A Southern African Guide to World Religions

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Islam

EBRAHIM MOOSA

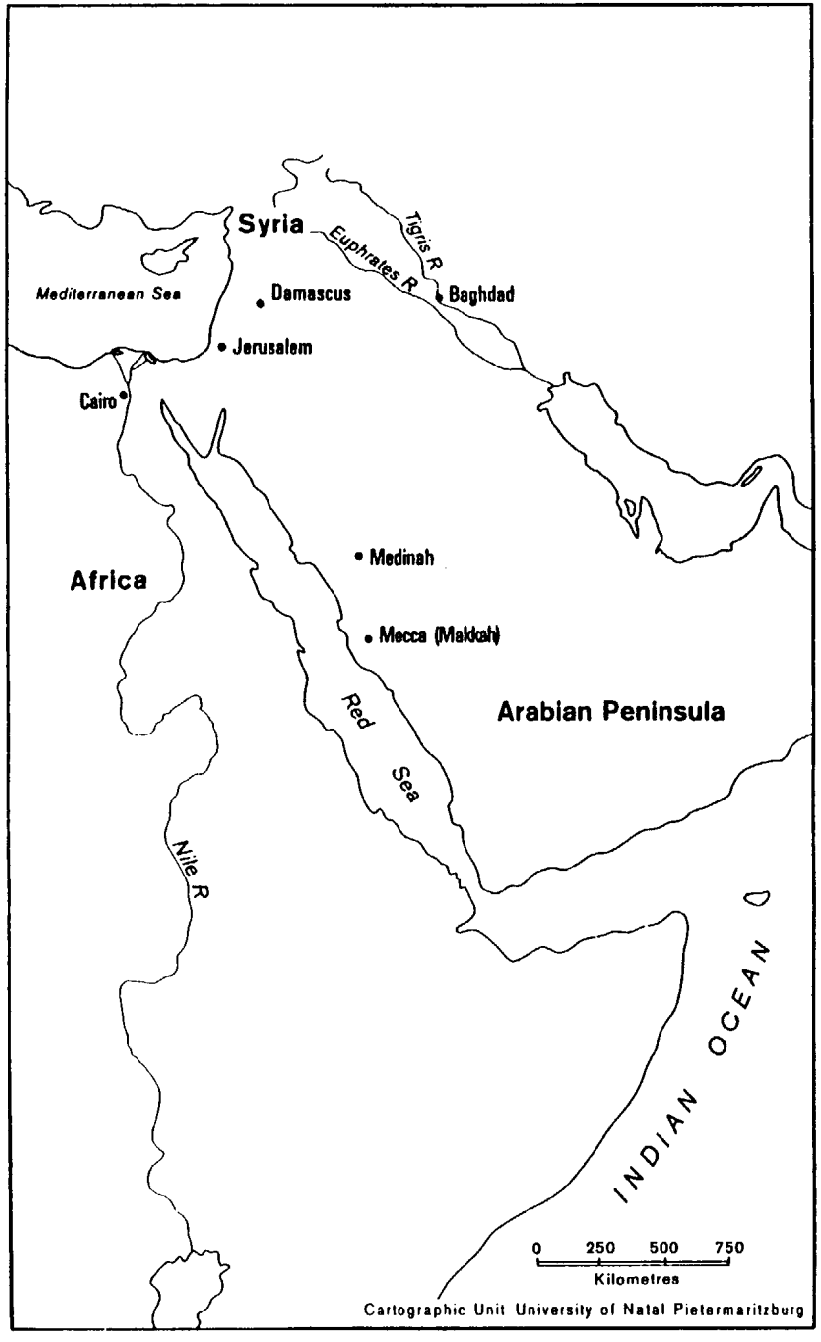
Near the end of the sixth century CE, an epoch-making religious figure, Muhammad the Prophet of Islam, was born. The life and teachings of this man herald the advent of Islam in history.

Muslims do not regard Islam as a new religion. For them it is rather the purification and reconstitution of the unique monotheistic religion which the Creator had provided for humankind from the beginning. Islam is the eternal religion, the culmination of a series of divine communications to humanity. Countless prophets in history, Muslims believe, have shared a common objective to preach the divinity of a transcendent creator to their own peoples. In Islamic thought this line of prophecy culminated in the Arabian prophet Muhammad.

Literally, the word 'Islam' originates from the Arabic root *s-l-m*, which means 'to be safe and free'. The infinitive *islam* means 'to surrender' and 'to be unfettered'. For this reason a person who 'surrenders' is called a Muslim (the active participle of *islam*) for submitting to the will of God. On the universality of *islam*, the Islamic tradition declares that throughout history all the prophets, sages and persons of wisdom have taught humanity the essential message to 'surrender' to God. It is in this sense that Muhammad's prophecy is a confirmation of the teachings of previous prophets. It is from the same root *s-l-m* that the familiar Islamic greeting, *salam* (peace) is derived. Implicit in it is the truth that peace in the world can only occur if humans 'surrender' themselves to God.

THE CONTEXT OF ISLAM

Arabia is the crucible of Islam and also forms part of a larger religious context, Mesopotamia, sometimes called the Near East. This was the region in which the Judaeo-Christian family of religions first flourished. From this perspective the origins and content of Islam cannot be viewed in isolation from the religious history of Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity, which also have their roots in the Near East. Though different in orientation, the three religions share



certain basic features. All are transcendental, holding that beyond this life there is a higher world, the realm of the divine, which can be attained through ethical action and faith in God; each one claims God exclusively, as a monotheistic deity; and they are all universal, believing that God created and continues to govern the whole universe and all people.

Makkah (Mecca)

The centre of the new religion that arose in seventh-century Arabia was Makkah – sometimes called Mecca. It was both a commercial centre and capital of the pre-Islamic religion and its pagan cults. The *Ka'bah* (literally, 'the cube'), a rectangular stone building surrounded by a holy space associated with Abraham, formed the point of annual pilgrimage for the whole of Arabia. Makkah had the added attraction of hosting the Fair of Ukaz, which coincided with the annual pilgrimage to the Makkan shrine. These activities were of immense political, economic and cultural importance to the prestige of the city.

At the time that Islam emerged, major changes were taking place in the political economy of Arabia. Under the impact of commercial development and commodity trade, the nomadic way of life based on kinship and a barter economy was giving way to a more settled society, characterised by increasing stratification and division. Towns grew in importance, notably the two centres associated with Muhammad – Makkah and Madinah – and came under the power of a merchant oligarchy which also controlled the new money economy.

At the same time religious practices were also becoming more centralised. Smaller tribes abandoned their local shrines and increasingly venerated those patronised by larger groups. While household gods and other religious symbols denoting kinship ties of the older society continued to exist until the advent of Islam, there was an increasing tendency in Arabia to worship one god above others.

Muhammad at Makkah

Muhammad was born about 570 CE into an impoverished branch of the main merchant family in the trading city of Makkah, an important junction of caravan routes along which products of the Arabian peninsula were carried to the Mediterranean. In terms of kinship and lineage, Muhammad was well placed, but he was orphaned at an early age and grew up in straitened circumstances. While many chroniclers have attempted to paint a picture of an unusual, even fantastic childhood, he seems to have been according to authentic accounts a serious, intelligent and normal young man. From a very early age he impressed his fellow citizens as an individual of integrity and enjoyed widespread respect and admiration. In his teens he earned the title of the Trustworthy among the citizens of Makkah.

Muhammad's personality is inseparable from any discussion of Islam, for he is seen by Muslims as the messenger of God to the world. In addition to the Qur'an, his prophetic example, known as the *sunnah*, also forms part of the central teaching of Islam. Muslims view the Muhammad as the 'seal of prophets', in that he both confirmed previous revelations and was the last in the

line of prophets, after whom there will be no other. Although he is considered a mere mortal in one sense, he is also the religious symbol of God in another. Dogma defines him as infallible. On mentioning his name in ordinary speech, Muslims offer a prayer and salute him by saying silently or audibly – depending on the circumstances – May God's peace and blessings be upon him.

Biographers record that from an early age Muhammad showed concern for the injustices of his society. The main features of Arab society at the time were the oppression of the poor and the weak, fratricidal tribal wars, gender discrimination, slavery and commercial exploitation. Muhammad often retired in isolation to a cave called Hira, near Makkah, in order to reflect and contemplate. On one such occasion, around his fortieth birthday in the year 610, he had a vision, in which appeared the archangel Gabriel (*Jibril*), who declared:

> Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created,
> created the Human of a blood-clot.
> Recite: And thy Lord is the Most Generous,
> who taught by the Pen,
> taught Man, that he knew not. (Qur'an 96:1–5)

This supernatural event – as Muslims regard it – marked the beginning of thirteen years of prophetic mission in Makkah. Muhammad's central message stressed the supremacy of Allah, as the only deity worthy of worship, rejecting at the same time the multitude of gods which the majority of people in the Arabian Peninsula worshipped.

Towards Madinah

As the Prophet's faith-movement and ideas gained a small but significant number of converts, there was increasing opposition from Makkah's mercantile aristocracy, whose materialist greed Muhammad censured. The hostility this aroused led to his *hijrah* (exodus or emigration) with his family and a few followers in 622 to the town of Yathrib, some 300 miles to the north of Makkah. This migration forms the turning-point in the development of Islam. In subsequent Muslim history, the *hijrah* marks the start of the Islamic calendar, signifying the beginning of a new community.

When the exiled prophet arrived in Yathrib, or Madinah (the City of the prophet, as it came to be known), conditions there were favourable for the new faith. The existing socio-religious order was riven by internecine strife between the two main tribes. Like Makkah, Madinah was undergoing social change. Here, Muhammad increasingly assumed the dual role of spiritual and temporal leader. And within a decade he had united the greater part of Arabia under his authority.

Soon after his arrival in Yathrib, it became necessary to defend the new Muslim community against attack. At the same time Muhammad's primary objective was to spread his message as widely as possible with the greatest degree of success. To this end he employed the Arab military traditions of raiding and plundering, which he infused with the notion of *jihad*, or moral struggle. One of his first moves was to strike at the commercial trade-routes

which were vital to the Makkan economy. The Makkan caravans had to pass by Madinah on their way to the prosperous markets of Syria. Muhammad's plan was to weaken Makkah so that he might establish Islam there, in what was already the religious capital of Arabia. The journey back to Makkah – a symbolic return after the *hijrah* – would thus be crucial.

The last years

After several encounters between Muhammad's forces and the Makkan army, the Prophet marched into Makkah in 630 in a surprise but bloodless take-over of the city. This momentous victory marked the fulfilment of the Prophet's wish to make Makkah the spiritual home of Islam.

