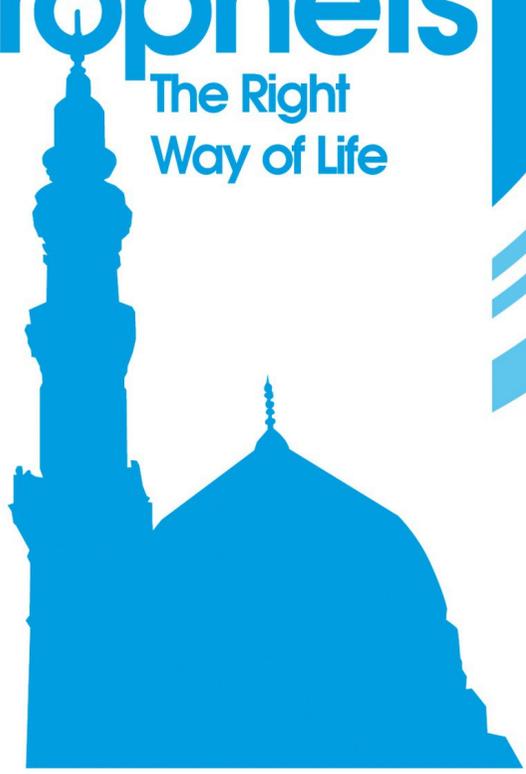




# The Religion of the Prophets

The Right Way of Life



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## The Religion of The Prophets

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### The Right Way of Life

#### Introduction

In this world of matter, an individual is totally lost in the complexities of life. He does not know what he is, where he is and where he is going. He is like a man who has lost his way in the great sandy desert. All directions look the same to him and seem to lead nowhere. After spending hours and even days of journeying in one direction, he finally finds himself at the same point from where he started his journey. All the dunes and ridges around look alike.

Likewise is the journey of this life for the ordinary man, who feels so small and insignificant in this limitless Cosmos. In the past, man *has* tried many ways to solve this puzzle *of life*, but every solution has led him further away from his destiny. And in all these vain efforts he has been drifting further away from his Creator. Some have believed that man's destiny is determined by time. He lives this life in the world and then dies.<sup>1</sup> They say that there is nothing but our life on the earth, and that we shall never be raised again.<sup>2</sup> But it seems that they are deceived by the charm and glitter and fascination of this worldly life with its goods and temptations.<sup>3</sup> They are so absorbed in the superficial and outward temptations and pleasures of life that they are completely heedless of the inner realities.<sup>4</sup>

The fact is that they have no true knowledge about life and are

merely guessing and conjecturing.<sup>5</sup> But obviously, mere conjecture and guess-work cannot be compared with real knowledge. To give an analogy, if one buys any mechanical unit, say a car or a vacuum cleaner, or any other thing of this nature, one is given a manual in which the manufacturer clearly explains in detail how to operate it, maintain it and look after it. If one tries to operate it without consulting the manufacturer's manual, one will not only fail to operate it properly as it has been designed to be operated, but will perhaps do it irreparable damage. When the unit purchased is delicate and complicated such as a computer, it may be totally ruined by being mishandled by an ignorant person who does not know the technical language used in the manual issued by its manufacturers.

Now man himself is more complicated and delicate than any computer or anything else that he has himself made. God is the Maker of man and He has issued instructions which show man how to live on earth in peace and happiness. The right course is therefore for man to study this Guidance regarding himself from his Creator and try to follow it. God has not only created man but has made these arrangements for his guidance so that he may not become lost among the multitude of man-made ways and philosophies that have sprung up around him over the ages.

## **God is the Creator of Everything**

The whole universe and all that is in it has been created by God and is controlled and managed by Him.<sup>6</sup> It is He Whose Law prevails in the heavens and on earth and in all other parts of the universe<sup>7</sup> and there is nothing that is hidden from Him.<sup>8</sup>

## **Everything is Created for Just Ends**

God did not venture into the creation of this wonderful world for sport<sup>9</sup> or for nothing,<sup>10</sup> but for truth and just ends. The Quran stresses this point in these words: "We created not the heavens, the earth, and all between them, merely in idle sport. We created them not but for just ends. But most of them do not understand."<sup>11</sup> And again, in these words: "We created not the heavens and the earth and all between them but in accordance with the Truth, and for a term set by Us. And yet, they who are bent on denying the Truth turn away from the warning which has been conveyed to them."<sup>12</sup>

These verses of the Quran emphasise that there is nothing on this earth or in the heavens which has been created, without purpose. It does not behove the All-Wise and All-Knowing God to create all this for nothing, or just for fun and sport. He is far from such petty human ideas. If He had had the intention to indulge in a mere pastime, as some human beings fancy, He would have done it with those who lived close to Him in the heavens.<sup>13</sup> In fact, God created this universe and all that is in it to fulfil a definite purpose in accordance with His Wisdom. Everything in the universe is meaningful and has a definite and precise aim and object. Even the tiniest and lowest thing created by Him serves a meaningful purpose in His Creation."<sup>14</sup>

How could man's creation be purposeless and meaningless! Man who is the best Creation of God,<sup>15</sup> who was created in the best and finest of moulds,<sup>16</sup> who was created by God with His Own Hands,<sup>17</sup> who was equipped by God with all the qualities and abilities needed for his life on the earth.<sup>18</sup> God endowed him with the appropriate and suitable intellectual and spiritual understanding required for his changing environment on the earth.<sup>18</sup>

God not only gave him the best of forms<sup>19</sup> but also made all the creation of this world, including the sun, the moon, the stars and other creation in the heavens and the earth, subject to his

command, so that he could use them for his benefit as he pleased.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to endowing man with all these personal qualities and abilities and granting him all the necessary physical resources, and equipping him with the necessary intellectual abilities and capacities, God also gave him Right Guidance through His Messengers, who showed him, by their own life-example, the Right Way of life.<sup>21</sup> The Messengers of God endeavoured all their lives to give good advice to man. But only the God-fearing listened to them and the majority of them rejected it.<sup>22</sup> The Quran mentions this in these words: "We showed him the Way: Whether he is grateful or ungrateful rests entirely on his own will."<sup>23</sup>

