

ANSWERS TO COMMON
QUESTIONS ON ISLAM

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عَلَيْهِ الصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ

MUHAMMAD THE
PROPHET OF ISLAM



Chapter One

THE BEGINNINGS

In the desert of Arabia, Muhammad was born, according to Muslim historians, on April 20, 571. The name means “highly praised”. He is to me the greatest mind among all the sons of Arabia. He means so much more than all the poets and kings that preceded and succeeded him in that impenetrable desert of red sand.

When he appeared, Arabia was a desert - a nothing. Out of the nothing of that desert a new world was fashioned by the mighty spirit of Muhammad - a new life, a new culture, a new civilisation, a new kingdom which extended from Morocco to India, and influenced the thought and life of three continents - Asia, Africa and Europe.

NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING

When I thought of writing on Muhammad the Prophet, I was a bit hesitant, because to write about a religion one does not profess¹ is a delicate matter, for there are many persons professing various religions and belonging to diverse schools of thought and denominations even in the same religion. Though it is sometimes claimed that a religion is entirely personal yet it cannot be denied that it has a tendency to envelope the whole universe seen as well as unseen. It somehow permeates, some time or other, our hearts, our souls, our minds, their conscious parts, subconscious parts, unconscious or whatever part they contain or are supposed to contain. The problem assumes overwhelming importance when there is a deep conviction that our past, present and future all hang by a soft, delicate, tender-silked cord. If we further happen to be highly sensitive, the centre of gravity is very likely to be always in a state of extreme tension. Looked at from this point of view, the less said about another’s religion the better. Let our religions

be deeply hidden and embedded in the recesses of our innermost hearts, fortified by the unbroken seals of our lips.

MAN IS GREGARIOUS

But there is another aspect of this problem. Man lives in society. Our lives are bound up with the lives of so many, willingly or unwillingly, directly

or indirectly. We eat food grown in the same soil, drink water from the same spring, breathe the air of the same atmosphere. Even while staunchly holding our own views, it would be helpful, if for no other purpose, at least to promote proper adjustment to our surroundings, if we also know to some extent how the mind of our neighbour moves and what are the mainsprings of his actions. From this angle of vision, it is highly desirable that one should try to know all religions of the world, in the proper spirit, to promote mutual understanding and better appreciation of our neighbourhood, immediate and remote.

Further, our thoughts are not as scattered as they appear to be on the surface. They have crystallised around a few nuclei in the form of great world religions and living faiths that guide and motivate the lives of millions. It is our duty, therefore, if we have the ideal of ever becoming citizens of the world, to make a little attempt to know the great religions and systems of philosophy that have ruled mankind.

THE PROPHET - A HISTORIC PERSONALITY

In spite of these preliminary remarks, the ground in the field of religion, where there is often a conflict between intellect and emotion, is so slippery that one is constantly reminded of fools that rush in where angels fear to tread. It is also complex from another point of view. The subject of my writing is about the tenets of a religion, which is historic, and its Prophet, who is also a historical personality. Even a hostile critic like Sir William Muir,

speaking about the Holy Qur'an, says that: *'There is probably in the world no other book which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text'*.² I may also add that the Prophet Muhammad is also a historic personality,³ every event of whose life has been most carefully recorded and even the minutest details preserved intact for posterity. His life and works are not wrapped in mystery. One need not, in the quest for accurate information, hunt for nor embark on arduous expeditions to sift the chaff and husk from the grain of truth.

PAST MISREPRESENTATION

My work is further lightened because those days are fast disappearing when Islam was highly misrepresented by some of its critics⁴ for reasons political and otherwise. Prof. Bevan writes in the Cambridge Mediaeval History: *"The accounts of Muhammad and Islam which were published in Europe before the beginning of the 19th century are now to be regarded as literary curiosities"*. My problem to write this monograph is easier because we are not generally fed now on this kind of history and much time need not be spent on pointing out our misrepresentations of Islam.

The theory of Islam and the Sword for instance is not heard now frequently in any quarter worth the name. Principle of Islam that there is no compulsion in religion is well-known. Gibbon, a historian of worldwide fame, says: *"A pernicious tenet has been imputed to the Muhammadans,⁵ the duty of extirpating all the religions by the sword"*. This charge of ignorance and bigotry, says the eminent historian, is refuted by the Qur'an, by the history of Musalman conquerors and by their public and legal toleration of Christian worship. The greatest success of Muhammad's life was affected by sheer moral force without the stroke of a sword.

Chapter Two

Mustafa -THE CHOSEN ONE

“WHO SUBDUE THEIR ANGER” (Holy Qur’an 3:134) To the Arabs who would fight for forty years on the slight provocation that a camel belonging to the guest of one tribe had strayed into the grazing land belonging to another, and both sides had fought till they lost 70,000 lives in all, threatening the extinction of both tribes, to such furious Arabs the Prophet of Islam taught self-control and discipline to the extent of praying even on the battlefield.

