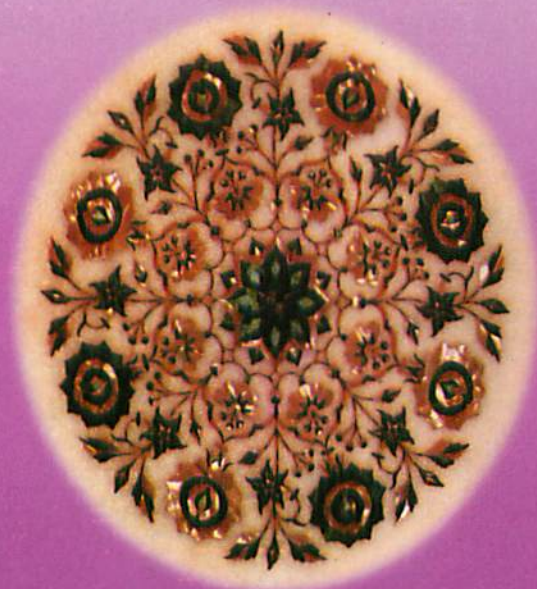


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# Islam Stands The Test of History

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the name of Allah  
The Merciful, the Compassionate*

*Presented to* .....

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# **Islam Stands the Test of History**

**Maulana Wahiduddin Khan**

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# Islam Stands the Test of History

**I**slam claims to be an eternal religion. Any claim of this kind invites people to judge its validity on historical grounds. If latter day history testifies to its claim, it stands endorsed, otherwise it must be rejected. Marxism in the 20th century is a clear-cut example of historical rejection. According to his concept of historical determinism, Karl Marx held that modern industrial capitalism bore within it the seeds of its own destruction. He further observed that according to its own inherent laws its antithesis would emerge which would destroy it. Whereupon a new synthesis would come into being. But, quite contrary to his prediction, industrial capitalism has not only survived, but is making great progress. Historical events have thus buried Marxist theory. Then there is the case of Adolph Hitler who made grandiose claims that Germans were the “master race” and were destined to rule all Europe. The rout

of Hitler and his Nazi party at the end of World War II put paid to all such theorizing.

But the case of Islam is quite different. Even after a period of one thousand five hundred years, Islam has suffered no erosion of its validity. The well known British historian, Edward Gibbon, describes the rise and expansion of Islam as “one of the most memorable revolutions which has impressed a new and lasting character on the nations of the globe.”

An Indian historian, M.N. Roy, has observed: “Muhammad must be recognized as by far the greatest of all prophets, before or after him.” He goes on to say that “the expansion of Islam is the most miraculous of all miracles.” (*The Historical Role of Islam*, pp. 4-5)

The American writer, Michael Heart, in his book, “The 100” has made a selection of the 100 most influential persons in history, who have achieved the most outstanding success in this world. Right at the top of this list is the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, of whom the author writes:

He was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.

The great success that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ had predicted for his mission at the very outset exactly came true. This too, in spite of the stiff opposition which Muhammad ﷺ faced right from the beginning, both from within his own family and from the outside world. This was in 610 AD, the year when he first started receiving divine revelations. At this stage he felt totally helpless. But then, in this adverse situation, he received a revelation from God, which said:

They want to extinguish God's light with their mouths. But God will perfect His light, even though the unbelievers may detest it. It is He who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the Religion of Truth, so that He may exalt it over all religions, much as the pagans may dislike it. (61:8-9)

At the very beginning of his prophetic career, the Qur'an declared that Muhammad ﷺ would certainly succeed in his mission. All his opponents, however powerful they might be, would ultimately be defeated. (This is pointed out at several places in the Qur'an in different wording). In history we find numerous personalities who began their work with towering claims, but none of them achieved the envisioned



success. Throughout human history, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is the only exception to this rule, in that his predictions were fulfilled to the fullest extent.