The Messengers' duty was only to convey the Message of God very plainly to man and it was left to him entirely whether he accepted or rejected it (for his own benefit or loss).<sup>24</sup>

But, unfortunately, man has a very limited vision, he sees only what is visible in the life of this world and is heedless of his final end.<sup>25</sup> He regards himself as independent and acts and lives as if he is the master of everything on the earth.<sup>26</sup> He then transgresses all limits of decency, fairness and equity and forgets that at the end of his life, he will return to his Lord to answer for all his excesses.<sup>27</sup>

The Quran explains the whole purpose of man's creation in these words: "To Him will be your return--of all of you. The Promise of God is true. It is He Who begins the process of creation, and repeats it, that he may reward with justice those who believe (in Him) and work righteousness. But those who reject Him will have draughts of boiling fluids, and a Penalty grievous, because they did reject Him (and spread aggression and wickedness on earth)."<sup>28</sup>

It warns those who live in the world of fantasy and regard all life as a play or a joke and reject all ideas of the Hereafter: "Did you then think that We had created you in jest, and that you would not be

brought back to Us (for account)?”<sup>29</sup>

All this clearly shows that God did create this universe and all that is in it, including man, for a definite purpose. Man, who is such a wonderful creation of God, cannot be meant for nothing. He cannot have been created merely for or as a pastime. This miniature creator is undoubtedly meant for a higher purpose--a nobler Mission in a much higher level and place in an entirely new spiritual cosmic existence--an existence where the present limited awareness of time and space will give way to new horizons and where an earthly time-scale of fifty thousand years will seem equal to one day (or even less).<sup>30</sup>

## **Wider Vision of Man's Life: The Home of Peace**

With this new and wider vision of what man's life can be in his cosmic existence, we will seek to find out what kind of conduct and works in this life will help a man to reach the level and standard of human excellence which will qualify him for that higher existence.

The Quran calls this higher existence "The Home of Peace" (*Dar as-Salam*). Allah invites all people to make an effort to reach the Home of Peace by following the Right and Straight Way towards which His Messengers tried to guide them: "But God calls (all people) to the Home of Peace. He guides whom He pleases to a Way that is Straight and Right--for those who do excellent works there is an excellent reward, even more (than they merit)! Neither gloom nor disgrace shall cover their faces. They are the Companions of the Garden; they will abide therein (for ever)!"

"But those who have earned evil will have their recompense according to the evil they earned: disgrace will cover them: there will be none to protect them from the Wrath of God: their faces will be covered with such darkness as if the black veils of night had fallen over them: they are Companions of Hell-Fire, wherein they

will abide forever."<sup>31</sup>

The Quran clearly states that the Way of submission to the Will of God (i.e., Islam) is the Right and Straight Way of Peace, which was shown by the Messengers of God in word and deed: "This is the Way of your Lord, leading straight. We have explained it in detail (through Our Messengers and in Our Books) for those who care to receive admonition. For them will be a Home of Peace in the Presence of their Lord. He will be their Friend, because they worked (works of righteousness on earth)"<sup>32</sup>

## **The Mission of the Prophets**

God sent His Prophets to all lands and to all nations in order to guide them to the Right Way of Life. The Quran stresses God's Universal Policy in these words:

"For We assuredly sent amongst every nation a Messenger (for their Guidance to the Right Way. He advised people) to obey and serve God only, and keep away from evil and wickedness. And among those past nations were people who availed themselves of the Guidance and some who inevitably fell prey to grievous error. So travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth)."<sup>33</sup>

This has been the normal practice concerning Divine Guidance. The Prophets convey God's Message and clearly explain the Right Way of their Lord to them. Then it is left to the people whether to accept their call and obey them and lead righteous and just lives in accordance with their teachings. They are equally free to reject their call and follow their own evil ways to their own loss. There is no coercion in matters of God's Guidance.<sup>34</sup>

The Quran refers to this Divine Practice in these words: "No Messenger did We send before, you (O Muhammad) without this

Revelation sent by Us to him: that there is no god but I; therefore obey and serve Me only."<sup>35</sup>

God sent the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad (*sallallahu alayhi wasallam* - peace be upon him) for the same purpose, so that he could inform people about the Right Way of Life:" Indeed, the Quran guides to that Way which is most right. To those who believe in it and work deeds of righteousness, it gives the Good News that there is a great reward for them, and to those who (reject it and) do not believe in the Hereafter, it gives the warning that a painful Penalty has been prepared for them."<sup>36</sup>

The Prophet Muhammad was Commanded to follow the Right Way in these words: "So, O Prophet, set your face firmly to the Right Way (*al-Din*), before there come from God the Day which there is no chance of averting. On that Day, all People will be divided (into two groups). Those who have denied the Truth will have to bear the burden of their denial (and wicked actions), whereas all who did what is Right and Just will have made goodly provision for themselves. All this that He may reward those who believe and do righteous works, out of His Bounty. For He loves not those who reject Faith."<sup>37</sup>

This Command is repeated in these words: "Set your face (O Prophet) sincerely and truly towards this Faith, turning away from all others, in accordance with the natural disposition which God has instilled into man. And let there be no change to corrupt what God has thus created. This is the Right and True Way of Life (*al-Din*); but most people know it not."<sup>38</sup>

This verse of the Quran explicitly Commands the Prophet and the believers to follow the Right Way of Life, which has been revealed to them by their Lord; and to turn away from all other, false and wrong, ways. This verse is very meaningful and comprehensive. We will therefore make an effort to explain all the points referred to in this verse:

(1) Its opening words *fa 'aqim wajhaka* (set your face) seem to

imply that when one has realised that none but Allah is the Creator, Lord and Sovereign of this world, then one should conform one's actions to one's knowledge.

(2) The natural consequences of this should be visible in one's actions and dealings with other people. One's whole thinking and attitude to life should be based on total submission to the Will and Way of God. All one's values, norms and affairs must be regulated according to the Right Way shown by the Prophet of God.