WAR FOR SELF-DEFENCE

When, after repeated effort at conciliation had utterly failed, and circumstances arose that dragged him into the battlefield purely in self-defence the Prophet of Islam changed the whole strategy of the battlefield. The total number of casualties in all the wars that took place during his lifetime, when the whole Arabian Peninsula came under his banner, does not exceed a few hundreds in all. He taught the Arab barbarians to pray, to pray not individually but in congregations, to God Almighty, even amidst the dust and storm of warfare. Whenever the time for prayer came - and it comes five times every day - the congregational prayer had not to be abandoned or even postponed. A party had to be engaged in bowing their heads before God while another was engaged with the enemy. After finishing the prayers, the two parties had to exchange their positions.

BATTLEFIELD HUMANISED

In an age of barbarism, the battlefield itself was humanised and strict instructions were issued not to embezzle, not to cheat, not to break trust, not to mutilate, not to kill a minor child or a woman or an old man not, to hew down a date palm nor burn it, not to

cut down a fruit tree, not to molest monks and persons engaged in worship. His own treatment of his bitterest enemies was the noblest example for his followers. At the conquest of Makkah, he stood at the zenith of his power. The city which had tortured him and his followers, which had driven him and his people into exile and which had unrelentingly persecuted and boycotted him even when he had taken refuge in a place more than 200 miles away, that city now lay at his feet. By the laws of war he could have justly avenged all the cruelties inflicted on him and his people. But what treatment did he mete out to them? Muhammad's heart overflowed with the milk of love and kindness as he declared, ***"This day, there is no reproof against you and you are all free."***

BITTEREST ENEMIES PARDONED

This was one of the chief objects why he permitted war in self-defence - to unite human beings. And when this object was achieved, even his worst enemies were pardoned. Even those who had killed his beloved uncle, Hamza, mutilated his dead body, had ripped it open and chewed a piece of his liver.

THEORY MERGED WITH PRACTICE

The principle of universal brotherhood and the doctrine of the equality of mankind which he proclaimed, represent Muhammad's great contribution to the social uplift of humanity. All great religions have also preached the same doctrine, but the Prophet of Islam had put this theory into actual practice and its value will be fully recognised, perhaps some time hence, when international consciousness is awakened, racial prejudices disappear, and a stronger concept of the brotherhood of humanity comes into existence.

PEASANT AND KING EQUAL BEFORE GOD

Sarojini Naidu, speaking about this aspect of Islam, says: "It was the first religion that preached and practised democracy; for, in the

mosque, when the Azaan (the Muslim call to prayer) is sounded and the worshippers are gathered together, the democracy of Islam is embodied five times a day when the peasant and king kneel side by side and proclaim, 'God alone is great.'" The great poetess of India continues: "I have been struck over and over again by this indivisible unity of Islam that makes a man instinctively a brother. When you meet an Egyptian, an Algerian, an Indian and a Turk in London what matters is that Egypt is the motherland of one and India is the motherland of another."

ISLAM - CIVILISED SPAIN AND IS ANSWER TO TODAY'S SOCIAL DILEMMA

Mahatma Gandhi, in his inimitable style, says: *"Someone has said that Europeans in South Africa dread the advent of Islam - Islam, that civilized Spain; Islam, that took the torch of light to Morocco; and preached to the world the Gospel of Brotherhood. The Europeans of South Africa dread the advent of Islam, as they claim equality with the white races. They may well dread it. If brotherhood is a sin, if it is equality of the coloured races that they dread, then their dread is well-founded."*

PILGRIMAGE - HAJJ - A LIVING TESTIMONY

Every year, during the pilgrimage season, the world witnesses the wonderful spectacle of this international exhibition of Islam in levelling all distinctions of race, colour and rank. Not only do Europeans, Africans, Persians, Indians, Chinese, all meet together in Makkah as members of one divine family, but they are all clad in one dress, every person in two simple pieces of white seamless cloth, one piece round the loins and the other piece over the shoulders, bare-headed, without pomp or ceremony, repeating: *"Here am I, O God; at Your command; You are One and the Only; Here am I!"* Thus there remains nothing to differentiate the high from the low, and every pilgrim carries home the impression of the international significance of Islam.

In the words of Prof. Hurgronje: *“The League of Nations founded by the Prophet of Islam put the principle of international unity and human brotherhood on such universal foundations as to show the candle to other nations”*. He continues: *“the fact is that no nation of the world can show a parallel to what Islam has done towards the realisation of the idea of a League of Nations.”*

ISLAM - A BEACON TO A DRIFTING WORLD

The Prophet of Islam brought the reign of democracy in its best form. Caliph Umar, Caliph Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet, Caliph Mansur Abbas, the son of the Caliph Mamun, and many other caliphs and kings, had to appear before the judge as ordinary men in Islamic courts. Even today we all know how the black Negroes are treated by the civilized white races. Consider the state of Bilal, a Negro slave in the days of the Prophet of Islam nearly 14 centuries ago. The office of calling Muslims to prayer was considered to be a position of honour in the early days of Islam and it was offered to this Negro slave. After the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet ordered him to call for prayer, and the Negro slave, with his black colour and his thick lips, stood over the roof of the holy Ka'bah, the most historic and the holiest place in the Islamic world, when some proud Arabs painfully cried aloud: *“Oh, this black Negro slave, woe to him. He stands on the roof of holy Ka'bah to call for prayer.”*

As if to answer this outburst smacking of pride and prejudice, both of which the Prophet of Islam aimed at eliminating, he delivered a sermon in which he said:

“Allah is to be praised and thanked for ridding us of the vices and pride of the days of ignorance. O people! note that all men are divided in two categories only: the pious and God-fearing who are estimable in Allah’s reckoning, and the transgressors and hard-hearted, who are lowly and contemptible in the eye of Allah. Otherwise all human beings are the progeny of Adam and Allah has created Adam of clay.”