Through the efforts of the Prophet and his companions, a unique event took place: starting from scratch, they succeeded in extending their influence to the entire populated world of that age. During this brief period, they not only conquered Arabia but also succeeded in crushing the two great empires of their time—the Roman and the Sassanid. This exceptional phase in history has been almost universally acknowledged by historians.

The Qur'an was revealed prior to the modern age of knowledge, yet fourteen hundred years ago, at the time of revelation, the Qur'an declared that the proof of its being divine in origin lay in its being in complete accordance with historical facts and in its remaining consistent with discoveries made contemporaneously and at all future times. Advances may be made in human knowledge, but they will never contradict Qur'anic statements. To a remarkable degree, latter day history has testified to this. While many statements contained in all the ancient books

have been at loggerheads with the latest scientific discoveries, the Qur'an is unique in steering clear of all such contradictions.

As the Qur'an says: "Do they not ponder on the Qur'an? had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy." (4:82) (The word "discrepancy" here means inconsistency, that is, a Qur'anic statement not agreeing with eternal knowledge).

Much has been written on this aspect of the Qur'an in modern times. The French scientist, Maurice Bucaille, has shown in detail in his book, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Modern Science*, how the statements contained in the Qur'an are astonishingly in exact accordance with the discoveries of modern science. This shows that the Qur'an perfectly comes up to the scientific standards.

This development of human knowledge in favour of the Qur'anic contents is no mere accident. It is another historical proof that the Qur'an is a book revealed by the Creator of the Universe, whose knowledge is not bound by the limitations of space and time. Hence we find in the Qur'an a unique prediction to this effect:

We will soon show them our signs in the Universe and in their own souls, until they clearly see that it is the truth. (41:53)

After completing his comparative study of the Qur'an and modern science, Maurice Bucaille comes to this conclusion:

In view of the level of knowledge in Muhammad's day, it is inconceivable that many of the statements in the Qur'an which are connected with science could have been the work of a man. It is moreover, perfectly legitimate, not only to regard the Qur'an as the expression of a Revelation, but also to award it a very special place, on account of the guarantee of authenticity it provides and the presence in it of scientific statements which, when studied today, appear as a challenge to explanation in human terms. (p.252)

To sum up, there is no other scripture that, having challenged all of mankind to disprove its authenticity as the Qur'an did, finally gained total rational support for its supernatural origin and veracity, even from its bitterest opponents. And there is no other historic figure whose future success was as uncertain as that of the Prophet Muhammad, who was finally crowned with such supreme success.

## Prophetic Vision

**T**he Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was born in 570 A.D. in Makkah, the power centre of Arabia, and died in Madinah in 632 A.D. His father Abdullah, died prior to his birth. His mother, Amina, also died soon after his birth. There was nothing extraordinary in his external circumstances. But, from his very childhood, his personality reflected extraordinary character. On seeing him, his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, used to remark that this grandson of his would reach a high place in life.

Chapters 93 and 94 of the Qur'an briefly describe the circumstances of his early years, and assert that, God took special care of him. In his youth when he went in search of truth, God gave him guidance through revelation. His livelihood was provided for when one of the wealthy ladies of Makkah, having become impressed by his extraordinary personality and character, desired to marry him. Besides, the Prophet was specially gifted with a vision that would

enable him to recognise favourable opportunities, and turn every disadvantage to advantage.

The well known German psychologist Alfred Adler in his book, *The Individual Psychology* has written that, after studying human beings all his life, the greatest potential he found in them was “their power to turn a minus into a plus.”

Throughout human history, the greatest example of this human potential coupled with vision is to be found in the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. This unique quality in him has been acknowledged by historians in diverse ways. For instance, British writer, Mr E.E. Kellet writes: “Muhammad faced adversity with the determination to wring success out of failure.”