(3) This Way has been shown to us by God through His Messenger. It stresses that none is worthy of service and obedience but God. It is only God Who has the Sole and Exclusive Right to obedience. It is His Way that one must follow. It is His Law that one must obey. And it is His Will to which one must sincerely and exclusively submit, turning away from all other ways, laws and desires.

(4) Islam is a religion of Nature. It does not demand anything from man which is against his natural instincts. All its instructions and regulations are fully in line with the needs and demands of his nature. They are neither contrary to his nature, nor harmful to him and his interests. It must, however, be stressed that 'Nature' here refers to the Natural Disposition of man, unspoilt by corrupt and false teaching or an unhealthy environment. A pure and unspoilt mind will readily and willingly accept the beliefs of Islam. It will feel at home in surroundings where everything surrenders to the Will of God and obeys His Law, while. it would feel uneasy and unhappy in a corrupt, wicked and unjust society.

In simple words, we can say that man, as created by God, is innocent, pure and free. He is inclined to do what is right and good. And he abhors and is repelled by evil, obscenity and injustice. He is endowed with an understanding of his own status and position in the universe in relation to God and in relation to his fellow-beings. That is the true nature of man. This means that the nature of all human beings is such that none but One God is their Creator, Lord and Master. So 'if they obey and serve others besides God, then they will be working against their own nature.

The Prophet Muhammad explained the real meaning of this in these words: "Every child is born with true human nature; it is his parents who make him a Jew, a Christian or a Hindu, etc., afterwards."<sup>39</sup>

Once, in a battle, the Muslims killed some children of the enemy who had come between the fighting soldiers. When the Prophet heard this, he was very angry. He said, "What has happened to the people that they have transgressed the limits and killed even the children?" Someone said, "They were the children of the unbelievers." The Prophet said, "Even the best of your people are not better than the children of the non-believers."<sup>40</sup>

This shows that it is in the nature of man to be obedient to God and to submit to His Will. And this is what Islam means. The Arabic word Islam means "submission to the Will of God." Islam also means "peace". Thus, whoever submits to God and obeys His Law and Command is guaranteed peace. The physical world obeys the Law of Nature (Law of God) and it enjoys perfect peace, stability and security. There is no conflict or friction in the physical world.<sup>41</sup>

Islam asks for nothing peculiar or sectarian; it but asks that man follow his nature and make his will conform to the Will of God, as seen in nature. The fact that all elements in the universe submit to the Law of God is stated in the Quran in various contexts.<sup>42</sup>

Thomas Carlyle stresses the same thing in these words: "Our whole strength lies in resigned submission to Him (God), Whatsoever He does to us. For this world, and for the other! The thing He sends to us, were it death and worse than death, shall be good, shall be best; we resign ourselves to God."<sup>43</sup>

(5) Thus this verse emphasizes that it is the nature of man to remain steadfast in the Right Way of God. Any attempt to corrupt or spoil the true nature of man, on which he has been created, is wrong and wicked.

## Islam is the Right Way (and Right Religion)

There is a clear and plain statement in the Quran that complete surrender and submission to the Will of God (in Islam) is the only Way of Life (and only Religion) which is acceptable to Him. There is no other Way of Life or Religion which is acceptable to Him: "The Religion (and Way of Life) before God is total surrender to the Will of God ---- But if they dispute with you (O Prophet), say, I have surrendered my whole self to God and so have those who follow me."<sup>44</sup>

This means "that in the Sight of Allah, there is only one true System and the Right Way of Life for Man. And it is this: Man should obey and serve Allah, acknowledge Him as his Master and surrender himself completely to Him in His obedience and service. He should not invent his own way of worship but should faithfully follow that Guidance alone which Allah has revealed through His Messengers, without adding to or taking away anything from it. This way of thinking and behaving in relation to other people is called Islam. And it is the absolute Right of the Creator and the Sovereign of the universe not to accept as lawful, (from His subjects, His Own Creation), any other way than Islam."<sup>45</sup>

The people who seek other ways and other systems of life than the Way of Islam are warned to be on their guard in these words: "Do they seek for other than the Way of submission to Allah (in Islam) -- (knowing well) that all things in the heavens and on earth, willingly or unwillingly, surrender to Allah, and to Him shall they all return."<sup>46</sup> All such people are bluntly told: "If anyone desires a religion (Way) other than surrender to God's Will (in Islam), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost everything."<sup>47</sup>

These verses of the Quran make it absolutely clear that

(a) since the Creation of this world, God's Way of Life has been Islam (i.e., surrender to the Will of God); (b) He gave the same Way

of Life to all His Messengers and Prophets; (c) The same Way is the Way of the entire universe, including the sun, the moon, the stars and all the other celestial elements. All are bound by His Laws and nothing can move even an inch from the course (Way) set for it.

Man is therefore advised, on the basis of his Nature and wisdom and for his own benefit, to obey and follow the universal pattern of life. When he conforms to the general pattern of life that pervades the whole of the universe, his systems of life will enjoy the peace, security and stability that prevail everywhere else.

This is the Colour of Allah and He wants all human beings to reflect it in their lives! This is the Way of God (*Din Allah*)! This is the Religion of Adam. This is the Religion to which the Prophet Nuh invited his people! This is the Religion which is called the Way of the Prophet Ibrahim,<sup>48</sup> or the Path trod by the Prophet Ibrahim.<sup>49</sup> This is the Religion of Nature and the Religion of the entire Universe,<sup>50</sup> and this is the Way and Religion to which the Prophets Musa<sup>51</sup> Essa<sup>52</sup> and Muhammad invited all mankind. (Points taken from Tadabbur-i-Quran, by Amin Ehsan Islahi).

