

Islam is an Arabic word and denotes acceptance of Allah as the Supreme and the Ultimate Reality. It means submission, surrender and obedience. As a religion, Islam stands for complete submission and obedience to Allah²—that is why it is called *Islam*. The Other literal meaning of the word Islam is 'peace' and this signifies that one can achieve real peace of body and of mind only through submission and obedience to Allah.² Such a life of obedience brings peace of heart and establishes real peace in society at large.

“Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah—indeed it is in the thought of Allah alone that the heart of man really finds rest—those who believe and act righteously, joy is for them, and a blissful home to return to.” (al-Qur’an, 13:28-29).

Unlike many other faiths, the name Islam is neither related with its founder (as in Buddhism or Christianity) nor tribe or race (like in Judaism) nor with land and soil (as in Hinduism).

Anyone who submits to Allah as the Creator of the universe is a potential Muslim.

Islam is the name given to this faith by Allah, the Creator, in His revealed scripture, the Qur’an...“This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favor on you, and have chosen for you as the way of life Al Islam.” (al Maidah 5:3).

According to the Qur’an this message was preached by all the prophets of God, who guided man to the right path. But man not only veered away from the right path again and again, but also lost or distorted the code of guidance which the prophets had bequeathed. That was why other prophets were sent to re-state the original message and guide man to the right path. The last of these prophets was Muhammad (peace be upon him), who presented God’s guidance in its final form and arranged to preserve it for all time. It is this guidance which is now known as *al-Islam* and is enshrined in the Qur’an and the life-example of the Prophet.

2. The word Islam is from the root SLM (pronounced *silm*) which means (a) to surrender, to submit, to yield, to give one’s self over, thus *aslama amrahu ila Allah*, means ‘he committed his cause to God’ or ‘he resigned himself to the will of God’. *Aslama* alone would be ‘he committed himself to the will of God’, or ‘he became a Muslim’. the other major shade of meaning in the root is (b) ‘to become reconciled with one another’, ‘to make peace’. *Salm* means peace. so does *silm*, which also means ‘the religion of Islam’. See Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1971, p. 424-425. Iman Raghīb says in *al Mufrīdat fi Gharīb al Qur’an*: ‘Islam in law is of two kinds; one is a simple confession with the tongue...the other that along with confession, there is a belief in the heart and a fulfilment in practice, and resignation to God in whatever He brings to pass or decree’. Raghīb further says: ‘Islam means entering into *salm*, and *salm* and *silm* both signify peace.’

The basic Islamic concept is that the entire universe was created by God, whom Islam calls Allah and who is the Lord and the Sovereign of the Universe. He is the Lord of the universe which He alone sustains. He created man and appointed for each human being a fixed period of life which he is to spend upon the earth. Allah has prescribed a certain code of life as the correct one for him, but has at the same time conferred on man freedom of choice as to whether or not he adopts this code as the actual basis of his life. One who chooses to follow the code revealed by God becomes a *Muslim* (believer) and one who refuses to follow it becomes a *Kafir* (non-believer).

A man joins the fold of Islam by honestly believing in and professing faith in the unity of God and the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him). Both these beliefs are epitomised in the *Kalima* or the *Shahadah*:

La ilaha illallahu Muhammad ur-rasulullah.

(‘There is no God except Allah; Muhammad is His Prophet’.)

The first part of this *Kalima* presents the concept of *Tawhid* (unity of God) and its second part affirms the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him).

TAWHID—THE BED-ROCK OF ISLAM

Tawhid is a revolutionary principle and constitutes the essence of the teachings of Islam. It means that there is only One Supreme Lord of the universe. He is all Powerful, all Knowing and the Sustainer of the world and of mankind.

How can one observe the inexhaustible creativity of nature, its purposefulness, its preservation of that which is morally useful and destruction of that which is socially injurious, and yet fail to draw the conclusion that behind nature there is an All-Pervading Mind of whose incessant creative activity the processes of nature are but an outward manifestation? The stars scattered through the almost infinite space, the vast panorama of nature with its charm and beauty, the planned waxing and waning of the moon, the astonishing harmony of the seasons—all point towards one fact: there is God, the Creator, the Governor. We witness a superb, flawless plan in the universe—can it be without a Planner? We see great enchanting beauty and harmony in its working—can it be without a Creator? We observe wonderful design in nature—can it be without a Designer? We feel a lofty purpose in physical and human existence—can it be without a Will working behind it? We find that the universe is like a superbly written fascinating novel—can it be without an Author? Truly, Allah said:

O, Mankind: worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may ward off evil. Who has appointed the earth a resting place for you, the sky a canopy? and who causes water to pour down from the heavens, thereby producing fruit as food for you? So,

do not set up rivals to Allah, when you know better.' (al-Qur'an, 2:2122).

