

INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM.

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The name "Islam" means "submission" [that is, to the will of God]. The root *s/m* also means "peace" coming from the end of opposition and struggle. "Muslim" is the participle meaning "one who submits". The final revelation of God came to Muhammad, Muslims believe, but there were many prophets in earlier generations, who spoke God's message - including Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Anglicized spellings (such as Moslem, Musselman, Mohammed, Koran) are best avoided in favour of closer transliterations (e.g. Muslim, Muhammad, Qur'an). The term "Mohammedan" is not appropriate as it suggests that Muhammad is the focus of worship, something forbidden in Islam.

Bibliographic details

Useful books for further reading are:

- Rodinson, Maxime 1971 *Mohammad* (Penguin)
- Khan M Z 1980 *Muhammad, Seal of the Prophets* (RKP)
- Ruthven, Malise 1984 *Islam in the World* (Penguin)
- Smart, Ninian 1969 *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, chapter 8 (Collins: Fountain) is still useful.

For more detailed study, there is a useful compilation of texts in:

- Rippen, Andrew and Knappert, Jan 1986 *Textual Sources for the Study of Islam* (Manchester University Press).

The most accessible copy of the Qur'an in English is edited by N. J. Dawood for Penguin (1956). The English is clear, but the Suras have been rearranged into a suggested chronological order - a strategy which Muslims deplore. A. J. Arberry's *The Koran Interpreted* (OUP, 1964) is in proper sequence. M. M. Pickthall's *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (Mentor) is in sequence but in rather strained English. A useful compilation of texts is given in Kenneth Cragg's *Readings in the Qur'an* (Collins: 1988), which is recommended. For Muslims, the text of the Qur'an can only be studied in Arabic: English, nor any other vernacular language, can catch the nuances of the laconic original and should be regarded as "interpretations" rather than "translations".

Muslims Today.

After Christianity, Islam is the largest religious group in Britain. Muslims come from many countries and continents, many have been born in Britain, and there are also converts from the British population. Their religious presence is visible since the Muslim community, with help particularly from the middle east, have been able to build purpose-built Mosques, with the traditional dome and minaret. The first stage has often been to convert large buildings which are available - one ever a fire station - or made a large floor-space available by knocking several terraced houses into one. The mosque is very often a community centre as well as a place of worship. This is in line with the Muslim view that religion is a part of the whole of life, not just of corporate worship.

Education

Muslims have been more active in education than any other religious group except Jews. The schools which have been set up have so far been private/independent (the Islamia school in

London is the best known example), but there has been considerable pressure for Muslim aided schools paralleling C of E and R.C. schools. The logic of there being Muslim schools is overwhelming as long as denominational Christian schools are retained. After a slow start, the government is now taking a deeper interest in setting up Muslim foundation schools.

The Muslim community in Britain

Muslims in Britain are in a real sense part of international Islam, drawing on support from the middle east in terms of finance, and from Pakistan particularly in terms of religious officials. Many of the imams of the mosques and communities are drawn from Islamic states. This can cause problems in dialogue if the local leader speaks little English. A community with a long established imam might have firm links with schools and local churches, which can all collapse as some as a new imam is appointed. Islam does not have a priesthood in the sense of a personage through whom a worshipper can worship - rather the imam has a pastoral and educational role, teaching, preaching and offering guidance to the community. The community will provide for his upkeep - and if the imam is unpopular, ensure that he is replaced.

Another aspect showing the link with international Islam shows itself in mosques which identify themselves with separate groups within Islam. Of Birmingham's many mosques, some have particularly Shiite communities, with close links with Iran. Sometimes Muslims from Bangladesh have separate mosques; and an Ahmadiyah mosque will be avoided by orthodox Muslims.

Press bias?

Since Islam is a major world power, a day rarely goes by without some press response to a situation involving Muslims and Muslim groups. This means that the general population of Britain are aware of Islam - but it unfortunately also means that many have negative responses to it. Whilst conflict in Christian countries is not always labelled as "Christian", Muslims are often labelled as perpetrators of violence in the Lebanon, Syria, Libya etc. Sikhs also suffer from the same sort of labelling. Whilst not wishing to whitewash Muslims (or Sikhs or Christians for that matter) who are involved in violence, the media response is unfortunate for those who are not. It is important also not to mix up the ideals which a faith stands for, with the actions of those who do not live up to those ideals. Public opposition to Islam has been described as Islamophobia: events during the first decade of the 21st century have provided some focus for anti-Islamic feeling. The Press have for the most part however provided balanced reporting.

Mosques.

We have seen that the outward appearance of mosques vary, some being new and purpose-built, and others not; but mosques on the inside have much more in common. Of central importance is the *mihrab*, the "niche" which points the way to Mecca and the Kaaba, the "house of Allah". It is important that an imaginary line is drawn through the mosque towards Mecca - this is the *qiblah*. At the place where it touches the outside wall, a niche or false door is built. In many mosques these are alternatively provided by a free-standing structure at that point in the wall. In the mosque, the leader will pray with his head just inside the niche. Wherever they are, Muslims need to ascertain the direction of the *qiblah* whenever and wherever they pray and will carry a compass: having set the compass needle to north, a pointer shows the way to Mecca. It is of course rarely **east**, and in certain locations could be due **west!** A purpose-built compass indicates the appropriate direction for that particular country.

There will also be a *Minbar* or pulpit, from which the imam or one of the leaders preaches the sermon. This will have at least three steps (to link it with traditions about Muhammad). There may also be a library to show that the mosque is also a school - *madrasah* - if not there will certainly

be books. In this country, children will almost certainly be taught Arabic and the Quran in the *mosque-madrasah* - after school and at weekends.

There will also be a room for **Ablutions** (*wazu*, or *wudu*), with running water if possible. Ablutions are made, with strict discipline, before prayer to remove the dirt of the outside world, and to symbolize inner purity.

The floor of the mosque is a carpeted area, without unnecessary furniture. Although there are no special rules, the carpet has often been made to resemble lines of prayer mats. This helps the worshippers line up during prayer (when straight lines are important) - although there may be so many people that the lines of worshippers do not keep to the actual lines. Cleanliness is helped by the fact that worshippers leave their shoes at the door: although there is also an element of coming into God's presence (like Moses and the burning bush) cleanliness is an important function of this. Other decorations are kept to a minimum so as not to interfere with or detract from devotions.

Often, a series of clocks show the **prayer times**, the time of Friday prayers, and perhaps even the times when prayer is forbidden - sunrise, noon and sunset (to avoid confusion with sun worship). Prayer times are set so as to interfere with the working day as little as possible. Muslims are expected to meet together in the mosque of Friday lunch-time, but not at other times when attendance is voluntary. This is called Juma (Juma = Friday). Friday is not a day of rest, so Juma prayers are usually performed during the lunch-hour. Worshippers start by declaring their "intention" to pray - that this action will be significant, thoughtful and prayerful and not routine. This is followed by the *azzan* , the call to prayer given by the *muezzin* . In the east this is given, often today by loudspeaker, from the minaret; but in Britain today it is performed inside, at the point just before the prayers begin.

In Arabic, the *muezzin* says,

God is Most Great (*Allahu Akbar*), God is Most Great,
 God is Most Great, God is Most Great.
 I bear witness that there is no god but Allah;
 I bear witness that there is no god but Allah;
 I bear witness that Muhammad is God's messenger;
 I bear witness that Muhammad is God's messenger;
 Come to prayer. Come to prayer.
 Come to success. Come to success.
 God is Most Great, God is Most Great.
 There is no god but Allah."

The obligatory prayers then begin, with worshippers in general far exceeding the obligatory number of "rakats" [prayer sequences]! A feature of Muslim prayer is the order and discipline which can be readily observed: this is a feature also of Muslim's daily lives. In prayer the lines are as straight as possible to emphasise this.

Festivals.

The Muslim year has twelve lunar months and does not recognize the solar year of 365 days. The shortfall is about 11 days - which means that each year Muslim festivals are 11 days earlier. In the course of 33 years, it will have revolved around the calendar to fall at the same time of year. Thus is Ramadan (see below) falls in April, it will fall in October in 17 years, and back in April in 33 years. This was one of several measures to minimize worship of the sun.

Many festivals celebrate events in the lifetime of Muhammad, or were originally set up by Muhammad. Although Muhammad is never worshipped, festivals indicate the high regard in which he is held, and the central place he holds.

Lailat-ul-Isra wal mi'raj - night of the journey and the ascension. This celebrates Muhammad's night journey from the Kaaba in Mecca to Jerusalem (the "Dome of the Rock" is said to mark the spot) and from there his ascension into heaven.