In 632, the last year of his life, Muhammad led the first Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah, where he delivered his historic Farewell Pilgrimage speech. The speech covered a wide range of moral and social issues, and enunciated some of the central beliefs of Islam – humanitarianism, egalitarianism, social and economic justice, righteousness and solidarity. A summary of the principal ideas is contained in the following edited version of this famous address.

> O men, listen to my words. I do not know whether I shall ever meet you in this place after this year. Your blood and your property are sacrosanct until you meet your Lord, as this day and this month is holy . . . He who has a pledge let him return it to him who entrusted him with it; all usury is abolished, but you have your capital. Wrong not and you shall not be wronged . . . You have your rights over your wives and they have rights over you . . . I have left with you something if you hold fast to it you will never fall into error – a plain indication, the book of God and the practice of His prophet, so give heed to what I say. Know that every Muslim is a Muslim's brother, and that the Muslims are brethren. It is only lawful to take from your brother what he gives you willingly, so wrong not yourselves. O God, have I not told you? [Those who were present said] "O God, yes," and the apostle said, "O God bear witness."[1]

THE BELIEFS OF ISLAM

Formal entry into Islam is achieved by proclaiming the *Shahadah*, which means 'to witness'. It is probably the simplest and tidiest credal statement in the Abrahamic religious tradition, and it declares: 'There is no other god but God, and Muhammad is God's Messenger.' When this formula – known as the 'two-witnesses', or 'the word' – is consciously uttered, one becomes a Muslim. In other words, surrender to God's will has taken place. Islam stresses the universality of monotheism as the primal creed of all humanity, which finds expression in the doctrine of unity – *tawhid*.

God

The Qur'an emphasises that within the Near Eastern tradition monotheism was the fundamental creed of faith. This is evident in the Qur'an's account of

Abraham, the patriarch of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. The doctrine of *tawhid* maintains the indivisible nature and oneness of God. Because Arabic is the liturgical language of Islam, Muslims from Jakarta to Boston describe God as 'Allah'.[2]

The term 'Allah' refers to a 'high god' in pre-Islamic religion. But Muhammad's revelatory inspiration changed this notion. In Islam, 'Allah' signifies a transcendent, omnipotent, omnipresent and sovereign deity, who is beyond human perception. The character and attributes of Allah are clearly described in both metaphorical expressions and unequivocal descriptive statements.

God has no intermediaries and has created everything by the command 'Be'. Although the Divine is believed to be present everywhere, it does not inhere in anything. The picture of God in the Qur'an does not categorically resolve the question of divine immanence or transcendence. 'We are closer to a human being than his jugular vein', says one verse, while another says: 'There is nothing like Him.' Above all, the Divine is the God who guides one along the 'straight path'. Compassion, mercy and power tempered with justice are the salient features of the God of the Qur'an. And, unlike the pre-Islamic concept of belief in a blind and inexorable fate over which humans had no control, Islam proposes a powerful but provident and merciful God.

Tawhid

The doctrine of *tawhid* or monotheism is the essence of Islamic faith. For outsiders, *tawhid* may appear to be a statement of the obvious, but for a Muslim it represents the alpha and omega of the faith.

> [It is] in addition to a metaphysical assertion about the nature of the Absolute, a method of integration, a means of becoming whole and realizing the profound oneness of all existence. Every aspect of Islam rotates about the doctrine of Unity which Islam seeks to realize first of all in the human being in his inner and outward life.[3]

A world-view based on *tawhid* considers God as the normative criterion of religious experience. In other words, God is the Being who commands. Every command of God becomes an ought-to-be, or an ought-to-do; in short, a value.

This emphasis on the oneness of God, or *tawhid*, recognises that nature is well knit and operates on the basis of laws of natural causation. But this does not render God a *deus otiosus*. Nor does it mean that God and nature are rivals which function at the expense of one another; or that God operates in addition to the activities of man and nature.

According to Fazlur Rahman, 'things and humans are, indeed, directly related to God just as they are related to each other'. In other words, God is 'with' everything in so far as the Divine constitutes the integrity of everything. Since everything is related directly to the Divine, 'so is everything, through and in relation to other things, related to God as well. God, then, is the very meaning of reality, a meaning manifested, clarified, and brought home by the universe.'[4] Without God's activity, both nature and humanity become delinquent, purposeless and self-wasting. The role of human beings is to further God's meaningful and purposeful activity through creative moral action.

Muslim theologians thus replaced the philosopher's explanation of causality with the doctrine of 'occasionalism'. This means that at every moment, God recreates the world and is directly responsible for what takes place. The upshot of this theory was the establishment of a causality of divine presence. This is what is meant by the expression that God is with everything, which is different from the immanentist belief that God is everything or is in everything.

The Muslim theologian perceives God as a 'core of normativeness'. Being normative means that God is that sought-after end which is an end-in-itself. In Islam the Creator is the Final End, which implies the uniqueness of the Other. This precludes the dependence of the Ultimate upon another entity. In this sense God is self-sufficient. God's self-sufficiency does not preclude human beings from knowing God's imperatives and obeying these commands. In the Islamic tradition it is possible for human beings to come to know God's will by means of reason. However, Muslims believe, certainty can only be arrived at by revelation. It is revelation that enables human beings to fulfil their ethical vocation with intellectual certainty.

Significance of tawhid

Al-Faruqi, one of the leading Islamic scholars of the twentieth century, has described the core principles of *tawhid* as five self-evident truths: duality, ideationality, teleology, human capacity/the malleability of nature, and responsibility/judgement.

Duality insists that reality is of two generic kinds – God and non-God, or Creator and creature. These are separate realms, both in terms of being (ontology) and of existence. One is infinite and the other is finite. Hence, it is impossible for the finite to transcend its finitude and pass into infinity, or for these two orders of reality to be united, confused or diffused into each other.

This relationship between the Creator and creature is ideational in nature, for it is human understanding that mediates between the infinite and the finite. The ideational faculties such as the intellect, reason, imagination, intuition and observation enable humankind to understand the will of God when it is expressed through revelation or the laws of nature or both.

Because of *tawhid* human endeavour is purposive, with a *telos* (goal) in sight. While human actions do have a utilitarian aspect, it is the teleological character of actions that provides them with the distinctive quality of being moral.

Human beings also possess the capacity and potentiality to realise the divine raison d'être of creation. Without potentialities *per se*, human beings would be unable to further the divine Will. The actualisation of these potentialities results in moral action. Nature and the entire universe is *'muslim'* (that which submits or surrenders). It conforms to the laws of nature ingrained in it; in other words it is automatically *'muslim'*.

Human beings are designated as the Creator's vice-regents on earth and are therefore required to 'surrender' to God's law by choice; in other words, to be *'muslim'* by choice. This indicates the uniqueness of humans in that they possess

a free will. By following divine commands, in terms of which they ought to act, they fulfil a responsibility placed on them by God. Effective responsibility requires that one has the ability to make a judgement and be decisive in such decision-making.

SOURCES OF DOCTRINE AND LAW

Islamic doctrine and law (in short, the social views of Islam) are based on four primary sources of knowledge. They are: (1) the Qur'an, (2) the *sunnah* (tradition), (3) *ijma'* (consensus), and (4) *qiyas* (analogy). The first two – the Qur'an and *sunnah* – are called the transmitted sources; *ijma'* and *qiyas* are rational sources. When these sources are employed to explicate theology they are known as the sources of theology; when used to elaborate the moral and social law, they are termed the science of jurisprudence.

The Qur'an

Literally, the Qur'an means a 'recitation' or 'reading', a reference to its oral character. Muslim tradition regards it as the Word or Speech of God, as the *ipsissima verba* of God revealed to Muhammad over a period of 23 years. Using a familiar Christian idiom one could say that for Muslims it is the 'incarnated word of God'. The text is divided into 114 chapters, called *surah*. Each *surah* consists of a varying number of verses. A *surah* may derive its title from the overall theme discussed in it, or by virtue of an idea or item mentioned in it, such as 'the Cow', 'Women', 'the Bee', 'Daybreak' and so forth. For devotional purposes the text is divided into 30 divisions so that one division may be read for each day of the month.

For practical and exegetical purposes, the chapters of the Qur'an are distinguished between those revealed in Makkah and those in Madinah. The two phases should not be seen as separate careers in the life of the Prophet, though they are discrete periods. They reflect the history of the Prophet's mission as spiritual teacher and statesman. The Makkan chapters deal primarily with such concerns as belief in a monotheistic God, eschatology (with specific reference to the Day of Judgement), and socio-economic justice. The style and tenor of the Makkan verses is short, abrupt and staccato – like volcanic eruptions. The early Makkan verses symbolise the spiritual struggle of the Prophet and give it a deep and powerful 'psychological moment'. This tone gradually gives way to a more fluent and easy style in the Madinan phase. Here the themes are of a theological and legal nature prescriptive of moral and ritual behaviour.

Collection and commitment to writing

As soon as the Prophet received the divine revelation he immediately dictated it to scribes. The earliest copies of the Qur'an were written on pieces of parchment, skins, bones and leaves. The Prophet also permitted people to recite the Qur'an in their various local dialects. However, after his death the Qur'an was standardised into the dominant Qurayshi dialect. Variant readings came to be regarded as unacceptable and the standard version became known as the 'Uthmanic codice, after the third caliph, who successfully completed this task.

Abrogation of Qur'anic verses

A document revealed over a period of 23 years in the life of a community is bound to reflect the various stages of change such a people experience. In the Qur'an (2: 106) mention is made of verses being abrogated, which are either replaced by a similar revelation or a better version. An example would be the verses which reportedly prescribed stoning to death as the penalty for adultery. Although no longer part of the Qur'anic text, these verses are believed to have been repealed by those which prescribe corporal punishment for sexual offences. Similarly, verses which propose that the inheritance of a dead person be distributed on the basis of kinship are still part of the written text, but have been superseded by others which suggest inheritance on the basis of agnate and cognate relations.

Controversy surrounds the exact number of abrogated verses, the figures varying between a dozen and close to a hundred. A small group of scholars denies that textual abrogation ever took place and interprets 2: 106 to mean the supersession of the Hebrew and Christian biblical dispensation by the Qur'an.

Inimitability of the Qur'an

Those who know Arabic well and who appreciate the genius of the language acknowledge that the Qur'an is both graceful and numinous. The inability of Muhammad's contemporaries to match the literary eloquence and beauty of the Qur'an is viewed as a triumph over those who disputed its divine origin, and gave rise to the dogma of the 'inimitability' or 'matchlessness' of the Qur'an. This claim has limited value for the non-Arabic speaker who is unable to appreciate the literary genius of the Qur'an at first hand. The dogma of inimitability has to a large extent contributed to the belief that the Qur'an is untranslatable. Some orthodox practitioners have in fact resolutely prohibited the publication of translations unaccompanied by the Arabic text.