This is the basic tenet to which Muhammad (peace be upon him) asked humanity to adhere.

It is an important metaphysical reality and answers the riddles of the universe. It points to the supremacy of the law in the cosmos, the all pervading unity behind the manifest diversity.

It presents a unified view of the world and offers the vision of an integrated universe. It is a mighty contrast to the piecemeal views of scientists and the philosophers and unveils the truth before the human eye. After centuries of groping in the dark, man is now coming to realize the truth of this concept and modern scientific thought is moving in this direction.³

But it is not merely a metaphysical concept. It is a dynamic belief and a revolutionary doctrine. It means that all men are the creatures of one God—they are all equal. Discrimination based on color, class, race or territory is unfounded and illusory; it is a remnant of the days of ignorance which chained men down to servitude. Humanity is one single family of God and there can be sanction for those barriers. Men are one—and not bourgeois or proletarian, white or black, Aryan or non-Aryan, Westerner or Easterner. Islam gives a revolutionary concept of the unity of mankind. The Prophet came to unite humanity on the word of God and to give it a new life. Allah says:

'Hold tight to the rope of God, altogether and never let go again.

Remember God's gifts and blessings unto you all, when you were enemies; remember how He forged your hearts together in love, and by His grace, you became brethren.' (al-Qur'an, 3:103).

This also defines the true position of man in the universe. It says that God is the Creator, the Sovereign; and that man is His vicegerent on the earth.⁴ It exalts man to the noble and dignified position of being God's deputy on earth and endows his life with a lofty purpose; to fulfil the Will of God on earth. This solves all the perplexing problems of human society and establish a new order wherein equity and justice and peace and prosperity will reign supreme.

The starting point of Islam is this belief in the Unity of God (*Tawhid*).

PROPHETHOOD AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

The second part of the *Shahadah*, on the other hand, signifies that God has not left man without any guidance for the conduct of his life. He has revealed His Guidance through His Messengers, and Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the last Messenger. And to believe in a messenger means

3. See Francis Mason (Ed.) *The Great Design*, London: Duckworth.

4. al-Qur'an, 2:30-39.

to believe in his message, to accept the Law which he gave and to follow the Code of Conduct which he taught.

Thus the second basic postulate of Islam is to believe in the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him), to accept the religion which he presented and to follow his commands.

Every prophet of God, according to the Qur'an, strove to build man's relationship with God on the principle of God's sovereignty and the acknowledgement of the authority of the prophet as the source of divine guidance. Every one of them said: 'I am to you God's apostle, worthy of all trust. So be committed to God, fear Him, and obey me.'⁵

The Guidance is revealed through the prophets. It is a part of their mission to translate that into practice, in their own lives and in the society they try to reform. All the prophets are representatives of God, but they are human beings and their lives are models for mankind. Muhammad (peace be upon him) is the last prophet and as such the final model for mankind. To believe in him means to accept his authority as representative of the Supreme Ruler and to follow his example in thought and behavior. The code of behavior, the law which is to decide what is permissible or otherwise (*halal* and *haram*) of things, is given by God through the prophet and is known as the *Shari'ah*. Belief in the prophet involves acceptance of the *Shari'ah*, the Path, he has conveyed and to implement that in all walks of life. This is how the Will of God is fulfilled on the earth.⁶ The Qur'an says:

'Every Messenger who was sent by Us was sent for the purpose that he should be obeyed under the sanction of Allah.' (al-Qur'an, 4:69).

And about the last prophet it explicitly states that:

'Nay, O Muhammad: by your Lord, they will not be believers until they accept you as the final arbiter in all their disputes and submit to your decision whole-heartedly without any heartache.' (al-Qur'an, 4:65).

The test of acceptance of God and His prophet lies in conducting all human affairs in accord with the Law conveyed by them.

