

**HADITH**  
**A RE-EVALUATION**

**By**

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by

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION:**  
**WHY WE RAISE THIS PROBLEM**

*... Therefore, congratulate My servants who listen to all views, then follow the best. These are the ones guided by God; these are the intelligent ones.*

*(Quran, 39:17-18)*

All Muslims are required to uphold the *hadith* or *sunna* of the Prophet, i.e. the so-called Prophetic traditions, as a primary source of law apart from the Quran, according to the teachings of classical jurisprudence. Yet not many, indeed very few, realize that the basis of this jurisprudential theory was promulgated two hundred years after Muhammad's death by the famous jurist Imam Shafi'i (d. 204/820). What have come to be known as the 'Six Authentic Books' of hadith of the majority Sunnite 'orthodoxy' were compiled, precisely after the promulgation of this theory, by Bukhari (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875), Abu Daud (d. 275/888), Tirmidhi (d. 279/892), Ibn Maja (d. 273/886), and al-Nasa'i (d. 303/915) during the second half of the second and the beginning of the third centuries of Islam, between 220 and 270 years after the Prophet's death.

The 'heterodox' Shi'ite minority sect has its own sets of hadith compiled during the third and fourth centuries, by al-Kulaini (d. 328 or 329), Ibn Babuwayh (d. 381), Jaafar Muhammad al-Tusi (d. 411) and al-Murtada (d. 436), who compiled sayings attributed to Ali.

Based on this Shafi'i theory and on what was later termed as the consensus of scholars, the hadith/sunna was propagated to and accepted by the Muslims as interpreter and complement to the Quran, implying thereby that the Quran needs an interpreter and is not complete in itself. Although the Shi'ites have not accepted the classical Sunnite jurisprudential theory *in toto*, they do accept the doctrine that the hadith/sunna constitutes a source of law on par with the Quran.

### **Background to this Study**

In accordance with this Sunnite tradition, I also accepted this position when I wrote my book on modern Islamic social theory in 1981-82, although I qualified my acceptance according to Ibn Khaldun's formula, which requires all acceptable traditions to be validated by the Quran and rational criteria. However, this position, though a scientific one, is still not clear enough until in 1985 the works of an outstanding Egyptian Muslim scholar, Dr. Rashad Khalifa, particularly his [The Computer Speaks: God's Message to the World, Quran, Hadith and Islam](#) and his superb translation of the Quran have opened for me a way to solve the problem of the hadith. I therefore began to re-examine the hadith: how they came about; the social factors that brought them into existence; a review of the classical criticism; the actual place of the hadith in relation to the Quran; their negative effects on the Muslim community; their connections to the decline and fall of the Muslims; and the way out of this impasse.

I am convinced that the time has come for the Muslim community and their intelligentsia to critically re-evaluate the whole heritage of traditional Islamic thought, including theology and jurisprudence. This is because the traditional formulation was made by the society and intelligentsia of that time in accordance with their knowledge and level of understanding, and conforming to needs of that time. Now the situation has changed tremendously and there is no doubt that the traditional formulation must be reconsidered.

Since the emergence of the modern reformism movement of Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Ridha at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, many studies have been made on the decline and fall of the Muslims. These include the works of thinkers like Iqbal, Malek Bennabi and Fazlur Rahman. However, the condition of the Muslim community has not changed very much and continues to be precarious. In comparison with other communities, especially those in Europe, United States, Russia and Japan, the Muslim community is the most backward, especially in socio-economic, scientific, technological and military fields.

What are the reasons for this backwardness? From the point of view of numbers, the Muslims, now more than a billion, have outnumbered the Christians, and from the point of view of natural resources, Muslim countries are among the richest in the world. Why, with such vast resources and possessing an infallible divine scripture, are the Muslims unable to compete with and surpass other nations?

This situation is exactly the opposite of the situation of their early ancestors who, within a short period of time, climbed the heights of success and created a great world empire and a great world civilization. These early successes which had astounded the world must have had their reasons based on the laws of historical change. What are those reasons? This is the greatest challenge facing Muslim intelligentsia at the close of the twentieth century and on the threshold of the twenty-first: to seek the true causes of Muslim decline and thereby to lay the ground for a new Muslim Renaissance.

As we have said, this study and review of our traditional formulation must encompass classical theology and jurisprudence. The hadith, of course, is at the core of these traditional disciplines.

Our present knowledge point to many factors that contribute to the rise and fall of nations, factors that are ideological, political, economic, social, cultural, historical, psychological, demographic, geographical, scientific, technological and military in nature. But it is also quite certain that within this pluralism of factors, not all play equally important roles. Technology can surmount geographical limitations; military strategy can overcome numbers; political leadership can offset economic weakness, and so on. Turning to the Quran as our infallible guide, we find the following statements that can give us a clue to the understanding of the problem under discussion.

*Surely, God does not change the condition of any people until they themselves change.*

*That is because God does not change the blessings He had bestowed upon any people, unless they themselves change.*

*If only the previous generations had some intelligent people who enjoined them from corruption, they would have been saved. But We saved a few of them, while the rest pursued their material things and became sinners. Your Lord never destroys any community unjustly while the people are righteous.*

*We will surely give victory to our messengers and to those who believe, both in this life and on the day the witnesses are raised.*

*You shall never waver, nor shall you worry; you are guaranteed victory for as long as you are believers.*

All the above Quranic statements point to a people's ideology as the most important component in the determination of their fate. This means that insofar as a people is imbued with a scientific, dynamic and progressive ideology, that far will it climb the ladder of success. Conversely, insofar as a people revert to

a previously held anti-scientific, static and regressive ideology, that far will it degenerate. The strong unambiguous statements about victory being granted to believers in both worlds necessarily follow from the definition of believers as those possessing and practicing the true scientific ideology.

Basing ourselves on this premise, we can make the following hypothesis. The rapid rise of the Arab nation from its dark period of paganism prior to Muhammad to become the most powerful and civilized nation in the world then, within a short period of time, is due to the new, inspiring, powerful and dynamic Islamic ideology of monotheism brought by Muhammad. The Arabs, under his and his immediate successors' leadership, discarded their erstwhile polytheism and superstitions. They united to fight and struggle under the guidance of the Quran and set up a just social order. Because this struggle was based on divine truth and justice as contained in the Quran, it was invincible. It also gave rise to a great social movement, bringing forth with it outstanding political, military and intellectual leaders who helped to create the first scientific-spiritual culture in history.

This hypothesis, in contrast to the modernist or the traditionalist theses, appears to be the most helpful in our effort to understand the history and the decline of the Muslims. The modernist thesis, in brief, states that the Muslims declined because they have remained traditional and have not modernized themselves according to Western secular values. The traditionalist thesis, on the other hand, blame the secularization of Muslim societies and the neglect of orthodox Muslim teachings as the major cause of Muslim decline.

It is obvious that the modernist and the traditionalist theses cancelled each other. Furthermore, the modernists have to explain why the Turkish experiment with Westernized modernization failed. They also have to explain why developed Western societies such as the United States and Europe have been undergoing a multi-faceted crisis since the First World War, and why a new philosophical trend of thought critical of Western-type modernization has developed in Europe and America.

The traditionalists, on the other hand, must explain the failure of their system from the beginning when it was first formulated around the third, fourth and fifth centuries of Islam. Some Arab countries have hardly modernized and had been practicing the traditional system for centuries – why have these not progressed? If they have not progressed, it is idle to expect Muslim countries to progress if they implement the traditional system.

The answer lies in our hypothesis. The early Muslims rose to the pinnacles of success precisely because they were in possession of and practiced the powerful and dynamic Islamic ideology as preached in the Quran. They subjected other knowledge, local and foreign, to the discriminative teachings of the Quran. As long as they did this, they progressed. A time came when other teachings, local and foreign, gained the upper hand and submerged the Quran, as witnessed by the following Quranic prophecy:

*The messenger will say, "My Lord, my people have deserted this Quran." We thus appointed for every prophet enemies from among the criminals, and God suffices as Guide and Protector.*

After about three hundred years, extraneous harmful teachings not taught by Prophet Muhammad but skillfully attributed to him gradually gained a foothold in the Muslim community and turned them away from the dynamic invincible ideology that initially brought them success. This ideology, as we shall show, is precisely the hadith. This is the main cause of their downfall. It therefore follows that the purging of this harmful ideology, and with it other foreign modern ideologies, from the Muslim community, and their return to the original ideology brought by Muhammad in the Quran is the *sine qua non* for the regeneration of the Muslim community and for a new Muslim Renaissance.

## **Age of "Great Disorder"**

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The time has now arrived for the Muslims to examine their situation more critically and boldly. Actually, this perilous situation is not confined to the Muslims alone; it covers the entire mankind. A number of twentieth century philosophers, historians and social critics have unanimously stated that this century is the most critical century in human history. The late Chinese leader, Mao Zedong, described the century as "Great Disorder under Heaven." The American historical philosopher, P.A. Sorokin, has detailed the crisis of the twentieth century in his able book, The Crisis of Our Age, published in 1941. It is in this century that two terrible world wars occurred, and a third more horrible one might still occur, in spite of the end of the Cold War, to destroy the present civilization.

It is in this century also that an array of philosophies, ideologies, theories, systems that includes liberalism, Marxism, pragmatism, logical positivism, existentialism, Nazism, Fascism, Stalinism, Ghandhism, Maoism and religious traditionalism collapsed. When dominant existing philosophies and systems cannot solve the problems of human security and welfare, it is a sure sign that a very serious crisis is upon us.

A number of modern writers and poets, such as Dostoyevsky, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Y.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot, had expressed this atmosphere and sense of great crisis in their works. Listen to the loneliness and poignant sorrow of Eliot:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope

For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love

For love would be love of the wrong thing;

there is yet faith

But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the

waiting.

and the deep despair and earnest prayer of Yeats:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world;

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;

Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

This literature of pessimism and absurdity of life beginning in the twenties and thirties and continuing after the Second World War is, of course, a reflection of the great disorder currently existing in the world. This great disorder is evidenced by the great ideological cleavage, the continuous raging of the fires of war, the massive starvation and poverty in the Third World, the steep decline in public morality, worldwide financial and economic crisis and the inability of the United Nations to function effectively.

The Muslims had long lost their intellectual and political leadership of the world. The break-up of their empire in 1258 AD gave way to independent dynasties which continued until they were colonized by European powers beginning in the sixteenth right up to the early twentieth centuries. Then, with the rise of nationalism in Asia and Africa, nearly all of them regained their independence and set up sovereign nation-states.

However, the Muslims had ceased to be creative around the fourteenth century. Their period of intense creativity lasted three centuries from the ninth through to the eleventh. Their last great philosopher was the Arab Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406). Since that time Muslim intellect stagnated and even degenerated and Europe took over to develop dominant philosophies and disciplines along materialist and hedonistic lines.

After more than a century of modern reformism efforts initiated by Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, the Muslim world, a world as disunited as any other, have not progressed much. They have not been able to fight off the ideological influence and domination of the world power-blocs. They are not united in their Muslim purpose. Their economies are dependent and backward. Their sciences and technologies are non-existent. Militarily, they are weak and dependent on the big powers.

However, there has been much talk, since the early seventies, of implementing the *Shari`a* or medieval Muslim law and the setting up of an Islamic state. This is the slogan of the traditionalists who have taken over the reform movement of Muhammad Abduh. The examples of *mullah* rule in Iran since the great popular anti-Shah revolution and the Islamization programmes in some countries do not give support to the traditionalist alternative.

The main weakness of the Muslims is their disunity. This disunity takes the form in their inability to cooperate for the good of Muslims in individual countries and the whole Muslim world. It also surfaces in the form of conflicts and wars between Muslims, as typified by the Iran-Iraq war and the civil wars in Lebanon.

What is the cause of this disunity? The Muslims claim that they worship one God and follow His one religion. They also declare their religious brotherhood. How then are they so disunited? This is the mystery that we have to unravel. This is the reason for our re-evaluation of the hadith. Our hypothesis is that the hadith — in principle, a false teaching attributed to Prophet Muhammad — is a major factor causing disunity and backwardness among Muslims. Our study is to prove this hypothesis.

### **Where Have We Gone Wrong?**

The time is ripe for Muslims and for mankind as a whole to undertake a fundamental study of this great human crisis. At some point, somewhere, we have gone wrong. Where have we gone wrong? It will be recalled that modern secular Europe emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in rebellion against the Catholic Church in particular and against religion in general to embrace secular humanism of the liberal or Marxist variety. For the last one to three hundred years it experimented with these social philosophies and systems and the experiments have proved a failure. Today the two philosophies and

systems are seeking a synthesis. Can the synthesis be achieved? Can it answer mankind's present quest for a new spiritual philosophy?

As for the Muslims, the new and young Muslim society and state set up by Muhammad and his compatriots in seventh century Arabia developed and expanded so rapidly that within a century it had become an empire to comprise also Persia and Byzantium, and within two to three hundred years it had created a great world civilization. But, as quickly as it had arisen, so quickly had it declined and fallen. Today, the Muslim polity, science and civilization, great though they were in their time, are glories and things of the past. There seems to be no bridge linking their great predecessors of the early centuries and present-day Muslims.

The great question mark hanging over the Muslims and the entire mankind today is: Why? The short answer to the question, which is the thesis of this book, is that mankind, including the Muslims, have deserted the true teachings of God. The true teachings of God in the era of Muhammad is contained in His final scripture to mankind, the Quran. The People of the Scripture, i.e. believers before Muhammad, especially the Jews and the Christians, rejected Muhammad because they had idolized their own prophets and religious leaders and refused to acknowledge Muhammad's divine message. Modern secular rebellious Europe not only turned against their religious priesthood, in which action it was right, but also against religion altogether, in which action it was wrong. This is the cause of the present Western impasse.

As regards the Muslims, Muhammad brought them the Quran, described by God Himself as an invincible book, but no sooner did Muhammad die and leave them, they contrived to make Muhammad bring two books and, after bitter quarrels, they legislated, two hundred and fifty years later, that Muslims must uphold not only the Quran but also the hadith. However, in truth, since then, they followed the hadith rather than the Quran. This explains God's warning in the Quran that we have quoted earlier. So it came about that while secular Europe embraced either liberalism or Marxism, the Muslim world embraced the hadith, with the philosophies of secular humanism infecting the elites of Muslim societies, thus justifying the Quranic warning.

### **Avoiding Misunderstanding**

Raising such a fundamental issue as this, it is difficult to avoid misunderstanding from both sides. The secular side, being more open-minded and tolerant, will simply dismiss this call to the Quran as antiquated, outmoded and irrelevant. Many secularists will simply not consider it. On the other hand, the traditionalist side, being close-minded and intolerant of dissenting views on matters regarded as their preserves, will raise a hue and cry and throw slanderous accusations into the debate.

One cannot be discouraged by the prospect. It is part of the social struggle to expose falsehood and confirm the truth. The secularists will be worthy opponents since they will be prepared to fight it out in open battles. Open debate is part of their secular tradition. The traditionalists are a different breed. Open debate is not part of their tradition. In fact, they came into being in Muslim society by killing open debate. Authoritarianism is their culture. Thus, slander, threats and falsehood will be their methods.

It will be claimed that the writer is trying to cause confusion and further divide Muslim society. This is far from the truth. The Muslims cannot be further confused and divided than they already have been for a long time. What worse confusion and division can there be than when Muslims fight and kill one another?

My aim is to try to establish the truth. My personal history bears testimony to this tendency. Like other Malays, I was born and brought up in an ordinary orthodox Malay Muslim family. However, my early

interest in social philosophy took me on a long spiritual quest, over a period of thirty years, spanning liberal nationalism, Islamic liberalism and socialism, every single one of which each time sat uneasily over traditional Islam. The failure became obvious to me when the coherent integrated social philosophy that I was seeking eluded me. It was in the Islam of the Quran, scientifically understood, that I discovered the framework of such a philosophy.

Looking back, this is only logical, since the Quran contains the sure truth from God, while most of human teachings, as the Quran points out, are mere conjecture. But at that time, the Quran was, so to speak, covered up for me by the fog of hadith.

It will be claimed that calling the people back to the Quran alone will create a new sect, in addition to the sects that already exist. This is standing the argument on its head. Since the Quran is, in the first place, anti-sectarian, not only will it not create a new sect, but it will, on the contrary, eliminate all existing sects and reunite all Muslims. This is precisely what we want to do. History proves that under Muhammad the young Muslim society was completely united and there was no sect whatever. It is ironic that the *Ahl'ul-Hadith* who talk so much about following the example of the Prophet have completely abandoned this finest of his examples!

It will also be claimed that in rejecting the hadith as a source of law, we shall be rejecting the role of the Prophet. It will further be claimed that this is the first step to the ultimate rejection of the Quran! As for the first part of the claim, it is obvious to anyone that it was only through Muhammad that mankind received the Quran from God Almighty. That was his primary role — God's messenger — indeed his only role, as the Quran stressed several times. Was not this role great enough for Prophet Muhammad? Surely, it was.

As for the second part, it is too ridiculous to even think of it. But since the die-hard traditionists would stop at nothing to slander their opponents, one would lose nothing to spend a few lines exposing them. How can anyone, after calling the people back to the Quran, then reject the Quran? Even if he does, and this means reverting to disbelief after belief, how can that benefit him? He would lose everything, while the people, on the contrary, would benefit greatly by going back to the Quran.

The Muslims must re-possess critical consciousness and discard prejudice and group fanaticism. We must avoid throwing slanderous accusations at what we may not like at first. God Himself has taught us to verify things before we accept or reject them. No less an intelligent man than Sayyed Hossein Nasr who has said the following about those who deny the authority of the hadith:

It is against this basic aspect of the whole structure of Islam that a severe attack has been made in recent years by an influential school of Western Orientalists. No more of a vicious and insidious attack could be made against Islam than this one, which undercuts its very foundations and whose effect is more dangerous than if a physical attack were made against Islam.

How can this scholar, who has quoted a blasphemous hadith in the same book, spout this slander? Why should we Muslims, in possession of an invincible scripture from God Almighty, be afraid of the criticisms and even attacks of Orientalists? Such fear, in fact, reflects our own weakness. It shows that we are not sure of our own selves. The Quranic methodology should be a lesson for us. The Quran incessantly reproduces the false arguments of idol-worshippers and hypocrites and rebuts them with proofs and with better arguments. We should do the same to expose falsehoods and confirm the truth. The methods of suppression and slander are alien to the methods of truth.

Rejecting the authority of the hadith does not mean denying its existence. Some true reports of what the Prophet said and did outside the Quran as leader of his community and as an ordinary man must have been preserved. Such reports deserve to be treated as any other historical account whose authenticity must be judged against other historical accounts, against the higher authority of the Quran, and against rational criteria. While Quranic pronouncements are divine and are eternally binding on believers, those of Muhammad in his capacity as leader must be treated in accordance with the Quranic injunction regarding politico-social authority, i.e. that they are only conditionally binding. The conditions are that they do not contradict the Quran, they are binding only for the community of that time, and that for other communities of other times they only constitute as precedents to be followed or bypassed as and when deemed useful.

It should also be well understood that this re-evaluation of the hadith is in no way a slur upon our classical scholars. They understood and reacted to their problems as best they could. We who come after them are not bound by their solutions. As Muhammad Abduh has well said, "They are human and we are human. We learn from them but we do not [blindly] follow them." No doubt our re-examination constitutes a criticism. But this is normal scientific procedure. It has been done by all our great philosophers and scholars from the beginning, by Ibn Sina, al-Ghazzali, Ibn Rush, Ibn Taimiya, Shah Waliyullah, Muhammad Abduh and scores of others. We owe it to them and to ourselves to constantly practice this method. For how else can knowledge develop and society progress unless they continually be purged of errors. This accounts for the very important Quranic directive, repeated many times, to believers:

*Let there be a community among you who preach goodness, advocate righteousness and forbid evil. These are the winners.*

It must also be pointed out that this criticism and re-evaluation of the hadith that we are making is nothing new. Imam Shafi'i who first stipulated that the hadith should be accepted as a source of law had opponents that he himself described in his book. In recent times there were such proponents in Egypt, India and Indonesia. It may be that our treatment, thanks to recent developments in Quranic and hadith studies, is more systematic than previous efforts.

In this study we have adopted what may be termed as Islamic scientific methodology. It is unfortunate that today we associate scientific methodology to the Western empirical and rational methods, when, in fact, it was Islam that introduced this methodology to the West. The words of the English historian Robert Briffault deserve to be quoted in full:

"... It was under their successors at the Oxford school that Roger Bacon learned Arabic and Arabic science. Neither Roger Bacon nor his later namesake has any title to be credited with having introduced the experimental method. Roger Bacon was no more than one of the apostles of Muslim science and method to Christian Europe; and he never wearied of declaring that knowledge of Arabic and Arabic science was for his contemporaries the only way to true knowledge. Discussions as to who was the originator of the experimental method ... are part of the colossal misrepresentation of the origins of European civilization. The experimental method of [the] Arabs was by Bacon's time widespread and eagerly cultivated throughout Europe..."

However, the scientific methodology of Europe sought to bar supra-rational and supra-sensory knowledge from science. It is now admitted that this is inadequate to conform to the truly Islamic scientific methodology of combining sensory, rational and supra-rational knowledge to produce true integrated knowledge. Using this methodology, we take the Quran as our basis and starting point and subject all the evidence of the hadith, i.e. the hadith itself, the major classical writings on them and modern European

and Muslim criticisms, to Quranic and rational judgements. We may, of course, take ten years to do this and produce five volumes that few will have the time and the stamina to read. Our purpose is different. Ours is to write a readable book for the general reader with enough matter for him to think and draw conclusions.

It is hardly necessary to state that this is a view offered to the reader for his consideration. God Almighty Himself has ordered us to read in His name, for doing that we cannot fail to develop our mind and increase our knowledge. A good book will do that positively; a bad one, negatively. Reading in His name, therefore, cannot but produce good results. Yet, the Muslims today are very bad readers. Centuries of subservience to bigoted religious authorities have shackled their minds. This subservience plus their deplorable ignorance of the contents of the Quran combine to make what they are today — a weak, backward and humiliated people. The time has come for us to break out of this prison. It is for this purpose that this study is undertaken.

