

# THE QUR'AN

*by*  
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### **TRANSACTION No. 74**

In 1984 a series of talks and discussions were held at the Indian Institute of World Culture on the great books of the world. Already published in this series are papers read on Tao te. Ching and Lam Rim Chen-Mo. This paper is on The Qur'an.

Dr. Dwight Baker, who lived in the middle east for a long number of years, was visiting professor in Bangalore at the United Theological College. He was invited to deliver a talk on The Qur'an and this transaction offers the text.

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# THE QUR'AN

## INTRODUCTION

In the recent past and immediate present we have experienced two Qur'anic events that have focused our attention on the significance of the Qur'an. I refer first to the International Seminar on the Holy Qur'an held under the auspices of the Indo-Arab Cultural Association in January, 1983, in Calcutta, which brought Qur'anic scholars from around the world to this two day seminar.

The second event was the exhibition of the facsimile collection of Qur'ans and bindings from the Chester Beatty collection, Dublin, here in Bangalore, from the 11th to the 17th of July, 1984. In it we saw the development of Islamic Calligraphy and Qur'anic decoration from the earliest times, including a couple of manuscripts from India.

In his inaugural address at the International Seminar on the Holy Qur'an in Calcutta, His Excellency Moustafa Ahmad Ali, Minister of Culture, Egyptian Embassy, Delhi, stated that the Qur'an contains such a complete code of human life that its teaching and instruction of socio-ethical nature may be acceptable to all humanity (An International Seminar on the Holy Qur'an," by M. S. Khan, Islamic Culture, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, April, 1984, p. 171).

In his paper entitled "Human Rights in the Light of the Qur'an," the same speaker showed how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the U. N. O., agrees well with the basic teachings of the Qur'an. He stated that "the Holy Qur'an preceded the U. N. not only in proclaiming and insisting on these human rights by fourteen long centuries but it revealed and asserted the divine origin of these rights in wider and deeper dimensions." He added that, according to the Qur'an, all mankind is the offspring of the same father and mother — Adam and Eve. This conception of "a common factor among all the members of the human family based on the unity of origin creates a true inner feeling of human brotherhood" among all the peoples of the world without any discrimination of religion, race, caste or color.

With these words of introduction, which are in the spirit of the words and thoughts I wish to share, I shall proceed with the topic at hand, The Qur'an.

There is no book published quite like the Qur'an. It is unique in the truest sense of the word. Whatever your idea of a book is or should be, you will find that it does not apply to the Qur'an. That is why the stranger to the Muslim holy Book is baffled by it when he first picks it up and discovers that there is no enunciation of a central theme or chronological progression in the arrangement of its chapters (Maududi, Introduction to the Study of the Qur'an, p. 4). Instead, the uninitiated reader finds that it is a book that deals with creeds, gives moral instructions, lays down laws, admonishes unbelievers, calls people to submit to God, draws moral lessons from narratives that are paralleled in history, the Bible and in Greek mythology. It warns, proclaims good tidings and extends hope.

## I. ANALYTICAL SURVEY

### A. Composition

As to the composition of the Qur'an it is made up of 114 chapters or surahs, each unequal in length. The arrangement of the surahs is determined solely by the non-chronological element of length beginning with the longest, but later Meccan. Suras on to the shortest, but earlier Meccan suras. Kenneth Cragg perceptively observes that "thus even crucial pre and post Hijrah consideration is a central division which does not divide" and adds that while chronology is important, the Qur'an fails to take the hint (The event of the

Qur'an, pp. 112).

While reflecting on the ignorance, depravity, dissention and lawlessness of his people in a cave on Mt. Hira, Muhammad (Sullah.) received his prophetic call. He heard a voice saying: "Read ; in the name of thy Lord who createth, createth man from a clot, Read!" These are the, first words of revelation and are preserved in surah 96:1-3. (Surat al 'Alaq).