This was later approved and confirmed by the Qur'an in the following words:

"O mankind! Most certainly it is We (God Almighty) who have created you all from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and it is We who have made you into nations and tribes, that ye may recognise each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you." (Holy Qur'an 49:13)

EXTRAORDINARY TRANSFORMATION

The Prophet of Islam thus brought about such a mighty transformation that the noblest and purest among Arabs by birth offered their daughters in marriage to this Negro slave, and whenever the second Caliph of Islam, known to history as UMAR the Great, the commander of the faithful, saw this Negro slave, he immediately stood in reverence and welcomed him by exclaiming, *"Here comes our master, here comes our lord"*. What a tremendous change was brought by the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad in the Arabs, the proudest people at that time on earth. This is the reason why Goethe, the greatest of German poets, speaking about the Holy Qur'an, declared that: *"This book will go on exercising through all ages a most potent influence"*. This is also the reason why George Bernard Shaw says: *"If any religion has a chance of ruling over England, nay, Europe, within the next 100 years, it is Islam."*

ISLAM - EMANCIPATED WOMEN

It is this same democratic spirit of Islam that has emancipated women from the bondage of man. Sir Charles Edward Archibald Hamilton says, *"Islam teaches the inherent sinlessness of man. It teaches that man and woman have come from the same essence, possess the same soul, and have been equipped with equal capabilities for intellectual, spiritual and moral attainments."*



WOMEN HAD RIGHT TO OWN PROPERTY

The Arabs had a very strong tradition that he alone can inherit who can smite with the spear and can wield the sword. But Islam came as the defender of the weaker sex and entitled women to share in the inheritance of their parents. It gave women, centuries ago, the right of owning property. Yet it was only 12 centuries later, in 1881, that England, supposed to be the cradle of democracy, adopted this institution of Islam, and an Act was passed called **“The Married Women’s Act”**. But centuries earlier, the Prophet of Islam had proclaimed that *“Women are the twin halves of men. The rights of women are sacred.”* *“See that women are maintained in the rights granted to them.”*

Chapter Three

Al - Ameen -THE TRUSTWORTHY

THE GOLDEN MEAN

Islam is not directly concerned with political and economic systems, but indirectly and, in so far as political and economic affairs influence man’s conduct, it does lay down some very important principles of economic life. According to Prof. Massignon, Islam maintains the balance between exaggerated opposites and has always in view the building of character which is the basis of civilization. This is secured by its law of inheritance; by an organised, and not an optional, system of charity known as Zakat; and by regarding as illegal all anti-social practices in the economic field like monopoly usury, securing of predetermined unearned incomes and increments, cornering markets, hoarding and creating artificial scarcity of any commodity in order to force the price to rise. Gambling is illegal. Contributions to schools, to places of worship, hospitals, digging of wells, opening of orphanages, are the highest acts of virtue. Orphanages have sprung for the first time, it is said, under the teaching of the Prophet of Islam. The

world owes its orphanages to this Prophet who was himself born an orphan. *“Good all this”* says Carlyle about Muhammad: *“The natural voice of humanity, of piety and equity, dwelling in the heart of this wild son of nature, speaks”*.

THE TEST

A historian once said a great man should be judged by three tests:

- (1) Was he found to be of true mettle by his contemporaries?
- (2) Was he great enough to rise above the standards of his age?
- (3) Did he leave anything as a permanent legacy to the world at large?

This list may be further extended, but all these three tests of greatness are eminently satisfied to the highest degree in the case of Prophet Muhammad. Some illustrations of the last two have already been mentioned. We will now begin by considering the first of these questions.