The process of revelation

The Qur'an is regarded by Muslims as a revelation or inspiration from God. Its cosmic 'descent' is said to have taken place between the 26th and 27th night of the month of Ramadan. Revelation unfolds gradually and intermittently, after the initial 'descent'. Gabriel, who is frequently referred to as the 'spirit', was also instrumental in the gradual revelation. Early traditions record the appearance of Gabriel impersonating a man, but many of these traditions are no longer uncritically accepted.

Revelation is said to have been accompanied by periods of heavy sweating, which signifies the extraordinary 'weight' of the message. The Qur'an itself testifies to the crushing burden and power of its message. 'If We had sent this Qur'an down upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled and split asunder through fear of God' (59: 21).

Interpretation

The Qur'an is traditionally interpreted by considering the chronology of revelation and the context or background against which revelation took place.

This genre of literature is called the 'occasions of revelation'. The primary source of this genre is the explanations given by the Prophet and his Companions. But the bulk of commentaries and interpretations can be traced back to the post-prophetic era. During the first two centuries of Islam (seventh and eighth centuries CE) certain principles were formulated to enable scholars to arrive at the correct literal interpretation (*tafsir*) of the Qur'an.

Interpreters were required to be skilled in the Arabic language, in grammar and rhetoric, knowledgeable in the 'occasions of revelation' and the theories of abrogation, and capable of classifying verses of a general or specific nature or differentiating between clear and unclear verses. Another form of interpretation was to resort to an esoteric interpretation, *ta'wil*, based on a personal reading of the text.

Commentaries on the Qur'an

There are a large number of classical and modern commentaries. Some of the more famous commentaries are those of al-Tabari (839–923), an encyclopaedic compendium of exegesis or *tafsir*; al-Zamakhshari (1075–1143), who despite his rational theological views, has been acclaimed for his commentary; and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209), known for his valuable insights on *tafsir*. In modern times a plethora of commentaries is available in virtually every major Muslim language. In major European languages there have also been several translations or commentaries. In English, the most popular are *The Holy Qur'an* by 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, *The Koran Interpreted* by A. J. Arberry, *The Glorious Koran* by Marmaduke Pickthall and *The Message of the Qur'an* by Muhammad Asad. The incomplete Arabic commentary *Tafsir al-Manar* ('The Light-house'), a series of lectures by the modern Egyptian scholar Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), which was edited by his Syrian disciple, Rashid Rida (1865–1935), deserves mention. The Urdu commentary *Tarjuman al-Qur'an* ('Interpreter of the Qur'an') by the Indian scholar and politician Abu al-Kalam Azad (1888–1958), and that of the revivalist scholar, Abu-l-A'la Mawdudi (1904–79), called *Tafhim al-Qur'an* ('Understanding the Qur'an'), are also of note. Both have been translated into English.

Symbolism and beauty

Our encounter with the Qur'an must include a grasp of its significance in the symbolic and semiotic universe of Muslims. As previously mentioned, the Qur'an is primarily an oral work. For this reason Muslims have developed an elaborate science of the art of recitation or *tajwid* which prescribes the proper recitation of the holy scripture. The Qur'an is most often read for liturgical purposes in the daily ritual prayers. It is also read at social events, celebrations and festivals. The melodious recitation (*qirat*) of the Qur'an is highly appreciated in devout circles.

The sunnah (tradition)

For Muslims, revelation ceased at the death of Muhammad. With the conclusion of scriptural mediation and the absence of a prophetic presence, the normative practice of Muhammad, the *sunnah*, came to gain increasing importance. Literally, *sunnah* means 'the well-trodden path'. Within the broader cultural context of pre-Islamic Arabia the term carried the wider meaning of an organic social practice accepted as the community norm. But early Islam baptised the term into the Islamic discourse. The Islamised *sunnah* has evolved into a precise and definitive understanding of the model practice of the Prophet as a religious norm. It needs to be stressed that this norm has undergone various stages of conceptual development. A grasp of these changes is therefore crucial in order to avoid a mechanical understanding of the *sunnah*.

The term *hadith* derives from the Arabic root *h-d-th*, which means 'to happen', 'to tell a happening' or 'to report', and refers to the verbal transmission of the *sunnah*. The corpus of *ahadith* is of titanic inclusiveness, ranging from instructions on how to cut toe-nails to the running of a government. A *hadith* is defined as a statement or action of the Prophet or those approved by him. In other words, it is the literary attestation of the *sunnah*. However, a great deal of discussion and debate has taken place, and still continues today, whether of necessity every *hadith* can be attributed verbally to the Prophet.

While the *sunnah* means the normative behaviour of the Prophet one must remember that the Prophet's society was primarily oral. During the growth and formative period of the original Muslim community the religious norms or *sunnan* were less of a verbal nature and more of a silent exemplification in action. It was this non-verbal 'living tradition' that in practice always aspired towards reproducing and fulfilling the example of the Prophet, which Muslims speak of as the Apostolic model. Knowledge of how the first generation of scholars after Muhammad's death accepted the tradition is the key to understanding the *sunnah* or the Apostolic model. Thus when speaking about the formative period of Islam we can say that the *sunnah* and the *hadith* were consubstantial and coeval.

The early community, especially during the time of the Companions or close followers of the Prophet and their Successors, deduced the living *sunnah* from an understanding of the ideal *sunnah* of the Prophet. In a sense the understanding of *sunnah* was organic to the community to the extent that the deeds and sayings of the Companions also became known as the *sunnah*. This means that the Companions interpreted the Prophet's conduct. For the first generation this was a relatively easy exercise since they reported what they witnessed the Prophet of God do. These eyewitnesses in turn became the actual sources of transmission.

After that early period, especially after the rapid expansion of the first two centuries, the difficulty of assessing *hadith* grew. What further complicated matters was the host of interpretations of the variety of living *sunnah*. Technical terms were invented to systematise this complex process of tradition and soon became a field for specialists. For instance, the chain of witnesses and transmitters who conveyed a specific tradition came to be known as the *isnad*. The content or 'text' of the transmission was called the *matn*. The *isnad* which introduces a *hadith* would read as follows: 'It was related to me by A, on the authority of B, on the authority of C, on the authority of D, from E (who may be a Companion of the Prophet) that the Prophet said: "My community will never agree on an error".'

Science of hadith

The *hadith* literature laid stress on the authenticity and credibility of the transmitters. In pursuit of authenticity a sophisticated science developed to sift *hadith*, known as the 'science of disparaging and declaring trustworthy'. This science was only fully articulated in the tenth century CE, after the major compilations came into existence.

With the emphasis on the chain of transmission (*isnad*), traditions can be divided into four broad categories: (1) the number of transmitters in the chain; (2) the soundness of the *isnad* itself; (3) some special features in the *isnad* (chain) or the *matn* (text); and (4) in terms of accepted and rejected traditions. We shall discuss each of these in turn.

1. When an overwhelming number of reliable transmitters narrate a *hadith* it attains the highest quality of *mutawatir* or *tawatur* – meaning consecutive testimony. It relies on the large number of narrators at every stage of the chain of transmission, which makes the *hadith* inductively so certain that doubt is logically excluded. Traditionists would say it is 'impossible to accuse all the narrators of colluding or being compelled to lie'.

All those *ahadith* which cannot make the category of *tawatur* are called *'ahad* (isolated). That means the number of transmitters are few. In between the *mutawatir* and *'ahad* categories are a number of sub-categories, such as a *mashur* (popular) tradition narrated by more than two persons, and *'aziz*, a tradition supported by at least one person.

2. In terms of the nature of the *isnad*, a tradition that has an unbroken or uninterrupted transmission from the source is known as a *muttasil* (continuous) *hadith*. When this unbroken chain cites the Prophet as the source it is known as *muttasil marfu'* or just *marfu'* (unbroken and elevated). If the source is a Companion it would be called a *muttasil mawquf* tradition (unbroken but discontinued at the source). Other categories are *mursal*, where a Companion quotes the Prophet directly and possibly skips the person he heard it from; and *munfasil*, a transmission with several breaks in the *isnad*.

3. As regards the special features of the chain or text, the most popular transmission is the *mu'an'an* (on the authority of), where successive transmitters report on the authority of a previous transmitter without indicating how the transmission was received; *tadlis* (hiding defects) in the transmission; *muharraf* (altered), when words are changed in a text; or *musahhaf* (mistaken) when a slight error takes place in the text or chain.

4. Rejected traditions which are fictitious are called *mawdu'*, which is the worst type; others are *munkar* (ignored), when one transmitter narrates something contrary to or different from what more reliable transmitters had stated.

The collection of hadith

Conflicting reports abound about the recording and collection of *hadith* during the Prophetic period and in the formative period of Islam. The Prophet is said to have discouraged the writing down of his own sayings, fearing that people would confuse his sayings with that of the Holy Book, the Qur'an. Other evidence indicates however that he allowed and even instructed people to record his statements.

Whatever the reasons for the prohibition of writing *hadith*, it is fairly certain that some persons made notes for their own guidance and these formed the basis of later works.

The earliest extant collection of *hadith* is the *Muwatta'* of Malik ibn Anas (d. 795) and the narratives of the biographer, Ibn Ishaq (d. 767). Neither of these scholars always provided the full chain of narrators. Later, it was al-Shafi'i (d. 819), whose insistence on correlating tradition with the law resulted in the rigorous pursuit of *hadith* as the second authoritative source in Islam.

The six canons of hadith

From the ninth century CE onwards, six authoritative canons of *hadith* were recognised by the Sunni tradition (the numerically larger of the two main branches of Islam), and these are known as the Six Genuine Ones. These books were named after their editors or compilers. Materials were included and excluded on the basis of criteria adopted by each compiler. The most authentic and revered collection is the *Authentic Collection* of al-Bukhari (810–70 CE), which is acclaimed as next only to the Qur'an in authority. The other highly rated collection is that of Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj (817–75 CE). These are the most important collections, with scholarly preferences shifting between the two. They are also known as the *Jawami* (sing. *Jami*), namely collections embracing all fields of reported prophetic knowledge. Another collection in the *Jami* category is that of al-Tirmidhi (d. 892).

Three other works are called the *Sunan* (Traditions) collections. Each is known as the *Kitab al-Sunan* of such an author. They are classified as *Sunan* because they cover specialised areas of *hadith*. Abu Da'ud al-Sijistani (817–889 CE) produced the *Kitab al-Sunan* ('Book of Traditions'), which contains only matters of jurisprudence. His student, Ibn Majah (824–86 CE) also compiled a collection with the same title, and they are popularly known as the *Sunan* of Abu Da'ud and *Sunan* of Ibn Majah. Al-Nasa'i (830–915 CE) likewise titled his work the *Kitab al-Sunan*, which contains materials on religious law relating to ritual acts.