Unlike the Prophets and Psalmists of the Old Testament who converse with God about their troubles and travail the Qur'an is not autobiographical, as Kenneth Cragg has pointed out. Rather, in the Qur'an, the reader awaits the divine approach, the divine initiative in total receptivity (The Event of the Qur'an, 27). Nor does the Qur'an take place in history though it reaches to the farthest antiquity in its narratives. Through literacy accounts, sacred and secular events, Allah conveys his message to mankind.

The Qur'an commemorates the event of its coming down by designating the time at Lailat al-Qadr, "The night of power." This remarkable occasion is celebrated during the month of fasting, Ramadan. Pious Muslims today believe that to be the night each year when God's decrees for the year are sent down foreman's guidance (Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, pp. 445-46).

Lo! We revealed it on the Night of Power. Ah, what will convey unto thee what the Night of Power is! The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the permission of their Lord, with all decrees. (That night is) Peace until the rising of the dawn. (Surah 97) (Surat al Qadr).

As the power crackled like bolts of lightning through the sides in a thunderstorm or as the fierce snap of electricity from a high tension Use, on that eventful night, we sob message and messenger fused as one. As Cragg envisages it, "the messenger was in the message, inasmuch as the message was by the messenger. God and His apostle 'became the due formula of the single Qur'anic fact (Op. cit., 32). Islam, from that fateful night, was on its way to becoming a Scripture.

Fazlur Rahman points out that from the second to third centuries of Islam onward! emerging orthodoxy, which was in the crucial stage of formulation "emphasized the externality of the Prophet's Revelation in order to safeguard its 'otherness' (objectivity and verbal character." Rahman continues: "The Qur'an itself certainly maintained the 'otherness,' tie objectivity and the verbal character of the Revelation, but had equally certainly rejected its externality vis-a-vis the Prophet." (Islam, 26). The Qur'an dedans: "It is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds which the True Spirit has brought down upon your heart (*italics mine*) that you may be one of the warners" (26 : Surat Ash-Shucara, 192-194). Rahman goes on to explain that medieval orthodoxy as well as all medieval thought, lacked the intellectual tools to bring together the teaching of the 'otherness' and verbal character of the Revelation with the religions personality of the Prophet." He farther adds, "it (orthodoxy) lacked the intellectual capacity to say both that the Qur'an is entirely the Word of God and... entirely the word of Muhammad" (ibid., 27) and adds that the Qur'an is both,. at one and the same, time "for if it insists, that it has come to the 'heart' of the Prophet, how can it be external to him ?" (Ibid.)

There Is no less an emphasis on the Qur'an as pure Divine Word to relate it in a vital way to the inner life, the personality of the Prophet, "whose relationship to it cannot be mechanically conceived like that of a record." The Qur'an makes it clear that, '-die Divine Word flowed through the Prophet's heart" (Ibid., 29).

This is not to even suggest that Muhammad identified in any- way with God. This the

Qur'an itself forbids. The Prophet avoided such connections and every true Muslim condemns such unlawful associations as the most serious of sins, that of shirk, the association of a creature with God (Ibid.).

However, Fundamentalist Islam, based largely on the hadiths, rendered "the Revelation of the Prophet entirely through the ear and external to him and. regarded the angel or the spirit 'that comes to the heart' an entirely external agent" (Ibid.). This formulation is not based on the Qur'an, but nevertheless is embraced by the common Muslim.

There is yet a further dimension to be examined. May we not consider the 'Event of the Qur'an as Kenneth Cragg poses it, as the encounter of the Divine with the human?

God the infinite, the Great Beyond, meeting with finite man through the person of the Prophet ? (The Event of the Qur'an, 36). Says Cragg:

The spokespersonship on behalf of God which wahy confers becomes a kind of touchstone of the divine will, la having to do with Muhammad men have to do with God's representative (Ibid).

In reality, "the apostolate of Muhammad — comes to be conjoined— with the divine purposes" (Ibid.). There is no true understanding of the Qur'an without taking into account this special relationship between God and his appointed messenger. Cragg further stresses that the epitome of the Qur'an is its recurring phrase: "God and his apostle", "God in close bracket with a messenger or better, a messenger always bracketed with God" (Ibid.), i6, 37).