IMPECCABLE CHARACTER

Historical records show that all contemporaries of Muhammad, both friends and foes, acknowledged the sterling qualities, the spotless honesty, the noble virtues, the absolute sincerity and the absolute trustworthiness of the apostle of Islam in all walks of life and in every sphere of human activity. Even the Jews, and those who did not believe in his message, accepted him as arbitrator in their personal disputes on account of his scrupulous impartiality. Even those who did not believe in his message were forced to say *“O Muhammad we do not call you a liar, but we deny Him who has given you a Book and inspired you with a Message:”*

They thought he was one possessed. They tried violence to cure

him. But the best of them saw that a new light had dawned on him and they hastened to seek that enlightenment. It is a notable feature in the history of the Prophet of Islam that his nearest relation, his beloved cousin and his bosom friends, who knew him most intimately, were thoroughly imbued with the truth of his mission and convinced of the genuineness of his divine inspiration. *“If these men and women, noble, intelligent, and certainly not less educated than the fishermen of Gaillee, had perceived the slightest sign of worldliness, deception, or want of faith in the Teacher himself, Muhammad’s hopes of moral regeneration and social reform, would all have been crumbled to dust in a moment:”*

(From **“The Spirit of Islam”** by Sayed Ameer Ali)

On the contrary, we find that the devotion of his followers was such that he was voluntarily acknowledged leader of their lives. They braved, for his sake, persecutions and danger; they believed, trusted, obeyed and honoured him even in the most excruciating torture and severest mental agony caused by excommunication, even unto death. Would this have been so had they noticed the slightest backsliding in their leader?

UNDYING LOVE FOR THE HOLY PROPHET

Read the history of the early converts to Islam and every heart would melt at the sight of the brutal treatment of innocent men and women. Sumayya, an innocent woman, is cruelly torn into pieces by piercing through with spears. An example is made of Yasir, whose legs are tied to two camels and the beasts driven in opposite directions. Khabbab Bin Arth is made to lie down on a bed of burning coal with the brutal legs of the merciless tyrant on his breast so that he may not move, and this makes even the fat beneath his skin melt. Khabbab Bin Adi is put to death in a cruel manner by mutilation and cutting off his flesh piecemeal. In the midst of his tortures, when asked whether he did not wish Muhammad in his place while he was in his house with his family, the sufferer cried out that he was gladly prepared to sacrifice

himself, his family and children and all to save Muhammad from the prick of a thorn. Scores of heart-rending incidents of this type may be narrated. But what do all these incidents show? Why was it that these sons and daughters of Islam not only surrendered to their Prophet their allegiance, but made a gift of their bodies, hearts and souls? Is not the intense faith and conviction on the part of the immediate followers of Muhammad the noblest testimony to his sincerity and to his utter self-absorption in the task assigned to him?

FOLLOWERS OF BEST CALIBRE

And these men were not of low station or of an inferior mental calibre. Around him, in quite early days, gathered what was best and noblest in Makkah, its flower and cream, men of position, rank, wealth and culture, and from his own kith and kin, those who knew the ins and outs of his life. All the first four Caliphs, with their towering personalities, were converts of this early period.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica says that *“Muhammad is the most successful of all Prophets and religious personalities”*. But this success was not the result of mere accident. It was not a windfall. It was a recognition of the fact that he was found to be of true mettle by his contemporaries. It was the result of his admirable and all-compelling personality.

Chapter Four

AS - Sadiq -THE TRUTHFUL

PERFECT MODEL FOR HUMAN LIFE

The personality of Muhammad, it is most difficult to get into the whole truth of it. Only a glimpse of it I can catch. What a dramatic succession of picturesque scenes! There is Muhammad, the Prophet. There is Muhammad, the General; Muhammad, the King; Muhammad, the Warrior; Muhammad, the Businessman;

Muhammad, the Preacher, Muhammad, the Philosopher, Muhammad, the Statesman; Muhammad, the Orator; Muhammad; the Reformer; Muhammad, the Refuge of Orphans; Muhammad, the Protector of Slaves; Muhammad, the Emancipator of Women; Muhammad, the Judge; Muhammad, the Saint. And in all these magnificent roles, in all these departments of human activity, he is like a hero.

Orphanhood is the extreme of helplessness, and his life upon this earth began with it. Kingship is the height of material power, and his life ended with it. From an orphan boy to a persecuted refugee, then to an overlord - spiritual as well as temporal - of a whole nation and arbiter of its destinies, with all its trials and temptations, with all its vicissitudes and changes, its lights and shades, its ups and downs, its terror and splendour, he has stood the fire of the world and came out unscathed to serve as a model in every phase of life. His achievements are not limited to one aspect of life but cover the whole field of human conditions.

MUHAMMAD THE GREATEST

If, for instance, greatness consists in the purification of a nation steeped in barbarism and immersed in absolute moral darkness, that dynamic personality who has transformed, refined and uplifted an entire nation, sunk as low as the Arabs were, and made them the torch-bearers of civilizations and learning, has every claim to that greatness. If greatness lies in unifying the discordant elements of society by the ties of brotherhood and charity, the Prophet of the desert has got every title to this distinction. If greatness consists in reforming those wrapt in degrading superstitions and pernicious practices of every kind, the Prophet of Islam has wiped out superstitions and irrational fear from the hearts of millions. If it lies in displaying high morals, Muhammad has been admitted by friends and foes as Al-Amin and As-Sadiq, the trustworthy and truthful. If a conqueror is a great man, here is a

person who rose from a helpless orphan and a humble creature to be the ruler of Arabia, the equal of Khosroes and Caesars, one who founded a great empire that has survived all these 14 centuries. If the devotion that a leader commands is the criterion of greatness, the Prophet's name even today exerts a magic charm over millions of souls, spread all over the world.