Lailat-ul-Barah - the night of forgiveness. This takes place two weeks before Ramadan when Muslims seek mutual forgiveness. Old scores are resolved, old problems forgiven and forgotten. This is held to influence their lives and fortunes during the coming year.

Ramadan - the month of fasting. Ramadan has been a sacred month since before the lifetime of Muhammad - Muhammad's own parents and grandparents appear to have fasted and meditated during this month. Today it is obligatory (except for those exempted, such as pregnant or nursing mothers, the young, the old, the sick) to go without food, drink, tobacco or sex during daylight hours. The traditional point marking the start of the fast is the time in the morning when it is first possible to distinguish between a black and a white thread. At sundown, a little high-energy food is taken, and a meal prepared for the evening - remembering the principle that the period requires moderation.

Ramadan is a festival of deep significance in which Muslims remember

1. Muhammad's meditation and fast during Ramadan
2. The first revealing of the Holy Quran on the "night of power" (see below)
3. The poor and starving in the world: through fasting they share in their hunger and contribute to their needs through the payment of *zakat*.
4. The Muslim demand of obedience and self-discipline.

Lailat-ul-Qadr - the night of power. Usually celebrated on 27 Ramadan although the traditional date varies slightly. This night is regarded as supremely spiritual, as the night on which the first section of the Quran was revealed to Muhammad. The whole night is devoted to prayer and worship, including readings from the Quran itself, seeking God's forgiveness, visiting the cemetery as a reminder of the eternal family and of their own mortality.

Jumat-ul-Wida - Farewell Friday. On the final Friday of Ramadan, large numbers meet together as a token of corporate solidarity, either in large mosques or in large public places. Their prayers usher out the fast, but also look forward to the coming year - purified by the fast, they look forward to being effective members of the faith community in the months to come.

Eid-ul-Fitr - the festival of fast-breaking. This is a "small festival" (the "little Eid") which is nevertheless of great importance. It marks the end of the fast, being the first day of the new month. There is a happy and joyful family holiday and meal, including communal worship in the mosque. Charity is given to the poor and gifts given to children. Eid cards are sent to friends who cannot attend.

Eid-ul-Adha - festival of sacrifice. This is the "big Eid", a joyful festival to mark the end of the pilgrimage. Called "the great festival" it lasts four days. After prayers in the mosque on the first morning, the worshipper traditionally sacrifices a lamb, goat, cow or camel. Some meat they eat, some they give to the poor and needy, remembering their responsibilities to others. The sacrifice celebrates the occasion when Prophet Abraham offered a sacrifice of a ram as a substitute for his son Ishmael.

The Day of Hijrah. This is the first day of the Muslim year, counted from the emigration of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE. After this Muhammad formed the first Muslim community. On this day, new year greetings are exchanged, and stories of Muhammad told. 622 CE counts as "year 1": to work out the current Islamic year subtract 622 from the current year, and multiply by ³³/₃₂ to take account of the shorter Islamic year.

Ashura. Shiite Muslims remember the martyrdom of Husain son of Ali, grandson of Muhammad, with a day of fasting and processions.

Meelad-ul-Nabi - birthday of Prophet Muhammad. 20 August 570 CE (12 Rabi-ul-Awal on the Muslim calendar) is regarded as Muhammad's birthday. The Muslim date is the one generally celebrated, so it is not fixed in August but revolves around the year [In 1991 it was in October].

THE BASIC CONCEPTS OF ISLAM

Faith (Iman)

It is sometimes said that a Muslim is one who believes that there is one god and that Muhammad is his prophet however, there is more to faith than this. Faith means that a person's life has been changed, that the whole of their energies are devoted to the worship of God and service to fellow creatures. Faith involves:

1. Belief. The Muslim believes in God, Angels, God's revelation in the Quran, God's messengers with Muhammad as the final messenger, the Day of Judgement.
2. Trust. The faithful have an unshakeable confidence in God.
3. Dedication. This might involve giving to the poor (Almsgiving is known as Zakat). But it might also involve dedicating one's whole life and time to the work of God.
4. Prayer. The faithful observe prayers five times a day every day of the week.
5. Obedience. The faithful obey God as revealed in the Quran and Muhammad. Muhammad is not worshipped but serves as an example of behaviour for people to follow.
6. Love. This involves the love of God, but also of his prophets, and a love of other people. This will involve ethical considerations, which means that the faithful will fight for the right and good as opposed to the bad and evil.

"It is clear that the very meaning of faith makes Islam penetrate deeply and constructively into every aspect of life. According to Islam, true Faith has a decisive effect on the spiritual and material lot of man, and also on his personal and social behaviour as well as his political conduct and financial life" (Abdalati 1975, 24).

True faith can thus never be a selfish thing, but involves careful thought and consideration about other people and the needs of other people. This is well summed up by one of the traditions about Muhammad:

"He who believes in God and the last day of judgement is forbidden to cause any harm to his neighbour, is to be kind to his guests - especially the strangers, and is to say the truth or else abstain".

Righteousness (Birr).

Righteousness must be based on a sound faith, and not be a mere empty formality. Righteousness is well summed up by a section from the Quran (2.177):

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces (in prayer) towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in God and the last day, and the angels and the book, and the messengers; to spend of your wealth - in spite of your love for it - for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which you have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-minded".

Thus, righteousness demands that faith should be true and sincere, it should be demonstrated by acts of kindness, it demands good citizenship, and it should produce people who are steady and unshakeable in times of stress. It will permeate the whole of a person's life, and give peace, hope and security. A righteous community would be peaceful, secure and harmonious, a humane society which sets out to meet the needs of the helpless.

Piety (Taqwa)

Piety is much deeper than empty lip service. They should be thoughtful about their faith, willing to give freely even if it leaves them short, they should be very self controlled and be easily able to control their emotions. Forgiving of others, they seek forgiveness for their own sins, and never assist knowingly in sin. Pious believers are people "of true and fine convictions, of determination and character, of will and courage and, above all, people of God. Piety, righteousness and meaningful faith are interrelated and all pour into one channel. They lead to Islam and build up the true Muslim". (Abdalati, 1975,27).

Sin

For Muslims the story starts with Adam and Eve. Warned not to eat the fruit of a particular tree, they were overcome by greed. The garden was "paradise", and they were expelled to Earth. They sought forgiveness which was granted.

Thus, humanity is seen as fundamentally flawed, committing greedy and selfish acts even in paradise. Yet making a mistake does not cut a person off from God forever - there is a way of atoning for sin and winning back God's favour - the way of faith, righteousness and piety. Such people will find God compassionate and merciful. During his life on earth, Adam is known as God's messenger and prophet - the first of a long line of prophets, ensuring that humanity knew God's standards right from the beginning.

Original sin has no place in Islam. An infant is in a natural state of purity (Fitrah) - submissive to God ("Muslim"). Through childhood and youth, the young respond to their environment and make their own decisions which might draw them away from this state of submission. Returning to Islam must then be a conscious decision. Humanity was created to worship God, not to be God's equal. Some individuals reach a high level of "perfection", but still fall far short of God's goodness. Humanity is finite and limited, but can seek perfection with the help of revelations the reason. This perfection may, in absolute terms, be somewhat limited, but it is enough to offer people ideals and to make their lives more meaningful.

Thus in Islam sin is not part of human nature; a sin is a deliberate decision which defies God's will and human rights. Sinful actions are avoidable - the person could have made a different decision. We choose to be sinful. God's demands are humanly possible!.

Forgiveness of sin involves the sincere determination not to repeat the sin, and if required, to have paid off any consequences or damages consequent on that sin.

Freedom

Islam teaches the importance of individual freedom so long as it does not violate God's law, or lessen the rights of others.

a) Islam should emancipate the believer from superstitions, uncertainties, sin, fear and disorder. The discipline which needs to be joyfully undertaken if we are to achieve ultimate freedom should not be viewed as a constraint.

b) Islam teaches freedom of belief - that there should be no compulsion in religion. People have to make their own decisions and exercise their free will. It is, of course, hoped that decisions will be *rational and responsible to God's revealed will*.

Within this framework there is no room for persecution, prejudice or conflict on whatever grounds. "The individual's right of freedom is as sacred as his right of Life; freedom is the equivalent of Life itself". (Abdalati, 1975,34).

Equality

People are not *identical*, in that they have different abilities and potentials, but Islam teaches that in spite of this all people are equal. These differences do not, in ultimate terms, establish one person as superior to another or one race as superior to another race. Therefore there should be no discrimination, no prejudice and no oppression.

Equality in these terms is an article of faith beholden on all Muslims. It is grounded in Muslim doctrine.