Students of the Qur'an are familiar with the Qur'anic practice of equating "enmity to Muhammad to enmity to God; disobedience to Muhammad as disobedience to God; recognition to Muhammad with recognition of God" (Ibid, 37, 38). Belief in one is invalid without believing in both.

### **Content — Major theme**

Teachings on the Day of lodgment, Yom ed-Din, are predominant in the Qur'an. Not only did they serve as strong warnings concerning the Last Judgment, directed at the unbelieving and the opponents of the message, but they were at the same time an incentive to those who submit (muslimun) to live pious, upright lives, producing good works as the outward evidence of an inner spiritual formation (H. A. R. Gibb, Islam, p. 27).

For the erring and wayward there is forgiveness, freely bestowed as God's grace. To obtain it, man must exercise rigid self control and practice servitude before God through offering good works, especially prayer and almsgiving (Md.): The message of impending damnation by a jealous God on a rebellious and unbelieving people is tempered by a message of forgiveness and hope extended to every submitter. Again and again in the Qur'an the quality and accessibility of mercy is stressed (Ibid., 28). One of the Qur'anic names for God, ar-Rahman, "the Compassionate One," is repeated at the opening of, every surah in the Qur'an save one: . Bismi'l llah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim, "In the name of Allah, the Com-, passionate, the Merciful."

The Meccan surahs repeatedly warned the erring to repent of their evil ways or face final retribution of Judgment Day. Even the possibility of the occurrence of some awful calamity befalling them in the present life was held before them (Ibid.). Did not catastrophe overtake the Egyptians, the 'people of Lot,' the 'people of Noah' and other evil doers ? Later Qur'anic narratives included stories of Joseph, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, Jesus and other well-known figures. These narratives served as homiletical vehicles on which the prophetic message was conveyed, messages that pronounced God's favour and blessings upon those who were submissive and his wrath and his wrath and destruction upon the

rebellious (Ibid.).

### **Content (Cont'd) — Major Doctrines**

The major doctrines of the Qur'an are familiar and can be briefly stated.

#### **1. God**

If it is difficult to adequately treat this great topic even at length, how much more difficult, if not impossible it is to deal with it in brevity. The doctrine of God may best be formulated from the attributes ascribed to Him, some of which we shall draw from the ninety-nine beautiful names of God. A few include: Hearer, Seer, Knower, Reckoner, Forgiver, Sustainer, Guide, Guardian, Merciful, Compassionate, in a most beautiful setting others are found in the well-known throne verse:

Allah ! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His throne includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous (2: 255).

The essential element in the Qur'an is its uncompromising monotheism, *la ilah illa Allah*, "there is no god save Allah." The greatest sin in Islam, described as unpardonable, is the sin of shirk (Gibb, 37), that of placing along side Allah an equal or assigning to Him a partner,

Lo ! Allah forgiveth not that a partner should be ascribed unto Him. He forgiveth (all) save that to whom He will. Who so ascribeth partners to Allah, he hath indeed invited a tremendous sin (4:48).

God is eternal, having no beginning or end :

And cry not unto any other god along with Allah. There is no God save him. Everything will perish save His countenance. His is the command, and unto Him ye will be brought back (28 :88).

All that is came into existence by his will at His creative word, 'Be !'. ' (Ibid., 38).

#### **2. Angels**

In the Qur'an the angels are God's messengers, created beings, servants who worship Him unceasingly. At His bidding they descend with His commands. The Angel Gabriel delivered the Holy Qur'an to the Prophet on that eventful "Night of Power." Angels record men's actions and will witness for or against him on Judgment Day (Ibid.).

#### **3. Books and Apostles**

Belief in God's apostle, Muhammad is next to the central doctrine of the unity of God in the Qur'an. From all times, God has sent messengers and prophets with His message. There are 28 mentioned in the Qur'an and Muslims are required to believe in all of them without distinction (Ibid., 39). Though the Prophet Muhammad is the last or 'seal' of the Prophets, among those mentioned, Jesus is given a place of special attention, with his story being related both in the Meccan and Medinan surahs. Particular attention is placed on his virgin

birth and miracles. Any claim to divinity, however is denied and the crucifixion is rejected as a fabrication with another of his resemblance being substituted in his place (Ibid., 40).