'And those who do not make their decisions in accordance with that revealed by Allah, they (in fact) are the disbelievers.' (al-Qur'an, 5:44).

Thus, belief in God and His prophet means commitment to obey them and to fashion individual and collective life in the light of the Law and Guidance provided by them.

5. al-Qur'an, 26:107-108; 110; 125-126; 131; 143-144; 150; 162-163; 178-179.

6. Jesus, like other prophets, presented the same message. This is what he aims at when he says: 'Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.' *New Testament*, St. Matthew, 6:10.

This automatically raises the question: Would those who follow the law and those who refuse to accept it or abide by it be at the same level of existence? Are they going to be treated in the same way or differently? What would be the consequences of differing attitudes and behaviors?

This brings us to the third postulate of Islam: belief in the hereafter.

The world, according to Islam, is a place of trial and man is being judged in it. He will have to give account of all that he does herein. Life on the earth will, one day, come to an end, and after that a new world will be resurrected. It will be in this Life-after-death that man will be rewarded or punished for his deeds and misdeeds. Those who live in the present world a life of obedience to the Lord will enjoy eternal bliss in the hereafter and those who disobey His commands will have to garner the bitter fruits of their disobedience. According to the Qur'an:

'And every man's deeds have We fastened around his neck, and on the day of Resurrection will We bring forth a book which shall be proffered to him wide open: "Read your record: This day there need be none but yourself to make out an account against you." (al-Qur'an, 17:13-14).

'Whosoever will come with a good deed, for him there shall be the like of it tenfold, while whosoever will come with an ill-deed, he shall be requited with only one like it, and they shall not be treated unjustly.' (al-Qur'an, 6:160).

The basic articles of faith in Islam include, besides *tawhid* (Oneness and uniqueness of Allah), *nubuwah* (prophethood), *al-Akhirah* (the life hereafter), a belief in existence of angels, earlier revealed scriptures, and in good and bad fate from Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala. The shahadah (declaration of faith) "There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is His Messenger," implies a conscious and willing acceptance of these essentials of faith.

Some Basic Characteristics of Islamic Ideology

Islam has a message for every human being. Its penetrating truth, overt simplicity, and relevance to every age makes it a unique way of life for man. Perhaps this is why a contemporary critic predicted: "I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable to Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be accepted to the Europe of today."⁷

The question is what are those characteristics of Islam which have won millions of followers to the faith in the past and which make it so appealing to the modern age? Some of the major characteristics of Islam are given in the following pages.

7. G.B. Shaw, quoted in *The Genuine Islam*, Singapore, Vol. I. No. 8, 1936.

1. Simplicity, Rationalism and Practicalism

Islam is a religion without any mythology. Its teachings are simple and intelligible. It is free from superstitions and irrational beliefs. The unity of God, the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the concept of life-after-death are the basic articles of its faith. They are based on reason and sound logic. All the teachings of Islam follow from those basic beliefs and are simple and straightforward. There is no hierarchy of priests, no far-fetched abstractions, no complicated rites and rituals. Everybody may approach the Book of God directly and translate its dictates into practice.

Islam awakens in man the faculty of reason and exhorts him to use his intellect. It enjoins him to see things in the light of reality. The Qur'an advises man to pray: 'O, my Lord! Advance me in knowledge' (20:114). It asserts that those who have no knowledge are not equal to those who have (39:9); that those who do not observe and understand are worse than cattle (7:179); that the meanings of revelation become manifest to those 'who have knowledge' (6:97) and 'who have understanding' (6:98); that 'whosoever has been given knowledge indeed has been given an abundant good' (2:269); that basic qualifications for leadership are, among other things, knowledge and physical strength (2:247) and that of all things it is by virtue of knowledge that man is superior to angels and has been made vicegerent of God on earth (2:30). The Prophet of Islam said:

'He who leaves his home in search of knowledge walks in the path of God.'

'To seek knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim.'

'Acquire knowledge, because he who acquires it in the way of the Lord performs an act of piety; he who disseminates it bestows alms and he who imparts it to others performs an act of devotion to Allah.'

This is how Islam brings man out of the world of superstition and darkness and initiates him into that of knowledge and light.