The 'Genuine Six' are also known as the *musannafat* (classified) works since their materials are arranged according to subject matter. Some collections are labelled as the *masanid* (chains) since their content is arranged according to the name of the Companion from whom the *isnad* starts.

The minority Shi'i tradition (the smaller of Islam's two main sections) developed its own corpus of traditions, although some *ahadith* appear in both Sunni and Shi'i branches. Unlike the Sunnis, the Shi'ahs only accept traditions that are reported by the people of the House of the Prophet. The basic belief of all Shi'ism is that the legitimate successor of Muhammad as *imam* (spiritual leader) was his cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali. He was followed by a number of successors who provided spiritual and worldly guidance. The traditions of the Prophet and the imams are documented in special collections known as *Kitab al Kafi fi-'Ilm al-Din* ('What is Sufficient for Knowledge of Religion') by al-Kulayni

(d. 939); *Kitab man la Yahduruhu al-faqih* ('Everyone His Own Lawyer') by Ibn 'Ali Babawayh al-Qummi (d. 991); and *Tahdhib al-Ahkam* ('Refining Judgements') and *al-Istibsar fi ma ukhtulifa min al-akhbar* ('Examination of What is In Dispute among the Reporters') by al-Tusi (d. 1067). In the Shi'i tradition these 'Four Books' enjoy the same status as the 'Genuine Six' in the Sunni tradition.

Ijtihad

Ijtihad (literally, 'to exert') means in legal philosophy to engage in systematic and creative original thinking. The intention of this creative process is to understand the purposes and intentions of God the Law-giver in the revealed sources. It also means to derive rules and principles from the Qur'an, the *sunnah* and the legal precedents of previous jurists. The aim is either to alter, modify, restrict or extend those rules in order that they might subsume a new situation. Over the centuries *ijtihad* has laid the groundwork for an intricate interpretive process or hermeneutics within Islamic thought.

In the post-Shafi period, original thinking gradually gave way to a greater reliance on two very formal methods of *ijtihad*, namely *ijma'* (consensus) and the limited use of *qiyas* (analogical reasoning). As the architect of the science of jurisprudence, al-Shafi'i introduced these two forms of *ijtihad* with the view of safeguarding the *sunnah*. Later jurists restricted the scope of *ijtihad* to a very rigid and formalistic procedure and in effect it became a dead letter. Thus, by the tenth century in Sunni thought 'the doors of *ijtihad* were closed'. However, in Shi'i thought this door must of necessity always remain open.

The end of *ijtihad* can partly be explained by the political upheavals during the formative period of Islam. As soon as relative stability was established around the tenth century it certainly suited some political leaders to discourage original thinking in the hope that political instability would end. With the co-operation of the religious authorities this became possible and the corpus of Islamic thought was assumed 'closed'. From then onwards it was sufficient to 'follow precedents' and acknowledge the prescriptions of the past authorities. Two methods of interpretation (sometimes called 'sources'), namely *ijma'* and *qiyas* were allowed, because they were widely approved and were also less threatening to the stability of the Muslim community.

In recent times several Muslims, notable among them the modern Egyptian thinker Muhammad 'Abduh and the Indian philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1875–1938), have advocated the reintroduction of creative thinking and an end to the uncritical following of past authorities.

Consensus

In the usage of Islamic jurists *ijma'* (literally, 'to be resolute') means the agreement or unanimity of competent thinkers on a religious matter for which there is no explicit previous textual evidence. For example, it is agreed by *ijma'* that when polluted water changes one of its features (colour, taste or smell), it becomes unsuitable for the purpose of ritual purification. Similarly, the five daily prayers and the five pillars of Islam are all validated by consensus.

The definition of *ijma'* has been a source of disagreement among scholars. According to the classical definition, the disagreement of even a single competent scholar proves invalidating. This seems to be the result of al-Shafi'i's influence on religious thought. But many classical scholars held that a 'majority view' constitutes an *ijma'*. Unanimity, in their view, applies to the few essentials of religion only.

Shah Wali Allah (d. 1176), an outstanding Indian mystic and scholar, criticised the classical definition of *ijma'*. Total unanimity, he said, was impossible, if not impractical. He favoured the consensus of those in authority. This consensus should then be enforced by the caliph in order that it may gain greater communal recognition. The well-known tradition of the Prophet which says that 'my community will not agree on error' does not imply *ijma'*, according to Wali Allah. This tradition is often construed in such a way as to impute infallibility to the process of *ijma'*. In Wali Allah's opinion, it can be explained by another tradition in the *hadith* collection of Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, which states: 'A section of my community will continue to obey God's command, and those who desert or oppose them shall not be able to do them any harm. They will be dominating the people until God's command is executed.' According to Wali Allah, if both traditions are read in context they refer to a defined group of people who will not deviate from the *sunnah* and who fulfil their obligatory religious duties. This interpretation is very different from the view which holds consensus to be infallible.

Ijma' can be construed to mean 'soundness of opinion'. It demonstrates that consensus lends an amount of relative certainty and exactitude to the content itself. It is in a sense a collective *ijtihad* or legislation. In Fazlur Rahman's view, *ijma'* provides an idea of authority which is not absolute. It is a method and principle to provide 'working security from error'. As a method and organic process it grows. At any given moment it has 'supreme functional validity and power and in that sense is 'final' but at the same moment it creates, assimilates, modifies and rejects.' As such it guarantees no absolute truth-value. In the post-Shafi' period, however, *ijma'* imposed an absolute authority not only on the present and future, but also on the past. It determined what was *sunnah* and what was not. It also determined the correct interpretation of the Qur'an. As a method it shaped the complex beliefs and practices of Muslims, but cut off from genuine *ijtihad* it became a 'static tool of oppression'. For example, if a husband utters the triple divorce formula to his wife in one sitting even in anger, then according to the dominant interpretation of the law she becomes irrevocably divorced from him. This ruling is even today enforced by many jurists on the grounds that it is supported by consensus, despite the painful consequences it has on people's lives.

In the Shi'i view *ijma'* means the unanimity of all the jurists in this branch of Islam. It is assumed that since consensus is the unanimity of 'all' the jurists, it would include the views of the imams of the past, because the views of the ancient imams are of paramount importance in the Shi'i tradition.

Analogical reasoning

Analogical reasoning or *qiyas* literally means 'to approximate one thing with another' or 'to equate two things'. Muslim jurists understand it to mean the application of a known ruling to a case where no ruling exists, simply because the two cases at hand share a common cause (*'illah*) or *ratio legis*. Simply put, it means to solve the unknown with the known because they share a common legal cause.

Of the two rational methods, *qiyas* is the more disputed. Leading scholars, including Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780–855 CE) and Ibn Hazm (994–1063 CE), have rejected it as a method of ascertaining and resolving religious questions. However, the majority of Islamic scholars and jurists accept it as an authoritative method of discovering the law in areas where there is no statute.

At best analogical reasoning is a linguistic device. It should not be confused with analogy as understood in logic. Analogy in logic requires two premises with a concluding middle. It further requires philosophical demonstration on the basis of universals to solve particulars. Analogy in Sunni jurisprudence differs significantly from its counterpart in the science of logic. In *qiyas* one premiss suffices and conclusions may be reached by way of particulars and not universals. *Qiyas* is flexible and admits of interpretation whereas logic has rigid and formal rules. An example of *qiyas* is the prohibition on the use of intoxicating drugs (for non-medicinal purposes) which is derived from the ruling on alcohol. Both drugs and alcohol share a common *'illah* (causative factor), which is intoxication. For this reason drugs, like alcohol, are unlawful.

According to the Shi'i school, reason (*'aql*) and not *qiyas* is the fourth source. By reason is meant the categorical judgements of pure and practical reason. Here reason implies its formal status in logic and philosophy. In Shi'i thought there is a principle which states that 'whatever is ordered by reason, is also ordered by religion'. Therefore, the judgement of practical reason deems that justice is good and injustice is evil. The modern Shi'i scholar, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (1931–80), believes that reason is a potential rather than an actual source in Shi'i law. He holds that while reason can discover a religious injunction on its own, in actual practice the categorical verdicts in Shi'i jurisprudence have always been derived from the Qur'an and the tradition.

ORIGINS OF THE LAW

The Shari'ah

The *Shari'ah* or the ethical and religious law looms large in the religious discourse of Islam. Literally, *Shari'ah* means the 'path' or 'road' leading to water. Like water, it is a life-giving source on the road to moral and ethical felicity. This path is ordained and revealed by God himself. For Muslims the *Shari'ah* embodies the will of God since it is God who is the author of the law. One may call the law of Islam the totality of ordinances laid down by the Prophet of God in matters of religion. According to one definition the *Shari'ah* comprises the unequivocal ordinances of the Qur'an and the *sunnah* as understood literally.

Contingencies not catered for by the revealed *Shari'ah* are met by legal ordinances formulated by lawyer-theologians or jurists. Through meticulous research, jurists arrive at new formulations by means of *ijtihad*. This gave rise to the science of *fiqh* (jurisprudence), a word which literally means 'to understand'. In time the principles and methods on the basis of which jurisprudence was practised also became formalised into a science called *usul al-fiqh* (literally, 'roots' of understanding). While there is a theoretical and qualitative difference between *fiqh* derived by human beings and the original revealed *Shari'ah*, such subtleties are not always observed in practice. All juristic formulations and deductions are ordinarily described as the *Shari'ah*.

Schools of law

During the second and third centuries of Islam major intellectual movements in both law and theology emerged. In various centres in Arabia, as well as Egypt, Syria and Iraq, religious thought flourished. Students formed study circles around certain well-known scholars, and in the process a variety of schools of thought developed whose concern lay with elaborating and interpreting the Qur'an and *hadith* materials.

Although there was an early proliferation of schools for nearly three centuries, four have managed to survive to this day. In Kufah (Iraq) but of Persian extract was Nu'man bin Thabit (d. 767), better known by his agnomen Abu Hanifah. His school was characterised by the exercise of free opinion and stood in good favour with the Abbasid dynasty. In Madinah, Malik ibn Anas (d. 795), formed a school relying on the 'living tradition' of the city as the key feature of his thinking. The third school is known as the Shafi' school, founded by al-Shafi'i (d. 819). He was a pupil of Malik, and played a great role in the development of Islamic thought. The feature of this school is that it bases its opinion on 'the most sound *hadith* to be found on a subject'. In the third century, a pupil of al-Shafi'i, Ibn Hanbal (d. 855), gained a substantial following in Baghdad. He was well known for his rigid traditionalism and staunchly opposed the rationalist currents of his day.