We further see that the Qur'an recognizes various scriptures with four. being singled out for special mention. First, Moses was given the Tawrah, or the five books of Moses ; David was given the Zabur, the Psalms : to Jesus was given the Injil or Gospel and to Muhammad, the Qur'an All confirm one another and as such are to be believed and accepted. The Qur'an not only confirms the other scriptures, but is the final Revelation, "clears up all uncertainties and is the final repository of perfect truth" (Ibid.).

#### **4. The Last Day**

The Last Day is presented in the Qur'an as a cataclysmic event coming suddenly at a time known only to God. Each man's guardian angel will bear witness to his record, his deeds will be milked in the balances and his book will be placed in his hand, the right hand of the blessed, or the left hand of the damned (Ibid., 41, 42).

Moving on to the chief Qur'anic doctrines, the following four doctrines in addition to the creed, or shahadah, constitute what is commonly known as the Five Pillars of Islam.

##### **1. Prayer**

The Meccan surahs mention only morning and evening prayers with personal devotions at night (Ibid., 29). Nowhere does the Qur'an prescribe prayers five times daily, nor the ritual of prostration. These came into practice as the result of following the Prophet's own example in Medina.

Apart from the religious value ascribed to prayer, congregational prayers have great merit as a disciplinary measure for Muslims in developing "a sense of social equality and solidarity" (All, 18). For worshippers to come together five times a day serves to nourish strong bonds of brotherhood. Friday prayers and high holy festivals serve the same purpose in promoting a sense of unity.

##### **2. Almsgiving**

The Meccan financiers were calloused exploiters, doubling and redoubling their fund\* (Surat 3 :130) at the expense of the poor. For their relief and the righting of these injustices, the Qur'an disallowed the practice of usury and advocated the bringing of alms, zakat.

So give to the kinsman his due, and to the needy, and to the wayfarer. That is best for those who seek Allah's countenance. And such are they who are successful <30:38), (Surat ar-Rum, the Romans).

In fact the emphasis of the Qur'an on almsgiving is so heavy that even prayer is seldom mentioned unless accompanied by zakat (Rahman, Islam, 33, 34).

##### **3. Pilgrimage**

The furthering of Islamic brotherhood is nowhere so forcefully and effectively promoted as in the hajj (Rahman, Islam, 34). Its institution was a part of the Prophet's strategy for unifying the community. It was always uppermost in his mind to establish Mecca as the spiritual center and work outwards. This is not to discount the religious significance of the hajj in deepening the Muslim's surrender to Allah, but perhaps no other practice in Islam holds greater social significance than the pilgrimage. Hundreds of thousands of people tom

every background and geographical area meet to pray fraternize and share their common faith. This shared commonality serves as a powerful unifying force, effectively erasing all boundaries of nation, class, colour and caste. B Sheik All affirms that

This is the only occasion of religious significance in Islam when men and women stand shoulder to shoulder, all lost in the love of God,<sup>1</sup> declaring that humanity is one (Islam, 21).

#### 4. Fasting

Fasting, compulsory to all with certain exceptions, is designed to promote self-control and help the Muslim fed with his poorer brother who may never be completely free from the pangs of hunger. Again, we see social significance blending with religious content. As one suppresses physical desire, there is release and greater freedom to deepen devotion and develop genuine piety (Ibid., IB, 191).

As noted earlier, the Qur'an is believed to have been sent down during the holy month of Ramadan, the month of fasting and celebrated as Lailat al-Qadr. "The Night of Power."