1. All are created by the same God.
2. All share a common ancestry, being descendants of Adam and Eve.
3. God is just and compassionate to all creatures, without discrimination.
4. All are born equal and die equal - we bring, and take out, no wealth or status.
5. We are responsible for our actions and decisions, and are judged on that basis only.
6. Within creation, God has given humanity honour and dignity, and endowed people with reason. Therefore, equality should be a fundamental belief and concern for all Muslims, and must take seriously the notion of the equality of non-Muslims also.

Brotherhood

Leading from this, Muslims believe in the unity of mankind, so people should regard each other as brothers and sisters. This implies that Islam should be an international faith, not recognising racial or territorial bounds.

Peace.

The words Peace[Salam], Islam and Muslim are related (note the 'SLM' in common) and one of God's names is "Peace". The normal greeting is Assalamu Aleikum, "Peace be upon you". The word Muslim as well as being "One who submits", can be understood as "One at peace". Islam should bring peace with God and with one's fellows. People with these values, "Of good faith and principles, cannot fail to make our world a better world, to regain human dignity, to achieve equality, to enjoy universal brotherhood, and to build a lasting peace" (Abdalati, 1975,37).

Community.

Community is defined internationally in Islam, without restricting it to specific races, nations or political groups. The Islamic community (Ummah) is the collection of all who submit to Allah's will. The Quran gives the Ummah a role in justice and deciding on right and wrong (3.110), as the guardian of sound Islamic practice. The Ummah also bears witness to others, to non-Muslims. The community of Islam should behave as though it is an example for the whole world of how to live and how to behave, an example of the best type of human society to evolve. The principles underlying this society are found in earlier sections.

The Discipline of Life

Being a Muslim involves the whole of life. **Prayer** dominates life, punctuating the working day and giving a focus to the evening. Prayer demands **cleanliness**, with ablutions preceding each prayer-time. This provides regular reminders of purity - not only eliminating pollutants from the outside world, but considering their inner selves.

Diet.

What people eat contributes to their sense of self discipline - the greedy eat greedily; the concerned share willingly and eat moderately. Muslims should respect their bodies by eating and drinking healthily, to satisfy their needs without indulging their appetites. Stimulants like alcohol impair efficiency and concentration, and should not be used. When life has to be taken in order to provide food, the act should be done thankfully and prayerfully, with prayers in God's name. Animals incorrectly slaughtered should not be eaten - there should be no encouragement for those without sympathy and without respect for the animals - their meat should be boycotted. Meat from animals which have died, naturally, or have been killed without appropriate supervision must be avoided. Pork is particularly to be avoided. At all times Muslims should remember those with insufficient food - throughout the year they contribute from their surplus wealth (at least 2.5%) to ease the lot of the hungry - the Zakat. It is easier to feel for the hungry if one has been hungry oneself. Each year, in the Ramadan fast, Muslims know what hunger means. They learn self restraint and discipline - and focus their attention not on their own achievements but on giving.

Dress.

The main principle of the Islamic attitude is modesty - the opposite sex should not find one's body attractive. Men should be covered from navel to knee; women should be completely covered except for face and hands. Men should avoid effeminate textiles and ornamentation; for women there is a place for finery, so long as it is modestly worn. Women should not become the object of lewd thoughts. Their clothes should not reveal the shape of their bodies, and in prayer women should not be exposed to male gazes. Prayer movements are modified so that no prayer position exposes the body's curves; and men are advised to pray in front, to give women privacy. Men should go through doors ahead of women, in case the women be put in a position of brushing past them or getting too close. Modesty is a matter of attitude as well as appearance - men and women should lower their gaze and avoid flirtatious behaviour.

Amusements.

There is a place for health-giving pursuits but there are limitations - games of chance are unworthy; dancing can lead to lewd thoughts, there should be no gambling, and no kind of drug-taking.

The Position of Women.

One of the commonest Western responses to an encounter with Islam is that Islam lowers the status of women; and there is no doubt that in some Muslim - as indeed in other - cultures this is so. We should distinguish cultural values and attitudes from religious ideals. In the case of Islam, we should start not with social custom but with the teaching of the Qu'ran and authentic traditions about Muhammad (hadith).

The teaching about creation stresses that God created a single individual and from him created his wife (Qu'ran, 4.1; 7.189). The Qu'ran stresses that humanity was created to become pairs (42.11). Man and woman share the same nature (16.72).

Faith and responsibility is defined as individual, whether for men or women, without distinction. In creation, both were jointly blamed for sin, and both were forgiven equally (2.36-7; 7.20-24) or if anything, Adam was blamed (20.121). There is a difference in the outward performance of worship, allowing for woman's particular role in childbirth and child-rearing, ensuring that neither mother nor child are put to undue discomfort or risk.

It was a custom in Arabian tribes to kill some female babies. The Qu'ran sets itself against this (81.8-9; 16.58-59). In addition, early hadiths (traditions) enjoin the faithful to treat girls well, and equally with the boys.

Whoever has a daughter and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favour his son over her, God will enter him into Paradise" (Ibn Hanbal, No.1957).

Whoever supports two daughters (or two sisters) would win merit at the day of judgement. It is the right, and responsibility, of every Muslim (male or female) to seek knowledge and understanding.

Marriage.

The Qu'ran teaches that marriage is a sharing, based on love, compassion and harmony.

"And among His signs is this: That He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest, peace of mind in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, here indeed are signs for people who reflect". (30.21)

Women should not be forced to accept a marriage that she does not wish. In one hadith of a girl who claimed to have been forced into marriage was allowed to choose (Ibn Hanbal No.2469) or alternatively, in accepting the marriage, claimed to have been making a point: "I wanted to let women know that parents have no right (to force a husband on them)" - a test case! (Ibn Majah No.1873). The wife kept control of the *mahr*, the marriage payments exchanged at the wedding which were for her protection.

In marriage, men and women should have equal rights - but amongst the shared responsibilities men should take on the duty of leadership - in particular offering financial support and protection. This should not imply superiority or authoritarian treatment.

Decisions should be made *jointly* - e.g. to wean a child (2.233). The relationship between husband and wife should be based on friendship and kindness (4.19). Muhammad is reported to have said,

"The most perfect believers are the best in conduct, and the best of you are those who are best to their wives" (Ibn Hanbal No.7396)

Polygyny was allowed but limited - not more than four wives; and by the responsibility to treat each wife equally well, Polygamy was found in Christianity and Judaism, without legal restriction to protect the wives. Whilst polygyny is not often the norm, it may be that particular circumstances might make it desirable. (For women, polyandry is not equally permitted).

Divorce.

Wives have equal rights to terminate their marriage. Laws sought to ensure that divorce did not become common, and that every effort was made to heal rifts which occurred in marriage.

Mothers.

Parents should be honoured, protected and supported. Mothers should in particular be treated with special kindness, remembering that she had given birth to her children and dedicated herself to their upbringing (31.14; 46.15; 29.8). "Paradise", said Muhammad in a famous saying, "is at the feet of mothers". Only the wicked insult women.

"A man came to Muhammad asking, O Messenger of God, who among the people is the most worthy of my good company?'. The Prophet said 'Your mother'. The man said, 'Then who else?'. The Prophet said, 'Your mother'. The man said, 'Then who else?'. The Prophet said, 'Your mother'. The man said, 'Then who else?'. Only then did the Prophet say, 'Your father'. (Al-Bukhari).

Economic rights.

Women have equal rights with men to the ownership of property, and to making commercial transactions. There are no economic restrictions on employment, although Muslims regard motherhood as a full-time job which should not be delegated to child-minders. Early Muslim jurists saw no reason against women even becoming judges. In inheritance, women were entitled to their share (as was not the case in pre-Islamic Arabia) - although this was less than for sons (Muslims note this is to compensate for men's increased financial responsibilities to his wife and children - and as she already has an interest in her *mahr*, marriage payment).

Politics.

From early days women were able to achieve political office and take a full part in debate. One hadith should probably be translated, "A people will not prosper if they let a woman be their leader" although this is not reflected in the Qu'ran. In contemporary Arabia, a chief-of-state was also leader of the armed forces, which may have led to this observation. Throughout Islamic history, women won respect and power, and did not have their Quranic rights eroded. Their role and status as mothers were particularly treasured.

MUHAMMAD

Arabia before Muhammad.

The Arabia of Muhammad's day was a curious mixture, of townfolk with commercial skill and materialistic ambitions, and desert dwellers ("Bedouin"). Close to the land and with strong views about group solidarity, hospitality was demanded among kin,. Blood feuds were the way of punishing offences, offering a measure of protection in an unpoliced society. The Bedouin had evolved their life style and values over centuries of precarious existence in harsh desert conditions. Hostile or potentially hostile groups were a fact of life, and strategies had to be developed for self protection and preservation - by banding together in times of danger. Central to this was the kin group, the clan. It was essential that kinship could be traced; and of course kinship could be extended through intermarriage.