Then, Islam is a practical religion and does not indulge in empty and futile theorising. It says that faith is not a mere profession of beliefs; it is the very mainspring of life. Righteous conduct must follow belief in Allah. Religion is something to be lived, and not an object of mere lipservice. The Qur'an says:

'Those who believe and act righteously, joy is for them, and a blissful home to return to.' (al Qur'an, 13:29).

And the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:

'God does not accept belief, if it is not expressed in deeds, and does not accept deeds, if they do not conform to belief.'

Thus, Islam is a simple, rational and practical religion.

2. Unity of Matter and Spirit

A unique feature of Islam is that it does not divide life into water-tight compartments of matter and spirit. It stands not for life-denial, but for life-fulfilment. Islam does not believe in asceticism. It does not ask man to avoid things material. It holds that spiritual elevation is to be achieved by living piously in the rough and tumble of life and not by renouncing the world. The Qur'an advises us to pray as follows:

'Our Lord! Give us the good in this world and the good in the hereafter.'
(al-Qur'an, 2:201).

Allah strongly censures those who refuse to benefit from His blessings. The Qur'an says:

'Say (to them): By whose order have you denied yourself those amenities which God has created for His people and those good things to eat and use (which He has made for you)? (al-Qur'an, 7:32).

Islam's injunction is: 'Eat and drink,* but do not exceed (the limits of moderation and decency)' (al-Qur'an, 7:31).

The Holy Prophet said:

'A Muslim who lives in the midst of society and bears with patience the afflictions that come to him is better than the one who shuns society and cannot bear any wrong done to him.'

He said:

'Keep fast and break it (at the proper time) and stand in prayer and devotion (in the night) and have sleep—for your body has its rights over you, and your eyes have rights over you, and your wife has a claim upon you, and the person who pays a visit to you has a claim upon you.'

On another occasion he said:

'These three things also are enjoyed upon the faithful:

- (a) to help others, even when one is economically hard-pressed;
- (b) to pray ardently for the peace of all mankind; and
- (c) to administer justice to one's own self.'

Thus Islam does not admit any separation between 'material' and 'moral', 'mundane' and 'spiritual' life and enjoins man to devote all his energies to the reconstruction of life on healthy moral foundations. It teaches him that moral and material powers must be welded together and spiritual salvation can be achieved by using material resources for the good of man in the service of just ends, and not by living a life of asceticism or by running away from the challenges of life.

The world has suffered at the hands of the 'brilliant' one-sidedness of many a religion and ideology. Some have laid emphasis on the spiritual side of life but have ignored its material and mundane aspects. They have looked upon the world as an illusion, a deception and a trap.

*The word drink refers to non-alcoholic beverages only.

On the other hand materialistic ideologies have totally ignored the spiritual and moral side of life and have dismissed it as fictitious and imaginary. Both these attitudes have spelt disaster. They have robbed mankind of peace, contentment and tranquility. Even today the imbalance is manifest in one or the other direction. Dr. De Brogbi, a French scientist, rightly says:

‘The danger inherent in too intense a material civilization is to that civilization itself; it is the disequilibrium which would result if a parallel development of the spiritual life were to fail to provide the needed balance.’

Christianity erred on one extreme; the Modern Western Civilization, in both of its variants of secular capitalistic democracy and Marxist socialism, has erred on the other. According to Lord Snell:

‘We have built a nobly proportioned outer structure, but we have neglected the essential requirement of an inner order; we have carefully designed, decorated and made clean the outside of the cup; but the inside was full of extortion and excess; we used our increased knowledge and power to administer to the comforts of the body, but we left the spirit impoverished.’⁸

Islam aims at establishing an equilibrium between these two aspects of life—the material and the spiritual. It says that everything in the world is for man—but man himself is for the service of a higher purpose: the establishment of a moral and just order so as to fulfil the Will of God. Its teachings cater for the spiritual as well as the temporal needs of man. Islam enjoins man to purify his soul and also to reform his daily life—both individual and collective—and to establish the supremacy of right over might and of virtue over vice. Thus Islam stands for the middle path and the goal of producing a moral man in the service of a just society.

3. A Complete Way of Life

Islam is not a religion in the common, distorted meaning of the word, confining its scope to the private life of man. It is a complete way of life, catering for all the fields of human existence. Islam provides guidance for all walks of life—individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international. The Qur’an enjoins man to enter the fold of Islam without any reservation and to follow God’s guidance in all fields of life⁹ al-Quran, 2:208.