## II. THE INFLUENCE OF THE QUR'AN IN DEVELOPING MUSLIM THOUGHT

### A. Theoretical Framework — Theological and Philosophical Developments

The early Muslims had little time for developing theological or philosophical thought while engaging in the awesome task of empire building. The luxury of pondering the teaching of their new Arabic Qur'an and the sayings of their beloved Prophet was denied them. However, in time, that situation changed. During the first century of the Islamic era there arose a controversy over the enthusiasm of some to defend the principle of human responsibility on the one hand and those who advocated a harsh interpretation of the concept of determinism (predestination) on the other (See M. A. Rauf, "The Quran and Free Will," M. W. Vol XX, No. 3 Jul. 1970, p. 217).

There are dozens of texts that could be cited in support of free will. The following are but a few:

And He it is who hath appointed night and day in succession, for him who desireth (chooseth) to remember, or desireth (chooseth) thankfulness (25: 62).

This is naught else than a reminder unto creation, unto whomsoever of you willeth to walk straight (81:27, 28).

Nay, but verily it is an admonishment, so let whomsoever will pay heed to it (80:11, 12).

Have we not made for two eyes and a tongue, and two lips ? And guided him in the two (high) ways? (99: 8-10).

Besides the great number of Qur'anic references which strongly affirm the free exercise of man's will, there are also numerous passages, which attribute the creation of man's actions to God's initiative. A few examples are given below :

He misleadeth many thereby, and He guideth many thereby; and He misleadeth thereby only miscreants (2:26).

Seek ye to guide him whom Allah hath sent astray ? He whom Allah sendeth astray, for him thou (O Muhammad) canst not find a road (4:88).

Allah verily sendeth whom He will astray, and guideth whom He will (35 :8 ; cf.

6:39).

Verily, we will place veils upon their hearts lest they should understand, and dullness in their ears ? And if thou shouldst call them to the guidance, they will not be guided then for ever. (18 :58 ; of. 6 :25 ; 17 : 46).

(It is He) who created and fashioned, and who determined (predestined) and guided (87 :2» 3).

Sects representing these conflicting views sprang up to do battle. During the Umayyad period, there arose a school which called itself the Jabriyas and which denied the ability of man to create his Own actions. They further maintained that in no way was man responsible for his actions, which preceded directly from God. Man was merely an instrument in divine hands. Thinking men revolted against the Jabriyas and asserted the free will of man (B Sheik Ali, 45). These views were challenged by a group who called themselves the Qaderites, who defended the Principle of man's responsibility for his own actions. The Sunnis came out vigorously, as had the earlier and more extreme Jabrites, in their condemnation of the free will advocates.

As the controversy progressed, a school known as the Mu'tazila rose, becoming the spiritual heirs of the Qaderites and bitterly opposing the Sunnis whom they castigated as Jabrites, accusing them of being enemies of divine justice and human responsibility (Rauf, op, cit., 298). The Mu'tazila were a rationalistic group that strongly opposed anthropomorphic and literal interpretations of the Qur'an and who liked to be known as the "Defenders of God's Justice. They maintained that man is the author of his actions and is solely responsible to God for them, but that God is the creator of causes and their operation (Ali, op, cit., 48). B Sheik Ali describes them as "the precursors of the natural philosophers of the modern world" (Ibid., 48, 49).

The controversy continued through much of the fifth and sixth decades of the first Muslim century and was finally resolved, by the influential theologian Abu'l Hasan al-Ash'ari who introduced the concept of kasb, "acquisition," the element of the involvement of man in the production of his deeds, as the foundation of human responsibility (Rauf, op, cit., 298). Al-Ash'ari maintained that although man's acts are created by God, man "acquires" moral responsibility for them (Williams, 175). Thus, on the problem of free-will, al-Ash'ari reconciled the production dogma with the requirements of justice by applying to certain Qur'anic texts this theory. (See Gibb, 79 and Watt, Islamic Theology and Philosophy, 86, 87);

There follows a long and impressive list of Muslim philosophers including al-Kindi, ar-Razi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and others who flourished during the middle ages at the time European theological and philosophical thought was at its lowest ebb. In addition to the theoretical, Islam was not without its practical expressions.

## **B. Practical Import**

While the philosophers treated the subject of the unity of God, Muslim ethicists were making their contribution to the unity of man.