The town dwellers had their own kinship structure - sometimes with a dominant clan who ran the town; and at other times with a number of warring clans. They owed their wealth not to shepherding but to their camel caravans, trading in Yemen or in Damascus. The nouveau riche, they saw themselves as urbane and sophisticated - but they were vulnerable. Their caravans could be attacked, and needed constantly to nurture the good will of the desert tribes. Apart from intermarriage, pseudo-kinship was created through fosterage links - the town children were fostered by Bedouin wet-nurses, which made them 'honorary' sons, and siblings of the desert youngsters. The food supply was crucial, meal and dairy produce coming from the nomads, dates and other crops coming from the oases.

The population of the fertile areas were mixed, including people from Aryan, Semitic, African, Turkish, Greek, Egyptian, Syrian and Persian backgrounds. In particular there were tribes who adopted the Jewish or Christian faiths - although we don't know whether the influence came via migrants, merchants or simply fashion. The Christians in the area often followed Nestoran or Monophysite teachings, resisting classical formulations of the trinity. Other tribes were "pagan", worshipping gods like Allah, goddesses like Allat, Manat and al Uzza. The land - the trees, rocks and springs - aroused devotion celebrating the significance with which the land was charged.

Mecca. Mecca was a merchant city which had additional income as a pilgrimage centre. With only one spring, the Zam Zam, there was insufficient water for farming, so food had to be bought in. Commercial links were therefore more important than in many other cities. Mecca had a strategic position, on trade routes south to Yemen, and north to Egypt, Syria and east to Mesopotamia and Persia. Meccan businessmen and women became entrepreneurs; and tolls were levied for trans-shipment. One family, the Quraish, devoted itself to a pilgrim shrine, the Kaaba, which brought more wealth into the city. Its main idol was Hubal, but it was said to be filled with other idols also, possibly tribal emblems.

It was thus a busy, cosmopolitan town, filled with the affluent hustlers, pilgrims, slaves - and the hopeful. Yet their desert heritage was strong. Their formative years were with their bedouin foster-kin, and the links were not forgotten. The clan demanded allegiance and solidarity, and offered protection. Religious values were no strangers. People meditated in the desert, during months like Ramadan; and the worship of the One God had taken firm hold. But there was a cosmopolitan tolerance which did not find the import of the Goddess - whether Allat, Marat or Al Uzza, or their prototypes Ashtart, Asharah, Ishtar, Tirit, Anat - at all disturbing.

Muhammad's Life and Career.

Mecca, in Arabia, was an important pilgrimage centre in the years before Muhammad was born. Its holy place, the Kaaba, was controlled by the Quraish tribe who organised pilgrimages and collected a tax from them. Local gods and goddesses, such as Allah [the god] his 'wife' Allat

[the goddess] and 'daughters' al Uzzah and Manat, were worshipped there, and a black stone was specially revered. One member of the Quraish clan, Hashim, married Selma from Yathrib, 200 miles to the north: from this union, in 497CE, was born Abdul Muttalib (497CE - 578CE). His family included Waraqa who translated part of the Gospels into Arabic.

His daughter Amina lost her husband in 570CE shortly before their son was born. Called Muhammad, the little boy was (as usual in Mecca) fostered by a nomadic woman, Haleema, and brought up in the desert learning a herdsman's skills. He was returned to his mother Amina when he was six, but she died that same year. Muhammad's grandfather Abdul Muttalib took over responsibility for him, but he died in 578CE. Finally, Muhammad's uncle Abu Talib, took him in. Muhammad spent some of his time as a herdsman (the family were poor) and travelled on business with his uncle - including, tradition says, to Syria, where he met a Syrian Christian monk.

A rich widow, Khadija of the Quraish hired Muhammad to take charge of the caravan to Syria. Pleased with his work, she wrote to him proposing marriage, which he accepted. He was 26 years old, Khadija 40. She bore him two sons and four daughters, but most died young.

When, in 605CE, the holy Kaaba was rebuilt, a dispute broke out about which tribe should move the black stone into its new position. According to tradition, Muhammad entered and suggested that the black stone be placed on a cloth so that each leader could hold a corner: Muhammad himself made the final adjustments.

Mecca was a cosmopolitan centre in which new ideas constantly circulated. Ideas stemming from 'Jewish' tribes and Christian monks (particularly from Syria and Abyssinia) were also influential, and Muhammad was not alone in rejecting idol worship. Khadija had given Muhammad a Syrian Christian slave boy, Zaid ibn Haritha, who chose to stay with Muhammad even when his father arrived to redeem him.

Muhammad's family had a tradition of meditating in the hills during the sacred month of Ramadan, probably including fasting. In 610CE, during his meditation in a cave called Hira, the first section of the Quran was revealed to him, by, it was said, the angel Gabriel in a vision. The first words were (Sura 96):

Recite! Recite in the name of your Lord who created,
who created man from clots of blood!
Recite! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One,
who by the pen taught man what he did not know.

This night is called "the Night of Power" and is celebrated usually on 27 Ramadan: today it is one of the most solemn days of the Muslim year. The Quran states (Sura 97):

We revealed the Quran on the Nights of Power. Would that you knew what
the Night of Power is like! Better is the Night of Power than a thousand
months. On that night the angels and the Spirit by their Lord's
leave, come down with his decrees. That night is peace, till break of dawn.

Muhammad was not without anxiety, as Sura 68 shows:

By the pen, and what they write, you are not mad!....When they [the unbelievers] hear Our revelations, they almost devour you with their eyes. 'He is surely possessed' they say. Yet it is a warning to all men. Early converts to Muhammad's message were Khadija his wife, Ali (son of Abu Talib), Zaid, Abu Bekr, Zubair ibn al Awwam and Saad ibn abi Waqqas. Generally speaking, converts were young and poor.

Revelations came in a variety of ways, like a bell, when covered in a cloak, with perspiration and while riding. The words were preserved on leather, leaves, stones and bones - and in the memory "in the heart". Most influential of the collectors and compilers was his 'secretary' Zaid ibn Thabit. Muhammad's call to preach came in 613CE (Sura 74): "You that are wrapped up in your vestment, arise and give warning". He offended Meccans by denouncing idol worship and suggesting that their ancestors were in hell. There were arguments, and plots to kill Muhammad, but Abu Talib did all he could to protect his adoptive son. A slave converted to Islam, Bilal, was tortured for his faith, so Muhammad redeemed him. In 615CE a number of followers went to the more tolerant Abyssinia, but Muhammad chose to remain in Mecca. The Muslims were boycotted between 616-9CE, with business and marriage refused, but this was largely unsuccessful.

Khadija died, 619CE, and Abu Talib in 620CE.

620CE - Sura 17 describes a night journey to Jerusalem and to heaven, still celebrated by Muslims.

621CE: *First Pledge of Aqaba*

Seven pilgrims from Yathrib were impressed by Muhammad in 620CE and next year, with five more, entered into a pledge - not to worship idols, steal, commit immorality, kill female babies, slander or disobey Muhammad's revelations.

622CE *Second Pledge of Aqaba*

Seventy three men and two women made the same pledge. The people of Yathrib agreed to defend Muhammad, since they were kin. This persuaded the Quraish to kill Muhammad, but the news leaked out. Muhammad decided to leave Mecca, with Abu Bekr.

The HEGIRA or HIJRA

They migrated to Yathrib between 8-19 June 622CE. The *HEGIRA or HIJRA* [Migration] is the point from which Islamic calendars commence (A.H. = after the Hegira). Yathrib soon became known as Medina (medinat nabi, town of the prophet).

Muhammad stayed with a young convert, Khalid ibn Zaid. A nearby barn was bought from two orphans and was converted to the first masjid (or mosque) [place of prostration, i.e. prayer]. The refugees from Mecca were called *Emigrants*, and the Yathrib converts *Helpers*. The new buildings which began to spring up were simple and unprestigious. Kinship links were strengthened by a "brotherhood" pact between Emigrants and Helpers.

Soon Muhammad became a local chief, of the Beni al Najjar because of his kinship links. Polygyny was common among chiefs: Muhammad's wives were Sauda (619) Aisha (623) Hafsa (625) Zainab bint Khuzaima (625) Umm Salama (628) Safiya (629) Maimoona (629) and Mary (630). Some marriages were to protect the widows of eminent Muslims killed in battle, others eminent captives or slave wives. The normal maximum of four wives was given in the Quran, with Muhammad stated as the explicit exception.