## **The Religion of all the Prophets of God**

This discussion clearly shows that the Religion (i.e., Way of Life) of all the Prophets of God was the same. Since the creation of man, Divine Guidance has been sent to him through God's Messengers. They all delivered to him the same Message of God: "That your Lord is One God; therefore serve and obey Him; and surrender yourselves to Him in sincere and total devotion in Islam."<sup>53</sup>

This Guidance from God left no doubt that the Right Religion (i.e., the Right Way of Life) for man has always been the same with God. The Prophet Essa (Jesus) gave this point great emphasis when he said to his disciples: "It is God Who is my Lord and your Lord; So serve and obey Him alone. This is a Way that is Straight (and

Right).<sup>54</sup>

The same Truth of Divine Revelation was emphasised by the Prophet Yusuf to his mates in the prison of the King of Egypt: "O my two companions of the prison! (I ask you) are many lords differing among themselves better, or the One God, Who holds absolute control over all that exists? You worship instead of God nothing but empty names which you have invented you and your forefathers --- (and) for which God has sent down no authority. (The fact is that) all Command belongs to none but God: He has commanded that you serve and obey none but Him alone: That is the Right Religion (i.e., Right Way of Life), but most people understand it not."<sup>55</sup>

Finally the Prophet Muhammad, who was the last in the line of the Messengers of God sent for human guidance,<sup>56</sup> left no doubt that God was the Source and Fountain of Man's life and that obedience and service of God was the sole object of man's existence.<sup>57</sup>

(a) "This is a Book which We have revealed to you (O Muhammad), in order that you might lead mankind out of the depths of darkness into Light... to the Way of (Him), the Exalted in Power, worthy of All Praise!---- of God, to Whom belong all things in the heavens and on earth! But alas for those who deny Him: for a terrible Punishment (their Unfaith will bring them)!"<sup>58</sup>

"By the Quran, full of Wisdom,... you are indeed one of the Messengers, on a Straight (and Right) Way. It is a Revelation sent down by (Him, the Exalted in Might, Most Merciful; in order that you may admonish a people, whose fathers had received no admonition, and who therefore remain heedless (of the Signs of God)."<sup>59</sup>

(b) "Say (O Muhammad)! This is my Way: I invite (all of you) to God,... on evidence clear as the seeing with one's eyes,...I and whoever follows me. Glory to God! And never will I associate others with God."<sup>60</sup>

All these verses of the Quran revealed to the Prophet Muhammad

and, before him, the Revelations made to the earlier Prophets, including the Prophet Eesa, Musa and others, clearly establish the fact that God is the Lord and Sovereign of this universe, and that obedience to His Law and total and sincere surrender of one's self to His Will is the only course which is not only Right for man but beneficial to him and his interests, and also in conformity with his true Nature as well as with the Law of Nature that pervades the entire length, breadth and depth of the heavens and the earth.

Thus the Quran has invited mankind to the Right and Straight Way, the Way of those who receive God's Grace and Bliss,<sup>61</sup> who hold His Rope which saves them from shipwreck, who seek His Protection and are given protection, and who hold the key to His Presence and are welcome therein to His Nearness.<sup>62</sup>

## **The True Significance of Obeying God in Life.**

God is the Creator and Sovereign of this universe and all that is in it. And, as such, He is entitled to total submission and complete obedience from His Creation. It is His Right that all creation in this universe, including human beings, should pay allegiance to Him as their Lord and obey His Laws and Commands, which are, in fact, enacted and ordained for their own benefit and well-being.

It must be fully recognised that all Authority and Command belongs to God only and, therefore, the godhead of no other power than God is acceptable. In simple words, it means that there is only One Being (i.e., God) in the whole of the universe Who possesses all Authority and all Command and exercises it as He pleases. The Quran stresses this point in these words:

"And He is God: there is no god but He. To Him be praise, at the first and at the last. For Him is the Command, and to Him shall you all be brought back (for account)."<sup>63</sup>

"It is He Who is God in heaven and God on earth; and He is full of

Wisdom and Knowledge. And Blessed is He to Whom belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and all between them."<sup>64</sup>

These verses emphasise that the only True, Mighty and Powerful Sovereign in the universe is God.

## **The Right Religion (i.e., the Right Way of Life)**

God is the Creator, Sovereign, Ruler and Master of the entire universe. He is the Source of Peace, the Fountain of Light and the Bestower of security and stability on all the elements of the universe. All sources of success, richness and prosperity vest in Him and Him alone. A true and genuine seeker of Truth who wants richness and prosperity in life; who desires real and lasting peace and happiness; who craves for security and stability in his life-systems; and who hopes for Light in place of darkness... will naturally and willingly surrender his whole self to the Will of God in order to secure all these benefits and advantages, knowing very well that God alone can bestow these favours upon him.

This is thus a rational attitude for a genuine seeker of Truth to take. And when he sees that this is so, he accepts it with total confidence and complete satisfaction. Such a person is truly on the Right Way. He has found the Right Religion in Life, the Religion which has been repeatedly revealed to man, through the Messengers of God, since the creation of Adam, the First man.

This submission to God's Will requires and demands that one leaves all one's desires, values, aspirations and ideals of life, covering one's secular as well as spiritual life, to God and God alone. One must never insist on one's own personal desires if there is a clear Commandment of God which conflicts with them.

## **The Practical Wisdom of Submission to God**

Submission to the Will of God means total Commitment to His Way of Life. It is a Way of Life which embraces one's entire life, including one's religious, social, economic, cultural and political activities. Its real object is to create God-consciousness (*taqwa*) in man to enable him to resist all material temptations and attractions which are in conflict with God's Will. In other words, while enjoying the world's material resources and pleasures, he should not completely lose himself in them and forget all the finer and nobler values of life.

Thus submission to God's Will acts as a source and foundation of all that is good and graceful in human culture and civilisation.<sup>65</sup> It becomes the means of educating, training and disciplining man in a better understanding of the Purpose and Object of God's Creation, in theory<sup>66</sup> and in practice<sup>67</sup> This helps him to translate his beliefs into practical actions and to integrate his beliefs into his life systems by establishing equality, goodness, justice and benevolence in society.<sup>68</sup>

These are the real practical aspects, or fruits, of submission to the Will of God. The absence of these practical results renders verbal submission to God's Will meaningless. Its true significance in practical terms is stressed by the Prophet Muhammad: "God does not accept Faith if it is not expressed in action, and does not accept action if it does not conform to Faith."<sup>69</sup> In simple words, True Religion requires and demands from its followers the total submission of all their affairs to the Commandment and Law of God. They should stop acting and behaving as though they were independent beings and start living as true and faithful servants of God, since they are living in His Kingdom in which His Law (of Nature)<sup>70</sup> prevails over all things.