THE UNLETTERED PROPHET

He had not studied philosophy in the schools of Athens or Rome, Persia, India or China, yet he could proclaim the highest truths of eternal value to mankind. Unlettered himself, he could yet speak with an eloquence and fervour which moved men to tears of ecstasy. Born an orphan and blessed with no worldly goods, he was loved by all. He had studied at no military academy; yet he could organise his forces against tremendous odds and gained victories through the moral forces which he marshalled. Gifted men with a genius for preaching are rare. Descartes included the perfect preacher among the rarest kind in the world. Hitler in his 'Mein Kamp' has expressed a similar view. He says: *"A great theorist is seldom a great leader. An agitator is far more likely to possess these qualities. He will always be a better leader. For, leadership means the ability to move masses of men. The talent to produce ideas has nothing in common with the capacity for leadership"*. But, he says: *"the union of the theorist, organiser, and leader, in one man is the rarest phenomenon on this earth; therein consists greatness:"*

In the person of the Prophet of Islam the world has seen this rarest phenomenon on the earth, walking in flesh and blood.

"A poor, hard-toiling ill-provided man; careless of what vulgar men toil for. Not a bad man, I should say; something better in him than HUNGER of any sort - or these wild Arab men, fighting and jostling three-and-twenty years at his hand, in close contact with him always, would not have revered him so!

“They were wild men, bursting ever and anon into quarrel, into all kinds of fierce sincerity; without right worth and manhood, no man could have commanded them. They called him Prophet, you say? Why, he stood there face to face with them; bare, not enshrined in any mystery; visibly clouting his own cloak, cobbling his own shoes; fighting; counselling, ordering in the midst of them: they must have seen what kind of a man he WAS, let him be CALLED what you like! No Emperor with his tiaras was obeyed as this man in a cloak of his own clouting.

“During three-and-twenty years of rough actual trial, I find something of a veritable Hero necessary for that, of itself”.
(Carlyle in “Heroes and Hero Worship”)

And more wonderful still is what the Reverend Bosworth Smith remarks: *“Head of the State as well as the Church, he was Caesar and Pope in one; but he was Pope without the Pope’s pretensions, and Caesar without the legions of Caesar, without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a police force, without a fixed revenue. If ever a man had the right to say that he ruled by a right divine, it was Muhammad, for he had all the powers without their supports. He cared not for the dressings of power. The simplicity of his private life was in keeping with his public life:”*

MUHAMMAD - UNTAINTED AND PURE

After the fall of Makkah, more than one million square miles of land lay at his feet. Lord of Arabia, he mended his own shoes and coarse woollen garments, milked the goats, swept the hearth, kindled the fire and attended to other menial offices of the family. The entire town of Madinah, where he lived, grew wealthy in the later days of his life. Everywhere there was gold and silver in plenty and yet in those days of prosperity many weeks would elapse without a fire being kindled in the hearth of the king of Arabia, his food being dates and water. His family would go hungry many

nights successively because they could not get anything to eat in the evening. He slept on no soft bed but on a palm mat after a long busy day, to spend most of his night in prayer, often pleading with tears before his Creator to grant him strength to discharge his duties. As the reports go, his voice would get choked due to weeping and it would appear as if a cooking pot was on fire and boiling had commenced. On the day of his death his only assets were a few coins, a part of which went to satisfy a debt and the rest was given to a needy person who came to his house for charity. The clothes in which he breathed his last had many patches. The house from where light had spread to the world was in darkness because there was no oil in the lamp.

CONSISTENT UNTO DEATH

Circumstances changed, but the Prophet of God did not. In victory or in defeat, in power or in adversity, in affluence or in indigence, he was the same man, disclosed the same character. Like all the ways and laws of God, Prophets of God are unchangeable.

Chapter Five

A PERPETUAL LEGACY -TO THE WORLD

MORE THAN HONEST

An honest man, as the saying goes, is the noblest work of God. Muhammad was more than honest. He was human to the marrow of his bones. Human sympathy, human love, was the music of his soul. To serve man, to elevate man, to purify man, to educate man, in a word, to humanise man - this was the object of his mission, the be-all and end-all of his life. In thought, in word, in action, he had the good of humanity as his sole inspiration, his sole guiding principle.

He was most unostentatious and selfless to the core. What were the

titles he assumed? Only two, Servant of God, and His Messenger; Servant first and then a Messenger. A Messenger, and Prophet, like many other prophets in every part of this world, some known to us and many not known. If one does not believe in any of these truths one ceases to be a Muslim. It is an article of faith with all Muslims.

“Looking at the circumstances of the time and the unbounded reverence of his followers,” says a Western writer, *“the most miraculous thing about Muhammad is that he never claimed the power of working miracles”.*

Miracles were performed, but not to propagate his faith, and were attributed entirely to God and His inscrutable ways. He would plainly say that he was a man like others. He had no treasures of earth or heaven. Nor did he claim to know the secrets that lie in the womb of the future. All this was in an age when miracles were supposed to be ordinary occurrences, at the beck and call of the commonest saint and when the whole atmosphere was surcharged with supernaturalism- in Arabia and outside Arabia.

SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION - A LEGACY FROM MUHAMMAD

He turned the attention of his followers towards the study of nature and its laws, to understand them and appreciate the Glory of God. The Qur’an says: *We (God Almighty) did not create the heavens and the earth, and all between them merely in (idle) sport: We created them not except for just ends: but most of mankind do not understand.* (Holy Qur’an 44:38-39)

The world is not an illusion, nor without purpose. It has been created with truth. The number of verses in the Qur’an inviting close observation of nature are several times more than those that relate to prayer, fast, pilgrimage, etc., all put together. The Muslims, under its influence, began to observe nature closely and this gave birth to the scientific spirit of observation and experiment which was unknown to the Greeks. While the Muslim Botanist, Ibn Baitar

wrote on Botany after collecting plants from all parts of the world, while Al Biruni travelled for forty years to collect mineralogical specimens, and Muslim astronomers made some observations extending even over twelve years, Aristotle wrote on Physics without performing a single experiment, wrote on natural history carelessly stating, without taking the trouble to ascertain, the most easily verifiable fact that men have more teeth than animals.

DEBT OF WEST TO ARABS FOR SCIENCE

Galen, the greatest authority on classical anatomy, said that the lower jaw consists of two bones, a statement accepted unchallenged for centuries till Abdul Latheef took the trouble to examine a human skeleton. After enumerating several instances, Robert Briffalut concludes in his well known book, *The Making of Humanity*: *"The debt of our science to the Arabs does not consist in startling discoveries or revolutionary theories. Science owes a great deal more to the Arab culture: it owes its existence".* The same writer says: *"The Greeks systematised, generalised and theorised, but the patient ways of investigation, the accumulation of positive knowledge, the minute methods of science, detailed and prolonged observation, experimental enquiry, were altogether alien to Greek temperament. What we call science, arose in Europe as a result of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks..... That spirit and these methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs."*

Chapter Six

Muhammad -THE MESSENGER OF GOD

ISLAM - A COMPLETE WAY OF LIFE

It is the same practical character of the teaching of Prophet Muhammad that besides giving birth to the scientific spirit, has

also sanctified the daily labours and the so-called mundane affairs. The Qur'an says that God has created man to worship Him, but the word worship has a connotation of its own. God's worship is not confined to prayer alone, but every act that is done with the purpose of winning the approval of God and is for the benefit of humanity, comes under its purview. Islam sanctifies life and all its pursuits provided they are performed with honesty, justice and pure intent. It obliterates the age-long distinction between sacred and profane. The Qur'an says that if you eat clean things and thank God for it, it is an act of worship. It is a saying of the Prophet of Islam that a morsel of food that one places in the mouth of his wife is an act of virtue to be rewarded by God. Another tradition of the Prophet says: *"he who is satisfying the desire of his heart will be rewarded by God provided the methods adopted are permissible."* A person who was listening to him exclaimed: *'O Prophet of God, he is answering the calls of passion, he is only satisfying the cravings of his heart.'* Forthwith came the reply: *"had he adopted the unlawful method for the satisfaction of this urge, he would have been punished; then, why should he not be rewarded for following the right course?"*

SUBLIME TEACHINGS

This new conception of religion, that it should also devote itself to the betterment of this life rather than concern itself exclusively with supermundane affairs, has led to a new orientation of moral values. Its abiding influence on the common relations of mankind in the affairs of everyday life, its deep power over the masses, its regulation of their conceptions of rights and duty, its suitability and adaptability to the ignorant savage and the wise philosopher alike, are characteristic features of the teachings of the Prophet of Islam.

BASED ON CORRECT FAITH AND RIGHT ACTIONS

But it should be most carefully borne in mind that this stress on

good actions is not at the sacrifice of correctness of faith. While there are various schools of thought, one praising faith at the expense of deeds, another exhorting various acts to the detriment of correct belief, *Islam is based on correct faith and actions*. Means are as important as the end, and ends are as important as the means. It is an organic unity. Together they live and thrive. Separate them and they both decay and die. In Islam, faith cannot be divorced from action. Right knowledge should be transferred into right action to produce the right results. *“Those who believe and do good, they alone shall enter paradise.”* How often do these words come in the Qur’an? Again and again, not less than fifty times these words are repeated. Contemplation is encouraged, but mere contemplation is not the goal. Those who believe and do nothing cannot exist in Islam. Those who believe and do wrong are inconceivable. Divine law is the law of effort and not of ideals. It chalks out for men the path of eternal progress from knowledge to action and from action to satisfaction.

GOD - THERE IS NONE LIKE UNTO HIM⁶

But what is the correct faith from which right action spontaneously proceeds, resulting in complete satisfaction? Here the central doctrine of Islam is the Unity of God. There is no God but the one God, that is the pivot from which hangs the whole teaching and practice of Islam. He is unique not only as regards His divine being, but also as regards His divine attributes.