He insisted at this time that prayers were directed towards *Jerusalem* saying that his revelations demanded a pure Judaism. Possibly too he wished to wean the Muslims away from their old habit of praying towards the Kaaba until they could see its significance with new eyes. However, the truce with the Jewish tribes was uneasy and short-lived. The Muslims became very poor - the Emigrants were struck with malaria from the Yathrib mosquitos, and were not used to agricultural work.

624CE The Battle of Bedr. The Meccans were defeated by the Muslims. Most of Muhammad's opponents in Mecca were killed.

- 625CE The Battle of Uhud. The Meccans took revenge, after an ignominious retreat on the rumour that Muhammad was dead. This was regarded as a test of the Muslims (Sura 3.120). The battles stemmed partly from blood feud, and partly from the desire to defend Islam from its enemies.
- 627CE *The Siege of Yathrib/Medina or the battle of the ditch.* The siege was foiled by the building of a defensive ditch, and failed after a month.
- 628CE *The truce of Hudaibiya.* An uneasy truce was signed which led to a number of defections to Medina.
- 629CE The victory over the Jewish tribes at Kheibar. There had been long and uncertain tensions with Jewish tribes, with faults on both sides.
- 629CE Pilgrimage to the Kaaba recommenced, under the truce agreement, with the direction for prayer (qibla) now focussing on the Kaaba. This raised Muhammad's standing among Meccans.
- 629CE Muslims were defeated in the battle of Mota against the Byzantines and came home in disgrace. Mud was thrown at them.
- 630CE Capture of Mecca. After a diplomatic incident, Mecca was taken almost bloodlessly. Meccans were incorporated into Islam.
- 631CE At the third pilgrimage to Mecca, the remaining pagans were given four months to convert. Thereafter the pilgrimage was for Muslim's only.
- 631CE *The Year of Deputations.* During this time, the local tribes were incorporated into Islam either by a show of force or through deputations.
- 632CE During Muhammad's final pilgrimage, the ritual of pilgrimage was crystalised. Muhammad died, his closest relatives being his daughter Fatima and Ali' and his sons Hasan and Husain.

The Caliphs (Successors).

Abu Bekr 632 - 634CE

Umar 634 - 644CE

Othman 644 - 656CE

Ali 656 -660 CE (the Umayyid dynasty, Damscus until 750CE)

Abbasid dynasty, 750 - 861CE in Baghdad.

Prophets

Prophets declare the will of God, warning the people against disobedience. They are therefore to be obeyed, just as one would obey God Himself. 28 prophets are generally recognized including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, David, Solomon, the Jewish prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus and Arabic prophets. Their names are suffixed with a phrase such as "peace be upon him". They are not regarded as divine in any way. Allah (God) built the Kaaba for Prophet Adam, according to tradition - the black stone being the only original stone left. Prophets Abraham and Ishmael later rediscovered and restored it.

Of the scriptures recognized by Muslims, the Quran has the most central place as the final and complete revelation of Allah. The Torah, Psalms and New Testament were to be respected and revered in *their true and original form* - but unfortunately we may never be able to get back to such an unadulterated text.

THE QUR'AN

The Revelation of God in the Quran

Revelation is a central doctrine in Islam - that God reveals his will to the world so that humanity can learn what is expected of them. For Muslims, God has revealed himself right from the first appearance of humanity on earth, and has never left himself without a witness. Adam and Eve, ejected from Paradise to Earth, were repentant about what they had done; Adam became a channel for God's word and is given the status of the first Muslim prophet. The prophet's job is to convey the message and to put it into practice. Through them, humanity is invited, through submission, to harmonize the human will with the divine. In this people need divine guidance (*hidaya*), to give them correct perception of reality. No one can, without this, solve essential problems or achieve peace and harmony, either in themselves or in society. This guidance conveys ultimate truth, applicable in moral, social and intellectual questions.

Revelation does not mean the disclosure of God's person or nature. There are enough glimpses to begin to build a relationship, but no certain disclosure of God's essential nature.

Prophets delivered the words of God orally. Before writing, a chain of prophets was needed to ensure that divine guidance was always available.

"Mankind was once one nation, so God dispatched prophets as heralds and warners. He sent the book down with them to bring the Truth, that it might decide among mankind concerning whatever they had been disagreeing about" (2.213).

Prophets Adam to Moses (including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac and Joseph) was one such chain. The revelation to Moses did reach written form (the Taurant [Torah]), as did the inspired words of David and Solomon. However there was no discipline in the preservation of these works, and no certainty that these writings were not altered in the process of transmission. Nevertheless, Muhammad taught that Jews and Christians should be respected as "people of the Book", people whom the earlier prophets had warned. People would be judged in accordance with that with their response to the messenger.

"Every nation has a messenger. Once their messenger has come, judgement will be passed upon them in all fairness and they will not be wronged" (10.47).

If no messenger comes to a particular people, then judgement will not be passed. People should regard the messenger as God himself in the sense that the messenger passes on God's will.

"Anyone who obeys the messenger has obeyed God himself" (4.80).

The prophets were God's spokesman. Not to obey them was not to invite judgement but to bring judgement against oneself.

Prophets Jesus and John

With Prophet Ishaq (Isaac) began the line of Judaic prophets, a line which ended with Jesus. The line of Ismail (Ishmael) was quite separate, and mostly oral rather than written: This line ended with Muhammad. There have been prophets too in all human communities throughout the earth, their names unrecorded, and their messages forgotten or adulterated.

Jesus is discussed on many occasions in the Quran. His historical existence is never doubted, and his name is honoured as an apostle of God. Although not recognizing Jesus as divine, as a

prophet he is the equal of Muhammad and the other prophets. He was born, as Adam was, without human father not as evidence of his divinity but as evidence of the infinite nature of God the creator. "It is not befitting to the Majesty of God that he should beget a son...When he determines a matter, He only says to it, "Be"; and it is. (19.36). The purpose of Jesus' mission was to bring guidance, not atonement by blood sacrifice. He preached the word of God, and his miracles provided evidence of God's creative power. The miracles described in the Quran go further than those in the New Testament, to include the creation of birds from clay.

At the crucifixion, God saved Jesus, and someone else was crucified in his place. Jesus was raised to be with God, but whether this was a bodily ascension, or after his natural death, is not a matter of Muslim doctrine.

The Qur'an.

The word Quran means "recitation" - first recited by Muhammad as the words were revealed. Muslims react, as Muhammad did, strongly against the term "poetry". Muhammad set himself against the poets of his day and even challenged them to produce something even approaching the grandeur of Allah's revelation. Muslims differentiate between the quotes of revelation and the ordinary words of Muhammad - the former coming in ecstatic states, and described as like a bell, a fever, visions and auditions.

The Quran is divided into 114 suras (or chapters). The early suras which originated in Mecca were in general short and emotionally charged; the later ones from the Medinan period are longer and more concerned with social organisation. To Muslims, the Quran is a copy of the "mother text" in heaven which was recited "to the heart of" Muhammad in thought-ideas which were converted to Meccan Arabic in his own mind. The Arabic text was therefore as close as it possibly could be to the heavenly text. The Arabic text can therefore be considered to be Kalam Allah, "Word of God", infallible with absolute authority. The messages (or revelations) came to Muhammad in trance, often accompanied by various auditory or visual experiences. The Quran is viewed as the last statement of God's will, the final guidance. Islam is therefore centred on, and committed to, the Quran.

"It does not contain any element that is a product of a human mind. Its contents and its arrangement are from God. It is the unmixed Word of God" (Irvine et al, 1979, p.29)

"The Quran contains the Word of God, pure and simple, with nothing added by the human mind and nothing lost from the original Revelation. It is unique, being the Divine Word in a human language." (30f).

The first revelation occurred in 610CE in a cave on Mount Hira: this message has been preserved as the first five lines of Sura 76, "Alaq", "the Blood Clot";

"Read: In the name of thy Lord who created,
Created mankind from a clot of blood.
Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous,
Who teaches by the pen,
Teaches mankind that which he knew not."

This stresses the creative power of Allah who has given life to mankind, who is mankind's provider, and who has taught mankind all the knowledge we possess. Since we owe our existence and wisdom to our creator, it is inappropriate and foolishly arrogant to regard ourselves as our own masters, in control of our own destiny.

Muhammad himself was affected very deeply by this experience of "reading" these short extracts of the heavenly text but was subject to doubt when some time elapsed before the next "revelation". The second revelation dispelled any doubts and set him off on his mission as a prophet. It is called "The Cloaked One":

"You who are wrapped up in a cloak
Stand up and warn!
Magnify your Lord,
purify your clothing
and steer clear of filth.
Do not shower favours
in the hope of getting more!
Be patient towards your Lord." (Sura 74.1-7)

The warning was to be about the "day of anguish" when disbelievers were to be punished by fire. Allah is "the fount of fear" but also "the fount of mercy", enabling people to give heed to His warnings.