In fact it was an unfortunate day when the scope of religion was confined to the private life of man and its social and cultural role was reduced to naught. No other factor has, perhaps, been more important in causing the decline of religion in the modern age than its retreat into the realm of the private life. In the words of a modern philosopher:

8. Lord Snell, *The New World*, London, Watts & Co. 1947, p. 11.

'Religion asks us to separate things of God from those of Caesar. Such a judicial separation between the two means the degrading of both the secular and the sacred...That religion is worth little, if the conscience of its followers is not disturbed when war clouds are hanging over us all and industrial conflicts are threatening social peace. Religion has weakened man's social conscience and moral sensitivity by separating the things of God from those of Caesar.'

Islam totally denounces this concept of religion and clearly states that its objectives are purification of the soul and reconstruction of society. Says the Qur'an:

'We verily sent Our messengers with clear proofs and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance (i.e. the authority to establish justice), that mankind may observe justice and the right measure; and He revealed iron (i.e. coercive power) wherein is mighty power and many uses for mankind and that Allah may see who helps Him and His Messenger though unseen.' (al-Qur'an, 57:25).

'The command is for none but Allah; He has commanded that you obey none but Him; that is the right path.' (al-Qur'an, 12:40).

'(Muslims are) those who if We give them power in the land, establish (the system of) *Salat* (prayers and worship) and *Zakat* (poor due) and enjoin virtue and forbid vice and evil.' (al-Qur'an, 22:41).

The Holy Prophet said:

'Everyone of you is a keeper or a shepherd and will be questioned about the well-being of his fold. So, the Head of the State will be questioned about the well-being of the people of the State. Every man is a shepherd to his family and will be answerable about every member of it. Every woman is a shepherd to the family of her husband and will be accountable for every member of it. And every servant is a shepherd to his master and will be questioned about the property of his master.'

Thus even a cursory study of the teachings of Islam shows that it is an all-embracing way of life and does not leave out any field of human existence to become a playground for satanic forces.¹⁰

4. Balance between the Individual and Society

Another unique feature of Islam is that it establishes a balance between individualism and collectivism. It believes in the individual personality

10. For a more thorough study of different aspects of the Islamic way of life see: Mawdudi, Abul A'la, *Islamic Law and Constitution* (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1960); Mawdudi, *Islamic Way of Life*, Lahore, 1967; Khurshid Ahmad (editor), *Studies in the Family Law of Islam*, Karachi, 1960; Khurshid Ahmad, *Family Life in Islam*, Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1974; Siddiqui, M. N., *Some Aspects of the Islamic Economy*, Lahore, 1970; Chapra, M. U., *Economic System of Islam*, Karachi: University of Karachi, 1971.

of man and holds everyone personally accountable to God. It guarantees the fundamental rights of the individual and does not permit any one to tamper with them. It makes the proper development of the personality of man one of the prime objectives of its educational policy. It does not subscribe to the view that man must lose his individuality in society or in the state.

According to the Qur'an:

'Man shall have nothing but what he strives for.' (al-Qur'an, 53:39).

'And whatever suffering ye suffer, it is what your hands have wrought.' (al-Qur'an, 42:30).

'God does not change the condition of a people unless they first change that which is in their hearts.' (al-Qur'an, 13:11).

'For each is that which he has earned and against each is only that which he has deserved.' (al-Qur'an, 2:286).

'For us are our deeds and for you are yours.' (al-Qur'an, 28:55).

On the other hand, it also awakens a sense of social responsibility in man, organizes human beings in a society and a state and enjoins the individual to subscribe to the social good. Prayer, in Islam, is offered in congregation which inculcates social discipline among the Muslims. Every one is enjoined to pay *Zakat* and it has been laid down in the Qur'an that: 'The alm-seeker and the destitute have their due rights in their wealth.' (al-Qur'an, 51:19).

Jihad has been made obligatory, which means that the individual should, when the occasion arises, offer even his life for the defense and protection of Islam and the Islamic state. The Holy Prophet said:

'All mankind is a fold every member of which shall be a keeper or shepherd unto every other, and be accountable for the entire fold.'

'Live together, do not turn against each other, make things easy for others and do not put obstacles in each other's way.'

'He is not a believer who takes his fill while his neighbor starves.'

'The believer in God is he who is not a danger to the life and property of any other.'