## **The Transmission of the Ideal of Submission into Practical Form**

The concept of the submission of human affairs to the Will of God is a very high and noble ideal. But it is no use if it remains merely an abstract ideal. How can people translate this abstract ideal into action in their practical lives? How can they make the practical realities and problems of life conform to the ideal? And how can they integrate it into human value-systems and life-systems, so that it becomes a part and parcel of their life and culture? Abul Ala Maududi has nicely described this phenomenon of human nature in these words: "The state of the heart, for its manifestation and stability, inevitably needs a physical act which may make it known to others in society, and which, at the same time, may go on nourishing and developing, the state of piety and devotion in one's own self also by means of practical experience and discipline. That is why, immediately after giving the Command for a mental change, Allah has given the Command for their physical act"(i.e., the establishment of the prayer) in the following verse of the Quran:" (O Prophet) so set then your face steadily and sincerely to the Faith; and be steadfast on the Nature whereupon God has created mankind. Let there be no change in the Nature made by God. This is the Right Religion, but most people do not know. (In order to acquire this culture) turn wholly to God in repentance and develop His *taqwa* and establish prayers and be not you among those who join associates with God."

It is true that the soul and essence of the Right Religion, as mentioned in the above-quoted verse and many other similar verses of the Quran, is total and wholehearted submission of one's self to God's Will, but it is very hard and difficult in practice to absorb it in one's life. It is especially difficult for the common man first to understand and grasp its true and real significance in practical terms, and second to integrate it into his social life.

This need for physical action is necessary because "as long as an idea is only an idea in the mind of man, it can neither be stable nor enduring. It may fade away or even change. But when he starts practising it, the idea takes root in him and goes on increasing in stability and strength with more and more practice; so much so,

that when it has become a belief it can neither change nor fade away easily. Considered from this viewpoint, no act can be more effective than the offering of the prayer regularly five times a day for strengthening piety and fear of God (*taqwa*) in oneself."

"The other act, whatever it be, is carried out at intervals, or in different forms on different occasions, but the prayer is an act which is performed every few hours in one and the same specific form, permanently, a form in which man has to rehearse, over and over again, the whole lesson taught him by the Quran about Islam, so that he does not forget it."<sup>71</sup>

The performance of the prayer is, in fact, one of the fundamental Commandments of Islam. It is the guardian, as well as the manifestation, of a believer's sincerity of Faith in Allah and his sense of God-consciousness (*taqwa*).<sup>72</sup>

Thus prayer is a unique formal discipline for man who not only gives him regular training to learn and adopt the essential requirements of his Faith but also enables him to demonstrate to others the sincerity and firmness of his belief in God. Besides, in addition to being a visible sign and symbol of his obedience to his Lord, it is also a very strong and effective means of building his relationship with God.

There is no doubt that the daily prayers help to strengthen man's Faith in God and bring him closer to his Lord, but they do not alone help to fully integrate the scheme of life of Islam into the life-systems of man. Therefore God has introduced the institution of *Zakat* (compulsory charity) to its discipline of prayers in order to bring it in line with the social realities of life and to make it more effective on social level:" And they have been commanded no more than this: to obey and serve God, offering Him sincere devotion, being true in Faith; to establish regular prayer; and to practise regular charity (*zakat*); and this alone is the Right and True Religion.<sup>73</sup>

The Quran repeatedly reminds Muslims of their duty to God (by the Prayer) and their duty to His servants (people, by *zakat*) which they

must fulfil honestly, diligently and conscientiously. And both these duties to God and to His servants (people) are always mentioned together, duty to God followed by duty to people.

This commandment regarding the payment of *zakat* shows that it serves the same purpose as the prayer. However, this verse lays special stress on showing generosity and kindness to the poor, the destitute and orphans. The prayer and *zakat* (i.e., charity), in fact, represent the overall attitude of kindness, goodness and benevolence that is generated by these acts in society for the betterment and welfare of the deprived section of the community. Thus the practice of these two pillars of Islam is not only a practical sign and manifestation of people's Faith in God but also helps in strengthening it.

There is another deeper and wider significance of this commandment to establish regular prayer and to practise regular charity (i.e., *zakat*) and it is this: Paying consistent allegiance to God through regular performance of the prayer, and, in consequence of this, looking after the welfare and betterment of God's creatures by spending freely of one's wealth in meeting the needs of the poor, the destitute, orphan and beggars. Both reflect the closeness of the believers' relationship with God and with His Creatures.

Thus, prayer and *zakat* are at one and the same time a manifestation of the believers' faith in God and a protection of that faith. These two elements of Islam have always been part and parcel of the Right Religion (i.e., Right Way of Life) since the first Revelation came to man. For they not only reflect the true faith of the believers but also help to guard it from corruptive and devilish designs of the wicked. However, it is extremely important that these two fundamental pillars of Islam should remain lively and reflect the true spirit for which they were prescribed by the Lawgiver; that is, they should not become a mere meaningless drill or exercise.

It is vital that the Lawgiver's purpose in giving these two basic components of *ibadah* (obedience and service) should be openly and clearly visible in the practical lives of the people in the form of

showing kindness, generosity and benevolence towards other members of the community, especially the needy, the poor and orphans. Then and only then, can they be said to be living by the Religion of God.