His wife Khadijah believed very firmly in his mission, and gave him invaluable support before her death in 619CE. Throughout Muhammad's active period of teaching, his disciples committed his sayings to memory, and wrote down his ecstatic words on leather, palm-leaves, stones and bones - anything they could find to write on. Of course, Muhammad's ordinary words were not regarded as Allah's revealed words.

From the days of Muhammad, Muslims have regarded the Quran as revealed scripture. The Quran itself announced its own authority and divine origin. After the summary opening (sura 1) the Quran begins with a declaration of its own authority:

"This is the book which contains no doubt,
a guidance to those who are heedful,
who believe in the Unseen, maintain their worship
and spend part of the wealth we have bestowed upon them;
who believe in what is revealed to you (Muhammad)
as well as that which was revealed before you,
and who are certain of the Hereafter.
These depend on guidance from their Lord.
These are the successful." (Sura 2. 2-5)

The sura called "the prostration" notes:

"The revelation of the Book which contains no doubt is from the Lord of the Worlds. Do some say, 'He has invented it'? No, it is the truth from your Lord, that you may warn a folk to whom no warner came before, so that they might accept true guidance" (32.2-3).

"Allah does not speak to any mortal except through revelation (wahy), or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal what He wishes. Behold, He is Exalted, Wise. Thus we have inspired in you, Muhammad a Spirit under our command. You did not know what the scripture was, not what the faith was. We have made it a light whereby we guide our servants. Behold, you guide into a right path." (42.51-2)

This Spirit was Gabriel in person. "For Gabriel it is who has revealed the Quran to your heart by Allah's leave..."(2.97). Throughout the ages, God had revealed his will through prophets, like Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. These prophets invite people to bring their human wills into line with the divine by accepting divine guidance. Without this mankind cannot solve essential problems

and achieve peace and harmony. Revelation does not mean disclosure of God's person - only fleeting glimpses through which people can build up a relationship with Him through faith obedience and service. The Quran is seen as the FINAL revelation or statement of the divine will, the absolute authority on which to build our lives. Therefore Islam is entirely centred on the Quran.

Some revelations were viewed as temporary injunctions, suitable for the time but soon to be rescinded: so, "Such of our revelations as we abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring in place one better, or another one similar. Do you not know that Allah is able to do these things?"

In the month of Ramadhan Muslims remember especially the sending of Allah's revealed word:

"The month of Ramadhan is when the Quran was sent down as guidance for mankind, with explanations for guidance, and as a standard." (2.185)

"We sent it down on the Night of Power.
 What will make you realize
 what the Night of Power is?
 The Night of Power is better
 than a thousand months.
 Angels and the Spirit (Gabriel) descend on it
 by the will of their Lord, with His decrees.
 That Night is Peace until break of day" (97)

The Preservation of the Quran

Wherever Muhammad went he was accompanied by secretaries. One specially was important, Zaid ibn Thabit. His revelations were written down on whatever was available - leather, palm leaves, stones, and bones. Most importantly, his revelations were committed to the memory of a number of people, so that collections of his revelations could easily be checked. After Muhammad's death, the first Kaliph ("successor") Abu Bakr commissioned Zaid to collect the material together to form the basis of the Quran. This process was begun during Muhammad's lifetime and completed shortly after Muhammad's death. Omar, the second Kaliph completed the job. At this stage, within a decade of Muhammad's death, Quoranic schools were established. Uthman, the third Kaliph, established an official version (around 650CE) in the same dialect that Muhammad spoke. He made orders that all other copies should be destroyed. He set four copies of his original text in four major centres in the Arabic world - Basrah, Damascus, Kufa, Medina.

All subsequent copies of the Quran had to be made from one of these texts. There is evidence that not everyone agreed with this move, for some texts from Kufa have survived in Kufic script instead of in Meccan Arabic. It is clear that every effort was made to ensure that the Quran was preserved in as accurate a form as possible.

Attitude to the Quran

Muslims regard the Quran as the most significant book in existence. It must never be placed so that other books are on top of it. No one should smoke or drink when it is being read. It should be listened to in silence. Translations are regarded as interpretations, and not therefore as authentic as the real Arabic text - although translations can be used for private study. It has been a custom in Islam for people to learn the Quran off by heart. Someone who has done so is called a Hafiz, "a memorizer". Such people are regarded with great respect in Islam. Children under the age of ten often begin to learn the Quran in this way. Their learning may be more selective.

Texts from the Quran

The Sura most often quoted by Muslims is the opening Sura of the Quran, Sura No I, called in Arabic Al-Fatihah.

In the Name of God, the merciful Lord of Mercy.
Praise be to God, the Lord of all being,
the merciful Lord of Mercy,
Master of the Day of judgement.
You alone we serve and to You alone come we for aid.
Guide us in the straight path,
the path of those whom You have blessed,
not of those against whom there is displeasure,
nor of those who go astray.

This Sura precedes all Muslim acts of worship. Is regarded as a summary of the entire Muslim message.

The Five Pillars of Faith

Islam is described as a structure supported by five pillars - the first at the centre bearing most of the weight, the other four subordinate, drawing their ultimate significance from the first.

1. The Shahada.

The first, and central pillar is the Shahada, "Confession" or "Testimony". Every Muslim testifies the following publicly, and acts upon it:

I testify that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.

God is One. Belief in the One-ness of God implies complete trust, obedience and submission to his will. God's attributes are described by the "99 beautiful names", but is essentially unimaginable, supreme and absolute Being. It is profitless to speculate on what God is really like, because his reality is far beyond our puny human understanding. We should beware of representing God in limiting ways, of substituting God with an image of God. This lies behind the prohibition of pictorial representations of God, including in its most extreme form, of "idolatry". It also lies behind the Muslim attitude to Jesus and the Christian trinity - to picture God as a father having a son is limiting; to picture God as a human (viz Jesus) is limiting; to picture the Godhead as three contradicts the oneness of God. Equally, picturing God as a human emotion or value is limiting and unacceptable. "God is Love" identifies God with an emotion - God is much more than love! Muslims have no doubt that God is loving, as well as compassionate, and merciful. "God the father" identifies God with a human status, and is unacceptable: Muslims have no doubt that God creates, provides and protects. That God is just must imply the possibility - indeed the inevitability - of punishment on those who deliberately flout his will. However God's love and mercy operate, it is not to negate God's justice. Since God (Allah) is greatest (Allahu Akbar), all are his servants equally. If we are Allah's servants, we cannot serve anyone else. If we do not regard ourselves as serving God, we will inevitably serve something lower - a political system or ideology, an appetite, a job. There are many who "make desire their god" (Quran, 45.23). Also, when we owe our entire allegiance to God, we are freed from earthly alliances - political, social or personal. In Muhammad's day, the ummah, or Muslim community, replaced pre-existing kinship ties.

Muhammad as God's Prophet. To prevent many a blind alley, God has always revealed his will to the world, so people are assessed ("judged") according to how they respond to God's will. Every human society has been sent a warner, in every generation - whether a person (a prophet) or a book. The names of most prophets are no longer known. Muhammad was the last of the Arab prophets (the line runs from Ishmael) - and since his message was faithfully recorded, he is the last prophet for the whole world.

The Muslim believes in all the messengers, without discriminating between them. 25 are named in the Quran. Every nation had prophets to teach God's will. Sometimes prophets were contemporaries - as with Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac - since with these the Jewish and Arab lines separated. The message throughout was "Islam"; and believers, from the very beginning, were "Muslims".

"We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes; and that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and that which was given to all prophets from their Lord. We make no discrimination between them, and we bow to God" (2.136).

Implications of the Shahada

Quran. The Muslim belief in the authenticity of the Quran - its authenticity guaranteed by human endeavour and divine preservation.

"Verily We have, without doubt, sent down the Quran; and We will assuredly guard it" (15.9).

Belief in angels. The Quran teaches about the existence of angels, spiritual beings who serve God, and explain human experiences which transcend the senses. Again it would be wrong to ascribe these limited (albeit transcendent) experiences to a limitless God.

The last day of judgement. The limited world has a beginning and an end. The precise nature of the end is known to God only, but there must be an element of judgement, as peoples responses to God's message will be assessed, and rewarded or punished appropriately.

"The real nature of Heaven and Hell and the exact description of them are known to God only. There are descriptions of Heaven and of Hell in the Quran and the Traditions of Muhammad but they should not be taken literally" (Abdalati, 1975, 13).