As regards the attributes of God, Islam adopts here, as in other things too, the law of the golden mean. It avoids, on the one hand, the view of God which divests the divine being of every attribute, and rejects, on the other, the view which likens Him to things material. The Qur’an says, on the one hand, there is nothing which is like Him; on the other, it affirms that He is Seeing, Hearing, Knowing. He is the King who is without a stain of fault or deficiency, the mighty ship of His power floats upon the ocean of justice and equity. He is the Beneficent, the Merciful. He is the Guardian over

all. Islam does not stop with this positive statement. It adds further what is its most special characteristic, the negative aspect of the problem. There is alone no-one else who is guardian over anything. He is the mender of every breakage and no-one else is the mender of any breakage. He is the restorer of any loss whatsoever. There is no god but the one God, above any need, the Maker of bodies, Creator of souls, the Lord of the day of judgement and in short, in the words of the Qur'an-

“Say. Call upon Allah, or call upon Rahman⁷. Whatever name you call Him, (it is well): for to Him belong the most beautiful names. (Holy Qur’an 17:110)

POSITION OF HUMAN BEINGS IN CREATION

Regarding the position of man in relation to the Universe, the Qur’an says:

“Allah is He Who has subjected to you the sea, that you may sail your ships through it by His command, that you may seek of His bounty and that you may be grateful; and He has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and on earth as from Himself. Behold, in that are signs indeed for a people who reflect.” (Holy Qur’an 45:12 - 13)

But in relation to God, the Qur’an says: *“He (Allah) it is Who, has created death⁸ and life, that He may test as to which of you is best in deed. And He is exalted in might, oft-forgiving;” (Holy Qur’an 67:2)*

Inspite of free-will, which he enjoys to some extent, every man is born under certain circumstances and continues to live under certain circumstances beyond his control. With regard to this, God says, according to Islam, it is My will to create any man under conditions that seem best to Me. Cosmic plans finite mortals cannot fully comprehend. But I will certainly test you in prosperity as well as in adversity, in health as well as in sickness, in heights as well as

in depths. My ways of testing differ from man to man, from hour to hour. In adversity, do not despair and do not resort to unlawful means. It is but a passing phase. In prosperity, do not forget God. God's Gifts are given only as trusts. You are always on trial; every moment on test. In this sphere of life *"theirs is not to reason why, theirs is but to do and die."*⁹⁹ If you live, live in accordance with God; and if you die, die in the path of God. You may call it fatalism. But this type of fatalism is a condition of vigorous increasing effort, keeping you ever on the alert. Do not consider this temporal life on earth as the end of human existence. There is a life after death and it is eternal. Life after death is only a connecting link, a door that opens up the hidden reality of life. Every action in life, however insignificant, produces a lasting effect. It is correctly recorded somehow.

THIS LIFE IS PREPARATION FOR HEREAFTER

Some of the ways of God are known to you, but many of His ways are hidden from you. What is hidden in you and from you in this world will be unrolled and laid open before you in the next. The virtuous will enjoy the blessings of God which the eye has not seen, nor has the ear heard, nor have they entered into the hearts of men to conceive of them. They will march onward, reaching higher and higher stages of evolution. Those who have wasted opportunity in this life, shall, under the inevitable law, which makes every man taste of that he has done, be subjected to a course of treatment of the spiritual disease which they have brought about with their own hands. Beware, it is a terrible ordeal. Bodily pain is torture, you can bear it somehow.

Spiritual pain is hell, you will find it unbearable. Fight in this life itself the tendencies of the spirit prone to evil, tempting you into iniquitous ways. Reach the next stage when the self-accusing spirit in your conscience is awakened and the soul is anxious to attain moral excellence and revolts against

disobedience. This will lead you to the final stage of the soul at rest, contented with God, finding its happiness and delight in Him alone. The soul no more stumbles. The stage of struggle passes away. Truth is victorious and falsehood lays down its arms. All Complexes will then be resolved. Your house will not be divided against itself. Your personality will get integrated round the central core of submission to the will of God and complete surrender to His divine purpose. All hidden energies will then be released. The soul then will have peace. God will then address you,
'O thou soul that art at rest, and retest fully contented with thy Lord, return to thy Lord, He is pleased with thee and thou pleased with Him; so enter among My servants and enter into My paradise.' (Holy Qur'an89: 27 - 30)

MAN'S DESTINY

This is the final goal for man: to become on the one hand the master of the Universe and on the other to see that his soul finds rest in his Lord, that not only his Lord will be pleased with him but that he is also pleased with his Lord. Contentment, complete contentment, satisfaction, complete satisfaction, peace, complete peace, will result. The love of God is his food at this stage and he drinks deep at the fountain of life. Sorrow and frustration do not overwhelm him and success does not find him vain and exulting.