The Prophet’s vision was on a totally different plane from that possessed by the common man. It would be true to say that such extraordinary vision has never been found in a person who is not a Prophet. The extraordinary nature of this vision is a proof in itself that it was not a human quality in the simple sense, but that he had received it, in a special sense, from the Almighty whose knowledge encompasses past, present and future.

As an illustration of this, we mention some incidents from the life of the Prophet. These events

are not just proofs of his personal superiority but, in their essence, they also provide proof of the fact that the Prophet was an inspired person, who had received knowledge directly from God—a knowledge the acquisition of which is not possible for an ordinary man.

## **Envisioning the Future**

How great was this vision of the Prophet can be judged by an incident in the early period of his prophethood in Makkah. It should first be explained that the Makkans regarded him as being so insignificant that instead of calling him Muhammad, son of Abdullah, they ridiculed him by calling him Muhammad the son of Abu Kabsha.' (Abu Kabsha was a shephard in Makkah, whose wife had been Muhammad's & wet nurse.) In these apparently ordinary and unpropitious circumstances, his vision was nevertheless on so high a plane that, when in the early years of his prophethood, the Makkan leaders gathered at the house of Abu Talib, the Prophet's uncle, to ask the Prophet what it was that he aspired to, he replied with complete determination: I want only one word from you, if you are willing to give that, you will come to possess the whole of Arabia

and all the other parts of the world will surrender before you. (*Hayat As Sahaba*, 1/56)

The day the Prophet made this pronouncement, he was all alone in the world, without a single soul to support him. To those who lacked insight he had no future, yet he could visualize something which appeared inconceivable to others. Today we all know that these words uttered by him became a part of history. Within barely twenty-three years of the commencement of his mission, the whole of Arabia was brought into the fold of Islam, while in the next two decades the Roman and the Sassanid empires,—the two great empires of the world,—had surrendered before his followers. These events were so astonishing that historians have called them the greatest miracle of human history. In the words of historian M.N. Roy:

Every Prophet established his pretension by the performance of miracles. By that token Muhammad must be recognized as by far the greatest of all Prophets, before or after him. The expansion of Islam is the most miraculous of all miracles. (*Historical Role of Islam*, p.4)

## Seeing an Advantage Amidst Disadvantages

After attaining to prophethood, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ lived in Makkah for thirteen years. This was the most difficult period of his life: only a few of the Makkans believed in him. While the majority—especially the leaders—put up stiff opposition to his ideas. They created all kinds of hardship for him and his companions, even killing some of them; placed a total boycott on him along with his family; deprived him of tribal protection, and resolved to kill the Prophet himself, in order to wipe out Islam forever etc.

In those days the circumstances appeared to be extremely disadvantageous. It was a tribal age. It was held that the actual power of an individual lay in his male child, and since the Prophet had no son, his opponents used to call him '*abtar*' (rootless), that is, he had no future. In these apparently desperate circumstances, the Prophet replied: "God has promised me a town which will swallow up all other towns, people call it Yathrib, but it is Madinah." (*Muwatta* Imam Malik, 641).

What in essence he was saying was that God had decreed that he leave Makkah for another town, a



town which would form the centre of his mission and which would then become so powerful as to “swallow up” all other towns. This was a figurative way of saying that all the nations of the world would surrender to it. This observation appeared strange, coming as it did from one who had become persona non grata in his own home town, Makkah, and who was now apparently living in the most straitened circumstances.

When the Prophet migrated from Makkah to Madinah, he did not even have a pair of shoes on his feet; hiding himself in this state from the Makkan leaders he reached Madinah. Called Yathrib in those days, was a town attached with no importance. However in that same Arabia where Makkah had become so inhospitable to him, Madinah proved to be quite the reverse. Almost all its inhabitants entered the fold of Islam, and moreover, the Muslims scattered outside the periphery began to settle within the town. In this way, Madinah became a powerful centre of Islam. Within the space of a few years, his mission flourished there, then it spread to all the other towns in Arabia. Ultimately, the whole of Arabia entered the fold of Islam.