The significance of this is more concerned with the present than the future. Any wrong thought or intention, any evil deed however hidden from human eyes has been seen and recorded. It will not be forgotten, and ultimately we will have to account for it. Of course God is merciful and forgiving: sincere repentance (and the appropriate actions to compensate for the evil) will wipe the record clean. Those who have not heard the divine message will not be punished as if they had.

Belief in God's intervention in the world. Muslims believe that God is in control, and that the world is a meaningful place as a result. Muslims therefore feel dependent on the will of God.

Belief about humanity. Muslims believe that humans rank high in the order of creation. People are born innocent, free from sin - and will remain so unless they decide otherwise.

We decide to sin; and we can decide to repent. It is up to us - there is no sinful nature to blame.

2. Prayer - *salat* .

Muslims pray five times a day, to help them keep God closely in mind at all time. The prayers are set, in Arabic, and learnt by heart from an early age.

To show that they should worship with the whole body, the prayer includes prostration and a series of precise bodily movements. The worshipper must be clear from the pollution of the outside world, and have performed Wuzu (or Wadu) - ritual ablutions. It is generally the rule that women do not worship in front of men, so they do not suffer from immodest glances by men. Prayer can be anywhere - and most prayers are timed to take place at home. Men congregate on Fridays (around 1.00 p.m.) for Juma ("Friday") prayers.

Rules:

1. The body must be free from impurities.
2. Clothes must be free from impurities.
3. The place of prayer must be clean.
4. The body must be decently covered.
5. Ablution must be performed.
6. Worshippers must face the Kaaba (QIBLA = the "direction").
7. Worshipper must form the intention (Neyat)

"I am going to purify myself from all bodily uncleanness preparatory to commencing prayer - that act of duty which will attract my soul near the throne of the most high. In the name of God, the great, the Mighty. All praises are for God who has given us grace to be Muslims. Islam is truth and infidelity falsehood".

Five daily prayers

1. FAJIR (early morning)
2 rakats alone, 2 in congregation.
2. ZOHAR (midday)
4 rakats alone, 4 in congregation, 4 more individual.
3. ASIR (late afternoon)
4 rakats alone, 4 in congregation
4. MAGHRIB (evening)
3 rakats in congregation, 4 individual.
5. ESHA (night, usually before midnight)
4 rakats individual, 4 in congregation, 9 individual.
During Ramadhan, 3 of the final individual rakats are congregational.

Friday Prayers = JUM'AH.

Congregational prayer is preceded by the AZAN, or "call to prayer".

MOVEMENTS

1. TAKBER TAHREMAH (entrance to the prayer)
Hands raised to ears (shoulders for women): Allahu Akbar.
2. QEYAM - standing position
3. RUKU - bow - hands on knees, looking at spot on floor between feet.
4. SAJDAH - prostration. Forehead on ground, elbows raised.

5. JALSA - sitting, hands on knees, figures pointing to floor.
6. SALAM to the right, then to the left (head turned).

MUSLIM PRAYERS

Takber	God is Most Great (Allahu Akbar)
Sana	Glory be to Thee O God: Thine is the praise, Blessed is Thy Name, and exalted is Thy Majesty. There is no God but Allah.
Tawuz	I seek Thy Refuge, O God, against the evil of Satan the accursed One.
Tasmeyah	In the name of God, the Benificent, the merciful.
Sura Fatiha (Quran)	All praise is due to God, Lord of all Worlds, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Thee do we worship and Thee do we seek assistance. Guide us on the right path - the path of those on whom Thou hast been gracious; not the path of those who have earned Thy disfavour nor of those who have gone astray. Amen.
Al-ikhlass	Say, He, God, is one. God is He of whom nothing is independent. He begets not, nor is he begotten. None is like Him.
Takber	God is most Great.
Subhana	Glory be to my Lord, the Magnificent.
Tasme'	God listens to those who glorify Him.
Tahmed	Our Lord, praise be to Thee.
Tashahud -	All reverence, worship and sanctity are due to Allah. Peace and blessings of Allah be upon you, O Prophet. Peace be on us all and on the righteous Servants of Allah. I testify that there is none worthy of being worshipped but Allah and I testify that Muhammad (praised be his name) is his chosen servant and messenger.
Darood -	O God, shower Thy blessings on Muhammad and his descendents as Thou has showered thy blessings on Abraham and his descendants. Truly Thou Art praiseworthy, the Glorious One.
Dua Masoorah -	O God forgive me and forgive my father and my mother. Forgive all the believing men and women. Forgive the living and the dead. Thou art One who accepts the prayers of Thy servants, O God. Grant Thy Mercy O Merciful One.
Salam -	Peace be upon you and the Mercy of God.

3. Almsgiving (zakat).

Muslims are expected to give two and a half per cent of their free income to the community to help the poor and needy - their those close to home or in the third world. Particular collections are taken during Ramadan, since the period of fasting focuses the mind on giving.

4. Fasting (saum).

The month of Ramadan is set apart for the fast. Muslims expect to go without food, drink, tobacco and sexual relations between sunrise and sunset - traditionally from the point when a black and a white thread can be distinguished from each other. The fast should also be a time of devotion, including readings from the Qur'an and prayers. Some are excused from the duty to fast - the very young, pregnant women and nursing mothers, the sick, and the old. The fast should not produce any threat to life. Travellers can choose to fast when their journey is over, if the journey coincides with the fast. (Fasting and strenuous activity do not go well together). Young children below the age of fasting sometimes fast for short periods to give them the experience, and to show solidarity with their family. At the end of the day, the family would eat a high energy snack (sweets or dates are popular) and prepare for the family meal. They should not overeat during the evenings. Breakfast next morning may be taken before daylight dawns, accompanied by prayer and Quran readings.

5. Pilgrimage (hajj).

Healthy Muslims are expected to go on pilgrimage to the Kaaba in Mecca once in their lifetime, *if they can afford it*. No family should be impoverished by the pilgrimage. In Mecca, the hajj consists of a set journey, established first by Muhammad in his last pilgrimage (632 CE), from the *haram*, house of Allah, around the nearby hills and villages. Pilgrims wear the same simple clothing, to indicate equality.

Muslim Law

The first century after Muhammad was important in legal terms - but it is obscure. This was a period of case law, with which the caliphs did not interfere. It was in this way that the Sunna, customary law, established precedents. As it became established, its conservative nature was difficult to break through - even Islamic principles found it difficult to penetrate, but as it did, new Islamic sunna were established.

Eventually there developed the concept of "the sunna of the prophet", attempting to recover material from the early period. Some laws based on the Quran were observed from the beginning - there is early evidence for the adoption of a divorce regulation - but few Quranic injunctions appear to have been enforced. Arabian customary law did not move quickly. In the first century after Muhammad, pre-Islamic law continued - there was no specifically Islamic law. Even the caliphs were thought not to be entitled to change it. In developing Arab law, influences crept in from Roman, Talmudic and Canon law. After eventual Islamicization, most of these did not survive.

Legal Specialists. The Umayyad dynasty wished to unify loosely organized tribes and eliminate strife. Islamic judges (kazis) were given jurisdiction over Muslims who made use of suitably Islamic precedents (sunna) and common sense (ra'y) in applying Quranic rules. This proved to be an important first step which laid a foundation for later legal development. By 720 CE, the Kazis had become specialists, who together began to flesh out in detail the Islamic way of life. They gave opinions on all matters of everyday life.

Schools of Law. These consisted of scholars ('ulama') and lawyers (fukaha') - private individuals with specialist interests. Schools grew up in Kufa, Basra, Medina, Mecca and Damascus. They shared a common doctrine, and took Quranic injunctions seriously. There developed the concept of "the living tradition of the school", constant and well established principles (sunna madiya). Consensus (ijma) - the opinion of the majority - was all important. Minority views were disregarded. This kept the doctrine conservative and traditional, inhibiting new ideas. The normative (fully developed) view of each school was the final form developed by the last generation - a consensus of a limited group, and certainly not of all Muslims. They produced a group view, even though the view is sometimes accredited to the school founder by name. Schools tended also to seek authority by tracing the view back to a companion of the prophet.

Examples:

The Hanifi school - after Abu Hanifa (died 767 CE) from Iraq
- supporting free opinion.

The Maliki school of Malik ibn Anas (died 795 CE)
- the earliest legal document to survive, based on the sunna of Medina.

The Shafi'i school of Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (died 819 CE).