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## CHAPTER II

### REFUTATION OF THE TRADITIONISTS' THEORY

*Do not accept anything that you yourself cannot ascertain. You are given the hearing, the sight and the mind in order to examine and verify.*

*(Quran, 17:36)*

Modern Europe has succeeded in pioneering various fields of modern knowledge and becomes a leader in these fields — especially science and technology — because it holds firmly to the Kantian motto of the European Age of Enlightenment: **Dare to know**. The Islamic world, in the early stages of its second renaissance, must do likewise. Since in Islam knowledge is based on revelation, the motto of the new Islamic Renaissance must read: **Dare to know under the guidance of the Quran**.

Any study of the hadith and sunna must, of necessity, be based on the Quran. Everything said about the hadith must be subjected to the critical scrutiny of the Quran and science. Only what passes this test is acceptable.

The word *hadith* means 'news,' 'story' or 'message', while the word *sunna* means 'law,' 'system,' 'custom' or 'behavior.' In the hadith literature, the word hadith carries the meaning of a report of an alleged saying or action of Prophet Muhammad. Therefore, although sunna originally refers to the customary behavior of the Prophet, in the hadith literature both the terms sunna and hadith carry a similar meaning.

#### **The Four Arguments of Traditionists**

The *Ahl'ul-Hadith* or the Traditionists did not distinctly emerge in Muslim society until the second Islamic century, more than a hundred years after the Prophet's death. There is a big gap between the Prophet and the first legal digest that contains some traditions, i.e. the *Muwatta'* of Imam Malik (d. 179 AH). It is historically known that the 'four guided caliphs' — close companions of the Prophet — not only did not leave us any collection of traditions, they did not make use or made very little use of traditions.

Nevertheless, against all odds, the Traditionists prevailed in insisting the hadith/sunna was binding on the Muslims from the beginning. They claim to derive this authority for the hadith from the Quran itself, as we shall presently show. They cannot do otherwise than make this claim, for without the authority of the Quran as the basis of its legitimacy, the hadith is automatically rejected. It will be seen that this claim is false.

They put forward four principal arguments. Firstly, the hadith is also Divine revelation. Secondly, God's command to the believers to obey the messenger means that they must uphold the hadith. Thirdly, the Prophet is the interpreter of the Quran and the hadith is necessary in order to understand and carry out Quranic injunctions. Fourthly and lastly, the Prophet is an example for the believers to follow, and his sunna is binding on the believers.

We shall discuss these four principal arguments of the Traditionists in detail and show that they are false.

#### **Argument One: 'Sunna is Revelation'**

Their claim that hadith/sunna also constitutes revelation is based on the following Quranic verses:

*Our Lord, and raise among them a messenger who would recite for them Your revelations and teach them the scripture and wisdom and sanctify them. (5)*

*Your friend is neither astray, nor a liar. He does not speak on his own. This is a divine inspiration. (6)*

The famous classical jurist, Imam Shafi`i, basically the creator of the theory of classical jurisprudence, interpreted the Arabic word *hikmah* in above verse and in similar verses as meaning `sunna' or `hadith.' In his major work, al-Risala, he stated:

So, God mentions His scripture, that is the Quran, and wisdom, and I have heard from those who are knowledgeable in the Quran — those whom I agree with — say that wisdom is the traditions of the Prophet. This is the same as the Word [of God Himself]; but God knows better! Because the Quran is mentioned, followed by Wisdom; then God mentions His blessing to mankind by teaching the Quran and wisdom. So, **it is not possible that wisdom means other things than the traditions of the Prophet ...** (Emphasis added).

Shafi`i's interpretation of the word *hikmah* as meaning the Prophet's tradition cannot but give rise to grave doubts. Was he justified in doing so? He did not produce any support from the Quran for such an interpretation. He merely reported the view of "experts" whom he concurred with. Who these "experts" were and what their reasons for advancing such a view Shafi`i did not say. According to the laws of logic, we can question any view put forward by anybody, but we cannot question certainty. In the quotation above, we notice that Shafi`i jumped from a statement of the status of probability to a statement of the status of certainty without giving proper proofs to enable the probable view to achieve the status of certainty. This is unacceptable in any scientific discourse.

God Himself states in the Quran that it is He Who explains the Quran. This means that the Quran explains itself. Taking this cue and examining the use of the word *hikmah*, occurring twenty times in the Quran, it is obvious that it refers to the teachings of the Quran, or to general wisdom that all prophet-messengers or moral teachers were endowed with. The following Quranic usage will illustrate :

*This is part of the **wisdom** that your Lord reveals to you.*

where the word `wisdom' refers to some thirteen ethical teachings enumerated in verses 22 to 38. These teachings are the worship of God alone and the prohibition of idolatry, doing honor and kindness to parents, giving charity to relatives, the poor and needy and the alien, to be moderate in spending, prohibition against child-killing for fear of poverty, prohibition against adultery, prohibition against killing any human being except in the course of justice, the safe-keeping of an orphan's property until he or she becomes of age, honesty in trading, prohibition against the acceptance of unverified news or views, censure against arrogant behavior and general censure against evil.

Again the word `wisdom' in the following verse:

*God has made a covenant with the prophets that He will give them the scripture and **wisdom**.*

refers to the contents of all divine scriptures. Similarly in the following verse:

*We have endowed Luqman with **wisdom**, for he was appreciative of God.*

where the wisdom in question refers to general wisdom of spiritual teachers.

Muhammad Ali in his translation of the Quran mentions *al-Hikmah* as one of the names of the Quran based on the verse 17:39 that we have quoted above.

Further evidence that the words *hikmah* or *hakeem* with the meaning 'wisdom' can be seen from the following:

*These are the revelations and the message of **wisdom** that we recite to you.*

*Y.S. By the **wise** Quran! You are indeed one of the messengers.*

It should also be noted that the word *hakeem* in the Quran meaning 'wise' without exception refers to God, as for example:

*Our Lord, and raise among them a messenger who would recite for them Your revelations and teach them the scripture and wisdom and sanctify them. You are the Almighty, the **Wise**.*

*Glorifying God is everything in the heavens and the earth; He is the Almighty, the **Wise**.*

Based on the above Quranic evidence we can make two conclusions. Firstly, the word 'wisdom' quoted by Shafi'i in verse 2:129 refers to the ethical teachings of the Quran. Secondly, general wisdom has been endowed to all prophets. Can we, therefore, infer that Prophet Muhammad taught wisdom to his community through his leadership of the community? The answer is, of course, Yes. History proves that. But that wise leadership is also consequent upon his acting strictly in accordance with the ethical teachings of the Quran. All this wisdom is contained in the Quran, although some hadith may also have preserved that wisdom. The case for upholding the hadith apart from the Quran is, therefore, not proved by this argument.

Further examination of the use of the words 'sunna' and 'hadith' in the Quran gives interesting information. The word 'sunna' is used in the Quran to refer to the divine system or law and to the example of the fate suffered by ancient communities. None refers to the behavior of the Prophet. The two usages are illustrated in the following verses:

*This is God's **system** that has always prevailed. God's **system** never changes.*

*Tell those who disbelieve that if they repent, their past transgression will be forgiven. But if they revert, then the **examples** of the past should be remembered.*

The word 'hadith' is used in the Quran to mean 'news', 'story', 'message' or 'thing'. Out of the 36 times it is used in various grammatical forms, none refers to what is known as the Prophetic hadith as another source of law beside the Quran. On the contrary, in ten instances of very powerful statements the word refers to the Quran and categorically rejects any hadith besides the Quran. Here we give two of them:

*God sent down the best **hadith**, a scripture consistent, repeating.*

*Some people uphold vain **hadith** in order to divert others from the path of God without knowledge, and to create a mockery of it.*

The other verses, 53:3-4, that the Traditionists quote as proof that the sunna is also divine revelation have been given. Commenting on these verses, Fazlul Karim said:

The Holy Quran exhorts the people to believe the Hadith of the Prophet as nothing short of revelation ... The only difference between the Quran and the Hadith is that whereas the former was revealed directly through Gabriel with the very letters that are embodied from Allah, the latter was revealed without letters and words...

This interpretation of the hadith as revelation is patently false and has its origin in earlier Jewish practice, as we shall show. Let us look closer at the verses in question.

*By the falling star. Your friend is neither astray, nor a liar. He does not speak on his own. This is a divine inspiration. A teaching from a mighty one. The possessor of omnipotence, who assumed (all authority). From the highest horizon. He came closer by moving downwards. Until He became as close as possible. He then revealed to His servant what He revealed.*

The above verses clearly describe the process of revelation to Muhammad. They refer to a specially inspired state, not to the ordinary state of Muhammad's human existence. Apart from the fact that the verses themselves make this clear, this is the interpretation given by all authorities. Thus, the later extremely subjective meaning given to these verses to conform to the Traditionists' theory, as exemplified by Fazlul Karim, must be rejected.

What should alert Muslims is the very close resemblance of this theory to the much earlier Jewish theory of written and oral revelations. The Jewish Talmud, consisting of the Mishnah and Gemara, the equivalent of Muslim Hadith and Sunna, is a body of oral teachings of Jewish rabbis and jurists based on their interpretations and expositions of the scripture over a long period. In the words of the Jewish scholar Judah Goldin,

"...[It was believed that] along with the revelation of the Written Torah was a revelation of an Oral Torah, that is, that interpretations of and deductions from the Scriptures must have accompanied the Scriptures themselves has at least this to recommend it: no written text, particularly if it is meant as a guide for conduct, can in and of itself be complete; it must have some form of oral commentary associated with it. This much however is clear : from the fifth century BC onward there was a conscious effort on the part teachers to expound the canonical books of the Torah, to make clear its meaning and its applicability. 'To make clear the Torah of the Lord and put it into practice, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances' (Ezra 7:10) was not only the programme of Ezra but of the colleagues whom he attracted to himself, the Soferim ... It was the Soferim who made what was implicit in the Book of the Torah of God explicit and intelligible ..., and under their tutelage too, as times required, enactments and decrees were issued. Such teaching and legislation as the Soferim conducted through their schools and councils were carried on orally, in order to carefully distinguish between what was the Written Torah, **Scripture**, and the body of exegesis, interpretation **by [word of] mouth**, Oral Torah."

This historical testimony is self-explanatory. The theory of two revelations that the Traditionists had propagated is Jewish in origin and had its beginning in the teaching of scholar-priest Ezra, idolized by the Jews as the son of God, and his followers.

We should note that this theory, built with such elaborateness, is demolished by the Quran in just two words with its declaration that the Prophet believes in God's words:

*Therefore, you shall believe in God and His messenger, the gentile prophet, who believes in God and **His words**, and follow him that you may be guided.*

## **Argument Two: 'Obey the Messenger' Means**

### **'Uphold the Hadith'**

The second principal argument advanced by the Traditionists relates to God's commandment to the believers to obey the messenger, which they have interpreted to mean belief in the hadith/sunna. Shafi'i used this argument as his principal argument and tirelessly repeated it in his book, al-Risala. He said,

But whatever is decided by him in the sunna God has decreed that we should obey, and He considers [our] obedience to him as obedience to Him, and [our] refusal to obey him as our denial of Him, which will not be forgiven ...

The Traditionists use the famous verse 4:59 as well as two other verses as their props for this argument. Let us look at the verses carefully:

*O you who believe, you shall obey God, and you shall obey the messenger and those in charge among you. If you dispute in any matter, you shall refer it to God and the messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day. This is better for you and provides you with the best solution.*

*Any gained spoils that the messenger gives you, you shall accept, and whatever he forbids you, you shall desist from.*

*Never, by your Lord, will they be considered believers, unless they ask you to judge between them, then find no hesitation whatsoever in their hearts regarding your judgement, and unless they submit completely.*

The Traditionists desire to convey two ideas by these quotations. Firstly, the messenger is an independent power to be obeyed apart from God. Secondly, obedience to the messenger means upholding the hadith/sunna. Are they right in these?

It seems obvious that obedience to the messenger in the above verse and in other similar verses means obedience to God, since the messenger is not an independent agency. As messenger, he was the agency that delivered the message, and obedience to him was equivalent to obedience to God. As stated in the Quran several times, "*The sole function of the messenger is to deliver the message.*" It should be noted that the Quran uses the word 'messenger' and not 'Muhammad'. The obedience is, therefore, to the messenger, that is, to the message that he brought from God. In short, God and messenger in this context constitute one concept which should not be separated.

We have said earlier that the Quran explains itself. Such verses where obedience to God is coupled with obedience to the messenger is explained by other verses where obedience is made due only to God. The following are examples:

*Say, "I exhort you to do only one thing: that you totally submit to God in pairs or as individuals, then reflect. Your friend is not crazy; he only alerts you to evade terrible retribution."*

*You shall be obedient to your Lord and totally submit to Him before the retribution comes to you.*

The second idea that obedience to the messenger means upholding the hadith is therefore categorically rejected by the Quran.

A question may still be asked: Did Muhammad the messenger not pronounce and act outside the Quran? It is only too obvious that he did and must have done so. He did so as leader of the then Muslim community and as an ordinary human being. Under such circumstances, the Quranic directive regarding leadership and obedience in verse 4:59 applies: that the people are duty-bound to obey their rightful leader or leaders in so far as he or they do not trespass the bounds of God. We may assume that Muhammad, the leader and the man, would not have said or done anything contrary to the divine message he brought, after he knew the message. Therefore, the truly genuine hadith can only be the ones that do not contradict the Quran.

Certain decisions he made as leader of the community that history has recorded must necessarily be circumscribed by the conditions of the time. The Madinah Charter is a good example. Although the principles of religious freedom, inter-communal equality and unity, local autonomy and just government underlying the charter conform to the teachings of the Quran, the forms they took were conditioned by the circumstances then prevailing. In the same manner, his decisions on other matters concerning methods that the Quran, for obvious reasons, does not stipulate were determined by historical circumstances and do not bind the Muslims after him. History records that this was precisely the attitude of the four righteous caliphs, although they did consider those decisions as precedents. That past decisions are precedents is normal legal procedure.

### **Argument Three: 'Hadith Interprets the Quran'**

The Traditionists claim that Prophet Muhammad is the interpreter of the Quran, and that this interpretation is obtainable through the hadith. Without the hadith, they assert, we cannot understand and carry out the commands of God in the Quran. A typical statement of the Traditionists is as follows:

If the explanations of the Prophet (pbuh) regarding general matters were not preserved and guaranteed from foreign interference, it is certain that Quranic commands cannot be implemented. In this way, a great part of Quranic directives which are binding on us will lapse. In this way, we shall be unable to know the true purpose of God.

The Traditionists quote the following verses to support their contention:

*We reveal to you this Reminder so that you may explain to the people what is revealed to them and to let them reflect.*

*We did not send this scripture down to you except that you may explain to them over what they dispute, and to provide guidance and mercy for those who believe.*

Commenting on these verses, one writer said that the Prophet detailed general or universal matters in the Quran, such as the times and number of prostrations of prayer and the rate of *zakat* or obligatory charity; the Prophet clarified matters that were not mentioned in the Quran, such as the time of *imsak* (early morning just before dawn when fasting begins in Ramadan); the Prophet specified general commands in

the Quran, such as division of family property where, it was claimed, that the hadith forbid any share for children who killed their parents; and the Prophet defined the limits of Quranic orders, such as determining the methods of carrying out the punishment for cutting off the hand.

It is clear from the above that what is meant by the Traditionists is the role of the Prophet as leader, contained in the Quranic concept *ulil-amr* (those in authority) that has already been explained.

As regards explaining and interpreting the Quran, Quranic statements and historical evidence have shown that it is not given to Prophet Muhammad or to any subsequent teachers to do so fully and all at once. The Quran, being from the omniscient knowledge of God, cannot all be understood fully, except through a prolonged process of rational understanding and scientific studies. The long history of Quranic exegeses prove this. The Quran itself attests to this when it declares about the allegorical verses:

*No one knows their correct interpretations, except God and those well-grounded in knowledge.*

While this verse refers only to the understanding of allegorical verses, God clearly states that it is He who teaches and explains the Quran. This means, on the one hand, that the Quran explains itself and, on the other, that God will, at the proper time, give man the necessary knowledge to understand it. The various discoveries and findings of modern science within the last four hundred years have thrown light on the meanings and corroborated the statements made in the Quran fourteen centuries ago when modern science was not yet born.

### **Mode of Prayer**

The Traditionists invariably asks: If we do not have the hadith, how do we pray? This shows that they have not studied the Quran nor Arab history prior to Muhammad carefully. The Quran clearly states that the obligatory prayers and all other religious observances of Islam were originally taught to Abraham. All the prophets and their true followers since Abraham practiced them, but, as the Quran also informs us, later generations, including the Arabs at the advent of Muhammad, had lost these prayers. The prayers of the Arabs at the Shrine at the time were described by the Quran as "no more than deceit and alienation."

It should also be noted that the very early revelations, such as the chapter 73 entitled al-Muzzammil which was the third in order of revelation, already mentioned *salat* and *zakat*, indicating that these religious observances were well-known and were being practiced. This is confirmed by early historical sources, such as Ibn Ishaq's biography of the Prophet. All these conclusively prove that our *salat* prayers today were not originally given to Muhammad during the Night Journey, as the Traditionists claim.

A moment's thought will also make us realize that we do not learn how to pray from the hadith. We learn to do so from our parents and teachers who inherit the practice through the generations from the first source, that is Prophet Abraham.

Although the Quran needs no longer teach us how to pray, since we have learnt and practiced it from the time of Abraham, still it gives us the main features of *salat* prayer, i.e. the normal ablution (5:6), the abnormal ablution (4:43), the proper dress (7:31), standing and facing the *qiblah* (2:144), the times (11:114, 17:78, 24:58, 2:238, 30:17-18 and 20:130), the bowing and prostrating (2:43,125,3:42, 22:77, 48:29), using moderate voice when saying prayers (17:110), not calling anyone else besides God in prayer (72:18) and modified mode of prayer at unusual times (4:101,103). It is quite obvious that many important details regarding the mode of prayer are given in the Quran.

It should be remembered that the Quran repeatedly teaches the people to be concerned with doing good sincerely and not to be concerned with form. It is obvious why this should be so. An obsession with form would defeat the purpose of an action. The incidence of Saudi Prince Sultan Salman who accompanied the American space mission, **Discovery**, in 1985 and who exposed the inability of the traditional Saudi *ulama* to answer the question of how he should pray in the space shuttle was a good modern illustration of the error of obsession with form.

#### **Argument Four: 'The Example of the Prophet'**

This is the fourth and last argument of the Traditionists: that the Prophet constitutes a good example for the believers to follow, and following his examples means following the sunna. They base this argument on the following verses of the Quran:

*The messenger of God is a good example for you, for any of you who truly seek God and the Hereafter and commemorate God frequently.*

Referring to this verse and the following verse

*You are indeed endowed with a great character*

one traditionalist writer remarked:

The messenger (pbuh) is a perfect man. He is the foremost example to be followed in all aspects and fields, except in those that cannot be followed.

According to the hadith scholar, M.M. Azami,

If we consider the Prophet as the model for the community, the Muslims have to follow his example in every way, especially as they have been specifically commanded to do so by Allah.

Even the late modern scholar Prof. Fazlur Rahman talks of the existence of the exemplary conduct of the Prophet. However, if we look at the context of verse 33:21 quoted above, it is clear that it does not refer to every detail of the Prophet's behavior, such as his eating, dress, sleeping and other personal habits. Actually, it refers to the Prophet's faith in God's help and victory. The verse is put in the middle of the account of the Battle of the Allies when the believers were really shaken and thought that the cause of Islam was lost. Nevertheless, it would not be wrong if we derive a general meaning for this verse that the Prophet provided a good example for Muslims to follow. The Prophet's example is none other than his staunch faith in God and strict adherence to the Quran.

That the phrase *uswah hasanah*, meaning 'a good example' in this verse, refers to one's conviction, stand and struggle, and not to one's personal behavior, can be proved by its usage, twice, for Prophet Abraham who was a staunch monotheist. Verse 4 of Surah 60 explains the meaning of the phrase:

***A good example has been set for you by Abraham and those with him. They said to their people, "We disown you and the idols you set up besides God. We reject you, and you will see from us nothing but enmity and opposition until you believe in God alone."***

The above verse explains the meaning of *uswah hasanah* as referring to one's religious conviction, ideological position and struggle. This is an instance of how the Quran explains and interprets itself.

It is unreasonable and unthinkable that God would ask the Muslims to follow the prophet's personal mode of behavior, because a person's mode of behavior is determined by many different factors, such as customs, his education, personal upbringing and personal inclinations. The prophet's mode of eating, of dress and indeed of general behavior cannot be different from that of other Arabs, including Jews and Christians, of that time, except regarding matters which Islam prohibited. If the Prophet had been born a Malay, he would have dressed and eaten like a Malay. This is a cultural and a personal trait which has nothing to do with one's religion.

So were the methods of the Prophet's wars and his administration of the Medina city-state. The weapons he used, such as swords, spears, arrows and shields, were in accordance with the prevailing technology. Today, with the development of modern weapons, the Muslims obviously cannot fight with the medieval weapons used by the Prophet, although they must emulate his staunch faith in God and complete adherence to God's teachings.

In political administration, the same Islamic principles operate. Some examples: sovereignty of the people under God's sovereignty, government based on just laws, complete freedom of religious worship, obedience to God and due obedience to leaders, leadership to be exercised by those who are competent and morally upright, and government through consultation. However, methods and the institutions vary according to time and circumstances. The methods and institutions used by the Prophet are not universally and eternally binding.