Thomas Carlyle, struck by this philosophy of life writes: *"and then also Islam, that we must submit to God; that our whole strength lies in resigned submission to Him, whatsoever He does to us, the thing He sends to us, even if death and worse than death, shall be good, shall be best; we resign ourselves to God:"* The same author (Carlyle) continues, *"if this be Islam", says Goethe, "do we not all live in Islam?"* Carlyle himself answers this question of Goethe, *"Yes, all of us that have any moral life, we all live so. This is yet the highest wisdom that heaven has revealed to our earth."*



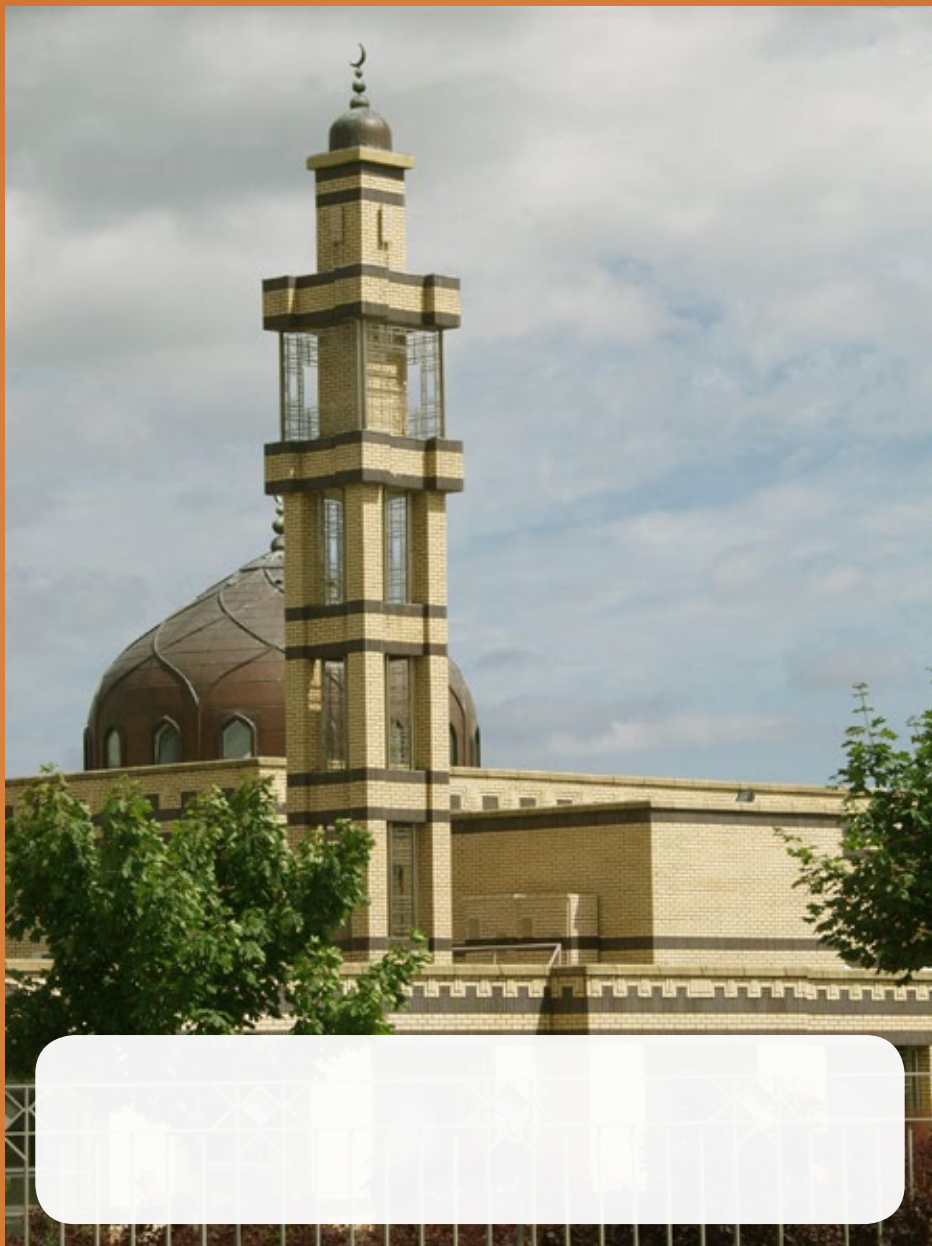
Carlyle continues: *“The word of such a man (Muhammad) is a voice direct from nature’s own heart; men do and must listen to that, as to nothing else; all else is wind in comparison....”*

From the book - (“Heroes and Hero-Worship”)

Footnotes:

- 1) The author is a professing Hindu.
2. Now 14 centuries.
3. “Most historical of all religious personalities”. Britannica.
4. “The lies which well-meaning zeal has heaped round this man (Muhammad) are disgraceful to ourselves only”. Thomas Carlyle.
5. The author means Muslims.
6. HOLY QUR’AN 112:4
7. ONE OF THE 99 NAMES (ATTRIBUTES) OF ALLAH IN THE HOLY QUR’AN.
8. “Created Death and Life.” Death is here put before life, and is created. Death therefore is not merely a negative state.
9. Holy Qur’an 89:27 -30





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ANSWERS TO COMMON
QUESTIONS ON ISLAM

محمد

عَلَيْهِ الصَّلَاةُ وَالسَّلَامُ

MUHAMMAD THE
PROPHET OF ISLAM