Legal reform

From the earliest days of Islam the disparities in the interpretations and rules of the law were a cause for concern. Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 756), a capable Persian writer, counselled the Abbasid caliph, Abu Ja'far al-Mansur, to codify the law. One of the reasons why this attempt was unsuccessful was the suspicion the early jurists had for state patronage. Hence, the *Shari'ah* remained officially uncodified until the nineteenth century. Prior to this, in the seventeenth century, the Indian sultan Awrangzeb instructed a committee of his country's leading academic jurists to compile the most distinguished verdicts in one compendium. This semi-official compilation called the *Verdicts of Alamgiri* reflected only the views of the Hanafi school. In the later nineteenth century, the Ottoman state charged a seven-man committee to prepare a civil code. The Committee of the Majallah, as it came to be known, enacted several pieces of legislation in modern

form which applied in the territories of the Ottoman empire until its demise in 1924.

In the twentieth century the pioneers of the *salafiyah* movement, al-Afghani (1839–97), Muhammad 'Abduh and his disciple Rashid Rida, all advocated legal reform in line with the spirit of the Qur'an. In addition, they emphasised that use be made of the authentic *hadith* of the *salaf*, early pious ancestors, from which the movement takes its name. Modern scholars like Muhammad Asad (b. 1900), Fazlur Rahman (1919–88), and the late 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Sanhuri, have actively campaigned for legal reform.

ORIGINS OF ISLAMIC THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

In order to understand Islamic theology and philosophy it is useful to explain their intellectual and political history. The beginnings of what is today known as Islamic theology and philosophy are intricately interwoven with the conflicts of the early political history of Islam. Two distinct periods feature in the discussion below. The period after the death of Muhammad (632–61 CE) is seen as an extension of the 'golden age' of the Prophet. This is followed by the era of dynasties – the Umayyad (661–750) and the Abbasid (750–1258), which for many people also represent the 'golden age' when the Islamic imperium controlled large parts of the globe.

Civil strife and sectarianism: The rise of ideology

The period after the Prophet's death was followed by some three decades of rule (632–61) by four of his senior companions, known as the caliphs, 'Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Ali. Their rule is famed as the period of the 'Righteous Successors'. An indication of the political climate in post-Muhammadan Arabia is the fact that three of the four caliphs died at the hands of assassins.

During the reigns of 'Uthman and 'Ali political upheaval reached a high point, producing a large number of schisms and sects. The origins of these sects are invariably related to some practical and political issues. Eventually these struggles coalesced into the schools of dogma and theology which were to be found in early Islam.

It must be borne in mind that in the Arabian Peninsula of the seventh century, Islam was both the faith and patriotism of individuals and of society. Islam was the official credo of the state-community, known as the *ummah*. The rules of government, religious ritual and dogma were all derived from the same religious source and authority – God and the Prophet. Where politics and religion were so inextricably interwoven, dissent from the state-community was adjudged an act of disloyalty and heresy. Deviation in politics implied being unfaithful to religion, and vice versa.

The early sects

Shi'ism

Dissatisfaction within the rapidly expanding Muslim empire was fuelled by a dispute over the succession to the caliphate between the followers of 'Ali and of Mu'awiyah, who later became the first caliph of the Umayyad dynasty. Those who pressed for 'Ali's special right to the leadership based their claim on 'Ali's closeness to the Prophet through both family and marital ties, and on the grounds that he had been the first Muslim converted as a child, and had been designated the Prophet's successor, the supreme spiritual leader or imam of the Muslim community. The 'divine light' from Muhammad had been passed on to 'Ali, it was claimed. Propagating these claims was a group whose members called themselves the party of 'Ali – *Shi'at 'Ali*, and eventually became known as the 'Partisans' or *Shi'ah*.

As this movement expanded it pressed 'Ali's claim as the Prophet's spiritual heir. Shi'ahs believe that on returning from the Farewell Pilgrimage the Prophet delivered a sermon at a place called Ghadir Khumm, where he said: 'For whomsoever I am his master and authority, 'Ali will be his master. O God! Befriend the friends of 'Ali and be hostile to his enemies.' According to the Shi'ahs, the spiritual heirs of Muhammad must be as pure and sinless as the Prophet was. Only 'Ali and his patrilineal descendants inherited this quality. Each successor is an imam who is a source of divine grace and inspiration, and together they form the Shi'i spiritual hierarchy.

The Shi'ahs can be divided into three major groups. The majority who follow a line of twelve imams are called the 'Twelvers'. Twelver Shi'ism is also the official tradition of Iran. Adherents of this branch are to be found in Iraq, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The second group are the seven-imam Shi'ahs – the 'Seveners', who are also called the Isma'ilis. They are a diffuse group in India, Africa, parts of Syria and Iran, whose current spiritual head is the Agha Khan. The five-imam Shi'ahs are also called the Zaydis, who are found in the Yemen. In many respects the last group closely resembles the Sunnis.

Hostility between the orthodox Sunnis and the more mystical and philosophical Shi'ahs has continued through the centuries, except for rare occasions of mutual tolerance. Under the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) the persecution of the Shi'ahs reached its height. In the early years of Abbasid rule (750–1258) Shi'ism enjoyed some amount of freedom. The Shi'ahs also established their own dynasty in Egypt, known as the Fatimid dynasty which lasted for 202 years (969–1171 CE), until Egypt was re-conquered for Sunnism by Salah al-Din Ayyubi (Saladdin) in 1171.

One modern Shi'i scholar views the emergence of Sunnism and Shi'ism as providential, enabling Islam to satisfy different psychological and spiritual temperaments. However, despite the conciliatory overtures of modern scholars, the mainstream traditions of Sunnism and Shi'ism each view themselves as exclusively orthodox.

The Khawarij

The divisions among Arabs caused by the dispute over the succession to the caliphate polarised doctrinal issues. At the height of the conflict between the factions, 'Ali accepted Mu'awiyah's offer of arbitration 'according to the will of God'. While the outcome of the arbitration was confusing and unclear, what is certain is that it failed to resolve the dispute and in fact gave rise to the formation of further political parties.

'Ali's acceptance of human arbitration infuriated a group of Bedouin tribesmen who took exception on theological grounds. They denounced him for submitting to arbitration when his claim to succession was in their belief in the right. Theirs was a fanatical and literal adherence to the axiom, 'there is no rule but the rulership of God'. Anyone who did not accept their doctrines or committed a major sin was viewed as committing infidelity (*kufr*).

The Khawarij, or Seceders as they were called, introduced a radical egalitarian doctrine of political justice into the religious discourse of Islam. They were quick to recognise the implications of the power struggles among the Arab aristocracy and mobilised the rural people in uprisings. They were the first, moreover, to raise the question of human rights in Islam and opposed the tyranny of the state. While the Shi'ahs claimed that only a patrilineal descendant of 'Ali could be an imam, the Khawarij argued that any virtuous Muslim, even a slave, could be the imam. Ultimately, they believed that in pursuing justice by enforcing the Law 'there would be no need for the Imamate and the state, both logically and doctrinally will "wither away" – only the rule of Law would prevail'.[5]

Doctrines of qadar (free will) and jabr (predestination)

Denouncing all acts of injustice, the Khawarij were perhaps the first group of Muslims to advocate the doctrine of *qadar* (free will). They held that individuals were personally responsible for their acts and not God. These arguments were fuelled after Islam's contact with Syrian Christianity, where the debate on free will and predestination was already in progress. The doctrine of *jabr*, which literally means 'compulsion', is based on the assumption that both man and his acts were created by God and therefore the question of human responsibility is irrelevant. The Umayyads, who were opposed to the Khawarij and Shi'ahs, found in *jabr* a useful doctrinal ally. Their legitimacy rested on the view that it was an act of God – *jabr* (predeterminism) – that entitled them to rule.

Within political circles exponents of *qadar* and *jabr* found willing followers. Two Qadarites (Voluntarists) of note were Ma'bad al-Juhani (d. 699) and Ghaylan al-Dimashqi (d. 743). While Ma'bad held moderate views, Ghaylan was an extremist. Contrary to the Shi'ahs and in agreement with the Khawarij, he held that any person, not only members of the Quraysh tribe, to which Muhammad had belonged, can qualify to be an imam. Both Ghaylan and Ma'bad were executed after being accused of conspiring against the Umayyads.

Among the Jabarites (Predestinarians), Jahm bin Safwan (d. 746) was the most prominent. His views were similar to those of the Mu'tazilah (Rationalists), holding that the Qur'an was created and not uncreated as the majority of people believed.

The Murji'ah

Following a middle path between these two extreme groups were the Murji'ah (Suspenders of Judgement). They tried to avoid passing judgement on those with whom they differed. Judgement was the prerogative of God, they argued. Their opinions on the issue of justice were of a theological and philosophical kind. The Murji'ah claimed the support of leading scholars, especially Hasan al-Basri (642–728 CE) and the jurist Abu Hanifah. Though neither of them seem to have been members, some of their views strikingly resembled those of the Murji'ah.

Hasan especially, who had good relations with the Umayyads, held views which were neither strictly Qadarite or Jabarite. Several scholars suspect him of being overtly supportive of the political regime. This is largely because he distinguished between political and ethical justice. He favoured order and solitude to disorder and chaos. Invoking the Qur'an (4: 62) he argued in support of the authority of the rulers but also cautioned them against injustice and oppression. Asked whether humans were the authors of their own actions, Hassan replied: 'Guidance comes from God but wrong-doing comes from humans.' He spoke of human actions being dependent on the volition (*qadar*) of God but insisted that specific acts involved the moral and religious responsibility of the individual.

The Mu'tazilah

Concern for political justice characterises the sectarian milieu of the second and third centuries of Islam. Hasan al-Basri's student, Wasil bin 'Ata' (699–749 CE) once asked his teacher what the status of a grave sinner would be. Al-Basri's reluctance to give a ruling on the question caused Wasil to leave the master's study circle. The break-away group came to be known as the Mu'tazilah, literally meaning the 'Separatists'. For Wasil and his followers, political justice was of primary concern. He contended that in failing to pronounce on a grave sinner, Hasan had relieved such a person from responsibility. This meant setting aside the political principle of justice, and thus undermined the spirit and purpose of the revelation and the *Shari'ah*.

Like the Khawarij and the Qadarites, the Mu'tazilah placed great emphasis on justice and called themselves the 'Partisans of Justice and Unity of God'. Humans were the authors of their own actions – both just and unjust deeds, good as well as bad. This notion was soon overshadowed by an understanding of the justice of God in the wider theological advance of Mu'tazilism. The Mu'tazilah believed that God can only do justice and good for man. Failing to do so, such a deity would be neither just nor God. In other words, God is obligated to the Mu'tazilites' own ratiocinations. There were undoubtedly Hellenistic and Stoic influences on their doctrines which later influenced Muslim theology.