Given the distressing nature of the circumstances in Makkah, it took great insight on the part of the

Prophet to see what the future held for him in Madinah, which was situated at a distance of 300 miles from Makkah. The fact that he foresaw a great future there, is proof of his quite remarkable vision.

Apparently, the inhabitants of both the towns, Makkah and Madinah, were idolators, yet there was a basic difference between the two: in Makkah, people's material interests were linked with idolatry, whereas, for the Madinans, idolatry was only an ancestral heritage; it had no other significance.

Due to the shortage of water in Makkah, agriculture and horticulture did not exist there. Idolatry, however, provided one of the greatest sources of the townspeople's livelihood. The Makkans had placed in the Kabah idols numbering 360, belonging to all the Arabian tribes. These Arabian tribes used to visit Kabah to worship their idols where they also offered devotional presents. Due to their visit in great numbers the business in Makkah prospered. By the visit of these devotees, Makkans benefited in almost the same manner as countries benefit nowadays from the visit of tourists on a large scale. Furthermore, since the Makkans were the custodians of this idolatrous system, they had come to acquire the position of political leadership of the whole of Arabia.

Abandoning idolatry, therefore, appeared to them to be synonymous with the collapse of their politics and economics.

Whereas the situation in Madinah was quite different. There was water and fertile soil. By means of agriculture and horticulture, its inhabitants easily managed to secure their livelihood. Therefore, they were not afraid that if they abandoned idolatry for monotheism, their economy would be ruined. That explains the difference in the response from the people belonging to the two cities. Where the Makkans vigorously opposed the call of monotheism given by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Madinans, soon after their first introduction to the religion of monotheism, abandoned idol worship and accepted Islam without any hesitation.

To understand this difference between Makkah and Madinah and to judge that Madinah rather than Makkah would provide the strongest ladder to progress called for keen perception. This assessment made by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is a living proof of the profundity of his vision, and is literally testified to by history.

## Introducing Peace as the Most Powerful Weapon

The period in which the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was born was one of war and conflict. Throughout the world the sword was regarded as the sign of power. The Arabs had a saying: The greatest check of war is war. In this connection the Prophet observed: "God grants to non-violence what he does not grant to violence." (*Al-Tirmidhi*)

In the conditions prevailing fifteen hundred years ago such observations seemed extraordinary. Such sentiments were so highly at odds with the times that words of this nature could be uttered only by one whose mind had not been moulded by his immediate circumstances, but had been inspired rather by some higher source of knowledge. Both the initial as well as the later period of Islam testify completely to the principle of inspiration.

During the life of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Quraysh, who enjoyed the leadership of Arabia, turned so hostile to him that they went to the extent of waging war against him. According to the books of *seerah*, the Quraysh wanted to embroil him in minor or major battles on more than eighty occasions. But the Prophet did his best not to engage in hostilities by adopting a peaceful policy. For instance, on the

occasion of the Ahzab encounter, the Prophet set up a buffer in the form of a trench between him and his enemies. Then on the occasion of Hdaybiya, when it came to making a peace treaty with the enemy, the Prophet, accepted all the conditions set by them.

During the 23 year period of his prophethood, the Prophet, physically encountered his antagonists only on three occasions—at Badr, Uhud and Hunayn, where conflict had become totally unavoidable. Each of these three engagements lasted for only half a day. This means that the Prophet fought for only one and a half days throughout his life, with the total casualties amounting to not more than 130 from both sides. The winning over of such an aggressive and belligerent people with so little bloodshed had been possible only because the Prophet always used to lay stress on the power of peace.

Arabia had been conquered during the lifetime of the Prophet. The wars that took place in this process took a toll of less than one hundred and fifty people. This revolution brought about by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was indeed a bloodless revolution. And this bloodless revolution became possible only because he acted on his belief in the power of peace.