As Islamic social life developed in its various expressions, it was guided by Qur'anic reprimands to those who do not feed the hungry, or who hoard wealth without recognizing the right of the poor (Ah, 65). Concepts of the dignity of labour, the need for economic justice and the benefits of a strong community are all articulated in the Qur'an. We find that the good advocated by the Qur'an is not individual good alone; But includes social good as

well (Hameed, op. cit., 47) as seen in Surat an-Nisa, ayat, 26, 27:

(Show) kindness unto parents, and unto near kindred, and orphans, and the needy, and unto the neighbour who is of kin and the neighbour who is not of kin, and the fellow-traveller and the wayfarer and (the slaves) whom your right hand possess. Lo ! Allah loveth not such as are proud and boastful who hoard their wealth and enjoin avarice on others, and hide that which Allah hath bestowed upon them of His bounty.

Hameed reminds us of two categories of virtues set down in the Qur'an : First those which enable man to refrain from causing harm to or bringing disgrace upon his fellow man ; and second, those which, enable him to do positive good to others. The first category includes reverence for the sacredness of human life, chastity, honesty, meekness, truthfulness, e.c. while the second includes forgiveness, justice, patience, sympathy, gratitude, etc. (Ibid., 49).

Muslim ethics consists of much more than certain "do's" and "don'ts", but rather includes "all the virtues, good manners and joining of the ties of good relationship" (Ibid.).

The Qur'an vigorously criticized the great social and economic gaps that were built on and perpetuated the evil divisions of the community (Rahman, Major Themes, 38). But how to right the harmful economic abuses as well as those perpetuated against, girls, orphans, women and slaves? (Ibid.).

Mecca, while a prosperous town, had a history of exploiting the weak and defenseless. The situation is described in the Qur'an, (102 :1-4 and 104 :16) in vivid, terms, with men clogged (Surat at-Takathur, "Rivalry in Worldly increase and Surat and Humazah, "The Traducer") in amassing wealth by means of cut-throat competition. The Meccans argued that their wealth was their own and they could spend it as they pleased. The Qur'an countered that not all wealth was rightfully owned by its possessor, for the needy also have rights.

And in whose wealth there is a right acknowledged for the beggar and the destitute (70 :24, 25 ; sec 51 :19). Surat al ma'ary, ("The Ascending stairways").

In response to the question as to how to correct the harmful economic abuses abounding in the society of that day, two measures are advocated in the Qur'an: the banning of usury and the levying of zakat tax.

That which ye give in usury in order that it may increase on (other) people's property hath no increase with Allah; but that which ye give in charity (zakat), seeking Allah's countenance, hath increase manifold (30 :39).

Usury is banned in 2 :275-278.

In these and many other references we see the widespread reforms in the economic sphere effected by the Qur'an.

Perhaps the two most important reforms which the Qur'an set in motion were those related to women and slavery.

## 1. Women

Unquestionably, following the advent of Islam, the condition of women improved vastly, the most basic improvement being that she was given a full-fledged personality (Rahman, Islam, 35). The Qur'an grants men and women equal rights except the man, as breadwinner has a small advantage. - The Qur'an stipulates that the daughter's share be one

half that of the son's. Some modernists argue that in today's world in which conditions differ greatly from those of the past when the Qur'an was revealed, the daughter should receive an equal share with the son. Opponents counter with the claim that since at marriage, the daughter receives dowry from her husband, the apparent inequality in inheritance is equalized (Rahman, Major Themes, 51).

Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women) (4 — Surat an-Nisa:34a).

This verse indicates only a functional, not an inherent superiority over women for men are charged with their financial support (Rahman, Major Themes, 49). Religiously speaking the two are absolutely equals.

And whoso doeth good Works, whether of male or female, and he (or she) is a believe?, such will enter paradise (4Surat an-Nisa: 124; sep' also 40 : 40 and 16 :97).

Before the advent of the Qur'an, polygamy was unregulated and thus unlimited. After it was revealed, the number of wives permitted was restricted to four with this number being conditioned in such a manner as to be the practical equivalent of one wife for each husband (Rahman, Islam, 35).