In order to safeguard the utter transcendence of God, the Mu'tazilah maintained that the Divine attributes should be interpreted in a rational spirit. Anthropomorphism – likening God to a human being – was anathema to them. But in the process of denying anthropomorphism they virtually negated all the Divine attributes. For this reason they were labelled the *mu'attila*, the deniers of all Divine attributes. Reason, they believed, had parity with revelation. Consistent with their views about the Divine attributes was their denial that the Speech of God was a divine attribute. The consequence of this line of reasoning was that they described the Qur'an, the Word of God, as created.

This belief caused serious controversy in the ninth century CE when the Mu'tazilite creed was adopted as the state tradition by the Caliph al-Ma'mun (d. 833). Those who opposed this doctrine were severely persecuted, especially Ibn Hanbal (d. 855), who tirelessly resisted its imposition. While Mu'tazilism introduced some creative elements into the systematic study of theology, it also caused more orthodox practitioners to go to the other extreme in stressing divine power, will, grace and determinism.

Islam and Hellenism

It is evident from a study of the theological divisions within Islam that Hellenistic and Stoic culture and philosophy were important influences on the development of Islamic religious ideas. While they were a source of enrichment to Islam's own cultural ethos, they also posed a severe challenge to traditional Islamic thought.

Arabic translations of Greek and Syriac texts made during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun were among the first fruits of Islam's contact with Hellenism and Greek philosophy. Al-Ma'mun founded an academy, called the *Bayt al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom), where scholarly work and philosophical reflection were encouraged by state patronage. Interestingly, it was the Syrian Christians, especially the Nestorians and the Jacobites, who were responsible for passing on the Greek legacy to the Muslims.

Islamic philosophy

Some scholars deny that philosophy in Islam started with the translation of Greek texts, and argue that certain verses in the Qur'an reveal a reflective attitude towards life. According to this argument, Greek thought only provided a spur to an existing philosophical current within Islam, which later developed into a systematic mode of thought.

The emergence of legal reasoning in early Islam provides further evidence of an original Muslim contribution to philosophical thought. In order to explicate the law, Muslim jurists developed appropriate rules and methods of legal reasoning which were of a philosophical nature.[6] These juristic modes of interpretation – analogy, deduction and the classification of knowledge – were produced in a milieu largely insulated from the intellectual influences of Hellenism. A plausible explanation may be that the Muslim thinkers responded favourably to Greek thought since they shared a similar intellectual interest in philosophy.

Muslim philosophers came to be known as the *falasifah*, a term likely to have been derived from Greek. Theologians who used dialectical methods of argument were known as the *mutakallimun*. Their works, though not exclusively so, were more of a polemical and defensive nature directed against some of the theologically unacceptable premisses and ideas of the philosophers. The *mutakallimun* argued from premisses originating from religious doctrine, which were rejected by the philosophers on the grounds that they could not be proved logically. This method of the *mutakallimun* is called dialectical reasoning. The philosophers in turn argued from premisses which were established as logically certain and unchallengeable, known as demonstrative reasoning.

The theologians dealt with the speculative content of Islamic beliefs. They employed both the authority of religious texts and acceptable philosophical methods. The philosophers were not obliged to invoke the authority of religious texts in support of their arguments. Although some did, others held reason to be equal to revelation. It goes without saying that given their respective approaches, there was little love lost between the philosophers and the dialectical theologians.

Among the leading Muslim philosophers were al-Kindi (801–73 CE),'Abu Bakr al-Razi (865–925), al-Farabi (870–950), Ibn Miskaway (933–1030), Ibn Sina (or Avicenna; 980–1037), Ibn Bajjah (or Avempace; d. 1138) and Ibn Rushd (Averroës; 1126–98). A number of philosophical ideas were unacceptable to the theologians. These included the dominant Aristotelian dualism in philosophical thought as to the eternity of matter which stood in opposition to God; and also deism, in terms of which God is recognised but has no will. God is not the efficient cause of things, according to this argument, but pure energy and the final cause of things. Later Muslim philosophers renounced Aristotelian metaphysics and turned to neo-Platonism.

Theological schools

'Abu'l Hassan al-'Ash'ari (d. *c.* 936 CE) is perhaps the most famous exponent of theological dialectics (*'ilm al-kalam*). Having been under Mu'tazilite tutelage before converting to more traditional views, his theological dialectics was largely influenced by the intellectual tools of his early career. His fame as a theologian is based mainly upon his discovery of an intellectual middle ground for orthodoxy. It was in his hands that *kalam*, until then largely suspect, became an acceptable method for the theologians.

Sunni orthodoxy: The middle ground

As one of the chief defenders of the Sunni tradition, an example of Al-'Ash'ari's definition of the creed is appropriate:

> The substance of our belief is that we confess God, His angels, His apostles, the revelation of God, and what the trustworthy have handed down on the authority of God's Apostle, rejecting none of them. We confess that God is one God – there is no god but He – unique, eternal, possessing neither consort nor child; and that Muhammad is His

> Servant and Apostle, whom He sent with the guidance and the real Religion; and that Paradise is real and Hell is real; and that there is no doubt regarding the coming Hour; and that God will raise up those who are in the graves; and that God is seated on His throne . . . and that he has a face . . . and that He has two hands *bila kayfa* . . . and that there is no good or evil on earth, save what God wishes; and that things exist by God's wish; and that not a single person has the capacity to do anything until God causes him to act, and we are not independent of God, nor can we pass beyond the range of God's knowledge; and that there is no creator save God, and the works of human beings are things created and decreed by God . . . and that human beings have not the power to create anything, but are themselves created. . . .[7]

The 'science of dialectics' systematically explained Islamic beliefs in relation to revelation and prophetic tradition. The emergence of controversial doctrinal divisions only reinforced the need to develop a formal and official credal statement. The product of this effort was the orthodox middle-ground, known as the 'Followers of the Tradition and the United Community' (*ahl al-sunnah wa'l jama'ah*). The Sunnis (as they came to be known) made the *sunnah* and consensus their principal legitimising techniques. If something was deemed to be the *sunnah* and verified by consensus it qualified for acceptance in the Sunni fold.

This middle group considered its methods to be correct and disqualified all other groups as 'sects', *firaq*. Given the political and historical conditions which gave rise to sectarianism, ideology played a major role in the legitimation of schisms. Al-'Ash'ari's credal formulae are designed to refute the views of the Mu'tazilah, the Qadarites, the Jabarites, Khawarij and the philosophers.

Al-'Ash'ari reaffirmed the doctrine of occasionalism or atomism in order to prove that God recreates the world at every moment in time. Causation and potentialities in bodies as a theory was denied in favour of the direct efficacy of God in the production of events. He insisted on using the literal expressions of God's hands, face, and so forth as true expressions of the Divine attributes, adding that these should be accepted 'without asking how' – *bila kayfa*. The reason given is that God's attributes can be neither figuratively explained nor regarded as similar to human forms. On the question of human voluntarism or will-power he introduced the doctrine of acquisition, whereby all acts are created and produced by God but are attached to the will of the human being concerned who 'acquires' those acts.

Contemporaneous with al-'Ash'ari, in Samarkand (presently part of the Soviet Union) there was another theologian, 'Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, who died in 944 CE. Despite the common purpose between 'Ash'arism and Maturidism, they were not in agreement on all issues. Later reconciliation between the two schools certainly did take place, but al-'Ash'ari himself was never of the same mind as his contemporary. Al-Maturidi also believed in determinism like al-'Ash'ari, but maintained that evil acts did not occur with the good pleasure of God. He also allowed greater room for human efficacy; in later

developments within this school the absolute efficacy of the human will was emphatically stated.

Sufism

Historical background

Legalism, political schisms and dissension of both a theological and a philosophical kind not only created a great deal of instability within the Muslim lands, but also contributed to growing cynicism and scepticism among more serious-minded people. As a result some of them sought refuge in more intense meditative and esoteric practices, which came to be known as Sufism.

The proponents of Sufism argue that Muhammad's religious and social consciousness was underpinned and informed by an acute mystical experience. They obviously refer to his earliest visions of the Holy Spirit and his mystical sojourn, known as the *Mi'raj*, which are alluded to in the Qur'an. The practice of the art of the esoteric (*tasawwuf*) or following the spiritual path (*tariqah*) is thus seen as the 'inner' dimension of the 'outer' practice of the *Shari'ah*.

The word *tasawwuf* literally means 'to dress in wool', a reference to the ascetic mode of dress adopted by the early practitioners of mysticism. Another explanation traces its origin from the word *safa'*, meaning 'to be pure'. In the West *tasawwuf* is known as Sufism.

The spiritual path or *tariqah* is rooted in both the Qur'an and the prophetic practice, and it gained great momentum in the eighth to ninth centuries CE. The increasing worldliness and secularism of the Umayyad dynasty, as well as the tumultuous political controversies of the age, created in many a desire to practise greater abstinence and personal piety. This impulse towards ascetic piety also served to correct the impersonal development of Islamic law, by providing that authentic ethos which appeared to have suffered at the hands of legalism and theology.

What is Sufism?

The Sufis' ideal model is the Prophet, from whom they receive divine grace. Some of the Companions are also viewed as models of renunciation, like 'Abu Bakr and 'Ali. Sufism or *tasawwuf* attempts to instil within the novice the ability to go beyond a purely mechanical obedience to God. Another Companion of the Prophet, 'Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari, who deeply interiorised the moral motive, became one of the leading figures of the early ascetism of Islam.

The Sufi discourse seeks to combine the *Shari'ah* and the spiritual path (*tariqah*). It focuses on the literal meaning of things (*tafsir*) as the entry point to their inner meaning, which tends towards allegory and symbolism (*ta'wil*). Some Sufis provide as an illustration the symbol of a geometric circle. From the centre a number of radii connect with the circumference of the circle. The circumference represents the *Shari'ah*, which comprises the 'totality of the Muslim community'. Each radius symbolises the various spiritual paths or *tariqahs* that emanate from the centre, which in turn represents the *Haqiqah* or Truth. It is the centre which is the source of both the *Shari'ah* and the *Haqiqah*.

Several theories have been proposed to account for the syncretic nature of Sufism. According to some, it is adapted from elements of neo-Platonism, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Buddhism. However, more earnest practitioners deny these claims. It is plausible to say that while Sufism was located within the prophetic and Qur'anic framework, many practices adopted later share features of mysticism found in other, non-Islamic traditions.

Sufi practices

The emphasis in Sufi practice is on remembrance of God in order to attain a close relationship with the Divine. These practices include repeating the names of God and singing hymns to his glory and greatness. A number of mystics concentrated their efforts on awakening absolute trust in God, which later became an important theme in Sufism. When the faith of the novice is perfected he or she attains an inner illumination, known as interior knowledge. In contrast to learnedness, this is an intuitive knowledge, which mystics describe as knowing 'by' God.