In the later centuries of Islam, too, this peace formula was followed. That is why Islam achieved such great successes. One prominent example of this matter is provided by an event which took place in the thirteenth century. During this period the barbaric Mongol tribes rose from Turkistan and devastated the entire Muslim empire right from Samarqand to Aleppo. The grand Abbasid Caliphate vanished altogether.

In those days the Muslims' political and military power had so greatly weakened that the saying spread among them that if you were told that the Mongols had been defeated, you should not believe it. It was in this situation that the Islamic policy of peace performed a miracle. Muslim men and Muslim women rose to the occasion, engaging themselves in peaceful *da'wah* work. The result was miraculous, within a period of 50 years the scene was completely changed. In the words of the Qur'an (41:34), the enemies had been turned into close friends. The majority of the Mongols had been brought into the fold of Islam.

"The Religion of Muslims had conquered where their arms had failed." (*The Preaching of Islam*, by T.W. Arnold). As another historian has put it: "The

conquerors had accepted the religion of the conquered.”

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ held that the power of peace was far greater than the power of violence, and on many occasions, he and his followers successfully put this into practice. As a result this concept of peace, as opposed to violence, influenced the course of events at the time and continued to have an impact on later generations. In present times this thinking has assumed the status of a permanent social philosophy. Many prominent thinkers are its advocates. For instance, it was this principle of peaceful activism on which Mahatma Gandhi based his movement of non-violence and with this power of non-violence the freedom movement successfully achieved its target. Then it was this same principle by which the South African leader Nelson Mandela became successful in his political movement in support of the blacks against the whites.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was born in the second half of the sixth century AD. It was an age of constant skirmishing. In those days people resorted to violence, regardless of the issue, for they knew of no other solution to their problems. In such an atmosphere the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ declared that

the power of peace was far greater than the power of violence. This peaceful activism could have been understood only by one whose vision was so profound as to enable him to penetrate appearances in order to see reality, one of rare insight, able to penetrate the present and see the future. As we know in present times, the invention and use of the latest weapons of war have only increased the destructiveness of war or violence. In no way do they herald success or victory for anyone. On the other hand, advances in modern science and technology e.g. today's communications systems, have to a hitherto unimaginable extent, proved strongly supportive of the peaceful method.

These extraordinary possibilities which lay hidden in the darkness of the future, fifteen hundred years ago required an exceptional vision. This observation of the Prophet serves, undoubtedly, as a vital proof of this vision.

### **His Words Determine the Course of History**

How extraordinary was the Prophet's declaration recorded as follows in books of *hadith*: "The chain of prophethood and messengership has been terminated and after me neither a prophet nor a messenger will be sent by God" (*Sahih Muslim*). In



addition to his having said that there would be no prophet after him, this was also clearly stated in the Qur'an. (33:40)

Such a declaration had never been made before him, nor was it ever made after him. It is all the more astonishing that these words have become a matter of history. No one has so far dared to claim to be a prophet of God.

Certain personalities have been named in connection with the prophethood, but this is certainly not right. These spiritual personalities have never made a claim in clear terms such as the Prophet Muhammad did: No doubt, I am a Prophet of God. (*Ibn Hisham*).

The first instance in this connection is that of Musailama of Yamama (Arabia), a contemporary of the Prophet, who died in 633 AD. It is said that he claimed prophethood. But the fact is that his claim was not that of being an independent Prophet but rather of being a co-sharer in the Prophethood of Muhammad. He sent to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in Madinah a two member delegation who brought with them a letter from him in which it was clearly stated: "I have been made a partner in this matter of

prophethood with him (Muhammad).” (*Seerat ibn Hisham*, p. 244)

This makes it evident that Musailama had never claimed independent prophethood. His claim, in fact, was that of having been appointed as a partner. This means that he himself referred the matter of prophethood to the Prophet Muhammad & himself. That is to say, that only if the Prophet Muhammad & testified to the veracity of his claim could he be held truthful. Since the Prophet did not so testify, Musailama’s claim stands nullified.