Actually, the ways of the Prophet were in strict conformity with the teachings of the Quran. He held firmly to the Quran and obeyed its injunctions. Therefore, following the example of the Prophet means upholding the Quran. The claim of the Traditionists that the Quran is general and requires the hadith to explain it and make it specific is based on a false understanding of the Quran. This claim has been partially dealt with here. It will be fully dealt with in Chapter V where we shall discuss the comprehensiveness of the Quran as a guide.

### **The Quran is Complete, Perfect and Detailed**

The hadith writers' allegations are clearly misleading. To say that the Quran is incomplete or unclear can only be blasphemous. Such an opinion belittles God's power by implying that He gave us an incomplete or unclear product. It is just like the Christian Bible insisting that God created the heavens and the earth in six days and then on the seventh day He had to take a break. In the Quran, God tells us that He created the heavens and the earth and God does not need to take any breaks for such is the power of God.

*Indeed your Lord is God; the one God who created the heavens and the earth in six days, then assumed all responsibility.*

It is not likely that the God who created the whole wide universe and then assumed all responsibility including revealing the Quran and teaching and explaining it would reveal a Quran that was incomplete or unclear.

Also consider the following:

*Any creature on earth and any bird that flies with wings, are all nations like you. We did not leave anything out of this scripture. To their Lord they will all be gathered. Those who reject our revelations are deaf, dumb and in total darkness.*

So if God "did not leave anything out of this scripture," how can the Quran be incomplete?

*The word of your Lord is complete, in truth and justice. Nothing shall abrogate His words. He is the Hearer, the Knower.*

*We have cited for the people every kind of example, that they make take heed.*

These examples referred to in the above verse served the Prophet well such that he in turn was able to learn from these examples and become a good example himself for his followers. How then can the hadith writers insist that the Quran is incomplete when it also has every kind of example quoted for mankind's reference? The Quran therefore contains details for all our needs. The Quran states general principles in places where it would be too burdensome for us if God were to make strict rules. This is especially true when the Quran touches on socio-cultural matters as they differ from place to place and among different peoples.

But still, how do we come to a solution for a problem that we have to solve by ourselves, for example, when Prince Sultan Salman wanted to pray aboard the space shuttle **Discovery**? God answers:

*O you who believe, you shall obey God, and you shall obey the messenger and those in charge among you. If you dispute in any matter, you shall refer it to God and His messenger, if you truly believe in God and the last day. This is better for you and provides you with the best solution.*

*They respond to their Lord and observe the salat prayers. Their affairs are decided by consensus among them, and from our provisions to them they donate.*

The only way we can refer anything to God and His messenger today is by using the teachings of God Almighty that is still with us in the Quran. We must use our own intelligence to deliberate among ourselves to solve our problems, but always guided by God, i.e. through knowledge of the Quran.

There are some matters whereby God clearly spells out exactly what we are required to do. The rights of individuals, ownership of property, the rules of marriage and divorce, the laws of inheritance, penal laws, the rules of witness, dietary laws, the methods of ablution, and so on are all clearly detailed in the Quran.

At other places, whenever God pleases, He provides us both the principles and the methods. Let us explore further the issue of penal laws. The punishments of hand-cutting for theft and a hundred lashes for adultery mentioned in the Quran are **forms**, not principles, of punishment. Furthermore, these forms are connected to specific historical circumstances.

What, then, are the Quranic principles for punishment? There are two, or one can say three, if we include the principle that all crimes must be punished and not overlooked. The two principles are: firstly, that every crime must be punished in accordance with the severity of the crime, i.e. the principle of equivalence; and secondly, the principle of mercy, as evidenced by the following verses:

*Whoever works evil must be punished.*

*They counter aggression with an equivalent response. However, those who pardon and conciliate receive a better reward from God.*

*They counter evil with good.*

According to the first principle, every crime must be punished, but following from the second principle, the punishment meted out must match the crime. This is the principle of justice designed to deter criminals. But the last principle gives the power to our courts to lighten punishments of crimes up to the point of pardon to encourage reformation on the part individual criminals. What a beautiful penal system this is!

Similarly, God provides us the guiding principles and the detailed methods of dividing property for inheritance purposes.

*The man shall get a share of what the parents and relatives leave, and the women shall get a share of what the parents and the relatives leave, **be it small or large, a decreed share.***

This verse therefore sets the principle that men and women can inherit property.

*God decrees what you shall bequeath for your children; the male shall get the share of two females.*

It will be seen that the above verses establish the general principle of inheritability by both males and females, while at the same time fixes the portions. The question arises: are the fixed portions of two for men and one for women historically determined or absolute? Is it fair that working women who also share the burden of family expenses be given less portion? At a time when women looked after the home and men were sole breadwinners, such portioning was fair. But when economic conditions change and women bear equal burden, is it allowed for us to make adjustments, implying that we consider the second verse as historically determined? (Hint: the above verses also talk about will; see also 2:180, 240). This is something, as in many other matters, that Muslim society, through council and through their rightful leaders, must decide.

The Quran also makes provisions for Muslims to handle problems in difficult or extraordinary circumstances. For example, foods that are forbidden to eat under normal circumstances, like pork, become permissible out of necessity and not by choice.

Thus, the Quran contains guidance and solutions to handle all of our affairs. The Quran is complete, perfect and detailed. If God "leaves anything out" of the Quran at all, it is only because God has put in place, elsewhere throughout the Quran, sufficient guidance with which human beings can guide their lives.

*God never sends any people astray without first pointing out the consequences for them. God is fully aware of all things.*

In spite of repeated Divine proclamations that the Quran is complete and perfect, the hadith writers insist that when the Quran is silent on some issues, the Prophet steps in (allegedly) and provides the hadith to fill in the gaps. Since, according to them, all the Prophet's words are inspired by God, therefore, it is actually God Himself who indirectly fills the gaps that He Himself created in the first place! A very neat and tidy explanation to justify their going around in circles. However, God replies in the following verse:

*O you who believe, do not ask about things if revealed to you, you will be hurt. If you consider them in the light of the Quran, you will realize that God left them out as an alleviation. God is Forgiver, Clement.*

Muhammad Ali interprets this verse thus:

As Islam discouraged religious practices, such as monastic life, it also prohibited questions relating to details on many points which would require this or that practice to be made obligatory, and much was left to the individual will or circumstances of the time and place. The exercise of judgement occupies a very important place in Islam and this gives ample scope to different nations and communities to frame laws for themselves and to meet new and changed situations. The hadith shows that the Prophet also discourages questions on details in which a Muslim could choose a way for himself.

God does not mention some things altogether or in detail for two reasons. Firstly, like the regular prayer, because He has taught mankind these things before Muhammad. Secondly, because such things concern the forms their principles take at different times and different places. These forms are therefore decided by the society's council or by customs or by personal preference. The principles of decision-making through council, or through customary usage, or through using reason are clearly enunciated in the Quran.

It is clear that the Quran, being the last of God's scriptures to mankind, is the only infallible source of our guidance.

Other sources, including previous scriptures as well the hadith/sunna, are subject to Quranic criticism. What passes this criticism is acceptable; what fails is automatically rejected. This is plain, as the following verses state:

*Shall I seek other than God as a source of law, when He revealed to you this Book fully detailed? Even those who received previous scripture recognize that it came down from your Lord, truthfully. Therefore, you shall not harbor any doubt.*

*... Those who do not rule according to God's scripture are the unjust.*

*You should judge among them according to God's scripture and do not follow their ideas, and beware lest they divert you from some of God's revelations to you. If they turn away, then you should know that God wants to punish them for their sins. Indeed, many people are wicked. Is it the laws of the days of ignorance that they want to apply? Whose laws are better than God's, for those who are firm believers?*

*Those who fabricate false doctrines are the ones who do not believe in God's revelations. They are the liars.*

*Shall we treat the Muslims like criminals? What is wrong with you? How do you judge? Do you have another book that you apply? One that gives you anything you want?*

So, do the hadith writers have another book that they apply? One that gives them everything? Is this why God revealed the earth-shaking verse that we have quoted several times?

*The messenger will say, "My Lord, my people have deserted this Quran."*

We cannot, therefore, use any other book other than the Quran to make our laws and punish the guilty, attributing these laws to God. But what do the hadith writers say? They say that anyone who does not accept the hadith books immediately become unbelievers. They insist that the hadith, although it is not the Quran, must be accepted. To them the hadith is "the other book that they apply, one that gives them anything they want," as the Quran puts it precisely and beautifully.

What does God say to these allegations?

*Who is more wicked than one who lies about God, or rejects His revelations? Indeed, the wicked never succeed. On the day when We gather them all together, We will say to the idol worshippers, "Where are the idols you had fabricated?" Their only response will be, "By God, our Lord, we were not idolaters!" Note how they lied to themselves! Whatever they have invented have misled them.*

*When God alone is advocated, the hearts of those who do not believe in the hereafter shrink with aversion. But when others are mentioned besides Him, they rejoice.*

*They follow idols who decree for them religious laws never authorized by God. If it were not for the predetermined decision, they would have been judged immediately. The wicked have deserved painful retribution.*

*This is because when invited to worship God alone, you disbelieved, but when others were made partners beside Him, you believed. Alas the judgement has been decreed by God, the Most Exalted, the Great.*

*God cites the example of a man with partners who contradict one another and a man who relies on one consistent source: are they the same? Praise be to God, the majority do not know.*

To place the hadith on an equivalent footing with revelation is to create another source of guidance – an idol. This is the major problem with the hadith. When we invite them to believe in God alone through the Quran, they hesitate, but when we throw in the false hadith and other false teachings, then they are happy!

In conclusion, the theory or doctrine that the hadith is an equal source of guidance with the Quran, propounded by Shafi'i, is the most important aspect of the hadith question. Even though we totally reject this doctrine, we do not reject the hadith as a secondary source, provided that it does not contradict the Quran. On this view also, we say that the hadith is an important source of early Muslim social history. We shall have more to say about this in the last chapter.

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### CHAPTER III SOURCE, REASON AND EFFECTS OF HADITH

*God created the heavens and the earth based on Truth.*

*(Quran, 29:44)*

Everything has its reason for being and, in turn, has its consequences. Nothing that happens is without its cause and, in turn, without its effect. This is a divine natural law, stated in the verse we quote above, and acknowledged by all mankind. This law applies equally to the hadith phenomenon. We shall show that the so-called Prophetic traditions did not originate from the Prophet. They grew from the politico-religious conflicts that arose in the Muslim society then, during the first and second centuries. It constituted a new teaching altogether, seriously deviating from the Quran that Prophet Muhammad brought to them. It was done against his will, but skillfully attributed to him.

According to the Traditionists, Prophet Muhammad left two legacies to his followers: a divine scripture and his *sunna*. We shall show later that this hadith is a fabrication. As a matter of fact, history has fully shown that at the time of the Prophet's death, only the completed written Quran, duly arranged into chapters by the Prophet, existed as his only legacy. It was not yet compiled into book form, but complete writings of it on parchments and other writing materials were kept in the Prophet's house and other houses of the Prophet's scribes. The Prophet also taught many Companions to memorize the Quran following the chapter arrangements he himself had made.

During the second caliph Abu Bakr's administration, Abu Bakr himself ordered the Prophet's secretary, Zaid ibn Thabit, to compile the Quran into book form, taking care that all its contents were corroborated by two or more witnesses. When the third caliph, Uthman, prepared his official version of the Quran for dissemination throughout the length and breadth of Islam, he based it on this version. Thus, the Quran fully satisfies the requirements of a well-corroborated text.

The Quran itself proclaimed the completion of Islam and of Muhammad's mission eighty-one or eighty-two days before Muhammad's death with the following famous verse:

*Today I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favor to you and I have chosen Islam as a religion for you.*

#### **The Beginnings of Hadith**

Although some traditions may have existed during the time of the Prophet, thus giving rise to his prohibition, their number doubled and tripled only several decades after his death. At the time of their compilations, stretching over a period of two to four centuries after his death, they existed in hundreds of thousands. The compilations were made against Muhammad's expressed order, but the Traditionists argued that this prohibition was conditional to his desire to avoid mixing traditions with the Quran. When this condition no longer existed, the prohibition was lifted. However, a historical report exists stating that thirty years after the Prophet's death, the prohibition was still on, showing that it had never been lifted.

As we have seen, what came to be regarded by the Sunnites as the 'Six Authentic Books' compiled by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Daud, Ibn Maja, Tirmidhi and al-Nasa'i, and the four Shi'ite compilations by al-Kulaini, Ibn Babuwayh, al-Murtada and Ja'afar Muhammad al-Tusi did not exist at the time of the Prophet's death, as the Quran did, but were made between 210 and 410 years later. Why were the

compilations not made earlier? Does not this fact alone show that the hadith was a new development, not sanctioned by the Prophet?

Several modern hadith scholars claim that they possess new evidence to prove that the hadith were written down at the time of the Prophet. They were memorized and handed down from generation to generation until the second and third Islamic centuries when the official compilations were made. The still unanswered question, even if we were to accept the claim, is this: "Why was the official compilation not made earlier, especially during the time of the righteous caliphs when the first reporters, i.e., the eye witnesses, were still alive and could be examined?" When we remember that there was an alleged statement by the Prophet, made at his final Pilgrimage Oration and heard by tens of thousands, exhorting his followers to hold on to the Quran and his sunna, it is most unreasonable not to expect the great early caliphs to order the writing down and compiling of the Prophet's sayings. That none of them did so could only mean that the Prophet never made the statement, and that it was a later invention attributed to him.

The answer given by the Traditionists that the hadith was not written down during the time of the Prophet to avoid confusing them with the Quran is not satisfactory. Not only did it contradict their own claim that the hadith were already being recorded during the lifetime of the Prophet; several documents of the Prophet, such as the Medina Charter, his treaties and letters, had been written on his orders. The hadith too could similarly be written down by indicating that they were hadith, and not the Quran. However, this constraint no longer apply when the Quran was completed, written down and compiled into a book, and the fear of mixing the Quran with the hadith was no longer a valid concern. Yet the hadith was not immediately compiled. The only conceivable reason why they were not compiled was precisely the Prophet's standing order prohibiting it. It is apparent that later generations ignored this order.

We also have later historical sources which say that the Caliph Abu Bakr burnt his notes of hadith (said to be 500 in all) for fear that they might be false, and that Caliph Omar ibn Khattab cancelled his plan to compile the hadith because he did not want to divert the attention of the Muslims from the Quran to the hadith. It is quite possible that these statements said to have been made by the first two caliphs are false, having been fabricated by upholders of the hadith in order to prove that hadith had already been written down at this early stage, but were not compiled by Abu Bakr and Omar not because of the Prophet's prohibition (which they must know), but because of other reasons.

Due to the fact that early historical writings about Muhammad and the early Muslim society were not done until a hundred or a hundred and fifty years after the Prophet's death, such as the works of Ibn Ishaq (d. 150) and Ibn Sa'd (d. 168), it is impossible to obtain documentary evidence (apart from the Quran, of course) on the precise position of the hadith/sunna between the time of the Prophet's death and the time of these works. However, Ibn Sa'd, an early major historian, showed that the first three caliphs did not use the hadith at all. In any case, it is interesting to note, as we have seen in Chapter II, that the phrases 'the prophet's hadith' or the 'the prophet's sunna' are never used in the Quran. This shows that these concepts did not exist in Arab society at the time of the Prophet. On the other hand, the phrases 'tribal sunna' or 'the sunna of the people' to mean 'customs' were in vogue. It is this concept of sunna that was later transformed to mean the Prophet's practice.

Basing ourselves on the Quran, we learn that a community did not break up into sects after the coming of divine revelation to them except due to jealousy and to vested interests. When jealousy and considerations of vested interests overcame them, divisions occurred and sects emerged:

*He has decreed for you the same religion decreed for Noah, and what is revealed herein, and what was decreed for Abraham, Moses and Jesus. 'You shall uphold the one religion, and do not be divided.' It is simply too difficult for the idol worshipers to accept what you advocate. God is the one who brings*

*towards Him whomever He wills; He guides towards Himself those who submit. They became divided after knowledge had come to them due to sheer jealousy. If it were not for a predetermined decision, they would have been judged immediately. Even those who inherited the scripture continued to harbor doubts. You shall preach and uphold this scripture as commanded and do not follow their wishes.*

*You shall hold fast to the rope of God, all together, and do not be divided. Be appreciative of God's favors upon you; you used to be enemies and He reconciled your hearts. By His grace, you become brethren. God thus explains His revelations for you that you may be guided. Let there be a community among you who preach goodness, advocate righteousness and forbid evil. These are the winners. Do not be like those who became divided and disputed among themselves, despite the profound revelations that had come to them.*

The above verses explain two things. Firstly, the divine revelations brought by Muhammad and other messengers, although true and beneficial, were hard to accept by the idol worshipers. They accepted them for a while and then lapsed into their former condition. Secondly, they reverted to their former condition because of jealousy towards one another and because of their love of material things. In short, human propensity for materialism and jealousy for one another made it difficult for them to follow the teachings of the prophet-messengers, including prophet Muhammad. These are the factors that cause division into sects and factions after the teachings had come to them.

We shall see that many hadith began to emerge and multiply at the same time as the emergence of divisions in the early Muslim community in three civil wars, beginning under Ali's rule right up to the end Mu'awiya rule. The relations between these two phenomena were direct: power struggles giving rise to divisions led to the fabrication of hadith to support each contending group, and the fabrications of hadith further deepened divisions. It is clear that the division originated in the power struggle to fill the post of caliph to succeed the Prophet, but hadith were fabricated to use the name of the Prophet to bolster politico-religious sectarianism.

### **Political Conflicts**

A study of original sources, such as Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845), Malik Ibn Anas (d. 179/795), Tayalisi (d. 203/818), Humaydi (d.219/834) and Ibn Hanbal (d. 241/855) will show that all 'four guided caliphs' made use of very little *sunna* in their administrations. The very term "the Prophet's sunna" was never used by the Prophet himself and did not emerge until the sixth and seventh decades after the Prophet in the administration of Omar Abdul Aziz (d. 720), and was first used by him. But later sources, such as Ibn Qayyim (d.691/1292), had connected the names of the great caliphs Abu Bakr and Omar ibn Khattab with the practice of following the sunna. It is clear that the 'authentication' of the sunna was carried out by the Traditionists to ward off opposition to the hadith by using the names of these two great authorities.

The development of the hadith, it seems, began in the form of stories about the Prophet, told by professional story-tellers, as praises for Ali and Abu Bakr and as guidance in matters permitted and prohibited. These were later given the form of hadith.

Compositions in the form of eulogies for Ali and Abu Bakr which came into being after the Prophet's death reflected the first political conflict between supporters of Ali (the Shi'ites) and those of Abu Bakr (the Bakriyya). Ibn Abi'l-Hadid (d. 655/1257), commentator of the compilation of famous sayings attributed to Ali Abi Talib, Nahj al-Balaghah, admitted that it was the Shi'ite party who began to create hadith eulogies. He said,

... Know that the origins of fabrications in *fada'il* traditions were due to the Shi'ite, for they forged in the first instance traditions concerning their leader. Enmity towards their adversaries drove them to this fabrication ... When the Bakriyya saw what the Shi'ite had done, they fabricated for their own master traditions to counter the former ... When the Shi'ite saw what the Bakriyya had done, they increased their efforts ...

The same writer further wrote regarding hadith forgeries sponsored by caliph Mu`awiya to oppose Ali. According to him:

Then Mu`awiya wrote to his governors saying: "Hadith about Uthman has increased and spread in every city, town and region. When this letter from me reaches you, summon the people to relate the merits of the Companions and the first caliphs. And do not let any Muslim relate anything about Ali without bringing something contradicting this about the Companions. This I like better and it pleases me more, it invalidates Abu Turab's claims and those of his Shi'ite in a more definitive way and it is for them more difficult to bear than the virtues and the merits of Uthman."

Mu`awiya's letters were read out to the people. And many forged reports concerning the merits of the Companions, in which there was no [grain of] truth, were related. The people went out of their way in relating reports in this vein until they spoke thereof in glowing terms from the pulpits. The teachers in the schools were instructed to teach their young pupils a vast quantity of these until they related them just as they studied the Quran and they taught these to their daughters, wives and servants. God knows how long they persisted in this.

It is abundantly clear from the above evidence that one of the sources of hadith forgery at the early stage was the political rivalry between the supporters of Ali and those of Abu Bakr, which continued unabated until Uthman's administration and then to the enmity and conflict between the Shi`ites and the Umayyad. This and other sources were pointed out by a modern Arab historian, Dr. Ahmad Amin, in his book The Dawn of Islam. According to him, five factors were responsible for the fabrication of hadith. These are political conflicts between various factions, differences of opinions regarding matters of theology and jurisprudence, materialistic ambitions among certain religious scholars, the desire to promote good and forbid evil by fabricating hadith to encourage and to discourage (*tarhib wa-tarhib*), as well as to provide a medium for transmitting good teachings from non-Islamic sources.

Although most of these hadith forgeries can no longer be found in the classical compilations, anyone who studies the hadith carefully and objectively can still observe the characteristics mentioned above. Hadith eulogies for the Companions in the Mishkat-ul-Masabih compilation still portrayed political conflicts between the Shi'ite faction and the followers of Abu Bakr and shows that the hadith was fabricated by the factions to support their respective sides. Note the following hadith:

Anas reported that the Prophet ascended Uhud with Abu Bakr, Omar and Uthman. It trembled with them and so he struck it with his foot and said: "Be firm, O Uhud, and verily on you there are a prophet, a truthful man and two martyrs." (Bukhari)

Zerre-b-Hubaish reported that Ali said:

"By One who splits seeds and creates breath, the illiterate prophet gave me a covenant: 'Nobody except a believer will love me, and nobody except a hypocrite will hate me.'" (Muslim)

The above traditions have been picked out at random from many others as examples to show the characteristic partiality of hadith. The obvious omission of Ali in the first hadith points to its fabrication by his detractors: there was no other reason why Ali was not in that company. The second one takes the opposite side, having the Prophet affirm Ali's faith and condemn those who maligned him.