There are also various levels of proximity to God. Sufi orders define the higher stages of union with God as *fana'* (extinction) and *baqa'* (survival). These are indicative of the experience the mystic undergoes by obeying the law and engaging in meditative practices or *muraqabah*. '*Fana'* and *baqa'* are two sides of the same experience',[8] where total self-effacement (*fana'*) is achieved and union with the Divine is accomplished and subsistence continues in him (*baqa'*).

The novice in the Sufi path selects a teacher who is called a *shaykh*, *pir* or *murad*. Under the supervision of this teacher the novice is guided along the mystical path. There are various spiritual brotherhoods with their own distinguishing characteristics. Early brotherhoods had an established retreat (*ribat*) where novices came to spend time with their mentors. After a novitiate or period of early training, the 'seeker' would be invested on graduation with the *khirqah* or mantle, when the teacher was confident that the novice is capable of inducting others into the Sufi path.

Some of the famous Sufi brotherhoods are the Qadiriyyah order, named after 'Abd al-Qadir Jilani (1078–1166 CE), one of the greatest saints in Sufism, and the Suhrawardiyyah order, founded by al-Suhrawardi (1144–1234); another major order was founded by al-Shadhili (1196–1258).

The Sufi view of ultimate reality

The way in which Sufis view ultimate reality is perhaps the most important part of the mystical path. The doctrine relating to ultimate reality is known as the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being), which has had a controversial career in Islamic intellectual history. S. H. Nasr maintains that this doctrine stems from the Muslim 'witness' (*shahadah*) in which God's sovereignty is proclaimed:

> It asserts that there cannot be two completely independent orders of reality or being which would be sheer polytheism or *shirk* . . . The relation between God and the order of existence is not just a logical one in which if one thing is equal to another the other is equal to the first. Through that mystery which lies in the heart of creation itself, everything is, in essence, identified with God while God infinitely transcends everything. To understand this doctrine intellectually is to possess contemplative intelligence; to realise it fully is to be a saint who alone sees "God everywhere".

Although criticised from various quarters, the doctrine of the unity of being remains central to Sufi discourse. The Indian mystic, Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624), better known as 'the Renewer of the second thousand years', reinterpreted the doctrine, and it reached its fullest expression in the writings of the Spanish mystic, Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240 CE), who settled in Egypt and died in Damascus. Sirhindi declared that the experience of *fana'* (extinction) and *baqa'* (survival) can be compared to a dream and has no independent reality. Similarly, the doctrine of the 'unity of being' is only a matter of subjective perception or *shuhud*. The concept of *Wahdat as-shuhud* (unity of being in vision), which is a reinterpretation of the mystical idea of unity of being, insists that God is completely and absolutely 'other' and is not one with the world. 'God is one being, and the world is another, and the two beings have nothing in common.'

For Sirhindi reality is dual and not unitary. His basic thesis is that this dualism is not ultimate; 'for although the world is not one with God it does proceed from God'. He also believed that while the existence of God is real that of the world is imaginary and unreal. In reality only God exists, in his Oneness. Sirhindi held that God excludes the world since there is in reality only One Being. The world being imaginary 'the presence of an unreal image by no means threatens the unity of the Real Being'.

This view differs marginally from that of Ibn 'Arabi. Identity, according to the latter, is one being and indivisible. For Ibn 'Arabi reality is one all-inclusive Existence which can be seen from different angles. Seen from the one, it is God and from the other, it is the world. He considered all created things to be manifestations of God, which does not mean he equated creation with God. The universe was linked to God by archetypes in the divine mind. In other words, 'things exist because they have been perceived by God'.[9] According to Ibn 'Arabi, the unity of being was consistent with *tawhid*, the fundamental principle of belief in Islam.

Ibn 'Arabi also advocated that the purpose of creation is to become the perfect human. Humanity is the microcosm which reflects the glory of God – the macrocosm. All prophets reflected this glory of God and became 'the friends of God', *awliya* (sing. *wali*). He himself claimed to be a *wali* and the 'seal of the friends of God'. Ibn 'Arabi was charged with claiming that the quality of being 'a friend of God' is higher than prophecy, a contention which led to great controversy.

Decades prior to Ibn 'Arabi, the Persian theologian and Sufi, al-Ghazali (1058–1111), tried to realign mysticism with theology. But Ibn 'Arabi's theories of 'friends of God' and his identification of the world with God gave him

notoriety among the theologians. It ran counter to al-Ghazali's sobering effects on *tasawwuf*.

Types of Sufism

Denny uses three useful categories to classify the various trends of Sufism – sober Sufism, antinomian Sufism and intoxicated Sufism.

Sober Sufism is practised by *Shari'ah*-minded disciples. Practitioners do not allow Sufi practices to violate the religious law and in fact constantly strive to seek realignment between *tasawwuf* and the *Shari'ah*. The majority of Sufis fall in this category, including al Basri (d. 728 CE), the celebrated woman mystic Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah (d. 801), Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 910), al-Ghazali and al-Rumi (d. 1273).

Antinomian Sufism, the second of Denny's categories, rejects the *Shari'ah* or the letter of it. They favour pure dependence on God alone. The most famous group in this category is the ninth-century Malamatiyah branch. As the name indicates, the group hoped to earn the reproach of people. They refused to gain approval of people and were concerned with purely obeying God in a sincere manner without ostentation of any kind.

Intoxicating Sufism seeks to reach union with God at all costs. Love and passion seem to be the central elements of this category. Some of the utterances of Sufis in a state of intoxication offended the theologians and ordinary people. Abu Yazid al-Bistami, who died in 875, once exclaimed: 'Glory to Me! How Great is My Majesty!' While ordinary folk interpreted this to be either madness or self-praise, the Sufi saw this as acknowledging an intense proximity to God. Another mystic, al-Hallaj (d. 922), ended up as a martyr for his beliefs. He uttered *ana al-Haqq*, 'I am God' (literally, 'I am the Truth'), and made claims to miraculous powers. In the end he was crucified in Baghdad when the religious establishment and authorities found his views intolerable.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

Common to all Muslims are the 'Five Pillars of Islam', the fundamental religious practices or rites by which faith is expressed. These are the confession of faith (*Shahadah*); prayer (*salah*); fasting (*saum*); alms (*zakah*); and pilgrimage (*hajj*).

The confession of faith

The formal expression of faith in Islam is the utterance of the *kalimah*, 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God'. According to Islamic doctrine, this formula should be uttered at least once in a person's lifetime in a loud and clear manner. To understand and believe the truth of this credal formula is a prerequisite of faith. As consequence of this belief a number of other beliefs are derived. They are belief in angels, books, messengers, decrees of good and evil, and in resurrection after death.

Angels

According to Muslim tradition angels are created out of light and are sexless. The religious sources are not definite about their true nature. What is known is

that they act as functionaries of the Divine Will and execute God's commands. Famous among the angels is Gabriel (Jibril) who is the agent of revelation to all the prophets in history. Two other high angels are Israfil who will sound the trumpet on the day of resurrection and Michael (Mika'il) who is in charge of general planning in the cosmic world. Then there are also angels assigned to each person who record all his or her activities. Among those angels who have fallen is Satan (Iblis or Shaytan) who lost his status for his refusal to salute Adam on God's instruction.

Books and messengers

Both these elements are connected. Muslims are required to affirm the revelatory and heavenly nature of all holy books. Special emphasis is placed on the following books (*kutub*, sing. *kitab*): the Torah (*Tawrah*) of Moses, the Psalms (*Zabur*) of David, the Bible (*Injil*) of Jesus and the Qur'an of Muhammad. Scriptures given to Abraham and other prophets are called sheets (*suhuf*). No count has been kept of how many scriptures, major or minor, have been circulated in the world.

Similarly, Muslims are also required to believe that all the prophets in history, especially those in the Judaeo-Christian tradition mentioned in the Qur'an, preached the same message of God's lordship in different circumstances. Tradition has it that approximately 124 000 prophets were sent to the world, an indication of the pervasiveness of the prophetic communication in the Islamic world-view. The significance of these two beliefs underlines the deference Muslims accord to the faith and belief-systems of others, especially when the Qur'an emphasises that all people in history have been the recipients of divine teachings.

Decrees of good and evil

This is perhaps the most controversial article of faith. In the mainstream doctrine of al-'Ash'ari's theological school it is widely accepted that good and evil are decreed by God. This doctrine is known as *qada' wa 'l-qadar*, divine decree and predestination. However, in more revisionist interpretations of Sunnism this doctrine is not widely accepted. Modern scholars are inclined to interpret it to mean that human beings have responsibility for their deeds.

Resurrection

The belief in resurrection after death, accountability to God and judgement forms part of the Qur'an's eschatology. The 'Final Day', or 'the Hour' as the Qur'an terms it, signals the end of the world and the beginning of a new eternal life. This doctrine is emphasised in view of the pagan Arab rejection of any meaningful purpose of life and the after-life. When the trumpeter signals the end of time, all people shall be presented to God for judgement. The sinners shall be doomed in Hell and the righteous shall attain the enjoyment of Paradise. On that day, the righteous shall have the opportunity to see God, in the same way that the full moon is seen on a clear night. This will be the supreme reward of the faithful, an experience that will lead to ultimate bliss.

Worship

Literally *salah* means 'to supplicate'. In the ritual practice of Islam it refers to the five daily prayers. These prayers are named after the various times of the day at which they are performed. The earliest appointed time for prayers is before sunrise is the morning (*fajr*). This is followed by the midday (*zuhr*) and afternoon (*'asr*) prayers. Shortly after sunset (*maghrib*) and an hour later (*'isha'*) are the occasions for the evening and night prayers.

Each prayer has a specific set of postures, called *rak'ah* (pl. *raka'at*). Each set involves a period of standing, bending and two prostrations. Prayers generally consist of units of two or four *rak'ah* but at times solitary units are also prayed. Prior to worshipping, worshippers are required to perform a ceremonial wash, called *wudu'*.

Congregational prayer is strongly encouraged. For this reason the *mu'adhdhin* (the caller to prayer) calls the worshippers to the mosque at every prayer-hour. In pre-modern times the *mu'adhdhin* would ascend to the minaret of the mosque in order to be heard effectively. Nowadays modern electronic amplification is used.

In terms of significance, the *salah* is perhaps the most important act of worship in the life of a Muslim after the confession of faith. It is viewed as the central pillar that upholds the canopy of spirituality. The Prophet of Islam had stressed prayer, and even held it to be the distinguishing mark between belief and unbelief.