Similarly, the Sikh religion is attributed to Guru Nanak, who was born in the Punjab. His devotees for their part sometimes call him a “messenger.” Guru Nanak himself never claimed that he was a Prophet of God. The book, the *Guru Grantha Sahab*, the sacred book of Sikhism, attributed to Guru Nanak, is actually a collection of work by different people. Nowhere in this book, is it mentioned that Guru Nanak regarded himself as God’s messenger or claimed to be one. This being so, including him in the list of prophets is not worthy of consideration.

Then there is the Iranian born Bahaullah (d. 1892), who is regarded as a prophet by his followers. The

religion based on his teachings is known as the Bahai faith. Now the question is 'Did he claim to be a Prophet of God?'

Events show that he never claimed either verbally or in writing to be a Prophet of God. His sole claim, according to the Bahai records, was that he was a Mahadi (Guided Person) and the manifestation of the unknowable God—*Mazhar-e-Haq*. (EB-732).

The declaration of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ that he was the last Prophet still remains unquestioned. The case of Bahauddin does not even figure in the list. For he never claimed to be a Prophet of God. What he claimed, rightly or wrongly, was something else, having nothing to do, directly with the declaration of the Prophet of God.

Another example is that of the India born Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani (d. 1908), regarded by some as a prophet. But, according to the historically established record, this attribution has no sanction in the works of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani. Therefore, he cannot be included in the list of prophets for he never pronounced himself to be a Prophet of God. On the contrary what he claimed, was that he was a shadow of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. He never

projected himself as an independent Prophet. He thus left it entirely to the Prophet Muhammad either to validate or nullify his position in terms of prophethood.

As mentioned above, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ declared that after him no Prophet or messenger would come until Doomsday. This means that after him neither a dependent nor an independent Prophet was to come to the world. The truth is that to say: "I am a Prophet" is more difficult than putting a mountain on one's head. Such words can be uttered either by one who is a Prophet of God in the real sense or by one who is insane. No third person can let this claim fall from his lips.

I have had two personal experiences in this regard, one pertains to Guru Gurbachan Singh (d.1980) and the other to Sree Karunakara Guru of Shantigiri, Trivandrum (d. May 6, 1999). The devotees of both holy men told me that their respective gurus were Prophets of God. I said that it was the guru who had the knowledge of being a Prophet of God, and not his devotees. Therefore, the question of considering such a claim seriously arose only when the concerned person uttered these words: "I am God's Prophet."

So long as these words were not spoken by the concerned person, the case was not worthy of consideration.

In the case of Guru Gurbachan Singh of Delhi, chief of Nirankari mission, some of his devotees visited my office and claimed that their guru was the Prophet of the time. I said that if they believed that to be true, I would come to see their guru, and they were to ask him actually to make the assertion that he was a Prophet of God. They said that they would request their guru to do so and that he would certainly utter these words in my presence. I further added that on that occasion I shall not debate his claim. After listening to those words from the lips of the guru, I would come back without questioning it. The devotees talked to their guru, and fixed the date and the time. At the appointed hour I went to the Sant Nirankari Mandal (New Delhi), where I was ushered into the Guru's chamber. His devotees too were present along with me. Their faces showed that they were convinced that the guru would utter the desired words. I stayed with the guru for about an hour. He continued to talk to me about his mission all this while, but he never uttered these words. For I had given my word to his devotees that I would neither question him nor enter

into any debate, so after waiting for one hour, I finally left.

In the other case, that of Sree Karunakara Guru of Shantigiri, a group of his devotees came from Trivandrum to Delhi, where they visited our centre and told me that their guru was a Prophet of God. I told them that I wanted to hear these words from the lips of the Guru. They invited me to their Ashram at Shantigiri and assured me that their guru would certainly utter these words.