We shall be taking a lot of time if we are to give examples of each type of hadith fabrication. It is not necessary. We shall be satisfied with quotations from a few hadith scholars, namely Ahmad Amin, Fazlur Rahman, Goldziher and M.M. Azami.

(a) Ibn 'Adli stated, "At the time when a forger of hadith by the name of Abdul Karim ibn Abu al-'Auja was taken to the place of hanging, he said, 'I have forged four thousand hadith for you whereby I prohibited and permitted.'"

(b) In the same book the author further noted, "Muslim reported from Muhammad ibn Yahya ibn Said al-Qattan, and from his father, who said, 'I have never seen good people telling more lies in any matter than when they do with the hadith.' Muslim explained these words: 'The lies were not intentional.' Some people who forged false hadith were motivated by good intentions, i.e. they sincerely believed that all that they had heard were true. In their hearts there was no desire to lie, and they repeated what they had heard. Then other people picked up from them because they were deceived by their outward show of truth."

(c) That opposing political parties tried to influence public opinion through the medium of the hadith and used the names of great authorities of Tradition is a fact no one conversant with the early history of Islam may deny.

(d) ... Every stream and counter-stream of thought in Islam has found its expression in the form of a hadith, and there is no difference in this respect between the various contrasting opinions in whatever field. What we learn about political parties holds true too for differences regarding religious law, dogmatic points of difference etc. Every *ra'y* (opinion) or *hawa* (personal desire), every *sunna* and *bid'a* (innovation) has sought and found expression in the hadith.

(e) ... Most likely the first fabrication of traditions began in the political circles, citing and discrediting the parties concerned. In the well-known work of al-Shaukani concerning spurious and similar tradition we find 42 spurious traditions about the Prophet, 38 spurious traditions about the first three caliphs, 96 spurious traditions about Ali and his wife Fatima [and] 14 spurious traditions about Mu'awiya. Therefore, it looks as if the spurious traditions began to originate for political purposes at and about the period of the war between Ali and Mu'awiya, and continued later on as a counter-attack on the Umayyad dynasty ...

From the time of Mu'awiya's rule (661-680) until the end of the second century Hijrah when the hadith were officially compiled, the fabrication of hadith was done on a wide scale. Not only did the hadith become the medium of stories and instrument for various political factions and theological sects to support their sectarian positions, but, as Maurice Bucaille said,

In view of the fact that only a limited number of hadiths may be considered to express the Prophet's thoughts with certainty, the others must contain the thoughts of the men of his time.

In order to stop the continued fabrication of the hadith and contain further divisions of Muslim society at that time, there arose a movement to fix the sources of law in Islam and to standardize the hadith. This is the main social determinant which gave rise to the major jurisprudential figure in Islam in the person of Shafi'i. He laid down the bases of Islamic classical jurisprudence with his theory that the sources of Islamic law were the Quran, the Hadith, *Ijma'* or consensus of religious scholars, and *Qiyas* or analogy.

## The Compilation of Hadith

It was about this time that the hadith throughout the length and breadth of Islam were collected, sifted and written down. What were later called the 'Six Authentic Hadith Books' of the Sunnites finally came into being. These are the compilations of Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Maja, Abu Daud, al-Tirmidhi and al-Nasa'i. The Shi'ites had their own four collections of hadith, compiled each by al-Kulaini, Ibn Babuwayh and two by Ja'afar Muhammad al-Tusi. These compilations were made within a period between 220 and 400 years after the death of the Prophet.

With the victory and general acceptance of Shafi'i's jurisprudential theory where the hadith was given a position of almost equal importance with the Quran (the formula is "second primary source"), the use of creative thought or *ijtihad* for all practical purposes was abolished. This came to be known later as 'the closing of the door of *ijtihad*' and the beginning of the regime of *taqlid* or blind imitation of the great masters, a period beginning from about the fourteenth century till the end of the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth centuries AD.

It can be seen from the above account that the conflict between the trend favoring creative thought and the trend favoring *sunna* (in both senses of the people's tradition and the prophet's practice) in early Muslim community was won by the *sunna* party. If Shafi'i's aim was to combine and harmonize these two trends and thereby to contain the process of disunity in Muslim society, it was obvious that he failed. Disunity continued to prevail in theology and law. By institutionalizing the hadith to achieve what he termed as consensus, he with one stroke killed creative thought in Muslim society. Fazlur Rahman rightly observed:

It is clear that al-Shafi'i notion of *Ijma'* was radically different from that of the early schools. His idea of *Ijma'* was that of a formal and a total one: he demanded an agreement which left no room for disagreement ... But the notion of *Ijma'* exhibited by the early schools was very different. For them, *Ijma'* was not an imposed or manufactured static fact but an ongoing democratic process; it was not a formal state but an informal natural growth which at each step tolerates and, indeed, demands fresh and new thought and therefore must live not only with but also upon a certain amount of disagreement. We must exercise *Ijtihad*, they contended, and progressively the area of agreement would widen; the remaining questions must be turned over to fresh *Ijtihad* or *Qiyas* so that a new *Ijma'* could be arrived at. But it is precisely the living organic relationship between *Ijtihad* and *Ijma'* that was severed in the successful formulation of al-Shafi'i. The place of the living *Sunna-Ijtihad-Ijma'* he gives to Prophetic *Sunna* which, for him, does not serve as a general directive but as something absolutely literal and specific and whose only vehicle is the transmission of the *Hadith* ...

Thus, by reversing the natural order, *Ijtihad-Ijma'* into *Ijma'-Ijtihad*, their organic relationship was severed. *Ijma'*, instead of being a process and something forward-looking — coming at the end of a free *Ijtihad* — came to be something static and backward-looking. It is that which, instead of having to be accomplished, is already accomplished in the past. Al-Shafi'i's genius provided a mechanism that gave stability to our medieval socio-religious fabric but at the cost, in the long run, of creativity and originality.

The process of substituting *ijtihad* with the hadith was a complex process, which took two centuries to complete. The social and historical factors causing it are still not clear to us. There is no doubt that anti-Islamic forces from the nations conquered by the Muslim Arabs, especially the Persians and the Jews, had infiltrated the various groups and played their subversive role to divert the early Muslims from the true teachings of the Prophet, i.e. the Quran, to other teachings in order to destroy them from within.

However, looking at the matter from our modern perspective, we cannot help but being amazed as to why the conservative and indeed reactionary forces were able to defeat the dynamic and progressive forces,

despite the constant prodding of the Quran for human creative role and the freedom of a community to administer its affairs.

### **The Effects of the Hadith**

One of the most important aspects, neglected so far in any study of the hadith, is their collective impact and effects on Muslim society. We have seen that the fabrication of hadith took place because of the politico-religious divisions which later resulted in the emergence of sects and legal schools. We have also seen that the hadith became the instrument to channel views, prejudices, customs and superstitions current in society then. Most of these views and ideas were nothing but superstitions and customs rejected by Islam.

It is logical for us to assume that Prophet Muhammad would not have said or done anything contrary to the teachings of the Quran. We make this assumption because he was very conversant with the teachings of the Quran that he himself had brought from God. As a messenger of God, he would not have acted contrary to those teachings. This assumption is most reasonable and consistent with his high moral character. Therefore, the greatest weakness of most hadith, deemed to be 'authentic' by classical criticism, is that they contradict the Quran. They are therefore false and could not have originated from him, but were falsely attributed to him. They actually originated from the various factions and groups who, due to reasons which we have stated, put into the hadith all manner of superstitions and customs current in society then.

The Quran tells us that God in His mercy has always sent His guidance to mankind through His messengers. He guides mankind with His revelations to the path of salvation, in this world and in the Hereafter. These prophet-messengers began with Adam in the remote Primitive Age, through Abraham at the beginning of the Ancient Age to the last prophet Muhammad at the dawn of the Scientific Age. Deviations from these divine revelations and away from the path of salvation, which is Islam (this is the meaning of the profound verse that the true religion with God is Islam), spells doom and destruction for the deviating society. The Quran tells us of the destruction of several ancient societies and civilizations as a consequence of their deviations. In the modern age ('modern' here is taken to mean the birth of the scientific method beginning with the rise of Muhammad), we have seen the destruction of the early Muslim empire and civilization and the destruction of several Eastern medieval states and European empires. Because this historical law operates objectively for all nations and civilizations, the decline and fall of Muslim society must inevitably be connected with the historical deviation from divine teachings that they had committed. We shall examine briefly the role of hadith in this historical deviation.

#### (a) Sectarianism

One of the first major consequences of the hadith is the division of early Muslim community into two major sects, the Sunnites and the Shi'ites. The Sunni sect splits into four major legal schools, and the Shi'ite has several of its own, each with its own political and theological beliefs. Without doubt, this division had its ground in the still strong Arab feeling of tribalism of the period of ignorance. Although Muhammad succeeded in breaking Arab tribalism and uniting them, this tribal spirit did not die with Muhammad. When he passed away, the resurrected tribalism led to the power struggle for the position of caliph. Because of the very strong Quranic prohibition against making factions in religion and the fact that they were unable to use the Quran to support factional interests, the competing parties had to recourse to the hadith — a convenient and clever way out. The Shi'ite faction that wanted Ali to be the caliph after the prophet's death fabricated hadith to support their contention. They claimed that the prophet had stated before his death:

Whoever recognized me as their master, Ali too is their master.

This forged hadith was then countered with another forged hadith by the opposing Bakriyya group. This then was how forged hadith came into being — to support political factions.

Now, let us assume for a moment that the hadith did not exist (in line with the Prophet's wishes that nothing should be written down from him except the Quran). This did not automatically mean that the split between the supporters of Abu Bakr and the supporters of Ali would not have existed. As the split was politically motivated, it would have happened anyway. But now, without the hadith, the Bakriyya and the Shi'ites would have had only the Quran for their guidance. In that case, how would they have solved their problems?

God answers this question for us:

*They respond to their Lord, and observe the salat prayers. Their affairs are decided by consultation among them, and from our provisions to them they donate.*

Without the hadith they would have had to read the Quran. Thus, they would have had to read the verse just quoted above. And they would have had to come to a consensus among them, because they were all Muslims, submitters to God, "those who respond to their Lord and observe the salat prayers." But such things never happened because they had more than enough hadith which they could pull out of their hats and use it to stab each other. Even if the Sunnites and the Shi'ites could not be reconciled, even if they had resorted to killing each other (which they did), they still would not have had more evil thoughts to provoke them had there not existed any hadith. They would have been forced to refer to the Quran. Therefore, sooner or later, they are bound to have solved their differences.

But unfortunately, history has merely repeated itself. The devils had laid their plan well. The Muslims listened to anything and everything except the Quran. The result is that they fell into the pits, and they are still there today!

#### (b) Anti-Intellectualism

Beside factionalism between the Sunnites and the Shi'ites, the Sunnites themselves are divided into different *madhabs* or schools of thought. They broke up into many schools of thought because of the differences of opinion between their founders. At the beginning of the establishment of these schools, over 16 of them came to exist, but today only the Hanafi, the Maliki, the Shafi'i and Hanbali schools predominate. There exist major differences between the four dominant schools as well, due largely to the differences between Imam Abu Hanifa and Imam Malik, the respective founders of the Hanafi and Maliki schools, which subsequently influenced the Hanbali and Shafi'i schools.

Imam Abu Hanifa (d.767) pioneered the use of creative thinking or *ijtihad* to settle his affairs. He lived in Damascus, far away from the Hijaz and thus out of regular contact with any descendants of the Prophet or his companions. Hence, he had little opportunity to listen to any hadith or sayings of the Prophet. (These four theologian-jurists imams all existed before the writing of the official hadith). He settled disputes by referring to the Quran and by exercising his reason.

Imam Malik (d. 795) on the other hand lived in Medina. Throughout his life, he never traveled outside Medina except once to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Unlike Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Malik had the luxury of meeting with many descendants of the Prophet and his Companions. Therefore, he could refer

to many hadith to solve his problems. Thus, while Abu Hanifa advocated creative thinking or *ijtihad*, Imam Malik advocated *ijma'* or referring to the hadith.

To compound this problem, the rulers at that time depended very much on these scholars to advise them. More often than not, the opinions of a particular scholar who was eminent under a particular ruler became the established rule in that territory.

Instead of being testimony to the dynamism of the Quran which allowed such diverse opinions to exist and thus serve as a catalyst for Muslims to continuously exercise their intellect, these differences of opinion gave birth to the rise of the likes of Imam Shafi`i (d. 820) who found it difficult to handle the freedom of thought and opinion that is allowed by the Quran. Imam Shafi`i came to view differences of opinion as a problem. To solve this problem he came up with his neat little idea to freeze everything as it were. In other words, Shafi`i came to the view that all opinions existing at that time would be acceptable, but nothing more than that – no new thinking could be allowed. The *status quo* would be set in stone with no possibility of new participants. Thus the idea of *ijma'* first and *ijtihad* later was crystallized and given an official authority.

Conformity became the norm. This was followed by the passivity and blind obedience that had to be fostered to maintain this conformity. The conformity and the passivity soon fused together to breed the pessimism and the fatalism which is a natural result of dead intellect. This came to be the character of the majority of Muslims until today.

On the other hand, the Europeans, who were overawed by the success of the Arabs in the earlier part of Muslim history, realized the importance of inquiry and free thought. The Europeans have progressed ever since because they never closed their doors to free thinking. The example that the Europeans copied was an excellent example of a Muslim people unimpeded by any false teachings. The early Muslims strove hard and achieved the success here on earth, precisely as God wanted them to achieve. By doing so, they earned the credits to give them an honored place in the Hereafter.

As for the hadith writers, God tells them:

*Shall we treat the Muslims like the guilty? What is wrong with you? How do you judge? Do you have another book that you apply? One that gives you anything you want?*

The Muslims developed the hadith that gave them everything they wanted. In fact, the hadith would envelop the whole of Muslim behavior right from prescribing the "correct" methods of sleeping to eating, dressing, etc. The Muslims under the *ulama*, therefore, effectively killed themselves off. For some *ulama* looking for easy followers, the hadith became a most effective tool to achieve that end. For other *ulama* with no proper objectives in sight, the hadith became an end in itself.

### (c) Pessimism and Political Opportunism

Among the many myths that have also found their way into the hadith is the belief in the Mahdi. The Mahdi is expected to arise towards the Last Days and is expected to save all the Muslims from their cruel oppressors. The Quran tells us to continuously strive to do good deeds and to make strong efforts to improve ourselves. The Muslims are commanded to encourage the good and to oppose evil. All this means continuous hard work in the path of God to achieve good objectives.

*God does not change the condition of any people, unless they change themselves.*

Therefore, encouraging the Muslims to hang their hopes on something called the Mahdi is actually a subtle attempt to make defeatists and pessimists out of them. The suffocating belief in fate: to make the Muslims submissive to other than God and to wait for someone else to come along to save them. The truth is that no one will help us unless we help ourselves first.

This pessimism, however, is further ensconced in another equally debilitating hadith about the attestation of faith or the *kalimah shahada*. This fabricated hadith says that just by reciting the *kalimah shahada* at the time of death, one can be forgiven by God and make it to Paradise. Such hadith was a necessary precursor to the pessimism and the passive lethargy that was imposed upon Muslims. For how else could the people be made to resign themselves to such docility? The promise of a savior, the promise of Heaven, the "keys" to Heaven etc. were necessary tools to maintain the people's subservience to the hadith and to the people who propagated such hadiths.

These are just two of the very many fabricated hadith that can be quoted. Not only that; these fabricated hadith, unlike other fabricated hadith, sought to freeze the dynamic thinking encouraged by the Quran. These hadith sought to make vegetables of the people and hence make them totally subservient to the hadith proponents. The result is that the Muslims lost everything that they had striven so hard to achieve.

We also list here a few hadith that are attributed to the Prophet by way of Hudhayfa, a Companion of the Prophet. They are set in a context of the civil conflict engulfing the supporters of Abu Bakr and Ali. These hadith seek to impose a certain will on the people so that the people may serve as useful tools for the vested interests behind these hadith. We begin with a hadith which most cruelly attributes the qualities of a soothsayer to the Prophet.

The messenger of God took a stand to address us in which he did not omit to mention anything that will occur in that place of his up to the occurrence of the Last Hour. Whoso got it to memory remembered it and whoso did not remember it forgot it. These companions of mine learnt it, and there will occur something therefrom which I forgot. When it is shown to me, I remember it, just as a man remembers the face of a man when he remains absent from him, but when afterwards he sees him, he recognizes him. (Bukhari and Muslim)

The people used to ask the Messenger of God of virtues, and I used to ask him of evils, fearing lest they might overtake me. I asked, "O Messenger of God! Certainly we were in ignorance and corruption. Then God brought this good for us. Will there be corruption after this good?" "Yes," he replied. I asked, "Will there be good after this corruption?" "Yes," he replied. I asked, "Will there be good after that corruption?" "Yes," he replied. "There will be darkness therein." I asked, "What is darkness?" He said, "A people who will introduce ways other than my ways and will give guidance other than my guidance. So you will recognize some of them and reject some." I asked, "Will there be corruption after that good?" "Yes," he replied. "There will be those who will invite towards the doors of Hell. Whoso will respond to them will be thrown therein." I asked, "O Messenger of God, give us their description." He said, "They will be our people, and they will speak with our tongues." I asked, "What do you enjoin me if I reached that time?" He replied, "You shall stick to the united body of Muslims and their leader." I asked, "If they have no united body and no leader?" He said, "Then keep aloof entirely from those parties though you should have to cleave to the root of a tree till death overtakes you ..." (Bukhari and Muslim)

The messenger of God said, "There will soon appear calamities in which one's sitting will be better than one's standing, and one's standing will be better than one's walking, and one's walking will be better than one's running..." (Bukhari and Muslim)

The messenger of God said, "... Keep to your house and hold your tongue, and take what you recognize and give up what you do not know, and mind your own business and give up the affairs of the public." (Tirmidhi)

The hadith concerning the Mahdi and the attestation faith and the hadith concerning the Last Days quoted above all advocate a passive, pessimistic and submissive community. It is totally contrary to the Islamic spirit of striving for the good in the name of God and in the way of God. Why did the ulama advocate such defeatist hadith? Fazlur Rahman says that these hadith reflect the ulama's thinking and their objectives with regard to the factionalism and the civil war that was going on between the Muslim factions. To them the hadith appeared as very handy tool to neutralize the dissenting and damaging effects of the Khawarij and the Mu`tazilites camps. By this simple means of creating hadith and attributing it the Prophet, the orthodox *Ahl'ul-Sunna wa'l-Jamaah* hoped to save the community from its internecine warfare.

Although these false hadiths were advocated to serve as a bridge to link up all the warring factions in peace and harmony, it became evident soon enough that these false hadith standing on their false foundations would collapse. How could the advocating of pessimism and passivity guarantee peace and harmony, unity and justice? Obviously the orthodox scholars were very short sighted. And on top of everything, all these false teachings were clearly against the teachings of the Quran. It would become all too clear how easily the corrupted and cruel rulers, the foreign invaders and the colonialists would overwhelm a docile and almost indolent Muslim populace. The Muslims had been perfectly molded into its submissive and servile form through the indoctrination of all these false hadith. This was the cause of their fall.

As we have stated, the passive political philosophy advocated by these hadith were completely against the spirit of the Quran which advocated exactly the opposite philosophy upon all Muslims. God enjoins believers in the Quran to get fully involved in community affairs, to consistently advocate good and to oppose evil.

Therefore, did the Quran not pose a serious problem for the hadith writers then? Any careful reading of the Quran and any serious discussion would definitely point out the errors of the hadith. So, how did the ulama handle this potential threat to their hadith? Very simple. They sought to cut off all intellectual discussion and inquiry in Islam. They came up with the not-too-original but effective idea that only the ulama, the priestly class, would be allowed to handle all matters pertaining to the religion.

They would teach people that they were the inheritors of the Prophet's mission. Despite the fact that Islam never allowed any priesthood, the ulama would go on to successfully set up not only a priestly class but a whole hierarchy of priests. Much like the Brahmins of Hinduism, they would seek to impose this hierarchy upon the Muslim masses and deny the masses any access to a true understanding of the religion without first being screened by them. Unfortunately, these ulama have been most successful to this day. Once again, to sustain their position and to nick any buds of dissent that might decide to bloom, the ulama resorted to their good old panacea for all their ills — the hadith! Consider these:

The ulama are the heirs to the Prophet. (Abu Daud and Tirmidhi)

Ibn Abbas reported that the Prophet said, "Whoever seeks to interpret the Quran using his own intellect, he should also prepare to burn in the hell fire." (Tirmidhi)

The following must remain a jewel among all the false hadith:

Jundub reported that the Prophet said, "Whosoever interprets the Quran, and his interpretation is correct, that person has committed a sin." (Tirmidhi and Abu Daud)

It should not come as a surprise to us that after a thousand years of adhering to the false teachings of such hadith, the Muslims' condition has progressively worsened as we have shown in Chapter I. If the present Islamic movement for reform and regeneration aims to achieve its objectives, it absolutely must face up to the reality of the corrupting influence of the hadith and other false teachings arising from it, and return to the divine Quran. There is no evading the issue. There is no shortcut to the truth except through the destruction of falsehood.

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## CHAPTER IV CRITICISM OF THE HADITH

*These are God's revelations that we recite for you with the truth. In which **hadith** besides the revelations of God, do they believe?*

*(Quran, 45:6)*

It is a recorded historical fact, as we have seen in the last chapter, that at the time of the Prophet's death in the 11th year of the Hijra (632 AD), the whole of the Quran, which had been revealed to the Prophet, had been carefully written down and arranged in an order as directed by the Prophet himself. This historical testimony supports the Divine assertion of the Quran's arrangement under Divine direction.