So the three essentials of living by God's Religion are:

1. Sincere and wholehearted submission to the Will of God;
- 2 Allegiance to Him demonstrated daily by the performance of the prayer; and
3. Service to His creatures by actions of goodness, kindness and benevolence, including generous spending on the welfare of the deprived sections of the community.<sup>74</sup>

## **Method of Divine Guidance**

Allah, since He created man, has always adopted two ways for His Guidance and Reformation: First, the sending of Divine Books and second, the sending of Prophets. He did not consider sufficient the mere revelations of the Book, or the mere appointment of the Prophets, for this work, but used these two means together at each stage of man's history. This points to the fact that neither a Book nor the person of a teacher were, in themselves, sufficient for the guidance and reformation of people and society. There was need, on the one hand, of a Divine Book and Divine Law, and, on the other, of a leader or teacher who would, through education and training, explain to people this Divine Code. This is because most people can only learn from another person; a book is too remote. A book must be there for the information, but a teacher must be there to act as a medium between it and those learning.

This is why the teaching of Islam from the very beginning was done through a Book and a Prophet together. These two means of human education helped to create, develop and stabilise a true and good social order in the world.

*Surah Fatihah* sums up the teaching of the Qur'an and its theme as *Sirat 'l-Mustaqim* (the Right Way of Life). The Qur'an directs us to this Right Way by calling it the Way of the Truthful and the Righteous: "The Way of those whom you have blessed; who have not incurred Your Wrath, nor gone astray." (1:7). In another place, the Qur'an specifies and elaborates this further in these words: "All who obey Allah and the Messenger are in the company of those on whom is the Grace of Allah, of the Prophets (who teach), the Sincere (Lovers of Truth), the Witnesses (who testify to the Truth, even by sacrificing their lives), and the Righteous (who do good). Ah! What a beautiful Fellowship!" (4:69).

The Prophet bequeathed this advice to his Companions: to follow two sources of guidance after he was gone: "O People! I am leaving two things for your guidance; hold to them both firmly and you will not fall into error. One is the Book of Allah and the other my *Sunnah*".

He also advised people to follow Abu Bakr and `Umar after him. (Bukhari). In another Hadith, he advised them to follow his way of life (*Sunnah*) and the way of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs who were to come after him.

This discussion clearly shows that in every age two things are necessary for the training and maintenance of good societies. The first is the Divine Guidance (i.e., the Qur'an) and the second, a body of experts of the Qur'anic Law and Way who can not only explain the Law of the Qur'an and its system of life but also enlighten people about the real purpose and significance of the Divine Law and Guidance on the social level. (Mufti Muhammad Shafi', *Ma'arif al Qur'an*, Vol. 1, pp. 331-337).

## Direction and Angle of Vision

The Prophet emphasised the education and training of the individual and made it the central and basic factor in his

programme. In order to make one individual the most important element in Islamic Society, the Prophet instilled in each one a comprehensive system of Faith (belief) which totally changed his attitude to life and gave him new values and a new direction. He was made to understand the purpose and object of his struggle and endeavour in life. It is, in fact, the object and purpose of a person's actions and deeds, rather than the actions in themselves, which are counted as important in the final analysis. The higher the object and the nobler the mission, the greater is the incentive to work and struggle to achieve it, and all actions done in this spirit, for the Sake of Allah, will be counted good.

The individual was provided with the highest and noblest possible object by the Prophet Muhammad. It is to gain the Pleasure and Presence of Allah by obeying His Prophet. What ideal could be higher or nobler than seeking the Pleasure of Allah? And what ideology could provide a greater, nobler and higher incentive to work, endeavour and struggle in life? Who could be more sincere, genuine and dedicated in his efforts to achieve his goal than a person who seeks Allah's Pleasure and works and endeavours to establish His Way of Life on the earth? The Qur'an states the object and purpose of the work of those sincere, moderate and honest people who, for instance, feed the poor: "We feed you for the Sake of Allah alone. No reward do we desire from you, nor thanks. We only fear a Day of Distressful Wrath from our Lord." (76:9-10). And this attitude pervades all the other good works done by individuals.

To reach this high goal and attain this sublime object, there is need for a similarly noble method of training which can lift ordinary individuals to great heights of excellence and nobility, enabling them to work consistently and persistently for their object under all circumstances and conditions, without thought for any hardships, pains and sufferings involved.

The method of the Qur'an is to develop the sense of Allah-consciousness in the individual so that he is continuously reminded of Allah and his eventual meeting with Him on the Day of Judgement. The sense of fear of that Day will always keep him alert and never let him fall into those of life's pleasures and vanities

disliked and prohibited by Allah.

The Qur'an therefore creates this feeling of responsibility for his own fate in the individual to keep him always on course in the struggle for the establishment of His Way of Life on the earth. We read these words in *Surah Nazi'at*: "...And for such as had entertained the fear of standing before their Lord and had, therefore, restrained (their) soul from lower desires (of the self) (79:40). *Surah Ibrahim* has these words: "This is the reward of the one who dreads the time when he shall stand before Me and is afraid of the threat of My Punishment." (14:14). *Surah Mu'minin* says: "And surely those who live in awe for fear of their Lord; those who believe in the Signs of their Lord; those who join not partners with their Lord; and those who give charity with their hearts full of fear because they have to return to their Lord -- it is these who hasten in every good work." (23:57-61).

These verses of the Qur'an clearly state that if the fear of Allah (i.e., *taqwa*, or Allah-consciousness) is developed in the individual, he will not deviate from the Right Way and will continue struggling even under heavy odds for the 'Sake of Allah and His Right Way of Life. The actual training course to create this consciousness in the individual is the discipline of *'ibadah* (forms of worship: prayer, *zakat*, fasting and pilgrimage). These forms of *'ibadah* create and develop this consciousness of Allah's Presence and keep it fresh in one's mind. Consistency and regularity of observing the forms of *'ibadah* is the most effective way of maintaining the consciousness of the individual at the required level, so that he steadfastly remains on the course set before him by the Qur'an.

The Qur'an keeps on reminding the individual of his higher and nobler ideals lest he fall into error: "Follow not the lusts (of your heart), lest you swerve (from the Right Way and fall into wrong ways of life and incur the Wrath of Allah." (4:135). In *Surah Al-An'am*, we read: "Nor follow you the vain desires of such as take Our Signs as falsehood, and such as believe not in the Hereafter." (6:150). The Qur'an asks: "Who is more astray than one who follows his own lusts, devoid of Guidance from Allah?" (28:50); or "follow the desires of those who are ignorant and know not." (45:18).