Prayer is expected to produce a specific spiritual effect in the soul of the believer. The consciousness of God and the awareness of divine presence and majesty are the most important effects desired from worship. Talking is prohibited during *salah*. Postures and prostrations are made in a disciplined manner in order to maintain decorum. Sprawling on the ground, speedy prostration like a cock pecking or crouching like a camel are viewed as incompatible with the dignity characteristic of humans. *Salah* is one of the main symbols of Islam and therefore it is held in public. According to Shah Wali Allah, the purpose of Friday congregational prayer is to stress this symbol.

Fasting

Abstaining from food, drink and sex from dawn to dusk is the discipline of fasting during the month of Ramadan, the tenth month of the lunar calendar. According to the Qur'an fasting is a spiritual practice, whose effect is to inculcate a sense of God-consciousness (*taqwa*).

The physical restrictions of fasting combined with the remembrance of God, giving charity, recitation of the Qur'an and the performance of voluntary prayers are said to be therapeutic to the individual psyche. This spiritual practice is meant to convert the individual from practices which are injurious to spiritual and moral well-being. Through fasting the faithful demonstrate their desire to sacrifice personal comfort and pleasure and show restraint in order to win the pleasure of the Creator. The end of the month of fasting is celebrated with the Feast of Ending the Fast (*'Id al-Fitr*).

Alms-giving

This is the compulsory tax in Islam. All people owning wealth above a specified taxable amount must pay towards the social upliftment of the underprivileged. On cash and metals (gold and silver) there is a 2,5 per cent tax. On agricultural produce the tax differs between 5 and 10 per cent, depending on the nature of farming. The prime function of *zakah* is to create an egalitarian Muslim society.

In spiritual terms the tax is viewed as an act which invokes God's mercy and benevolence. When a person spends in order to meet the need of others it is as if the giver had responded to a divine inspiration and served God's creation. It is an act which brings about an intimacy between Creator and creature.

Pilgrimage

This pillar is obligatory for those who can afford to visit the holy mosque in Makkah during the pilgrimage season, which takes place in the twelth month of the lunar calendar, Dhu al-Hijjah. It is the ritual of honouring the symbols of God, especially the shrine in Makkah, the *Ka'bah* (literally the cube), which is believed to have been built by the prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael as a place of monotheistic worship. The pilgrimage rites extend over a number of days. Pilgrims wear a seamless white ritual garb called the *ihram*, which symbolises their purity and other-worldly orientation. Entry points to the holy precincts are known as the *miqats* from where the pilgrims must be ritually prepared for the sacred pilgrimage.

Pilgrims walk around the *Ka'bah* seven times, which is called the ritual of *tawaf*. They also take a brisk walk between the two adjacent hills in imitation of the rituals performed by Abraham's wife Hagar. In the last three days of *hajj* the pilgrims travel to the little town of Mina, a few miles from Makkah. On the ninth day of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah they are required to stand in penance for some time on the plains of Arafat, the meeting place of Adam and Eve after they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. This is called the *wuquf* or standing ceremony, and is the most important part of the ritual, without which the *hajj* is incomplete. On their return from Arafat the pilgrims stop at a place called Muzdalifa where they pray and collect pebbles with which to pelt the symbol of the devil the next day.

The pelting of the symbol of the devil is once again a replay of the story of Abraham and Ishmael. The latter was tempted by the devil to refuse to be his father's sacrifice as God had commanded. Ishmael then rebuked the devil by pelting him with stones. This ritual symbolises each person's struggle with his or her temptations.

Finally, the pilgrims slaughter a sacrificial animal and have their hair cut or trimmed in order to symbolise the end of the restrictions of the seamless pilgrimage robe or *ihram*. This takes place on the tenth day, which is known as the Festivity of Sacrifice. The *hajj* is completed by a farewell *tawaf*, after which the pilgrims return to their homes. Those who have not been to Madinah would do so after the pilgrimage to Makkah in order to visit the grave of Muhammad

and pray in his mosque. After Makkah, the Prophet's mosque in Madinah is the second most holy place of Islam, followed by the Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem.

A lesser pilgrimage can be performed at any time of the year, called the *'umrah*. The *hajj*, however, can only be performed during a fixed period.

ISLAMIC ART

Islamic civilisation over the centuries has become a rich repository of art which is as varied as that of any other tradition. Recently there has been renewed interest in Islamic art as the Western world seeks aesthetic inspiration from other cultures of the Far and Near East. Art allows us to understand what type of world shaped the artist and how the artist viewed the world when communicating through one or other medium. Islamic art forms range from the visual mediums to music and architecture.

The philosophy of art

Specialists believe that Islamic art aesthetically expresses the fundamental concept of *tawhid*, the oneness of God. The dominant forms in Muslim art are a ceaseless symphony of lines and patterns. The patterns are mainly non-representational. When living things are represented they are normally subjected to denaturalisation in order to suppress the effect of the natural forms. Islam's aversion to representational art is attributed to its commitment to monotheism. Natural forms of art would compromise this commitment in an aesthetic sense because God completely transcends nature. Another reason for prohibition is the fear that the artist may create images of living things. In Islam the creative act is strictly reserved for God and thus it comes into conflict with doctrine. But the ban against representational art was not total. In the past some jurists permitted the artistic representation of living objects provided that the art forms did not cast a shadow.

Visual arts

One of the main visual art forms is the arabesque. It is an abstract design which may have recognisable patterns and designs. It is said that the purpose of this design is to generate within the viewer an intuition of infinity. The viewer is aesthetically released from the material world into the abstract and unseen world. Thus, through contemplation and reflection on the patterns, the observer is reminded of the Divine.

Calligraphy is another important dimension of the visual arts. This art form represents the divine word, the religious communication God made to the Prophet Muhammad. Here the artistic modes of the Qur'anic verses also become abstract, resembling the arabesque, which enhances its symbolic quality.

Architecture

Mosques are perhaps the architectural form par excellence in Islam. While they are designed to meet the needs of worshippers they are often ornately embellished with designs and patterns. In different parts of the world mosques

have different shapes. In remote areas of Africa, a mosque would be a basic shelter made of wood and mud. In more prosperous surroundings they reflect the material advancement of the people. Mosques are often rectangular or round in shape. The front wall is directed towards Makkah, known as the *qiblah*. Along the centre of the wall a small niche would be cut, known as the *mihrab*. Calligraphy is often used to decorate the inside walls. Mosques have courtyards with adjacent ablution blocks. In Eastern countries large pools are used for ablution purposes. The characteristic mark of the mosque is the minaret. In pre-modern times the minaret served as a platform to call the worshippers to prayer. Today it has an aesthetic function as part of the decoration of the mosque.

Music

Music, though frowned upon by conservatives, is an integral part of Muslim culture. Folk music, military music, popular and religious music span a wide variety. To the Western ear, Islamic music has a monotonous rhythm and melodic structure. The musician constantly improvises his or her musical skills, which once again provides the intuitive quality of infinity. Vocal music is not totally absent. The recitation of the Qur'an, while not exactly musical, is certainly one of the most popular vocal art practices.

Belles lettres

Poetry (*sh'ir*) and literature (*'adab*) are two forms in which Islamic culture has made a major contribution. Poetry had been the major pastime of the pre-Islamic Arabs, a skill that continued to flourish in the Islamic era as well. Prose writing also developed, especially as literacy increased. It was primarily used to disseminate religious ideas. One of the famous productions of this kind is the *Conference of the Birds* of Al-Attar (d. 1230). In this work, through the character of birds, the mystic sets out in his journey for the search of God.

CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS IN ISLAM

The post-colonial phase of modern history has witnessed significant developments in the Muslim world. Islam's contact with Europe has to some extent irreversibly changed certain traditional features of Muslim society. The effect of this has been a growing tension between modern and traditional trends of thinking. These categories of modern and traditional should in no way be seen as watertight. People can and do subscribe to both modern and traditional ideas at the same time. The traditional or orthodox view generally maintains that Islam's self-image is unchanging, and if it does change it should not be determined by external influences. Hence a great deal of resistance to modernisation has been forthcoming from the orthodox and conservative *'ulama'* (literally, 'those who have knowledge').

From the nineteenth century onwards, modern thinkers have increasingly made an impact on Muslim society. Many of these thinkers have had a major concern for Islam and its civilisation. Some of them were educated in the West or were familiar with Western ideas. These include people like Muhammad

Abduh (d. 1905), Rashid Rida (d. 1935), Ahmad Amin (d. 1954) and Taha Husayn (d. 1973) in Egypt; Zia Gökalp (d. 1924) in Turkey; and Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938) in India. Influenced by Western modes of thinking, these thinkers have attempted to bring about reforms in the Muslim world.

Although many Muslim countries gained political independence from the West, they were unable to rid themselves of neo-colonialism and Westernisation. In order to counter this, a revivalist tendency espousing an Islamic political and economic order emerged in many Muslim countries at the beginning of the twentieth century. These tendencies found expression in organisations like the Egyptian-based Muslim Brotherhood and the *Jama'at-i Islami* in Pakistan. For nearly five decades such revivalist activity has been dominant in Muslim countries, dubbed by the Western media as 'Islamic fundamentalism', which is a misleading term derived from developments in Christianity. Revivalists were responsible for the most eventful political development of the 1970s, the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. This revolution was spearheaded by the Ayatollah Khomeini (1902–89) after alliances between the major opposition forces ousted the ruling monarch, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1919–80).

CONCLUSION

A study of Islam extends to virtually every dimension of human life. This is because Islam today is a living civilisation, in one form or another, for nearly one billion people on the globe. For many centuries prior to the rise of the West, it exerted great influence over large parts of the world. Islam, like all religions, is itself experiencing fascinating changes in its own heartland – the Middle East, Asia, large parts of Africa, Europe and North America. As a social process the multiple dimensions of this civilisation cannot be ignored by serious students of religion and society. Towards that end, this chapter forms merely an introduction.

NOTES

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1. Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, (trans.) Alfred Guillaume (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 651–652.
2. Because the notion of God is also linked to a theological complexity in Christianity, which involves the status of Jesus in terms of the Trinity, some Muslims may argue that the semantic fields of 'God' and 'Allah' are discursively different. Mindful of these considerations, I have chosen to use the word 'God' in this essay for practical reasons. The reader should consider my use of the word God to assume the standard Muslim understanding of Allah.
3. Seyyid Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), p. 29.
4. Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibleotheca Islamica, 1980), pp. 4–5.
5. Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 22.

6. Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 6.
7. Abu'l-Hassan al-'Ash'ari, *Al-Ibanah 'an Usul ad-Diyanah (The Elucidation of Islam's Foundation)*, (trans.) Walter Conrad Klein (New Haven, Connecticut: American Oriental Series, 1940), vol. 19, reprint, p. 50.
8. Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1986), p. 36.
9. Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1985), p. 290.

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