On the other hand, there exists no hadith collection that Muhammad himself authenticated. In fact, he was reported to prohibit the writing down of any hadith. Even among the religious scholars there is much controversy over what is termed the *mutawattir* hadith, or multiple-source reports. Some say that there are seven of these, some say only one while others say none at all. If the hadith scholars cannot agree on the number of the very few multiple-source reports, how could they impose the 6,000-odd so-called authentic hadiths of Bukhari on the Sunnite Muslim community? We also know that the Shi'ite Muslim community have their own hadith collections.

As we have seen in Chapter III, the so-called authentic hadith collections came into being after much editing by the likes of Bukhari and Muslim only about 250 years after the Prophet's death. The 'authentic' or 'genuine' (*sahih*) label attached to the collected and edited works of these six collectors is a subjective classification based on certain criteria, which may not be agreed to by other scholars. This is the source of the hitherto endless debate on the authenticity of the hadith.

What is not realized by the general Muslim community now is that all these hadith reporters and scholars in their own day had their critics who are now conveniently forgotten. In some cases, a particular scholar's opinion or writing came to dominate the Muslim mind because those writings received support from the caliph or whatever authority existing at that time. A good example is the action of Caliph Harun Al-Rashid who wanted to ban the writings of all Muslim scholars except the book Al-Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas. The caliph insisted on making Al-Muwatta as the standard text by which to formulate the Shari`a or Islamic law. Fortunately, it was through the insistence of Imam Malik himself that such a course of action was denied, hence allowing debate and fruitful discussion to continue in the caliph's realm. Imam Malik felt compelled to speak up because he understood that, after all, his writings could be mistaken. The human intellect is eminently fallible.

Compared to all these weaknesses which beset the hadith, the Quran is completely vouchsafed for its authenticity by no less an authority than God Himself.

*The majority follows only conjecture, and conjecture is no substitute for the truth. God is fully aware of everything they do. But the Quran can never be invented by other than God. It confirms all previous scriptures, and consummates them. There is absolutely no doubt that it comes from the Lord of the Universe.*

### **Criticism of the Hadith Has Always Existed**

Criticism of the hadith, even the rejection of the hadith theory advocated by Imam Shafi`i, is not something new. Criticism of it existed from the earliest times. At the time of Imam Shafi`i, the

Mu`tazilite rationalist school, one of the earliest Muslim theological schools, advanced two very sound arguments to refute the hadith theory. They stated that the hadith was merely guesswork and conjecture, and that the Quran was complete and perfect, and did not require the hadith or any other book to supplement or complement it.

However, as we mentioned earlier, the hadith/sunna school mustered significant social and political support for its teachings. The Mu`tazilite school was therefore subjugated and the sunna school became dominant. It is not within the province of this book to delve much deeper into this interesting controversy; it suffices to say that much remains to be understood from the causes and effects of this controversy alone.

Closer to our time, namely towards the end of the nineteenth century, the reform movement spearheaded by Jamaluddin Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh sought to curb the emphasis on *taqlid*, or blind conformity to the opinions of early Imams. However, little effort was made to address the problems of the hadith itself. These two renowned scholars only went so far as to further tighten the criteria for accepting the hadith. At the same time, they still accept the hadith as a principal source of law on par with the Quran.

Other schools of thought did arise in Egypt, India and Indonesia, seeking to question and even repudiate the hadith. Although detailed information about them is rather scarce, in Egypt Muhammad Tawfiq Sidqi (d. 1920) and Mahmud Abu Rayya, whose book on the hadith was published in Cairo in 1958, questioned the reliability of the hadith. In India, the *ahlul-Quran* group led by Ghulam Ahmad Parvez arose during the 1930's to take Muslims back to the Quran. It is most probable that similar movements have sprung up in other Muslim societies throughout Islamic history. Therefore, it is important for us to keep in mind that criticism of the hadith has always been extant since the day the hadith was written down.

### **The Underlying Weakness of the Hadith:**

#### **Conjecture and Guesswork**

Lately it has become a novelty for some writers to allude to historical evidence to prove the existence of written hadith records from the time of the Prophet. These writers claim that various *sahifah* or personal diaries of various Companions have been found. Unfortunately for these writers, such writings do not exist at all. Perhaps the impetus for this *sahifah* theory was sparked by the reference to the records of Hammam ibn Munabih (d. 101 or 102 Hijrah), a pupil of Abu Huraira. Hammam ibn Munabih is reported to have recorded 140 alleged sayings of the Prophet from Abu Hurairah. But we do not have conclusive evidence for the existence of these personal diaries. The scholars have differing opinions on this subject. Therefore, to vouch for the existence of a complete set of *sahifah* writings can only be an intellectual flight of fancy.

It is also pertinent to note that the collecting, collating and editing of the hadith into the six dominant books that we have today has never been conclusively witnessed or vouched for. To make matters even more complicated for the hadith writers, there is a recorded hadith of the Prophet which claims that the Prophet himself had expressly forbidden the writing down of any hadith! According to Muslim and ibn Hanbal:

Abi Said al Khudri reported that the Prophet said, "Do not write down anything from me except the Quran. Whoever writes down anything other than the Quran must erase it."

The hadith writers come up with the retort that the Prophet said what he said in order to prevent his followers from confusing the Quran, which was still being revealed at that time, with the hadith. Hence, his prohibition. It was later repealed, they argued, when the danger of mixing the Quran with the hadith no longer existed.

But this appears to be a rather lame excuse to justify the writing of the hadith. Even after the Prophet's death and even very much after the Quran had been carefully bound into its present form, the true followers of the Prophet still refused to write down anything of the so-called hadith. This is clear from another report of Ibn Hanbal:

"Zayd ibn Thabit (the Prophet's personal aide and scribe) was visiting the house of Mu'awiya and was narrating to the Caliph a story about the Prophet. The Caliph, who became much impressed with the story, immediately asked his scribe to record the story. Zayd then cautioned the Caliph, 'The holy prophet has forbidden us from writing down anything from his hadith.' "

There is also the story regarding the first caliph Abu Bakr who could not lay his head down to sleep upon finding out that there were some written records of the Prophet's sayings in the house of his daughter Aisha, who was the Prophet's wife. Not until he had personally burnt the written records was he able to sleep peacefully again. The second caliph Omar ibn Khattab also refused to allow anyone to compile the hadith for fear that the people may take to them and discard the Quran.

This is just another proof to deny the authority of the hadith. Not only that, but since the hadith writers can show us other hadiths that does allow for the writing down of the hadith, it only goes further to show that the hadith even contradict one another. To attribute all these conflicting and preposterous hadiths to the Prophet and also to equate these hadiths with the Quran is only being presumptuous and belittling the mission of the Prophet.

It would have been impossible for the Prophet to equate any of his own sayings with the Quran. It would also be quite illogical for him to want his people to follow a set of writings which he never authorized and whose authenticity would later give rise to so much confusion and hardship for the Muslims. We must also remember that the Quran itself, although revealed fully to the Prophet, was never fully compiled into one book during the Prophet's own lifetime. It would only be bound into one complete book under the caliphs Abu Bakr and Omar. So if this was the case for the Quran, can the case for the hadith be stronger? Definitely not. The hadiths were never written down in the presence of the Prophet and neither was the Prophet present to supervise the 'transmission' of any of his sayings. That is why the hadiths differ so much. That is why we have the split in Islam into the Sunnite and the Shi'ite sects, and among the Sunnites into the Shafi'i, the Hanafi, the Maliki, the Hanbali major and numerous other minor schools. They all quote their own hadith to color their particular shade of ideology.

Another illuminating example that must be quoted is the hadith that records the Prophet's last sermon during his final pilgrimage. This hadith has two chains of reporters: one as reported by Jabir ibn Abdullah (which itself has two versions) and another as reported by Malik ibn Anas.

First let us quote the two different versions attributed to Jabir ibn Abdullah:

(a) Jabir ibn Abdullah reported during his farewell sermon the Prophet said, "... and I have left with you one thing; if you hold on to it firmly, you will never stray, i.e. God's Scripture. **You will be asked about me. So what will you say?**" They said, "We will vouchsafe that you have truthfully and completely delivered the message and brought the remainder." (Muslim) (Emphasis added)

(b) Jabir ibn Abdullah reported that the Prophet said in his farewell sermon during his final pilgrimage, "And I have left among you one thing; if you hold on to it firmly, you will never stray – God's Scripture **and whatever you have gained from questioning me (hadith)** (Muslim) (Emphasis added)

Surely Jabir ibn Abdullah could have narrated only one of the above versions. Version (b) with its extra wording is an obvious addition to the original.

The second (or actually the third) record of this same event is attributed to Anas ibn Malik (a companion) who concedes that it is only a weak hadith. It says:

I have left you **two** things, so long as you hold tightly to them both, you will never stray – Allah's Holy Quran and the Sunnah of His Messenger (Muwatta) (Emphasis added)

It is interesting to note that this hadith is classified as a 'weak' hadith by the hadith writers themselves. To further highlight this incongruity, Ibn Ishaq, another early chronicler, reports,

Al-Zuhri informed me from Anas ibn Malik: "While Abu Bakr was receiving allegiance from the followers the day after the Prophet had died, Omar stood up and spoke to the people, 'O People! God has left you His Scripture, with which He guided His Messenger.' "

It is quite evident that the Prophet instructed us to hold on to the Quran only. This is consonant with the later testimony and conduct of the Caliphs Abu Bakr and Omar regarding the hadith. The allegation that the Prophet also made reference to the hadith in his Farewell Sermon can only be a falsification of the truth. This falsification might likely have crept in after the death of Omar, at the earliest, because we are aware that Caliph Omar ibn Khattab was a strict man and a stickler for correct behavior.

However, it is the Quran itself that gives us the final say regarding the hadith. In Chapter II we have referred to the usage of the words 'hadith' and 'sunna' in the Quran. We have seen that not even in one of these references in the Quran is there any indication for the existence of the prophetic hadith or tradition. The word 'hadith' in all its forms is used thirty-six times in the Quran, eleven of which refer to the Quran, while none refers to what has later been termed the hadith or sunna. When we ponder on those verses containing the word 'hadith' in the Quran, we shall notice a subtle criticism of the so-called hadith:

*These are God's revelations that we recite for you with the truth. In which **hadith** besides the revelations of God, do they believe?*

*God sent down the best **hadith**, a scripture that is consistent, repeating.*

*It is a revelation from the Lord of the Universe. Are you then evading this **hadith**?*

The first verse quoted above clearly forbids us from accepting anything other than the Quran as a source of guidance and criterion for measuring things religious. The second makes reference to the Quran as being the best hadith. The third chides us for resorting to sources that wish to replace the Quran.

To further clarify any doubts that we might have about the supremacy of the Quran compared to the distorted and fabricated recordings of the hadith, God uses an ingenious technique to impress upon us that the Quran and only the Quran is our source of guidance. This must be part of God's promise to permanently protect His teachings, i.e. the Quran. We refer in particular to verse 31:6 of the Quran:

*Some people uphold vain **hadith** in order to divert others from the path of God without knowledge, and to create a mockery out of it. These have deserved humiliating retribution.*

In verse 39:23 God refers to the Quran as *ahsan'al- hadith* or 'the best hadith'. In 31:6 He refers to the fabricators of false teachings as upholding 'vain hadith' (*lahw'al-hadith*) to divert the people from the path of God. These people, needless to say, are to be condemned. Therefore, God uses the word 'hadith' in two contradictory contexts to impress upon us the basic difference between His teachings and the teachings of those who deny Him.

It is clear now that most of the hadith attributed to the Prophet are, in fact, nothing but vain talk (*lahw'al-hadith*) which only serve to "divert others from the path of God without knowledge."

## **Weaknesses in the Methodology of**

### **Chain-Reporters or 'Isnad'**

The hadith writers are fond of saying that the collection and collating of the hadith was undertaken with much care and accuracy, especially by Bukhari and Muslim – two of the hadith writers held in the highest regard by their own followers. Bukhari and Muslim are supposed to have used strict and meticulous techniques to criticize and evaluate the sources of their hadith prior to writing them down.

The hadith writers founded a whole new branch of learning called *Ilm al-Jarh wa al-Ta'dil* (the science of accepting and rejecting narrations) whereby the narrators are examined for their honesty and integrity. Although we must appreciate and praise them for the labor they had put into the task, we cannot turn a blind eye to the basic weakness of their methodology.

We note that the majority of the hadith only appeared during the time of the *tabi`in*, i.e. successors to the Companions, and the time of the *tabi` tabi`in* (successors to the successors of the Companions). Who were the *tabi`in* and the *tabi` tabi`in*? The *tabi`in* were the generations that succeeded the Companions of the Prophet. This is two and a half to four generations or 70 to 120 years thereabouts after the Prophet. The *tabi` tabi`in* were those people who succeeded the aforementioned group, that is, four and a half to six generations or around 130 to 190 years after the Prophet. That means the majority of the hadith arose around a hundred to two hundred years after the Prophet.

However accurate the methodology of the *isnad*, the scholars first started talking about it and started writing it down only about 150 - 200 years after the deaths of the very last *tabi`i tabi`in*. This means that when the research to establish the *isnad* got started, none of the Companions, the succeeding generation or the generation coming after them were available to provide any kind of guidance, confirmation or rebuttal. Therefore, the authenticity of the statements cannot be vouched for at all.

It is not our intention to say that Bukhari, Muslim and others were fabricators. However, even students of elementary psychology or communication will testify that a simple message of, say, 15 words will get distorted after passing through only about five messengers. (Our readers are welcome to try out this experiment). Keep in mind that the hadith contains thousands of detailed and complex narrations — everything from ablution to jurisprudence. These narrations passed through hundreds of narrators who were spread out over thousands of miles of desert, and spanned over two to three hundred years of history. All this at a time when news traveled at the speed of a camel gait, recorded on pieces of leather or bone or scrolls in a land that had neither paper nor the abundance of scribes to write anything down!

Even today in this modern day and age of the twentieth century, there have been major historical events, which although well documented, still elicit much controversy. We cite, for example, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy — an event that is surrounded by much mystery. We also have the controversy surrounding the exact causes of the First World War. In our own country, there is much debate as to the true story behind Mahsuri and Hang Tuah. In every family there are always conflicting stories or versions of stories to explain certain events that happen within families.

Therefore, it is not likely that the various hadith writers could have been accurate, however much they wanted to, in checking the authenticity of the hadith which they wrote down. A camel journey from Mecca to Damascus might take a month or two. In fact, any journey by camel between the major populated areas of the Arabian deserts took much time. It makes it highly unlikely that the hadith writers checked out all the thousands of details personally. Otherwise, they must have spent a large part of their lives sitting on the backs of very fast-moving camels. History has recorded who these hadith writers were, where they lived and how much travelling they undertook. As for the camels, a camel's gait remains much the same then as it is now.

It stands to reason that the hadith writers depended on much story-telling to fill in the blanks. Many 'authentic' narrators whom the hadith writers allude to in their chains of *isnad* were wholly fabricated names. To overcome this type of logical criticism, the hadith writers came up with an ingenious device to actually pull the wool over our eyes. They came up with the concept of *ta'dil* of the Companions. This concept states that the Companions of the Prophet are wholly protected from committing any error whenever they recall or narrate the sayings of the Prophet!

Although this concept is preposterous and defies all logic, we must note that Muslims were not the first to make such blatant claims. In fact, the hadith writers have taken a page from the Christian books. Although Jesus did not write anything down, the disciples and followers wrote down the various books of the Bible. To lend credence to their work, these Bible writers were also deemed to have been "inspired" and without fault whenever they undertook to record 'the Word of God'. In fact, there are even parts of the Bible that appeared to one of the Bible writers in a dream while he was asleep!

Let us examine two examples of *isnad* for hadith compiled by the famous Bukhari.

### **Prophet Muhammad Prophet Muhammad**

1. Omar ibn Khattab 1. Aisha
2. Al Qanmah ibn Waqqas al-Laithi 2. Urwah ibn Al-Zubayr
3. Ibni Ibrahim at Taimi 3. Ibni Shihab
4. Yahya ibn Said al Ansari 4. Uqail
5. Sufyan 5. Al-Baith
6. Abdullah ibn Az Zubair 6. Yahya ibn Bukhair

### **Bukhari Bukhari**

As we have mentioned earlier, these *isnad* were recorded at least 150 years after the last *tabi` tabi`in* had died. Therefore, what real proofs are there to show that Omar ibn Khattab or Aisha were the real sources of this particular *isnad*? The proofs simply do not exist. The only things made available to us are strongly-held opinions and neat concepts like the *ta`dil* of the Companions.

But what does God Almighty have to say about all these? We quote:

*Additionally we have appointed for every prophet enemies from among the human devils and the jinn devils, who invent and narrate to each other fancy words in order to deceive. Had your Lord willed, they would not have done it. You shall disregard them and their inventions. This is God's will so that the minds of those who do not really believe in the Hereafter may listen thereto, and accept it, and to have them commit what they are supposed to commit. Shall I seek other than God as a source of law, when He revealed to you this book fully detailed? Even those who received previous scripture recognize that it came down from your Lord, truthfully. Therefore, you shall not harbor any doubt. The word of your Lord is complete, in truth and justice. Nothing shall abrogate His Words. He is the Hearer, the Knower. **If you obey the majority of people on earth, they will divert you from the path of God. They only follow conjecture, and they only guess.***

***The majority follows only conjecture, and conjecture is no substitute for the truth. God is fully aware of everything they do. But the Quran can never be invented by anything other than God. It confirms all previous scripture, and consummates them. There is absolutely no doubt that it comes from the Lord of the Universe.***

In the verses above, God warns us that many `religious' books written by men are merely guesswork and conjecture. Can anyone deny that the hadith books are also religious books written by mere mortals?

But the hadith writers are still insistent. According to some, at least Bukhari's hadith is infallible. Why? Because Bukhari is reported to have sifted through more than 600,000 hadiths and had picked only 7,275 to be included in his `authentic' collection. This fact is put forward to impress upon the reader that Bukhari was meticulous and thorough in his life's work. Bukhari merely took 1.25% of all the hadiths he came across as authentic. But a simple calculation will show that these figures are preposterous and impossible to be achieved by Bukhari or any other human being.

If, on the average, a hadith consists of three simple sentences (in truth many hadiths run into paragraphs), then Bukhari would have had to collect, read, investigate, evaluate and record over 1.8 million sentences over a period of 40 years. This is the equivalent of researching (which include the long camel journeys to and fro across the desert) and attesting to the authenticity of over 300 books, each equivalent to the thickness and complexity of a Quran, over a period of 40 years! Compare this to the 6346 verses only of the one Quran which God in His all encompassing mercy gave to the Prophet over a period of 23 years!

According to another source, Ibn Hanbal reported that there were over 7 million `authentic' hadiths. If this were true, then working for 23 years at a pace of 18 hours a day, seven days a week, the Prophet would have had to produce one hadith every 77 seconds! There would definitely have been no time left at all for the Prophet to have done anything like living his life and carrying out his mission as a Prophet!

It is evident that to rely on the *isnad* alone to vouch for the hadith is wholly unacceptable. It would be more correct to evaluate a hadith based on its content and logic of the content. Any hadith whose *isnad* is satisfactory (to the hadith writers) but whose content does not satisfy logic must be rejected as

unacceptable. If we use this simple method, we will most probably discover that the majority of the hadith in the six collections cannot be accepted anymore.

The weakness of the hadith can be analyzed from three aspects. Firstly, its contradiction with the Quran. Such hadith is automatically rejected. Secondly, its contradiction with history, scientific facts or common sense. Such hadith must also be rejected. Thirdly, its self-contradiction. With such hadith, it is possible that one of them may be true and acceptable.

### **The Coherence Theory of the Hadith**

Again in anticipation of criticism, the hadith writers came up with other neat tricks to safeguard their position. Imam Shafi`i postulated the theory of the coherence of the hadith. By this fantastic theory, Shafi`i held that the hadith could never contradict the Quran, or another hadith. If any contradictions were found to exist, these were merely outward appearances but not real contradictions. These rather simple tricks of word-play were set up to cover the obvious discrepancies and contradictions that exist in the hadith. But whether this theory can really save the hadith is another matter. We will see that this theory only condemns the hadith further.

To prove his point that the hadith can never contradict the Quran or itself, Shafi`i provides the following convoluted explanation. He takes the Prophet not only as a Divine messenger but as a Divine spokesman whose every word and action is divinely inspired. The Prophet must be obeyed absolutely in every single way because it is only the Prophet who has the necessary knowledge to explain those matters that are discussed in rather general terms in the Quran. In this way, there can be no conflict between the sunna and the Quran. Contradictions may sometimes be seen between one sunna and another due to certain peculiar circumstances which gave rise to such sunna, or due to incomplete reporting of the sunna, but in reality the contradictions do not exist. Note the following dialogue between Shafi`i and a questioner where this confusing and contradicting theory is explained:

He (i.e. the questioner) asked: Would it be possible for the sunna to contradict the Book [of God]?

[Shafi`i] replied: Impossible! For God, glorified be His praise, imposed on men the obligation [of obedience to the law] through two avenues – the origin of both is in His Book – His Book and the sunna: [The latter is binding by virtue of] the duty of obedience laid down in the Book that it should be followed. So it was not permissible for the Apostle to allow the sunna to be abrogated [by the Book], without the Apostle himself providing another sunna to abrogate it. The abrogating sunna is known because it is the later one, while most of the abrogating [communications] of the Book can be known only by [indications provided in] the sunna of the Apostle.

Shafi`i does not provide any hard evidence or good examples to prove this coherence theory. What he attempts to explain is what the hadith scholars allege to be the function of the sunna to explain and detail the general rules mentioned in the Quran. We have already discussed this in detail in Chapter II. However, let us discuss Shafi`i's handling of a clear-cut case, the punishment for adultery, where the hadith clearly contradicts the Quran.