In short, Islam neither neglects the individual nor society—it establishes a harmony and a balance between the two and assigns to each its proper due.¹¹

5. Universality and Humanism

The message of Islam is for the entire human race. God, in Islam, is the God of all the world (al-Qur'an, 1:1) and the Prophet is a Messenger for the whole of mankind. In the words of the Qur'an:

'O people! I am the Messenger of God to you all.' (al-Qur'an, 7:158).

'One who comes as a warning to all the nations.' (al-Qur'an, 25:1)

11. It might be worthwhile to recall here what the late Professor H. A. R. Gibb said some time ago: (*continued on bottom of page 12*)

and 'We have not sent thee but as a (source of) mercy for all the nations.' (al-Qur'an, 21:107).

In Islam all men are equal, whatever be their color, language, race or nationality. Islam addresses itself to the conscience of humanity and banishes all false barriers of race, status and wealth. There can be no denying the fact that such barriers have always existed, and do exist even today in this so-called enlightened age. Islam removes all these impediments and proclaims the idea of the whole of humanity being one family of God.

The Holy Prophet said:

'All creatures of God form the family of God and he is the best loved of God who loveth best His creatures.'

'O Lord! Lord of my life and of everything in the universe! I affirm that all human beings are brothers to one another.'

'Respect God and be affectionate to the family of God.'

6. Islam's Anti-Racism

Islam is international in its outlook and approach and does not admit barriers and distinctions based on color, clan, blood or territory such as were prevalent before the advent of Muhammad (peace be upon him) and which are rampant in different forms even in this modern age. It wants to unite the entire human race under one banner. To a world torn by

¹¹ 'Within the Western world Islam still maintains the balance between exaggerated opposites. Opposed equally to the anarchy of European nationalism and the regimentation of Russian communism, it has not yet succumbed to that obsession with the economic side of life which is characteristic of present-day Europe and present-day Russia alike. Its social ethic has been admirably summed up by Professor Massignon: "Islam has the merit of standing for a very equalitarian conception of the contribution of each citizen by the tithe to the resources of the community; it is hostile to unrestricted exchange, to banking capital, to state loans, to indirect taxes on objects of prime necessity, but it holds to the rights of the father and the husband, to private property, and to commercial capital. Here again it occupies an intermediate position between the doctrines of bourgeois capitalism and Bolshevik communism."

But Islam has a still further service to render to the cause of humanity. It stands after all nearer to the real East than Europe does, and it possesses a magnificent tradition of inter-racial understanding and co-operation. No other society has such a record of success in uniting in an equality of status, of opportunity, and of endeavour so many and so various races of mankind...Islam has still the power to reconcile apparently irreconcilable elements of race and tradition. If ever the opposition of the great societies of East and West is to be replaced by co-operation, the mediation of Islam is an indispensable condition. In its hands lies very largely the solution of the problem with which Europe is faced in its relation with the East. If they unite, the hope of a peaceful issue is immeasurably enhanced. But if Europe, by rejecting the co-operation of Islam, throws it into the arms of its rivals, the issue can only be disastrous for both." H. A. R. Gibb, *Whither Islam*, London, 1932, p. 379.

national rivalries and feuds, it presents a message of life and hope and of a glorious future.

Historian Toynbee has some interesting observations to make in this respect. In *Civilization on Trial* he writes:

“Two conspicuous sources of danger—one psychological and the other material—in the present relations of this cosmopolitan proletariat (i.e. westernised humanity) with the dominant element in our modern Western society are race consciousness and alcohol; and in the struggle with each of these evils the Islamic spirit has a service to render which might prove, if it were accepted, to be of high moral and social value.

“The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one of the outstanding moral achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue...It is conceivable that the spirit of Islam might be the timely reinforcement which would decide this issue in favour of tolerance and peace.

“As for the evil of alcohol, it is at its worst among primitive populations in tropical regions which have been “opened up” by Western enterprise...the fact remains that even the most statesman like preventive measures imposed by external authority are incapable of liberating a community from a social vice unless a desire for liberation and a will to carry this desire into voluntary action on its own part are awakened in the hearts of the people concerned. Now Western administrators, at any rate those of “Anglo-Saxon” origin, are spiritually isolated from their “native” wards by the physical “colour bar” which their race consciousness sets up; the conversion of the natives’ souls is a task to which their competence can hardly be expected to extend; and it is at this point that Islam may have a part to play.