Thus the Qur'an first sets the target to achieve and the direction to follow, then suggests a strong and effective method of maintaining the will and the ability to continue in that direction, namely, following a disciplined course of training in the form of *'ibadah*. At the same time, it cautions the individual to keep guard against the temptations and desires of the self. To accomplish this, it offers him, and recommends him to follow, the example of the Prophet, which will enable him to translate his ideals from mere mental consciousness with practical reality in the social order and thereby keep him on the Right Course as required by his Lord. The Qur'an stresses: "We have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern of conduct for everyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day." (33:21).

Obviously, this is the right course of action for all those people who believe in Allah and in their meeting with Him on the Day of Judgement. The Prophet's life gives one a clear, precise and practical example of an ideal pattern of conduct, whereby one may judge, conduct and follow a right course of action in one's own practical affairs without overstepping the permissible limits, being sure that one is going in the right direction.

## Summary

It seems absolutely clear that the Right Religion (i.e., Right Way of Life) consists in complete and exclusive submission and surrender to the Will of God in matters of principle, as set out in the Quran and Sunnah. This total submission to God's Will in all matters of life and death, prosperity or poverty ... whatever comes from the Lord is to be seen as good. Nothing that comes from Him can be bad for us, for He knows and we do not know what is best for us in the end. It is therefore essential that we offer Him complete submission, surrendering to Him and His Law and asking for guidance in all our affairs. We should seek the Divine Instructions, which are set out in the Quran clearly and precisely and follow their guidance willingly

and happily.<sup>75</sup>

God guided Muhammad and all the earlier Messengers before him: "Say, indeed my Lord has guided me to a Way that is Straight ---- a Right Religion ---- the Way (trod) by Ibrahim the true in Faith."<sup>76</sup>

And all the other Prophets were told the same thing which demands total commitment: that one should sincerely and genuinely come into the fold of God's Command and submit one's whole self to Him: "Say, (O Muhammad), truly my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are all for God, the Lord of the universe."<sup>77</sup>

By adopting this attitude of complete submission to God's Will, man willingly conforms to the general pattern of life that pervades the entire universe. In this respect, humans are no different from other elements of the universe, for they were all created by God so that they might obey and serve Him alone (i.e., follow the Law of Nature, which is ingrained in their disposition and is meant for their well-being and betterment).<sup>78</sup>

But man is, in one respect, different from the rest of creation.<sup>79</sup> He has been given free will to decide his actions. He may choose whether or not to follow the Right Way of Life (i.e., the Law of Nature). It has been left entirely up to him to carve his own way, of his own free will, in this world. This is really a great test for man, on the outcome of which depends his eventual success or failure.<sup>80</sup> However, God, in His Greater Wisdom and Benevolence, promised to send man Guidance by His Messengers, so that he might not be misled by evil people into taking up wrong ways of life. Nevertheless, he was still free to follow or reject this Guidance and told that following it would be to his own benefit and rejecting it would be to his own loss.<sup>81</sup>

This Divine Guidance was considered necessary for man because of his different nature, position and function in life from that of the rest of creation. All the other elements in the universe are quite

satisfied to obey their Lord without any option for they have, as a result, no responsibility of any kind. Man, because he has been given free will to decide his own actions, is, as a result, personally responsible for all his omissions and commissions. There are great hazards and pitfalls which may encounter on his life path and God, Who is Merciful and Compassionate, does not, therefore, leave him to make decisions alone, without the necessary knowledge. He has arranged to give him Guidance to the Right Way through His Messengers. Now, although the concept of Right Religion (i.e., the Right Way of Life) is clear and definite and is amply and plainly stated by the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, yet to most people it is abstract and theoretical. As such, it cannot easily be fully grasped and understood by the man-in-the-street. If it is to appeal to the ordinary person and come within his grasp so that he can organise his life on the basis of its plain Truth, it has to be presented in some concrete and tangible form which can easily be used in the daily routine of life.

The Lawgiver has therefore prescribed daily prayer as a discipline to establish the concept of Right Religion in the practical lives and life-systems of the Muslims. Its performance not only serves as a demonstration of a believer's total submission to his Lord but is also a very effective and concrete method of strengthening the deep and close relationship between the believer and his Lord. It helps to keep him on the Right Way of Life and to strengthen his resolve always to remain an obedient slave of God. The Quran states this recipe for bringing the abstract concept of the Right Religion into a concrete system of life in Surah Rum which has already been explained earlier in this article.<sup>82</sup>

They are told to turn back to Allah alone and surrender themselves to His Religion and not to follow their whims and desires, which will lead them into ignorance and darkness.

The same thing is repeated, but in a different context, in Surah Bayyinah as explained before.<sup>83</sup> Here again, emphasis is laid on the fact that the essence and soul of the Right Religion is sincere and complete devotion and total submission and obedience to God

alone, turning away from all others. In other words, the Right Religion consists in complete and exclusive surrender to God. This is the First Principle of the Islamic Faith. Then man is told how to establish this principle in his daily practice so that it becomes part and parcel of his life. For this purpose the daily prayer is prescribed as a means of grasping the true significance of the First Principle of the Islamic Faith and absorbing it into the system of life. The latter verse of Surah Bayyinah goes further by giving the First Principle a more real and concrete basis founded in the social and economic structure of society. It commands people to spend their wealth freely for the betterment and welfare of society.