On the subject of adultery, the Quran clearly lays down the punishment as follows:

*The adulteress and the adulterer, you shall whip each one of them one hundred lashes, and do not be swayed by pity from carrying out God's law, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day. And let a group of believers witness their punishment.*

On the other hand, the hadith holds the following:

Omar reported that God had sent His messenger Muhammad and revealed the Scripture to him. Among the verses revealed by Almighty God is the commandment to stone (the adulterers) until death. The Prophet stoned (the adulterers) until death and likewise we also stoned (the adulterers) until death. Stoning until death in the Scripture is truly prescribed for husbands and wives who commit adultery, if they are found guilty, or become pregnant, or confess their sins.

Shafi`i explains this contradiction as follows:

The sunna of the Apostle specified that the penalty of scourging with a hundred stripes for [fornication on the part of the] free unmarried couple was confirmed, but that it was abrogated concerning the married; and that the penalty of stoning for [adultery on the part of the] free married couple was confirmed.

This is an extremely interesting interpretation. Not only does the sunna punishment clearly contradict the punishment in the Quran, but it is also given the power to confirm or overrule the Quran! But surprisingly, in other places, Shafi`i does not allow the sunna to contradict the Quran or vice versa. He only allows the Quran to abrogate the Quran and the sunna to abrogate the sunna. It is obvious that the coherence theory of the hadith is confusing and unacceptable.

The greatest weakness of the hadith is its contradiction with the Word of God, i.e. the Quran. We quote here just a few of the samples:

### 1. The Rise of Imam Mahdi towards the Last Days

The hadith about the coming of the Mahdi to save mankind from the tribulations of the *Dajjal* or Anti-Christ towards the end of the world is not consistent with the teachings of the Quran. God commands us to strive in God's cause and to command good and to forbid evil every second of our lives. These hadith instead advocate a passive response and surrender to 'fate' and await the Mahdi's arrival to save us.

The belief in the Mahdi arose from the Jewish belief in the coming of a savior. Actually this savior, as foretold in their scripture, was Prophet Muhammad whom they rejected when he arose among the Arabs. It is also consonant with the Christian belief about the Second Coming of Christ. The Shi`ites, when they lost political power to the Umayyads, similarly created their own myth about the return of the 12th Imam. He was believed to have disappeared, and will return towards the Last Days as the Mahdi who would rule the world with justice.

### 2. The Miracles of Prophet Muhammad

There are quite a few hadiths that quote many miracles performed by the Prophet. The Quran tells us clearly that the Prophet did not perform any miracles. The only miracle given to the Prophet was the Quran itself, as witness the verse:

*"They said, 'How come no miracles were sent to him from his Lord?' Say, 'Miracles come only from God, and I am no more than a warner'. Is it not enough of a miracle that we sent down to you this scripture, which is being recited to them? Indeed, it is a mercy and a message for those who believe."*

### 3. The Prophet's Intercession

Many other hadiths give the power of intercession to the Prophet. But there are many verses of the Quran that clearly testify that no one can intercede on anyone's behalf. Verse 2:254 states:

*"O you who believe, you shall give to charity from our provisions to you, before a day comes wherein there will be no trade, no favoritism and no intercession. It is the disbelievers who choose wickedness."*

No intercession is allowed. Even if it is allowed, it can only be with God's permission, i.e. in accordance with God's will only. In this case, intercession cannot be limited just to Prophet Muhammad; it can be from anyone whom God allows. To insist that only Prophet Muhammad can intercede is to discriminate among God's prophets, as well as to restrict God's omnipotence in making decisions.

### 4. Punishment for Apostasy

The hadith prescribes the death penalty for apostasy. "If anyone leaves his religion, then kill him." (Bukhari and Abu Daud) The Quran, on the other hand, makes no provision for the killing of apostates. Verse 5:54 states:

*"O you who believe, if any of you reverts from his religion, then God will bring people whom He loves as they love Him, and humble themselves towards the believers, while being stern towards the disbelievers; and strive in the cause of God; and never worry about any blamer who might blame them. Such is God's grace that He bestows upon whomever He wills. God is bounteous, omniscient."*

Verse 2:256 affirms complete freedom of religious belief:

*"There shall be no compulsion in religion ..."*

On the contrary, the Quran informs us that the leaders of misbelief practiced murder or stoning to death of those who believed in God, as witness this verse: "... *If they find out about you, they would stone you, or force you back into their religion...*" This refers to the story of the monotheistic youths, the seven sleepers of Ephesus, who took refuge in a cave from the persecution of Christians who had deviated from the monotheistic teachings of Christ around the time of the promulgation of the Nicene Creed in 325 AD. In this respect, it is most interesting to note that the Old Testament punishment for apostasy is also death.

### 5. Reward of Paradise by Just Uttering the Attestation of Faith

#### Before Death

A number of hadith promise Paradise to anyone who utters the *kalimah shahada* or attestation of faith before death. This hadith seeks to annul all of God's teachings that only sound faith and good works will get one to Heaven. Just by mentioning a few words is not going to cause one to gain an entry into Heaven,

just as forgetting or not mentioning these words does not mean that Heaven is forbidden. Death can sometimes approach us suddenly without any warning. The example of the drowning Pharaoh uttering the *shahada* and rejected by God from His Paradise in the Quran shows that faith must be nurtured by good works before it can take root in any individual. This hadith is self-abrogating.

#### 6. Encouraging Passivity

We have already quoted several hadiths that advocate passivity and withdrawal from active participation in society. This is clearly in contradiction not only with the Quran but with the whole purpose of Islam. Surely if the Prophet had chosen to be passive, none of us would be Muslims today!

#### 7. Punishment for Adultery

We have already discussed this.

#### 8. The Command to Pray

We have already dealt with this subject in detail.

#### 9. The Prophet's Prophecies

Many hadiths tell us about the Prophet's own prophecies regarding the future. This contradicts the Quran's assertion that the Prophet does not know the future. Verse 7:188 states:

*"Say (O Muhammad), 'I possess no power to either benefit or harm myself. Only what God wills takes place. Had I known the future, I would have increased my wealth, and no harm would have afflicted me. I am no more than a warner and preacher for those who believe.' "*

Verses 72:25-27 inform us thus:

*"Say, 'I have no idea how soon or how far is that which is promised to you. Only God is the knower of the future; He lets no one else acquire such knowledge. Only the messengers that He chooses may be given certain information concerning the past or the future.' "*

#### 10. Fatalism

The sixth pillar of faith, drawn from the hadith, teaches fatalism among Muslims. This must be one of the chief causes of Muslim decline in the last thousand years. This hadith is annulled by the Quran in two verses, which states:

*"Anyone who disbelieves in God, His angels, His scriptures, His messengers and the Last Day has indeed strayed far away."*

*"Wherever you may be, death will catch up with you, even if you are in formidable castles. When something good happens to them, they say, 'This is from God,' and when something bad happens to them, they say, 'This is because of you.' Say, 'All things come from God.' What is wrong with these people that they can hardly understand any preaching? Whatever good that happens to you is from God. Whatever bad that happens to you is a consequence of your own work..."*

## **Self-Contradiction of Hadith**

As we have said, the hadith reflects the views and opinions of various factions and groups, many with vested interests, existing in society then. It is to be expected, therefore, that many of them contradict one another. We list a few here:

### 1. Hadith on the Recording of Hadith

There exist 'authentic' hadiths which forbid as well as allow the writing down of hadith besides the Quran. One that forbids the writing down of hadith reads as follows: "Abi Said al Khudri reported that the Prophet said, 'Do not write down anything from me except the Quran. Whoever writes anything other than the Quran must erase it.' " (Bukhari and Ibn Hanbal). An opposite hadith is the following: "Abdullah ibn Amr reported that the Prophet said, 'Deliver from me even one sentence ... Whoever betrays me intentionally let him prepare to burn in Hell.'" (Bukhari)

M. Hamidullah claims that the prohibition was made due to certain circumstances, but that it was later revoked. This is a very weak argument, as we have indicated earlier.

### 2. The Farewell Sermon

We have already discussed this.

### 3. Punishment for Adultery

We have shown earlier how the hadith on this matter contradicts the Quran. The earlier hadith that we quoted wrongfully sets down the death penalty (by stoning) for adultery. Compare that with the following hadith:

"Jabir ibn Abdullah reported that the Messenger of God said, 'You have rights over your wives, such that they should not bed with anyone else. If they transgress in this matter, you may beat them without causing any injury.' " (Bukhari and Muslim).

It should be noted that this hadith makes adultery a light matter. It should also be noted that stoning to death for adultery was a punishment stipulated in the Old Testament.

### 4. Striving in the Cause of God

While some hadith advocate passivity, there are others that call for striving in the way of God.

### 5. The Status of the Prophets

There are some hadith which correctly obey the Quran and forbid discriminating between the Prophets. Yet there are hadith which seek to glorify the Prophet Muhammad over other prophets.

### 6. On the Quran

Some hadith explicitly require us to refer to the hadith besides the Quran. But once again, there are other hadiths which warn us of going astray if we were to seek guidance from other than the Quran.

There are many more hadiths that contradict one another. We have quoted just a few for our readers. Surely if we delve deeper into this area of hadith research, we can discover even more contradictions. Perhaps this book will serve to stimulate further thought in this area.

### **Hadith Contradicting Science, History and Logic**

Finally, we must test the hadith for their congruence with scientific facts, historical facts and simple common sense. God tells us in the Quran that His signs are manifest in the physical universe that surrounds us. Verses 10:5-6 inform us:

*"God is the One Who made the sun luminescent, and the moon a light, and He designed its phases to provide you with a timing device. God did not create all this in vain. He explains the revelations for people who know. The alternation of the night and day, and of the things that God created in the heavens and the earth, provide signs for the righteous."*

Therefore, the physical world is full of God's signs. The natural laws of physics, biology, chemistry and everything else are merely a manifestation of the system put into Nature by God Almighty. Whenever our scientists 'invent' something new, it is not an invention, instead it is merely uncovering or coming to grips with a system that has already been put there. Therefore, scientific observation and scientific knowledge can only confirm what God has placed in Nature, the Unwritten Book of God. This is what the Quran, the Written Book of God, already tells us. Established scientific facts are, therefore, in complete consonance with the Quran. Any fact that cannot be scientifically established cannot be consonant with the Quran.

The same is true for recorded history. Anything that really happened in history can never contradict the Quran. Therefore, if any 'historical fact' contradicts any Quranic teachings, that 'fact' cannot be true. It must have been fabricated. The same applies also for simple logic and common sense. Logic and common sense can never contradict the Quran.

In these respects, the hadith again fails miserably. An eminent French physician and member of the French Academy of Sciences, Dr. Maurice Bucaille, a Muslim who has made a deep study of the contents of the Quran and the hadith, has stated:

*"The difference is in fact quite staggering between the accuracy of the data contained in the Quran, when compared with modern scientific knowledge, and the highly questionable character of certain statements in the hadith on subjects whose tenor is essentially scientific... In view of the fact that only a limited number of hadith may be considered to express the Prophet's thought with certainty, the others must contain the thoughts of men of his times, in particular with regard to the subjects referred to here. When these dubious or inauthentic hadith are compared to the text of the Quran, we can measure the extent to which they differ. This comparison highlights ... the striking difference between the writings of this period, which are riddled with scientifically inaccurate statements, and the Quran, the Book of Written Revelation, that is free from errors of this kind."*

We can provide numerous examples of the hadith contradicting scientific facts, historical facts and simple logic. Some of them are as follows:

#### 1. The Movement of the Sun

A hadith records the following,

"Abu Zarr reported that the Messenger of God said that when the sun wishes to set, it travels until it prostrates itself below the Divine Throne. It requests for permission and is granted. It prostrates but its supplication is not accepted and it will request for permission but is not granted. It will then be commanded to return to whence it came. So it will rise at the place where it sets ..."  
(Bukhari and Muslim)

Apart from the fact of its contradiction with what we know from science, the reader should note what the Quran says on this matter. Verses 36:38-40 inform us:

*"The sun runs in a specific orbit. Such is the design of the Almighty, the Omniscient. And we designed the moon to appear in stages until it reverts to a thin curve. The sun never catches up with the moon, nor does the night prematurely overtake the day. Each floats in its own orbit."*

Not only is the hadith above ignorant of the Quran, but it also places the earth in the center with the sun orbiting around it, when the truth is much to the contrary.

## 2. The Command to Pray

We have seen that the Divine command to pray, as with other religious rituals, was first given to Prophet Abraham and his followers, and this ritual prayer was handed down from generation to generation until Prophet Muhammad. This is testified both by the Quran and by history.

## 3. Discrimination Against Women

A hadith quotes Abu Sayeed al Khudri as reporting that a woman came to the Prophet and complained that her husband had forced her to break her fast in order to have sexual intercourse with him. To this the Prophet is alleged to have replied, "A woman cannot fast without her husband's permission." (Abu Daud and Ibn Majah)

This hadith tries very hard to cast a terrible slur on the Prophet's good name. Such an attribute is clearly against the chivalrous and good-natured character of the Prophet. Moreover, it is also contrary to the Quranic teachings concerning the method of fasting and how to interact with our wives and other human beings around us.

## 4. Discouraging Sport

A hadith quotes Oqabah ibn A'mer as reporting that the Prophet allegedly said, "All types of sport is forbidden for men except archery, horse riding and playing with their wives." (Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja and Abu Daud).

## 5. Anti-Reason

While God insists that we use our minds to think, some hadith falsely allege that humans can never think. "Jundub reported that the Messenger of God said, 'Whoever interprets the Quran using his own intellect, even if the interpretation is correct, he is committing a grievous sin.'" (Tirmidhi and Abu Daud)

## **Conclusion**

As the Quran says so very precisely and accurately, many of the hadith contained in the six 'authentic' books of hadith are nothing but "vain talk in order to divert others from the path of God without knowledge, and to create a mockery of it."

The hadith/sunna, therefore, can never be referred to as an infallible source of guidance, as the Quran is. This is not to say that we have to burn all the hadith books. They are useful social and historical records, reflecting people and events of their times. However, we cannot agree with the anxiety of the late Pakistani scholar, Professor Fazlur Rahman, who said that if we were to neglect the hadith, then the historical basis for the existence of the Quranic teachings would be destroyed. This argument has often been repeated and stressed by the hadith party on behalf of the hadith, but it really has no basis. The historical proofs for the Quran and for Prophet Muhammad who brought it to mankind is the Quran itself, the existence of the Muslim community throughout history and the existence of many historical records. The Quran, without the hadith, is not in the least affected. So is Prophet Muhammad. On the contrary, the Prophet will emerge in a much better light without the fabrications of many so-called hadith/sunna that had been attributed to him.

As historical records, the hadith is useful. However, as historical records go, they cannot be fully accepted as true until they are criticized and evaluated by scientific, historical and divine, i.e. Quranic, criticism.

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**CHAPTER V**  
**CONCLUSION:**  
**RETURN TO PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S**  
**ORIGINAL TEACHING — THE QURAN**

*You shall obey God and obey the Messenger and beware. If you turn away, then you should know that **the sole function of our messenger is to deliver the message.***

*(Quran, 5:92)*

*Say, "O people, I am God's messenger to all of you. To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. There is no God except He. He grants life and death." Therefore, you shall believe in God and His messenger, the gentile prophet, who believes in God and **His Words** and follow him, that you may be guided.*

*(Quran, 7:158)*

When Prophet Muhammad died, he left with us only the Quran and nothing but the Quran as a guidance for Muslims and indeed for all mankind. This has been shown by solid historical evidence. Moreover, the Quran pronounced this fact as well when God stated several times that the function of the messenger was only to deliver the message. Verse 92 of Sura 5 that we quote above is one of them. We also quote Verse 158 of Sura 7 which states that Prophet Muhammad himself believes in the divine words, i.e. the Quran.

Nevertheless, the previous chapters have shown how Muslim society between 200-250 years after the death of the Prophet, through their religious scholars (particularly Shafi`i) built a new doctrine to the effect that the Prophet has left them the Quran **and** the hadith and that they must hold on to both.

Notwithstanding the conflicting versions of hadith that say otherwise, historical facts also prove beyond any shadow of doubt that there were no hadith collections existing at the time of the Prophet's death. History also proves that the early caliphs prevented the dissemination or recording of hadith. Al-Muwatta' of Malik ibn Anas (d. 975) may be said to be the first hadith collection, although, properly speaking, it was a law-book rather than a hadith collection. We know that the official collections were made only after Shafi`i pronounced the hadith to be also divine and a source of law on par with the Quran.

Whether to go back and refer to the Quran alone to solve our many pressing problems today, or to persist in our thousand-year old error of clinging to the unauthorized hadith and heresies resulting out of it — this is the greatest dilemma facing the Muslims today. Are we brave enough to admit our mistake, retrace our steps and make amends? Or, shall we continue arrogantly to cling to and defend traditions that we have inherited from our forefathers? To let ourselves drift aimlessly in confusion, backwardness, degradation and disunity that have plagued us all these thousand years? To be divided not only among ourselves, but, more importantly, divided within our own individual selves about what is right and what is wrong, what is "religious" and what is "secular," who is an "alim" and who is not and the thousand other conflicting teachings fed to us by the hadith? What a tremendous achievement indeed for the hadith!

So what are we to do now? Is there any way out? Is there no "Second Comings" for us, for mankind? But there is. Everything that we need, the primordial element, lies in the Quran, latent and merely waiting for us to reach out to it again. The clearest spring with its purest fount of knowledge still runs straight and true in the Quran, just as it has from the day it was first revealed by God Almighty in His All-Encompassing Mercy for all mankind.

As we contemplate the fate of the Muslims and agonize over traditions that many of us have come to love and fear to reject, let us be reminded by these verses:

*"When they are told, 'Follow God's commandments only,' they say, 'We follow what we found our parents doing.' What if their parents lacked understanding and guidance? The example of such disbelievers is that of a parrot; they repeat what they heard without understanding. Deaf, dumb and blind, they fail to understand."*

So, we shall not be deaf, dumb and blind anymore. We shall not be like parrots and repeat what others tell us without first questioning and understanding things. The answer to our dilemma, therefore, lies in our going to the Quran for guidance.

*"Why do they not study the Quran carefully? If it were from other than God, they would have found many contradictions therein."*

Such is the challenge written in the Quran. We are challenged to find even one contradiction within it. Does any other book, revealed or not, have any such statement? Does the hadith allow us to question itself, or does one become a heretic to do so? Is the hadith beyond reproach – perhaps it occupies a plane higher than the above verse?

### **The True Position of the Hadith/Sunna**

As we have explained, our rejection of the hadith/sunna as an infallible source of guidance on par with the Quran in no way means our rejection of Prophet Muhammad. On the contrary, this rejection is precisely to clear the name of the Prophet from false teachings attributed to him against his will, in the same manner as the false teachings that Jesus is the Son of God has been attributed to Jesus by later Christians. Let us summarize our reasons for our rejection of the hadith/sunna as an infallible source of guidance as follows:

- (1) The Quran is complete, perfect and detailed. It is the fundamental law and the basic guidance for mankind covering every aspect of life. Other books are merely expositions either for or against the grand ideas contained in the Quran.
- (2) The sole mission of Prophet Muhammad was to deliver the divine message, the Quran. He was, of course, also an exemplary leader and teacher, but these roles were secondary.
- (3) The hadith compiled by hadith scholars consist of reports of alleged sayings and actions of the Prophet and cannot be absolutely guaranteed as to their authenticity. Those hadith that conform to the Quran are acceptable, while those that conflict with it are automatically rejected.
- (4) Religious duties of regular prayer, fasting, charities and the optional pilgrimage were not delivered by way of hadith, but were religious practices handed down through generations from the time of Prophet Abraham.
- (5) Besides being prophet and messenger of God, Muhammad was also a leader of the Medina city-state and later the Arab nation-state. In that role, he implemented the divine imperatives in the context of 7th century Arabia. It is impossible that he would have done anything contrary to God's commands.

We have with us records of the Medina Charter, the various letters sent by the Prophet to other leaders and also the Prophet's treaties. If anything, these should be the real hadith. But strangely, none of these treaties, constitutions etc. are made binding on us or given much credence, even by the hadith writers themselves. However, it is only the Quran that is binding upon us all, for all time. The status of the Medina Charter, for example, is the status of a legal precedent. It is not binding on us because in it the Prophet applied Quranic principles of administration to seventh century Arab tribal society. Our modern nation-state can study it and learn whatever lessons we can from it.

But the hadith can still be read, just as we read other books: religious, philosophical, historical or any other kind. Whatever good teachings that can be found in them — and there are many — we can and should follow them. But those that are against historical facts, scientific facts, reason, or the Quran, are obviously unacceptable. This should be plain.

### **A Recurring Weakness of Mankind**

History is a good teacher to mankind as it bears true testimony. So let us look at history. God sent Prophet Jesus to the children of Israel to bring them the Gospel and teach them to worship the One God. However, some three hundred years after his death, the religious leaders instituted a new doctrine not taught by him that he was the Son of God! Before that, God sent Prophet Moses to the same children of Israel with His scripture, the Torah. But a few centuries after his death, their religious leaders set up another book, the Talmud, which they followed while ignoring the Torah.

Ironically, after knowing all these, the Muslims repeated the same mistakes. God sent Prophet Muhammad – the last prophet – to mankind with His final scripture, the grand Quran, to correct once and for all the deviations that had been made by the Jews and the Christians. But about 250 years after his death, our religious scholars set us the hadith to replace the Quran! Thus, history repeated itself!

Why did this happen? It does seem that this is mankind's perennial disease: the desire to associate God with gods. People set up idols thinking that these idols will bring them closer to God. But this is only an excuse. Actually, they set up these idols beside God because they want an illegal share in God's kingdom without having to work for it, and without having to answer for their crimes. Through these idols, they legalize their whims and fancies without paying the least regard to God's laws. This is what God has explained in the following verses:

*Additionally we have appointed for every prophet enemies from among the human devils and jinn devils, who invent and narrate to each other fancy words in order to deceive. Had your Lord willed, they would not have done it. You shall disregard them and their inventions. This is God's will in order that the minds of those who do not really believe in the Hereafter may listen thereto, and accept it, and to have them commit what they are supposed to commit.*

### **The Quran: The Final Solution to All Deviations**

Before Muhammad, it was not possible to preserve God's revelations to the various communities of mankind due to certain historical and intellectual circumstances of human society. With Muhammad, however, the true scientific age of mankind began. Thus, God commissioned Muhammad to deliver His final scripture, the Quran, not just to a specific national community but to all mankind. This scripture is not only complete, perfect and detailed, but also protected by God against human corruption. The aim of this scripture is to finally free mankind from all manner of shackles, burdens and wrong teachings as well as to lead mankind along the Path of Peace to the Light of God.