“In these recently and rapidly “opened up” tropical territories, the Western civilization has produced an economic and political plenum and, in the same breath, a social and spiritual void...

“Here, then in the foreground of the future, we can remark two valuable influences which Islam may exert upon the cosmopolitan proletariat of a Western society that has cast its net around the world and embraced the whole of mankind; while in the more distant future we may speculate on the possible contributions of Islam to some new manifestation of religion..¹²

7. Permanence and Change

The elements of permanence and change co-exist in human society and culture and are bound to remain so. Different ideologies and cultural systems have erred in leaning heavily towards any one of these ends of the

12. Arnold J. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, London, 1957, pp. 205-299 (See also pp. 87-88).

equation. Too much emphasis on permanence makes the system rigid and robs it of flexibility and progress; while lack of permanent values and unchanging elements generate moral relativism, shapelessness and anarchy. What is needed is a balance between the two—a system that could simultaneously cater for the demands of permanence and change. An American judge Mr. Justice Cardozo rightly says: ‘that the greatest need of our time is philosophy that will mediate between conflicting claims of stability and progress and supply a principle of growth.’¹³ Islam represents an ideology which satisfies the demands of stability as well as of change.

Deeper reflection reveals that life has within it elements of permanence and change—neither is it so rigid and inflexible that it cannot admit of any change even in matters of detail nor is it so flexible and fluid that even its distinctive traits have no permanent character of their own. This becomes clear from observing the process of physiological change in the human body: every tissue of the body changes a number of times in one’s life-time, but the person remains the same. Leaves, flowers, and fruit of a tree change, but the character of the tree remains unchanged. It is a law of life that elements of permanence and change must co-exist in a harmonious equation. Only that system of life can cater for all the cravings of human nature and all the needs of society which can provide for both these elements. The basic problems of life remain the same in all ages and climes, but the ways and means to solve them and the techniques of handling the phenomenon undergo change with the passage of time. Islam brings to focus a new perspective on this problem and tries to solve it in a realistic way.

The Qur’an and the *Sunnah* contain the eternal guidance given by the Lord of the universe. This guidance comes from God Who is free from the limitations of ‘space’ and ‘time’ and as such the principles of individual and social behaviour revealed by Him are based on reality and are eternal. But God has revealed only broad principles and has endowed man with the freedom to apply them in every age in the way suited to the spirit and conditions of that age. It is through the *Ijtihad* that people of every age try to implement and apply divine guidance to the problems of their times. Thus the basic guidance is of a permanent nature, while the method of its application can change in accordance with the peculiar needs of every age. That is why Islam always remains as fresh and modern as tomorrow’s morn.

8. Complete Record of Teachings Preserved

Last, but not least, is the fact that the teachings of Islam have been preserved in their original form and God’s Guidance is available without adulteration of any kind. The Qur’an is the revealed book of God which has been in existence for the last fourteen hundred years and the Word of

13. Justice Cardozo, 37, *Harvard Law Review*, p. 279.

God is available in its original form. Detailed accounts of the life of the Prophet of Islam and his teachings are available in their pristine purity. There has not been an iota of change in this unique historic record. The sayings and the entire record of the life of the Holy Prophet have been handed down to us with unprecedented precision and authenticity in works of the *Hadith* and the *Sirah*. Even a number of non-Muslim critics admit this eloquent fact. Professor Reynold A. Nicholson in his *Literary History of the Arabs* says:

‘The Koran is an exceedingly human document, reflecting every phase of Muhammad’s relationship to the outward events of his life; so that there we have materials of unique and incontestable authority for tracing the origin and early development of Islam such materials as do not exist in the case of Buddhism or Christianity or any other ancient religion.’¹⁴

These are some of the unique features of Islam that establish its credentials as the religion of man—the religion of today and the religion of tomorrow. These aspects have appealed to hundreds of thousands of people in the past and the present and have made them affirm that Islam is the religion of truth and the right path for mankind; and this will continue to appeal to them in the future. Men with pure hearts and sincere longing for truth will always continue to say:

‘I affirm that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, that He is One, sharing His authority with no one; and I affirm that Muhammad is His servant and His Prophet.’

14. Nicholson, R. A., *Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge, p. 143.