I went to Trivandrum in February 1999. There I met the Guru at the Shantigiri Ashram, which is located about 20 km. away from the Trivandrum airport. This meeting took place in a spacious room, in which many of his devotees and some foreigners, men and women, were also present. These devotees were either standing or sitting on the carpet. The Guru reclined on a bed, beside which a chair was placed for me.

Thus the distance between the guru and me was about less than one meter. Since the guru did not know Hindi, the conversation took place in English. After some introductory remarks, I came to the point and asked him directly:

Do you claim that you are a Prophet of God in the same sense in which Moses, Jesus and Muhammad claimed to be Prophets of God?

A silence fell for a few seconds after my question, then the guru replied quite clearly: “No, I make no such claim.” Afterwards there was no need for further questions on this topic. I talked to him about his mission for some time, then took his leave after receiving his special parshad—an orange.

To conclude, we may confidently assert that the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was endowed with such divine vision as enabled him to visualize the future very clearly. That is the secret behind all his religious, social and political achievements. It is no wonder then that, by the virtue of this vision, he was also able to predict the continuing ideological supremacy of his prophethood—to the extent that the history itself has refused, and will refuse credibility to any later ideological counter claims, be they made in prophetic or non-prophetic terms.

## The Islamic Concept of History

**A**ccording to the Qur'an, God has created the universe with a certain purpose, and all its parts which are strictly under His control, are carrying out His divine scheme without the slightest deviation. Similarly, man too has been created with a certain purpose. Yet man, on the contrary, is totally free. He can do what he wants by his own decision. However, in spite of this freedom he is being watched constantly by God, for He does not allow any such deviation in human history over a long period as would nullify His very creation plan.

### **Creation Plan of God**

The Universe made by God is so vast that, despite the enormous progress made by human beings in their attempts to fathom the universe, many of its secrets still remain unknown. The planet earth, made by God as part of the cosmos was and still is unique in the entire universe, in that it has been endowed with



an atmosphere and all the other factors which are essential to make it habitable for man.

After bringing into existence a favourable world in the form of the earth, God created the first man Adam and his feminine counterpart, Eve. Although the precise date of this event is unknown, it is a fact that the first pair of human beings to set foot on earth was this very Adam and Eve.

Adam was the first man as well as the first Prophet. The way of God is to select a man as His messenger from amongst human beings themselves in order to send His revelations to mankind. Therefore, God revealed to Adam through an angel the purpose of man's inhabiting the earth. According to this plan, God created a creature in the form of man, upon whom He bestowed freedom. Where the rest of the universe had no choice but to submit to the will of God, it is desirable for man to opt for this divine plan of his own free will.

This plan of divine will is based on two basic principles—monotheism and justice. Monotheism holds man to worshipping one God alone, and not associating anyone or anything in this worship. Justice holds man to adhering completely to ethical principles

in dealing with other human beings and refraining from all kinds of injustice and oppression.

Along with this, God informed man that, although he appeared to be free, he was fully accountable to Him. God had a complete record of man's actions. In the eternal life after death God would judge everyone according to this record. One who exercised his freedom wrongly would be thrown into eternal hellfire.

Adam prepared tablets of clay on which he engraved the basic divine teachings, then heated them in a fire, thus preserving this divine guidance for the coming generations. It is believed that these divine teachings were written by Adam in the Syriac language.

Adam died at a ripe old age. For a long period of time his people continued to adhere faithfully to the divine guidance. But later, rot began to set in in the people. Idolatry replaced monotheism. People began to adopt the ways of injustice and oppression instead of justice and rectitude. After about one thousand years the perversion became all pervading that they were completely distanced from the path of the Shariah as shown by Adam.

## **The Age of Perversion**

God subsequently sent Noah as His messenger. He was granted an exceptionally long life of nine hundred and fifty years. During this extended period, he continued to show people the right path, generation after generation. But only a few people heeded his words. The rest persisted in their sinful ways. Then, in accordance with the ways of God, a huge flood engulfed them by way of punishment. Noah and his small band of followers were saved in a boat, while all the rest were drowned.