At the beginning, i.e. during a period of about three hundred years, the Muslim community adhered to the teachings of the Quran. They scaled the heights of civilization and progress so rapidly, surpassing the two superpowers of Byzantium and Persia then, that it astounded the world. They created the greatest material, intellectual and spiritual civilization at that time. The names of statesmen and administrators like caliphs Abu Bakr, Omar ibn Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan and Ali ibn Abi Talib and others, military geniuses like Khalid ibn Walid and Abul `As, brilliant scientist like Al-Biruni, Al-Khwarizmi and Al-Razi, world-class philosophers like Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, and famous historians like Al-Tabari, Al-Baladhuri and Al-Masudi are names that make the first Muslim civilization justly famous. These are names enshrined in the history of world culture. It is this supreme achievement of the first Muslim civilization that made the famous British science historian, G. Sarton, remark:

"The main task of mankind was accomplished by Muslims. The greatest philosopher, Al-Farabi, was a Muslim, the greatest mathematicians, Abu Kamil and Ibrahim ibn Sinan, were Muslims, the greatest geographer and encyclopaedist, Al-Mas`udi, was a Muslim; the greatest historian, al-Tabari, was a Muslim."

### **Muslims Deviation**

The process of change in Muslim beliefs from the Quran to the hadith, or the Quran **and** hadith, with the hadith **actually** overshadowing the Quran, did not occur within a short period or smoothly. It took a period of about four to five centuries, beginning from the second and lasting in the sixth century of Islam. This was the period of the political infighting and the alignment of the various power-blocs among the inheritors of the Prophet's legacy.

Prior to the political and ideological conflicts, caused by nothing more than greed and pride, the Muslims had always settled their issues by referring to the Quranic teachings. Therefore, they had remained united and strong. Guided by the Quran, they did not discriminate between the weak and the powerful, the few and the many, and between factions and tribes. The Quran points out the truth and the right course of action for them to follow.

But the hadith allowed leeway for some groups to still **insist** on an independent course of action and attribute it to the Prophet and to God. Therefore, it was in their vested interests to tout the hadith as a source of theology and law. Beside helping the various factions to maintain a specific station, the hadith also introduces splits and diverse opinions that are always a necessary cost to giving up a unified belief and world-view. Soon after this came the factional fighting, the moral decay and the demise of the Muslim pre-eminence. That is why the Omniscient God, knowing that this would happen, in His incredible mercy to the Muslims and to mankind, put this warning in His Quran:

*The messenger will say, "My Lord, my people have deserted this Quran." We thus appointed for every prophet enemies from among the criminals. God suffices as guide and protector.*

We should note that God never said, and neither did the Prophet, that some day the people would desert the hadith. This is because the hadith is not the Word of God and neither is it the word of the Prophet. The hadith are merely conjectures and opinions of Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Daud, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, al-Nasa`i and others who took it upon themselves to record stories about the Prophet and then accord these stories the labels of 'authentic,' 'weak,' etc. Since the Prophet had explicitly forbidden the writing down of the hadith (as witnessed by the hadith itself), therefore the hadith contradicts the teachings of the Prophet by its very existence.

It is logical, therefore, that if our intention today is to honor and follow Prophet Muhammad, we must return to his original and true teachings, i.e. the Quran, and cleanse his name of all the heresies that have been falsely attached to him. We cannot avoid this responsibility, although some of us do not like it. The Prophet himself told us that his mission was to deliver the Quran, and he himself followed the Quran and nothing but the Quran.

The negative development that has occurred in Muslim society, as we have stated above, is due to the general human weakness of wanting to idolize human beings. In his history human beings have idolized prophets, saints, religious scholars and priests, leaders, material wealth, their own egos and, of course, lifeless idols. This mistake has been committed by all religious communities, not excepting the Muslims. The best way to avoid and overcome this weakness is to apply Islamic scientific criticism to all beliefs, theories, philosophies and man-made systems and towards all public figures, as we have explained in Chapter I. Only in this way can we separate truth from falsehood and make the truth uppermost and falsehood low.

Due to the regime of *taqlid* or blind imitation, imposed in the name of religion from about the 12th century until the end of the 19th century, the Muslims swallowed the teachings of the so-called 'Four Great Imams', even the wholesale medieval theology and jurisprudence, *in toto*. There were many factors that gave rise to this blind imitation regime of that period and we cannot discuss them here. Nevertheless, it is important for us to realize that after nearly a hundred years since the reopening of the door *if ijtihad* or critical thinking by Muhammad Abduh's reform movement, this *taqlid* regime is still with us.

The confusion surrounding this talk is a clear evidence of the Muslims' servile and unquestioning adherence to traditional religious authorities. If the Muslims, particularly their leaders and intelligentsia, had held fast to God's command not to accept anything without verification, to listen to all views and follow the best, and to apply Islamic scientific criticism towards all important theological works as the intelligentsia of Europe had done, it is certain this *taqlid* regime would not have lasted for seven centuries. In my opinion, the re-evaluation of the whole Islamic heritage is one of the biggest tasks that has to be undertaken by the Muslim intelligentsia in the next thirty years.

### **The Quran Promises Salvation to Mankind Again**

The Quran informs us that the monotheistic religion, named by God as 'Islam' (meaning 'peace' or 'surrender'), is taught by all prophets of God. It begins from Adam, through Idris, Noah and Abraham (who was given the religious practices of prayer, fasting, charity and pilgrimage), and handed down to Moses, Jesus and ending with Prophet Muhammad, when the divine teachings to mankind were completed, perfected and forever protected in His final scripture, the Grand Quran. Although the religion is the same, the laws introduced by Muhammad are different from those brought by Jesus and Moses. This is due to the different social conditions. While at the times of Moses and Jesus, human society was tribal and still at a lower social evolution, with Muhammad it was entering a period of the international society and scientific-technological era.

For that reason, the most important feature of the new laws is the liberation of mankind from all forms of superstitions and wrong beliefs. This liberating feature of the law is stated thus in the Quran:

*...God said, "My retribution afflicts whomever I will, and My mercy encompasses all things. However, I shall designate it for those who work righteousness, give to charity and believe in Our revelations. Also for those who follow the messenger, the Gentile prophet, whom they find written in their Torah and Gospel. He exhorts them to work righteousness and refrain from evil, and he permits for them the good things and prohibits the bad, and he unloads the burden of their covenant and remove the chains that*

***bind them.*** Thus, those who believe in him, honor him and follow the light that was sent down to him, they are the winners."

By this message, God freed the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from the restrictions and covenants of the past. With this type of freedom thrust upon them, together with the illuminating magnificence of the Quran to guide them, the Prophet and his followers went on, within a very short space of 300 years, to build a civilization that is yet unparalleled in terms of the rapidity of its advancement and in terms of the justice of its laws.

At a time when Europe was in the Dark Age, the Muslims founded an intellectual and material civilization that would serve as the model and source of knowledge for the rise of modern Europe later. But it would be a Europe that would inherit the mantle from the Muslims. The knowledge founded by the Muslims was the spark that would ignite Europe. Europe would develop further on this borrowed knowledge and build up a leadership in the intellectual arena that perhaps has not been surpassed till this day. The Muslims, on the other hand, settled into a complacency that would smother them until today and perhaps for some time to come. The Muslims have ignored the source of their greatness and instead have shackled themselves with superstitious and silly ideas. The teachings of the Quran have been almost completely put aside. Today, with the hadith in their hands, the Muslims are still groping in the dark. They can only exaggerate and fall back upon the memory of a great past that now escapes them.

### **The Twin-Deviation of the Modern World**

However, Europe has also faltered. After waking up with a vengeance from the suffocating strangulation of the Church, Kant's stirring exhortation to "Dare to know" helped to sever the Church from all 'worldly' affairs. There began the distinction between the secular and the spiritual. Western civilization has therefore crippled itself. The complete severing of ties with God opened a Pandora's box of ideologies and humanism that has brought the West to the present relativistic ideologies and philosophies with nothing permanent or true to hold on to.

We can thus denigrate the West. But what about the Muslims? Between the turbans and the modern suits and even the post-modern Islamists, the common denominator is the empty rhetoric which, without any material and intellectual backing to it, these Muslims are perhaps in a worse-off situation than the West. At least, the West has some tangible benefits which it can call its own. Let us remind ourselves again of the old warning: *"The messenger will say, 'My Lord, my people have deserted this Quran.'* "

Not only the Muslims, but the Christians, the Jews and everyone else have yet to live up to the lofty moral and intellectual position that God has assigned to them. The Prophet and the Quran were sent as a blessing and a guidance for all mankind. While the West has adorned itself with the material successes of its humanism, the Muslims have choked themselves with the alleged spirituality of the hadith and their 'Muslim fundamentalism.' All of this is surely wrong. We all need to return to the Quran — now. Muslims especially need to read the Quran — just to read it in any language of their choice if a translation exists in that language. Nowadays, the Quran is available in most world languages. What is important is to make each of us communicate directly with the written words of God Himself. No matter how many books of hadith we read, it cannot compare with even one word of the Quran. Even if truly authentic, the hadith are only the words of a mortal human being. On the other hand, even one Word of the Quran is still the Word of God.

### **Humanity Ultimately Headed Towards The Quran**

*"This is the path of God, Who possesses everything in the heavens and the earth. To God all matters ultimately return."*

So goes Verse 53 of Sura 42 of the Quran. Therefore, in the end, all of our affairs must return to God. By returning to God we do not only mean the Last Day and the Day of Judgement. Even long before that, all our earthly affairs also have to be according to God's Will.

This is simply because it is God Who created us, Who designed the earth and the universe and on the basis of Whose laws we act out our lives in this world. Therefore, all our behavior, in order for it to reach a proper level of efficiency and to be of maximum benefit to us, must be according to how the Master-Designer wants us to behave. The detailed instructions on how to conduct ourselves are explicitly written down in the Quran.

In fact, a closer affinity towards God is manifesting itself in many branches of science and technology. Take the design of automobiles, for example. Design engineers are discovering that a particular, streamlined shape is best for the cars to have the least coefficient of resistance. This is why more and more cars nowadays are all beginning to look alike, with their similar curves and rounded edges. Wind resistance is due to air molecules, which in turn is a function of gravity that holds the air molecules down. It is God who programmed the force of gravity into the earth.

*Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High. He created and perfected. He designed and guided. He produces the pasture. Then He turns it into light hay. We shall recite for you, so do not forget. Everything is in accordance with God's Will. He knows what is declared and what is hidden.*

The same also applies in the realms of philosophy, religion, the social sciences and the arts. There can only be one optimum form which will maximize the efficiency of all social behavior in human societies. Up till now, human beings have been struggling and are still struggling and groping in the dark to find a solution and achieve a stable form of conducting their lives. Till now, everything has failed us. As we mentioned earlier, secular humanism, encompassing everything from liberalism to Marxism, is collapsing. All the holding on to rather man-made religions (including the current practices of Christianity, Judaism and Islam) have all failed us. So what is going to replace this large gap in human society?

This twentieth century human anguish has been poignantly expressed by the Irish poet, William Butler Yeats:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lacks all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;

Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

Surely the Second Coming is at hand! But the second coming is none other than the return of a Book, the Quran, the spirit of God in written form, the Scripture that was for a brief period with the Muslims and then was rejected for more than a thousand years. The necessary precursors for the establishment of the philosophy and the system of God are already being laid down. Despite the agnosticism and the atheism of logical positivism or dialectical materialism, there has always been a strong undercurrent of theism running through all of modern thinking. Man is always yearning for his real God.

In the last four to five decades this theistic stream of thought is gaining momentum. A professor of philosophy has written:

The philosophy of nature is thus part of the area of overlap between science and philosophy as species of knowledge. Modern science has progressed beyond the empirical attitude and tends to become philosophical. Meanwhile modern philosophy has more and more become allied to the sciences and our foremost philosophers are eminent scientific figures. This is no new situation in the history of thought .... But the movement begun at the Renaissance, in reaction against the theological tyranny of the Middle Ages, to split off the sciences as disciplines independent of philosophy, has now come full circle, as science in the course of its own independent investigations, has come to adopt a philosophical position which is at the same time integral to the body of scientific theory ... Similarly, the 19th-century conflict between science and religion has passed away ... the existence of God is the absolute and most indispensable presupposition of science, and so far from there being an alienation of science from religion in the modern era, there is and can only be the closest *rapprochement* between them if both scientific and religious concepts are rightly interpreted ...

The same thing is also happening in Islam. Despite the heresy of certain concepts like *taqlid* or blind imitation that have been dominant since the 12th century, there has always been a strong anti-*taqlid* movement that has manifested itself through the likes of Ibn Rush (d. 1198), Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) and Shah Waliyullah (d. 1762). The anti-*taqlid* movement obtained its strongest impetus from the reform movement of Muhammad Abduh towards the end of the nineteenth century. It is most likely that within a short period of a few decades, the anti-*taqlid* movement in Islam and the theistic spirit that is growing in Europe will unite and return to the Quran in its entirety. This is a real possibility.

"Return to the Quran" — this is the most fitting slogan for the people of Muhammad, because it is the Quran which is the message that he brought to mankind, and because it is the most appropriate response to his famous complaint in the Quran. But, once again, a return to the Quran does not mean that we destroy all the books of hadith and all the books of the religious scholars, nor do we mean that we no longer need the religious scholars. **It only means that we must refer to the Quran alone as infallible guidance for our conduct. As regards other books, be they books of hadith, books of religious scholars, books of the Marxist school or of the liberal school, we shall use our discriminating faculty either to accept or reject, partially or totally, their interpretations, explanations and recommendations in accordance with the teachings of the Quran and the needs of modern life.** Our religious scholars who, all this while, have been trained according to the medieval method of rote learning only in religious knowledge, must master the important secular sciences, according to the modern critical and historical method, to enable them to have an integrated knowledge of the world. The same thing applies to the secular intelligentsia: they too must master the religious sciences. Only such people can be called *ulama*, or learned.

As we conclude this book, we can say that Muslims have three major tasks that they must undertake. Firstly, they must evaluate critically everything that has been inherited from their Islamic tradition, in strict accordance with the bidding of the Quran. Secondly, Muslims have to learn to accept things that are from outside their fold but which by themselves are inherently good and therefore originate from God. Modern Western civilization and the other Eastern civilizations have discovered many good things through much effort and pain. We too can learn from these civilizations, if there is any good to be learnt.

If Muslims can learn to do these two things, then they can go on to the third and final task. To build the second Islamic civilization that will doubtless be far superior to the first because it will be the combined efforts of all united humanity. All these three tasks are inter-related. Our Muslim thinkers must also seek to reach out to those intellectuals and thinkers in other faiths and cultures, for they also seek to do good in the world. They must cooperate with the followers of other religions, those "who believe in God and the Last Day and do good," in order to carry out the major tasks of humanity at the closing decade of the twentieth century and in the coming twenty first.

There will be no Second Coming of Christ and neither will there be any superhuman savior to save the world. Our salvation lies in our own hands and through applying the teachings of the Quran creatively and scientifically.

This is a task which we must embark upon. There is no need at all to feel intimidated or over-awed. We must take courage, inspiration and encouragement from Words of God Himself:

*I have made it a duty upon Myself to give victory to the believers.*

*He is the One who sent His messenger with the guidance and the religion of truth, to make it prevail over all religions. God suffices as witness.*

*Say, 'The truth has come, and falsehood vanished. Surely, falsehood is destined to vanish.'*

*God has decreed, 'I and My messengers, will always win.' God is Powerful, Almighty.*

The Prophet and his followers were people who firmly believed in these divine promises, held on tight to the Quran, His revelations, and scaled the heights of success, as no human community had done before. Following him and the early Muslim generations, we shall also achieve success, far greater than any human society had ever achieved.

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**ADDENDUM**  
**A SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY**  
**FOR UNDERSTANDING THE QURAN**

*"What did your Lord say?"*

*They will answer, "The truth." (Quran, 34:23)*

*The Beneficent.*

*He teaches the Quran. (Quran, 55:1-2)*

Some people argue that, even if we hold on to the Quran, we shall still be faced with the problem of different interpretations, and this in turn will bring about disunity. It is for purposes of answering this question that we include this chapter. The two verses that we quote above not only tell us that the Quran contains the truth; they also tell us that in the final analysis it is God Who teaches us the Quran.

This topic itself can be the subject of a big volume, but our intention is not an exhaustive study from all angles. We are not discussing history and comparative study of Quranic exegeses, history of the Quran, Quranic language, its relations with previous scriptures and so on. We shall only discuss the question of a scientific methodology for understanding the Quran.

What we have to avoid is not differences of opinion, but differences in **aims**. We can resolve differences in opinion through discussions. But differences in aims cannot be settled in that way, since both sides begin from different bases. Take for example the difference between a colonial power and a colonized people: this contradiction can only be resolved through pressure of the colonized people's movement against the colonial power.

### **A Clear Book**

There is no doubt that there are differences in Quranic interpretation. This is proved by the existence of many translations. However, God tells us that the Quran is 'clear' and 'easy.' 'Clear' here means 'straight', 'not crooked', 'not deviating'. It also means 'easy', because the Quran has been sent down as guidance for all, and not for any elite class of people. Still, since the Quran covers all matters, including Resurrection, Heaven, Hell, the creation of the universe, the creation of mankind and the purpose of creation – subjects which are still beyond human comprehension – it is not easy in a trivial sense.

It is due to the Quran's clarity that no one can falsify it or make it crooked. Nor can anyone else, except God, invent it. It is in this sense that the teachings of the Quran cannot contradict science and reason, for science and reason are nothing but manifestations of the laws created by God in nature, human society and the human psyche. Therefore, God has proclaimed that there is no discrepancy between the verses of the Quran. It is on this basis – the integrity and unity of Quranic verses – that if we hold on to the Quran we shall succeed.

### **Two Types of Verses: Decisive and Allegorical**

The Quran itself has given us a basic rule of interpretation, contained in the following verse:

*He is the One Who revealed to you this scripture. Of its verses, some are decisive, constituting the essence of the scripture; others are allegorical. Those who harbor doubts in their hearts dwell on the allegorical verses, to create confusion and misrepresentation. No one knows its interpretation except God and those well-grounded in knowledge...*

The verse tells us that the Quran has two types of verse: those whose meanings are clear and decisive, forming the bases of Quranic teachings, called *muhkamat*, and those with allegorical meanings, called *mutashabihat*, whose interpretation should not be attempted by the people but should rather be left to the experts in the field.

Let us test this division by taking one example of each type of verses. Below we quote fourteen *muhkamat* verses containing a list of fourteen commandments:

- 1. You shall not set up beside God any other god, lest you end up despised and disgraced.*
- 2. Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship except Him, and your parents shall be honored. For as long as they live, one of them or both of them, you shall not speak harshly to them, nor mistreat them; you shall speak to them amicably. And lower for them the wings of humility and kindness, and say, "My Lord, have mercy on them, for they brought me up from infancy." Your Lord is fully aware of your innermost thoughts; if you are righteous, whenever you turn to Him, you will find Him forgiving.*
- 3. And you shall regard the relative, the needy, the poor and the alien equitably.*
- 4. But do not be extravagant, for the extravagant are brethren to the devils, and the devil is unappreciative of his Lord.*
- 5. If you have to break up with any of them, in the cause of your seeking your Lord's mercy, you shall continue to speak to them amicably.*
- 6. Do not keep your hand tied to your neck, nor open it completely, in excessive charity, lest you end up blamed and remorseful. Your Lord increases the provision for whomsoever He wills, and withholds it. He is fully Aware of His creatures, Cognizant.*
- 7. You shall not kill your children for fear of poverty; We provide for them along with you. Indeed, killing them is a gross offense.*
- 8. You shall not commit adultery, for it is a vice and a wicked path.*
- 9. You shall not kill anyone, for life is made sacred by God, except in the course of justice. Anyone who is killed unjustly, We give his kin authority to avenge; thus, he shall not avenge excessively; he will then be helped.*
- 10. You shall not touch the orphan's money, except for his own good, until he grows up.*
- 11. You shall fulfil your covenants; you are responsible for your covenants.*
- 12. You shall give full measure when you trade, and weigh with an equitable balance. This is better and more righteous.*

13. *Do not accept anything that you yourself cannot ascertain. You are given the hearing, the eyes and the mind in order to examine and verify.*

14. *Do not walk on earth proudly, for you can never rend the earth, nor become as tall as the mountains. All the evil things are disliked by your Lord.*

We have deliberately given an example of a long series of *muhkamat* verses, because they contain fourteen command-ments that we need to carry out. If they are difficult to understand, if their meanings are not clear, how are we to carry them out? This example serves to demonstrate to us the meaning of *muhkamat* or decisive verses. Their meanings are clear; there is no ambiguity whatsoever.

On the other hand, the *mutashabihat* or allegorical verses refer to a phenomenon that mankind does not yet know, like Resurrection, Heaven, Hell, or even the creation of man and the universe. Observe the following verses:

*If you fail to do this, and most certainly you will fail, then beware of hellfire whose fuel is people and rocks; it awaits the disbelievers. And give good news to those who believe and work righteousness that they have deserved gardens with flowing streams. When given a fruit therein, they would say, "This is what was given to us before." They will be given the same kind. They will have pure spouses therein, and abide therein forever. Thus, God does not shy away from any kind of allegory, from down to a mosquito and higher. Those who believe know that it is the truth from their Lord, while the disbelievers would say, "What did God mean by such an allegory?" He misleads many thereby and guides many thereby, but He never misleads any except the wicked.*

The above verses draw a picture of Heaven and Hell. They are allegorical, because man does not, and never can, know the conditions in Heaven or Hell until those conditions themselves exist on the Day of Judgement.