Elaborating on that theme, B Sheik Ali declared that Qur'anic permission for a plurality of wives was "made dependant upon the condition that justice be. done among the co-wives' (Op. cit., 69). He adds that "as justice in matters of tenderness and love to all wives is impossible in practical toms, the Qur'anic injunction amounts in reality to the limitation of the number to one" (Ibid.).

Divorce is permitted as a last resort. Both man and woman have the right in Islam to ask for separation if it becomes a necessity. In such event the proceedings are subject to a set of formalities which see to it that procedures are not hasty or ill advised. The Qur'an pronounces divorce to be the most detestable before God of all permitted things (Ibid., 70).

## **2. Slavery**

Since slavery was a built-in feature of Arab society in the first Islamic century, there was little possibility of liquidating the practice with one stroke. Nevertheless, strenuous efforts were made towards freeing the slaves and creating an environment where slavery would in time, disappear (Rahman, Islam, op. cit., 36).

What will convey unto thee what the Ascent is ! — (It is) to free a slave (90 — Surat al-Balad: 12, 13 ; see also 58 : 3). -

Clearly, Qur'anic jurisprudence, in content and spirit,, evidence an orientation towards human liberation and progress.

## **3. Other Social Concerns**

Many additional areas of social concern are dealt with in the Qur'an; Among them the following are included:

Infanticide of unwanted baby girls as practiced before the rise of Islam, is absolutely forbidden and respect for human life is held up as the highest good in the Qur'an (Ali, 66).

And when the girl-child that was buried alive is asked for what sin she was slain (81 — Surat

at-Takwir : 8, 9 ; see 16 :57, 58 ; 43 :17 ; 17 :31 ; 6 : 140, 151 : 60 :12).

A healthy family life is promoted in the Qur'an. Celibacy is discouraged and marriage encouraged. Great value is placed upon chastity and the Qur'an recommends marriage as the best means for promoting and ensuring this condition (Ibid.). And those who accuse honourable (chaste) women but bring not four witnesses, scourge them (with) eighty stripes and never (afterward) accept their testimony- (24 : An-Nur : 4).

Baydawi, in commenting upon this verse says:

Chastity here implies being free, of full age and sound mind, professing Islam and abstaining from fornication. And there is so distinction made in it between male and female. (Chaste) women are specified (in the verse) in order to give actual examples, or because accusation against women is graver and more culpable (Quoted in Reuben Levi, *The Social Structure of Islam*, 119).

The purpose of Islamic ethics according to Dr. Hakeem Abdul Hameed, is to make man worthy of his status as God's viceregent, God's Khalifah on earth, a status superior to even that of angels (Op. cit., 52). The extended goal is the oration of an ideal community where all Muslims may enjoy equal opportunity for betterment and position, Muslims in such a community are described as brothers. In Surat al-Hujurat, 49:9-12, we have the picture of the ideal community where a premium is placed on the peacemaker and equity is a distinct virtue. Men and women are admonished not to deride or defame one another.

While in the Tawrah, Jews and Christians have their Ten Commandments; Muslims have their Ten Rules for Living or (some read twelve) for living life at its best and highest, set out in Surat Bani Israil, 17:22-39. In these verses, the ethical portrait of the Muslim is seen in full. Tune prevents the reading of the complete reference but in sum it commands the following: 1) the worship of one God, 2) the honouring of parents, 3) careful attention to the needs of kinsmen and strangers, 4) generosity while avoiding wanton excesses, 5) respect for human life (do not kill), 6) chastity (do not commit adultery), 7) guardianship for the orphan, 8) the keeping of vows, 9) honesty in business, and 10) humility before God and man (we Hameed, 53, 54).

Thus we clearly see that the authority for moral action does not stem from the whims, customs or fads of the day, not even high and enlightened principles, but from the Qur'an itself. Without this authority, the whole fabric of society would unravel, and come apart. But because of it and perpetuated by it, the foundations of society stand secure.