In fact, observing these two practices (i.e., prayer and obligatory charity) is the most practical, objective and effective method of linking heaven with the earth. The prayer establishes a 'hotline' between man and his Creator, while obligatory charity (*zakat*) nourishes and develops a close relationship between the rich and deprived section of the community. The former indeed is the cause of the latter, for if the believer remains absorbed in the remembrance of God and forgets the needs of the poor and helpless in his society, his belief and prayer become meaningless.<sup>84</sup>

One of the basic differences between Islam and other religions is that it is a practical religion. In it, Faith is very closely related to human actions on social level. A person who is wholly absorbed in the remembrance of God and is cut off from the social life of the community has nothing to do with Islam. He is following a way which is totally against the fundamental teachings of Islam<sup>85</sup> and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>86</sup>

In Islam, belief and good deeds towards fellow beings go together; belief is not authentic without good actions (*a'mal salih*), nor are good deeds accepted without belief. This fact is stressed again and again in the Quran: "Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness, and, in the service and obedience of his Lord, hold no associate as His partner."<sup>87</sup>

"And he who works deeds of righteousness, and has Faith, will have

no fear of being wronged or deprived of his merit."<sup>88</sup>

These and many other similar verses of the Quran make belief in God and works of righteousness essential symbols and demonstrations of a believer's true faith in God and, as such, a part and parcel of the Right Religion. Likewise, the Quran has also used the terms *salat* (prayer) and *zakat* (charity) to represent respectively the Rights of God (*Huquq Allah*) and the rights of people (*Huquq al-ibad*), as in the verses quoted above,<sup>89</sup> thus emphasising that the Rights of God cannot be fulfilled unless the rights of people are effectively fulfilled.

What is, in fact, the true essence and soul of Right Religion (i.e., the Right Way of Life, *Al-Din*) is total surrender and submission to the Will of God together with its practical signs: regular allegiance to God through the performance of the prayer and doing good works in relation to other people in society. The Quran sums up the ingredients of the Right Religion in these words:<sup>90</sup>

"Indeed this Quran does guide to that which is most Right and gives the good news to the believers who do works of righteousness."

## NOTES

## Notes

[←1]

The Quran: 45:24.

[←2]

The Quran: 6:29.

[←3]

The Quran: 31:33.

[←4]

The Quran: 30:7.

[←5]

The Quran: 45:24.

[←6]

The Quran: 6:1; 25:2.

[←7]

The Quran: 6:3.

[←8]

The Quran: 6:3.

[←9]

The Quran: 21:16.

[←10]

The Quran: 38:37.

[←11]

The Quran: 15:85.

[←12]

The Quran: 46:3.

[<13]

The Quran: 21:17.

[<14]

The Quran: 2:26.

[<15]

The Quran: 17:70.

[<16]

The Quran: 95:4.

[<17]

The Quran: 38:75.

[<18]

The Quran: 82:6-8.

[<19]

The Quran: 87:2.

[<20]

The Quran: 22:65; 31:20; 45:13; 14:33.

[<21]

The Quran: 87:3; 26:78.

[<22]

The Quran: 87:9-11; 96:11-13.

[<23]

The Quran: 76:3.

[<24]

The Quran: 6:104-105.

[<25]

The Quran: 30:7; 31:33.

[←26]

The Quran: 96:7.

[←27]

The Quran: 96:6-8.

[←28]

The Quran: 10:4.

[←29]

The Quran: 23:115.

[←30]

The Quran: 70:4.

[←31]

The Quran: 10; 25-27.

[←32]

The Quran: 6:126-127.

[←33]

The Quran: 16:36.

[←34]

The Quran: 2:256.

[←35]

The Quran: 21:25.

[←36]

The Quran: 17:9-10.

[←37]

The Quran: 30:43-45.

[←38]

The Quran: 30:30.

[←39]

Bukhari and Muslim.

[←40]

Musnad, Ahmad and Nisai.

[←41]

The Quran 55:5-8.

[←42]

16:49-51; 22:18; 55:5-8.

[←43]

On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History, p. 201.

[←44]

The Quran: 3:19-20.

[←45]

Abul Ala Maududi, The Meaning of the Quran, Vol.1, P.19, note.16.

[←46]

The Quran: 3:83.

[←47]

The Quran: 3:85.

[←48]

The Quran: 2:27.

[←49]

The Quran: 6:161.

[←50]

The Quran: 3:83.

[←51]

The Quran: 10:84.

[←52]

The Quran: 5:120.

[←53]

The Quran: 22:34.

[←54]

The Quran: 3:51; 19:36.

[←55]

The Quran: 12:39-40.

[←56]

The Quran: 7:185; 45:6; 77:48-50.

[←57]

The Quran: 51:56.

[←58]

The Quran: 14: 1-2.

[←59]

The Quran: 36: 1-6.

[←60]

The Quran: 12:108.

[←61]

The Quran: 1:6-7.

[←62]

The Quran: 2:186; 40:60; 50:6; 89:27-30.

[←63]

The Quran: 28:70.

[←64]

The Quran: 43:84-85; 35:3; 6:46.

[←65]

The Quran: 16:53.

[←66]

The Quran: 2:186; 40:60; 50:16.

[←67]

The Quran: 2:177; 6:151-152; 17:23.

[←68]

The Quran: 4:135; 5:8-9; 5:45; 16:90-91; 57:25.

[←69]

Bukhari.

[←70]

The Quran: 3:83.

[←71]

The Meaning of the Quran, Vol. III, p.213.

[←72]

Amin Ahsan Islahi, Tadabbur-i-Quran, Vol. 5, p. 94.

[←73]

The Quran: 98:5.

[←74]

The Quran: 89:17-20; 90:12-16; 107:1-7; 92:5-10.

[←75]

The Quran: 4:65.

[←76]

The Quran: 6:161.

[←77]

The Quran: 2:208.

[<78]

The Quran: 6:162-163; 27:91.

[<79]

The Quran: 30:30; 51:56.

[<80]

The Quran: 67:2.

[<81]

The Quran: 2:38; 2:120.

[<82]

The Quran: 30:30-32.

[<83]

The Quran: 98:5.

[<84]

The Quran: 107:1-7; 51:19; 70:24-25.

[<85]

The Quran: 57:27.

[<86]

Hadith, quoted by Bukhari and Muslim.

[<87]

The Quran: 18:110; 21:94.

[<88]

The Quran: 20:112.

[<89]

The Quran: 30:30-32; 98:5.

[<90]

The Quran: 17:9.