There are, of course, instances when the allegorical verses refer to something that, at the time of the Prophet, was not yet known, but would later be known through scientific and technological discoveries. The Miracle of Code 19 is an example. Note the following verses:

*I will commit him to retribution. What a retribution! Thorough and comprehensive. Obvious to all the people. **Over it is nineteen.** We appointed angels to be guardians of Hell, and We assigned their number to disturb the disbelievers, to convince the Christians and the Jews, to strengthen the faith of the faithful, to remove all traces of doubt from the hearts of Christians and Jews as well as the believers, and to expose those who harbor doubts in their hearts, and the disbelievers, for they will say, "What did God mean by this allegory?" God thus sends astray whomever He wills, and guides whomever He wills. None knows the soldiers of your Lord except He.*

These verses in the beginning seem to indicate that the number 19 refers to the angels guarding Hell, but later state that the number is allegorical, and finally deny that it refers to the guardian angels of Hell.

There are verses which, at the time of their coming down, relate to future events, and they are plain, straightforward verses, belonging to the *muhkamat* category, although they are not command verses. One of them is with regard to the splitting of the atom, an event mentioned in the Quran more than 1,300 years before it actually happened. At the time when the Quran was being sent down, the world knew the atom to be the smallest particle. Only towards the end of 19th the century did European physicists discover that the atom can be broken into smaller constituents.

The discovery of the remains of Merneptah, the son of Ramses II, the Egyptian Pharaoh who was drowned in the Red Sea, is another example of a scientific discovery, not known at the time of the Prophet, but was foretold in the Quran.

The *muhkamat* verses differ from the *mutashabihat* ones in their function. The function of the first type is to clarify divine commandments, to state a principle or a rule, or simply to give information. We have seen the above-quoted 17:22-38 verses which contains fourteen commandments. Likewise, the short pitchy Sura Al-Ikhlās (Sura 112), also contain *muhkamat* verses that inform us of five very important attributes of God.

On the other hand, the *mutashabihat* verses bring to us information regarding the invisible worlds through the language of allegories. We have given some examples above. Other examples of *mutashabihat* verses are those referring to Man's creation, the creation of the Universe and to the coming of Gog and Magog or Anti-Christ towards the Last Day. These are not command verses which require our obedience to them. Therefore, the ordinary people need not concern themselves with their interpretations. We are required to believe in them, but we are to leave them to be interpreted by God and those who are experts in the field.

We use metaphor or allegorical language in order to explain something which our listeners do not know or have no experience of. For example, a father trying to impress upon his two-year baby not to touch or play with fire. Or a teacher trying to explain the joys of married life to his students of five or six years old. Such listeners have not yet the knowledge of these things, and so we use allegorical language to make them understand. Yet, they will later come to know of these things. In the same way, God uses metaphorical language to let us know Him, the Day of Resurrection, Heaven, Hell and other invisible things. When the time comes, we too shall know the worlds that are now incomprehensible to us.

This basic rule of interpretation taught by the Quran in order to understand its verses properly will enable us to avoid the pitfalls of misinterpreting the *mutashabihat* verses. There are other rules, comprising what we may call a scientific methodology for understanding the Quran, that we need to follow to get a better understanding of the divine book. An example of misinterpretation can be shown in the case of the famous verse concerning the sources of law, verse 59 of Sura 4, although this is not a *mutashabihat* verse. We shall come to this later.

### **A Scientific Methodology of Interpretation**

What do we mean by this scientific methodology? Whatever man wishes to do, from eating, bathing, sleeping and playing to the understanding of his God, there is a method. This method must of necessity be scientific, because only a scientific method can guarantee success. On the other hand, an unscientific method can only result in failure.

If we wish to study Plato's philosophy, not only do we have to read Republic and Symposium, we have to read all his dialogues. We also have to study the history of Athens around the time of Plato, learn about other philosophers who were his contemporaries and go through his genealogy and character. Only then can we gain a full and proper understanding of Plato's philosophy. The same applies to the Quran.

However, when we come to the Quran, we are in a more fortunate position. Understanding the Quran is, in fact, easier than understanding Plato. This is because God's revelations are consistent and not self-contradictory. Furthermore, the Quran gives us a complete set of rules for its own interpretation. We shall list out the following nine principles of scientific Quranic interpretation:

1. Two types of verses that must be distinguished, which establish the principle of distinction between straightforward and metaphorical language. (Quran, 3:7)
2. The principle of unity of the Quran's contents, meaning that its verses are not contradictory, but in perfect harmony. (4:82)
3. The congruence of Quranic teachings with truth and logic, establishing the principle of truth, and its congruence with science and right reason. (41:41-42; 42:24; 23:70-71; 8:7-8; 17:81; 10:100)
4. The principle of self-explanation, i.e. that Quranic verses explain one another. (55:1-2; 75:18-19)
5. The principle of good intention, i.e. that the Quran cannot be comprehended by anyone who approaches it with bad intention. (41:44; 56:77-79; 17:45-46)
6. The principle of topical context, i.e. that the meaning of any verse or verses must be understood in the context of the topic under discussion. (17:58; 53:3-4; 59:7)
7. The principle of historical context, i.e. that verses relating to a particular historical condition must be interpreted in the light of that condition. (4:25, 92; 4:3)
8. The principle of easy practicability, i.e. that the teachings of the Quran are meant to facilitate and not to render things difficult for mankind. (22:78; 20:2; 5:6, 101-102; 4:28)
9. The principle of distinction between principle and methodology and putting principle above methodology. (22:67; 2:67-71)

### **Proof of the Truth of This Scientific Methodology**

These are nine principles of scientific interpretation given either directly or indirectly in the Quran. When we use these principles to evaluate existing translations, we shall discover several weaknesses. Let us examine a few cases.

#### **(a) Regarding Sources of Law**

The famous verse stipulating the two sources of law reads as follows:

*O you who believe, you shall obey God and you shall obey the messenger and those in charge among you. If you dispute in any matter, you shall refer it to God and the messenger, if you believe in God and the Last Day.*

At first glance, it would seem that the verse stipulates three sources of law: God, the messenger, and any secular authority. But, upon closer reading, and in reference with other verses regarding obedience – where obedience to the messenger means obedience to God – and regarding the function of the messenger solely to deliver the message, it becomes absolutely clear that the verse refers to **two** sources of law. The primary source is, of course, God, Who is the Absolute Sovereign. His Law is the fundamental law for mankind. Obeying God and the messenger means obeying God, because the messenger, being God's instrument, cannot be separated from Him in this case. Therefore, obeying God and the messenger means upholding His Book, the Quran, as the fundamental law.

The secondary source of law is the recognized or duly constituted human authority in any social unit, from the family right up to the nation. This source, however, is not independent; it derives its authority from the Lawgiver God and acts only in consonance with His Law. Thus, the secondary source can only draw up supplementary laws to implement the fundamental law. It can in no way promulgate laws contradicting the fundamental law. If it does, then such laws become null and void.

Now almost all translations of the Quran interpret obedience to God to mean upholding the Quran, and obedience to the messenger to mean upholding the so-called hadith/sunna of Prophet Muhammad. Although such an interpretation flies in the face of incontrovertible Quranic evidence, it is claimed that it is based on an 'authentic' hadith.

(b) Regarding Man's Ability To Know

The verse informing us of the two types of Quranic verses that we discussed above have been translated in two ways. More translators think that no one knows the interpretation of the *mutashabihat* except God, while others think that a class of people, the experts, can have such knowledge by God's leave.

Basing oneself on the Quranic premise that the whole Quran was meant by God as a guidance for mankind, it is not logical to say that any of its verses are beyond human comprehension. Moreover, verses 30-34 of Sura 2 tell us that God has endowed man with the ability to know all of His creations, above the knowledge even of His angels. It is, therefore, conclusively proved that the second minority group of translators are correct in this case.

(c) Regarding the Death of Jesus Christ

This is one of the good examples of the classical jurisprudential doctrine that the hadith interprets the Quran. The Quran is quite clear about the death of Jesus Christ, although it denies that he was killed on the Cross, as his enemies alleged. It states the fact on five occasions, either directly or indirectly. Let us see the verse where the misinterpretation is made.

*Thus, God said, "O Jesus, I am terminating your life on earth, raising you to me and ridding you of the disbelievers. I shall raise those who follow you above those who disbelieve from now until the Day of Resurrection. To Me is your ultimate return. Then I shall judge among you regarding everything you disputed."*

Note the two key phrases used in this: 'to terminate your life' (*mutawaffika*) and 'to raise you' (*rafi`uka*). There is no ambiguity whatsoever. First, God took Jesus' life; then He raised his soul as He does to all human souls when the body dies.

The above translation is Rashad Khalifa's. Let us look at the popular Marmaduke Pickthall's:

*(And remember) when Allah said: "O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend to me, and am cleansing thee of those who disbelieve ..."*

The phrase 'I am gathering thee' is ambiguous and is a mistranslation. Why? The answer lies in the hadith that speaks not of Jesus's death but of his ascension and his Second Coming in the Latter Days and the desire of many translators to bend the words of God to conform to the hadith! Thus, the doctrine that the hadith interprets the Quran is here falsified.

So far, we have talked only of the translation of the relevant verse as against its text. When we apply the principle of internal consistency of Quranic text, it becomes over-whelmingly clear that this verse cannot mean other than what it says, that is that Jesus died, though not on the Cross, as claimed by his persecutors who wanted to kill him.

(d) Regarding the Idolization of Muhammad

Muslims throughout the world will deny vehemently that they have idolized Muhammad, just as the Christians had Jesus and other religious communities had their leaders. But it is highly enlightening to look closely at the Quranic verse that has been used to promote this idolization. It goes as follows:

*God and His angels honor the prophet. O you who believe, you shall honor him and regard him as he should be regarded.*

On the basis of this verse, Muslims would call for the blessings of God on him every time his name is mentioned. Strangely, the mention of God's name does not evoke the same response from them! However, a careful reading the Quran would immediately tell us not to do so. Firstly, a few verses before the above-quoted verse (verse 43), we are told that God and His angels honor the believers to lead them out of darkness into light (the same Arabic root word *salla* is used). This means that God puts the believers and the prophet on the same level, deserving of God's and His angels' honor. How is that this verse has not been brought out together with the other verse so that the Muslims would have a proper understanding of Prophet Muhammad's status?

Secondly, Muslims should know that God prohibits them from discriminating His prophets and messengers. They are all on the same level and we are not to elevate any of them above the others.

(e) Regarding Touching the Quran Without Ablution

The belief the Quran cannot be touched prior to taking ablution is based on a misunderstanding of the following verse:

*This is an honorable Quran. In a perfectly preserved book. None can grasp it except the righteous.*

A literal translation of the verse in question would give us: "None can **touch** it except the **clean**." When these verses are compared to others regarding the understanding of the Quran, it becomes clear that the word 'touch' means 'grasp' or 'understand' and the word 'clean' means 'pure,' 'righteous' or 'believer', so that the verse can be paraphrased thus: "None can achieve an understanding of the contents of the Quran, except those who believe in it and strive sincerely to understand it."

Such a translation is much more logical, for if it were a matter of touching, the disbelievers have been touching and reading it too, for centuries! What they did not do is understand its message.

(f) Regarding Loss of Ablution Through Touching Women

The Shafi'i school of thought holds that touching women of the marriageable categories results in loss of ablution. This erroneous belief is based on a misinterpretation of the Arabic word *lamastum* whose literal meaning is 'you touch' in verse 43 of Sura 4. In fact, it is an idiom meaning 'you have sexual intercourse'. This is proved by a reference to Sura 3, verse 47 which speaks of Mary, the mother of Jesus, 'not being

touched' by man, using the same root word *massa*. Here, again, we arrive at a correct understanding by using the principles of logic, internal consistency and easy practicability mentioned above.

### **Methodology of Classical Jurisprudence**

Studying the Quran without a scientific methodology definitely gives rise to many problems. Orthodox translation uses the methodology of classical jurisprudence which is based on the teachings of Imam Shafi`i (d. 820 Hijra). According to him, the four sources of Islamic law are : Quran, Hadith/Sunna, *Ijma'* or consensus of scholars and *Qiyas* or analogy. This methodology places the hadith as interpreter of the Quran, in contradiction to the Quranic principle of self-explanation (Principle 4). On the top of that, according the *ijma'* principle of classical jurisprudence, it is *ijma'* that determines the authenticity of hadith as well as the correctness or wrongness of Quranic interpretation.

It is due to this unscientific methodology of classical jurisprudence that the interpretation of many Quranic verses has been rendered subjective, arbitrary and contradictory. We have seen how the famous verse 4:59 on legal authority has been misinterpreted by this methodology to mean that Prophet Muhammad brought two books, namely Quran and hadith. We have also shown other misinterpretations. We can add to these examples.

The principle of topical context (Principle No. 6) is such an elementary principle in any understanding of any text that one wonders how any educated person can make an error on this point. Yet the error has been made regarding at least two crucial verses on the issue of the role of the Prophet. Let us look at the verses:

*The spoils of war that God bestowed upon His messenger from the banished inhabitants of the town shall go to God and the messenger in the form of charity to the relatives, the needy and the alien. In this way, it will not be monopolized by the rich among you. Whatever the messenger gives you, you shall accept, and whatever he forbids you, you shall forgo.*

*By the falling star! Your friend is neither astray, nor a liar. He does not speak on his own. This is a divine inspiration. A teaching from a Mighty One. The Possessor of omnipotence. So he attained to perfection.*

As can be seen, the first passage speaks of the division of the spoils of war. God ordered the Muslims to accept whatever the Prophet gave them and to desist from taking whatever He forbade them. However, the *Ahlul-Hadith* have interpreted it to refer to hadith! What a far cry!

The *Ahlul-Hadith* interpret the statement "He does not speak on his own" in the second passage to mean that all the Prophet's words and actions are equally inspired, divine revelation not being confined to the Quran alone. This interpretation is obviously a mistake, because the passage clearly speaks of the process of Quranic revelation to the Prophet. Moreover, Muhammad, being a human being like the rest of his followers, were subject to the same human weaknesses. It was only when he was receiving and reciting the revelation that "He does not speak on his own."

### **The Abrogation Theory**

The principle of Quranic unity (Principle No. 2), stating that no Quranic verse contradicts another, is a very important principle in our scientific methodology. This principle is found in the following verse:

*Why do they not study the Quran carefully? If it were from other than God, they would have found many contradictions in it.*

Since the Quran is a perfect divine revelation, it is logical that we do not find any contradictions in its teachings. Although we know from history that a period of twenty-three years lay between the first and the last revelations, the entire teachings of the Quran remain integral and harmonious. If the Quran were a human composition, we shall no doubt find many a contradiction in its parts, since human beings change.

However, human thinking is subject to the laws of evolution; it is to be expected that many students of the Quran, including famous translators, see 'contradictions' in its teachings. Due to their failure to solve these 'contradictions' in a logical way, some of them came to erect this so-called theory of abrogation, meaning that some verses of the Quran have been abrogated by some other verses. They base this theory on the following verse:

*Any message which We annul or consign to oblivion We replace with a better or similar one. Do you not know that God has the power to will anything?*

The Arabic word *ayat* is used here to mean 'message' or 'revelation'. This is clear from the context. Some translators have mistranslated it as 'verse', thus giving rise to this abrogation theory. The topic under discussion, however, is about the unbelievers from among the Jews and the Christians as well as the idol worshippers who did not like the idea of a new message being given to the Arabs. This meaning of the verse is supported by verse 16:101 which reads:

*When We substitute one revelation in place of another, and God is fully aware of what He reveals, they say, "You made it up!" Indeed, most of them do not know.*

When we take into consideration the verses which reject totally the abrogation of any of its parts, this theory collapses.

Take an example of a verse alleged to have been abrogated, according to this theory. Verse 6 of Sura 109 on the freedom of religious practice, revealed in Mecca, is said to have been abrogated by verse 5 of Sura 9, revealed later in Medina, ordering Muslims to kill unbelievers. However, this view is falsified on our principle of historical context (Principle No. 7). The historical context of the verse in question was a war situation between the Muslims and the idolatrous tribes of Arabia. Hence the order to kill those enemies who broke their treaties with the Muslims. Thus, there is no contradiction between this order and the fundamental policy of the freedom of religion proclaimed by Islam.

### **Historical Context**

The principle of historical context is another important principle of Quranic interpretation, which, if neglected, would render the Quran to be an obsolete teaching. This can be shown in matters relating to slaves, status of women, law of inheritance and penal law.

A careful study of the Quran would reveal that its contents consist of two types of statements: the universal and the particular. The universal statements refer to absolute truths, while the particular statements refer to relative truths that are limited to certain concrete situations. Take the example of the concept of God itself: on the one hand, the Quran mentions 'Lord of the Universe', and 'the God of mankind' (the universal concept); on the other, it mentions 'my Lord', 'your Lord', or 'the God of Moses, or 'the God of your fathers Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac' (the particular concept).

The same applies to other matters. Mankind is one and equal as creatures of God, but from a historical point of view, there existed slave communities oppressed by free powerful communities; there existed communities where the women were oppressed by the men with laws that were not equitable to women, and there existed harsh penal laws. All these inequalities can be explained by a recourse to historical circumstances and a historical process which developed from a primitive human society to conditions of civilization, eliminating slavery, giving equal status to women and practicing humane penal laws.

The Quran acknowledges the existence of slaves in the Arabia of the time the Prophet arose, but advocates their freedom. The Quran acknowledges the low status of women at the time when the Prophet arose, but it establishes the equality of men and women and advocates steps towards achieving that. The Quran acknowledges the harsh laws that were in existence in the Arabian Peninsula at the time of Prophet Muhammad, just as they existed in other countries, but opens the way for lighter and more humane punishments.

In the matter of inheritance laws, the two portions given to men is a rule stipulated in the light of historical conditions. These historical conditions refer the times and places when and where men assume the role of bread-winners, thus deserving of two portions: one for the family and one for himself. But when this condition changes and women become equal and assume an equal role for the family, the rule also changes, as provided for by this general rule:

*The men get a share of what parents and relatives leave. The women too shall get a share of what parents and relatives leave. Whether it is small or large, a definite share.*

### **A Practical Way of Life**

God has made the religion of Islam easy for mankind to practice (Principle No. 8), because God, being Merciful to His creatures, does not want to overburden men. This is another principle that we must remember when interpreting the Quran. We can give many examples. Here we cite three.

First: the prohibition against liquor or intoxicants. This prohibition is given in three stages. During the first stage, God says that liquor contains more harm than good, but stops short from prohibiting it. During the second stage, God prohibits us from praying while in a state of drunkenness, yet not prohibiting liquor totally. The final stage comes when God prohibits liquor totally.

It would be wrong for us to say that verses 5:90-91 which bring the total ban against liquor have abrogated verses 2:219 and 4:43. Such an interpretation shows that we fail to take into consideration this principle of easy practicability. This principle teaches us this wise strategy when we convert idolaters who normally are heavy drinkers to Islam. This does not mean, of course, that those who can give up liquor at once, cannot do so. But, generally, most people do not possess such strong will power to accomplish that. Most people need time; hence this flexibility is given by God to them.

The second example is the method of regular prayer. In extraordinary circumstance, we are allowed to perform prayers in any manner suiting the circumstances we are in: as we walk or as we travel in any type of vehicle, or while sitting or lying down, if we are prevented from standing. Only under normal circumstances are we required to perform these prayers in the usual way.

The last example is the allowance for the suspension of ordinary laws under circumstances of extreme danger. Ordinarily, pork is prohibited, but in circumstances when pork is the only food available to keep oneself from starving, its eating becomes permissible. Even outwardly committing disbelief under compulsion is allowed.

## **Principle Is More Important Than Form**

What is meant by the difference between principle and form (Principle No. 9) has been explained above in the case of penal laws. The form of punishment may vary according to time and place, but the principle of punishment occurs universally. That applies to other matters as well.

There is a story in the Quran about the Jews being asked by God to make a sacrifice. They were reluctant to do it and asked Moses all types of questions about the size, age and color of the cow to be sacrificed in order to evade it. This story teaches us that form is less important than the principle. Are we prepared to make sacrifices in the way of God? If we are, only that matters; how we do it should depend on our capability and our situation.

The same applies to prayer. The purpose of prayer is to worship God, to praise and to supplicate Him for man's own self-development. Although the *salat* prayer has its definite form, in the end this form is not important, as this verse tells us:

*For every community We have established its own devotional practices. Therefore, do not let yourself be dragged into argument about these, but continue to invite to your Lord. Most assuredly, you are on the right path.*

What we have explained above regarding the principles of historical context and the supremacy of principle over form also conforms to the principle of truth and logic (Principle No. 3), a very important principle in this scientific methodology. This is because the Quran is the Word of God and contains the Truth, as the verse we quoted at the beginning of this chapter shows. It is a book of guidance for mankind designed to take them out from the realm of darkness into the realm of light, from falsehood into truth, from injustice into justice and from slavery into freedom.

Can such a grand book not encourage to free the slaves, not give equal status to women, not advocate just and humane laws, not advocate fundamental human rights, not advocate science and technology and scientific, rational and logical thinking for man's advancement? Impossible! Only those who are narrow-minded, who cannot comprehend that God is the Most Beneficent and the Most Merciful who would think otherwise. Our scientific methodology must subsume these principles.

Although existing translations of the Quran, especially those in the Malay language, suffer from certain weaknesses, it is far better that our people read and study the Quran in these translations rather adhering to the old customs of 'reading' the book in Arabic without understanding. By reading the translation, they will have direct access to the source of their religion. This is a thousand times better than just depending on middle men to teach their religion for them.

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