At that time, human population was probably concentrated only in the region of Asia known as Mesopotamia. The men and women saved in the wake of this flood settled afterwards in other parts of the world. Their race multiplied until it spread over the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe.

After the death of Noah, his people continued for a considerable time to adhere to the divine path shown by him. But again rot set in in later generations and they again deviated from the path of monotheism as well as of justice. God's messengers—the Qur'an has mentioned twenty six by name—continued to come for several thousand years. The Hadith tell us that about one hundred thousand messengers came to

the world. In this way a long period elapsed between Adam and Messiah, when God's messengers continued to come to the world in almost every generation. But each time only a few individuals believed in them. The majority rejected these prophets in every age.

### **The Reasons for Perversion**

What were the reasons for this continued transgression? There were two main reasons; one, political absolutism; another, ignorance about the world of nature.

In ancient times, the system of monarchy prevailed everywhere. The kings of those days had adopted an easy strategy for the consolidation of their empire, and that was to apply a complete curb on intellectual freedom. As a result, science could not make any progress in the days of old.

The same was the case with religion. The policy adopted by these kings was not to allow their subjects to follow any religion other than that approved of by the king. Superstitious religion served their purpose only too well. Therefore, not only did they themselves embrace superstitious religion but they also compelled their subjects to adhere to it. People were denied the right to think freely and opt for any

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religion other than the official one. This policy of the kings produced the evil of religious persecution. History shows that religious persecution has continued from time immemorial in one form or another.

The other main factor in this connection was ignorance. In ancient times, man knew too little about the world and its phenomena. Political absolutism had placed an almost total ban on scientific research. Therefore, all kinds of superstitions regarding natural phenomena made inroads unchecked. It was generally held that the sun, the moon and the stars etc. possessed supernatural powers. Similarly it was believed that the sea, the mountains and other such natural phenomena were endowed with some extraordinary, mysterious power and exercised decisive control over human destiny.

### **The Problem of Evil**

Those who want to interpret human history in the light of predetermined law as is done in the physical world, cannot but meet with failure. While the physical world may be explainable within the framework of predeterminism, the events of the human world are simply not amenable to interpretation in terms of any such law.

Others want to interpret the events of the human world in the context of freedom. But they are not satisfied either with their interpretation. This is because in the case of human freedom, the suffering experienced in this world has no valid understandable explanation. The failure of both these interpretations is due to the fact that they attempt to explain the whole in the light of a part—which is not at all possible.

The truth is that the right principle by which to interpret human history is neither that of predeterminism nor of freedom. According to Islam, there is only one correct principle to interpret human history and that is the principle of test. Man has been placed in the present world for the purpose of being tested. On the outcome of this test will depend the eternal future of all mankind.

Favourable circumstances were a *sine qua non* for this test in the world. Predeterminism had to a certain extent to be a feature of these circumstances as a guarantee against any obstacle coming in the way of carrying out man's trial. On the other hand, the element of freedom was also essential in order that the intentions and actions of each individual could be properly judged. For man can be granted the credit

for a good deed only on the condition that, despite having the opportunity to indulge in bad deeds, he chooses of his own free will to act virtuously.

If in this world everything had been totally predetermined, the element of trial would have been absent. However the granting of freedom did involve the risk of some people misusing their freedom and misuse it they did. This gave rise to the problem of human suffering which results from evil, yet this suffering, or evil, is a very small price to pay for a very precious thing. According to Islam that person is most precious who leads his life in this world in such a manner that despite facing all sorts of temptations he succeeds in overcoming them. Despite having the power to misuse his freedom, he refrains from doing so. Despite the possibility of leading an unprincipled life, he chooses of his own free will to be a man of principle. To identify such individuals, it is essential that an atmosphere of freedom prevail in the world. This is not possible under any other system.