Gradually the Sunna evolved - the idealized doctrine of this type of scholarship, based on the Quran. Schools looked very carefully at the wide range of Hadith, "traditions" about Muhammad. Some were historically useful, but others were dubious and, at worst, fraudulent - created to prove a theological point. Nevertheless, 200 years after Muhammad's death, a recognizable Sunna of Islamic legal opinion was in place.

Some groups within Islam

Sunni. The majority group in Islam are called Sunni, "orthodox". This developed out of the most commonly recognized line of 'caliphs' ('successors'). There are sunni muslims in all Muslim countries, and in most they are in the majority. Most Muslims in Britain are Sunni.

Shi'a. The word means 'separatists' and refers to a strong minority faction which opposed the early caliphs and campaigned for Ali and his line to become caliphs. Ali became the fourth caliph, but was killed after a troubled period. Ali represented Muhammad's relatives, opposed to the apparent take-over of the Meccan converts. There were twelve recognized imams: the twelfth disappeared in 873 CE at Samarra - and the return of the "hidden immam" is still expected. The tombs of imams have become shrines. Stories of martyrdom play an important part in Shia consciousness. There is a major festival on the first ten days of the month of Muharram: The majority of Iranian Muslims are Shi'ite, and 50% of Iraqis, with smaller minorities elsewhere.

Isma'ilis. Shiites, sometimes called Seveners as they recognized seven imams ending with Isma'il. They established the "Fatimid" caliphate in North Africa (909-1171). After centuries of decline, the Isma'ilis established themselves in the 19th century.

Kharijites. These began around 656 CE, as puritanical opponents of Ali, totally opposed to aristocracy in demanding equality and democracy. There are a few scattered communities today.

Ahmadis. Beliefs in a Messianic saviour were not unusual. Ahmadis regarded Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) as spiritual leader, redeemer and prophet - and were criticised by orthodox Muslims as turning Ahmad into another prophet.

Druze. Established in the eleventh century C.E. by Darazi, and Ishmaeli missionary, the Druze developed distinctive doctrines. They are mainly located around Lebanon and Syria.

INNER DIMENSIONS OF ISLAM

The "beautiful names" of God include al-Zahir, "The Outer" and al-Batin, "The Inner". Islam is more than an outer shell of ritual: the externals of faith reveal a deep spirituality which should integrate experience and perception:

"Life has many dimensions, many layers, many phases. On the one hand, all of them should exist fused together, in continuing dynamic interaction with each other. For life is an integrated whole" (Khurram Murad, Foreword to al-Ghazali 1983,7)

Murad went on to warn against the imbalance of studying each dimension in isolation, and conversely of not allowing each dimension its proper place in the study.

The "inner" dimension looks beyond externals to intentions - as Muhammad said, "Actions are valued according to intentions". External forms of worship are preceded by the 'intention' (*ne'at*). This raises the question of whether intentions alone suffice, without the external disciplines of prayer, pilgrimage, fasting. If 'pilgrimage' describes life's journey, conducted in a spirit of devotion and purity, do Muslims still have to go to the Kaaba in Mecca? The answer of Islam has generally been 'yes' - inner and outer dimensions complement each other, providing a spiritual discipline, a structure to faith, and an opportunity to demonstrate obedience to God's will.

Sufism.

The Sufis - seeking the inner meaning of Islam. There has been from early days a tendency for certain writers and preachers to look for hidden depth in the message of Islam. A group of people with whom this was generally associated was the Sufis, a group which still exists today. The word Sufi is probably derived from the woollen garment which many of them wore. The Arabic Suf means wool - although many other derivations have been suggested, especially by the Sufis themselves. In the early days the Sufis made use of music and dance, and in some parts of the ancient world, became known to travellers as the "whirling dervishes". One of their main themes was love, particularly the love between the worshipper and God. When their teaching, and their poetry, came across into Europe via Spain, similar ideas and poems were given a quarterly setting by the troubadours. Here the sentiments about love are refined and stylised, but the connection with God has disappeared.

The Sufis looked back to Muhammad as their founder. They pointed to aspects of his teaching which dealt with love for God and the possibility of union with God or closeness with God. There may however have been a tendency for them to seek the respectability of association with the prophet. It took centuries for the Sufi mystics to be respected in society. Some were regarded as heretics, and one was executed for his teachings. It was only in the 12th century that the teachings of the mystics were set within an acceptable Muslim framework.

In the following quotations, study the Sufi writings carefully, pondering on each phrase and sentence. Do not move on until you are happy you have understood the sense, or until you can get no further. (A few statements are a little obscure in their allusions).

Note particularly that they are dealing with inner spirituality rather than the outer form of religion.

Rabia (around 800 AD). Rabia had been kidnapped as a child and sold as a slave, but she devoted her life to prayer and the service of God. She had many disciples, and her advice was often sought. A theme found in her work is that of *union with God. through love.* In the following passage, certain doctrines are regarded as hindrances to the true vision of God, that their true meaning has to be sought beneath the surface.

"One day Rabia was seen carrying fire in one hand and water in the other and she was running with speed. They asked her what was the meaning of her action and where she was going. She replied: 'I am going to light a fire in Paradise and pour water onto Hell, so that both veils may completely disappear from the pilgrims and their purpose may be sure, and the servants of God may see Him, without any object of hope or motive of fear'. What if the hope of Paradise and the fear of Hell did not exist? No one could worship his lord or obey him."

Thus, the worshipper has to get beyond the primitive notions of reward and punishment (i.e. Paradise and Hell) before they can truly perceive the nature of the divine.

"The best thing for the servant, who desires to be near his Lord, is to possess nothing in this world or the next, except Him. I have not served God from fear of Hell, for I shall be like a wretched hireling if I did it from fear, nor from love of Paradise, for I should be a bad servant if I served for the sake of what was given, that I have served Him only for the love of Him and out of desire for Him.

The Neighbour first and then the house. Is it not enough for me that I am given leave to worship Him? Even if Heaven and Hell were not, does it not behove us to obey Him? He is worthy of worship without any intermediate motive.

Oh My Lord, if I worship Thee from fear of Hell, burn me in Hell; and if I worship Thee from hope of Paradise exclude me thence; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty".

The next passage uses the metaphor of God the Lover, or the Beloved.

"The groaning and the yearning of the lover of God will not be satisfied until it is satisfied in the Beloved.

I have made Thee the Companion of my heart,
But my body is available for those who desire its company.
And my body is friendly towards its guests,
But the Beloved of my heart is the Guest of my soul.
My peace is in solitude but my Beloved is always with me.
Nothing can take the place of His love and it is the test for me among mortal beings.
Whenever I contemplate His Beauty, He is my *Mihrab*, towards Him is my *Qibla* - Oh Healer of souls, the heart feeds upon its desire and it is the striving towards union with Thee that has healed my soul. Thou art my Joy and my Life to eternity. Thou wast the source of my life, from Thee came my ecstasy. I have separated myself from all creative beings: my hope is for union with Thee, for that is the goal of my quest".

Al-Junayd (around 900 AD). Al-Junayd was a Persian born and brought up in Baghdad. He helped to systematise the teachings of Sufism.

"The journey from this world to the next, giving up worldly things, is easy for the believer: the journey separating us from dependence on creatures to the Creator is hard: the journey from the self to God is very hard: and to be able to abide in God is harder still.

Sufism means that God makes you die to yourself and makes you alive in Him. It is to purify the heart from the recurrence of creaturely temptations, to say farewell to all the natural inclinations, to subdue the qualities which belong to human nature, to keep far from the claims of the senses, to adhere to spiritual qualities, to ascend by means of Divine knowledge, to be occupied with that which is eternally the best, to give wise council to all people, faithfully to observe the truth, and to follow the Prophet in respect of the religious law.

Love means that the attributes of the lover are changed into those of the Beloved. Now he lives in accordance with the sayings of God: "When I love him, I will be his eye by which he sees and his hearing by which he hears and his hand by which he reaches out".

The saint who desires to attain to the unification of the human will with the Divine Will (which is the preliminary to the complete union), should be as a dead body in the hands of God, acquiescing in all of the vicissitudes which come to pass through His decree and all that is brought about by the might of His power, for the saint is submerged in the ocean of Unity, by passing away from himself and from the demands of the preachers upon himself and from all response to them, into the realisation of the Unicity of God, into the direct experience of His presence. He leaves behind him his own feelings and actions, as he passes into the life with God, and so becomes that which God desired of him, that the servant, at the last, should return to the state in which he was at first, and should become as he was before he began to be.

God gives those who know him the ardent desire to behold His Essence, then knowledge becomes vision and vision revelation, and revelation contemplation and contemplation existence - with and in God. Words are hushed to silence, life becomes death, explanations (which are necessary for finite minds in this world) come to an end, signs (which are a concession to those who are weak in faith) are defaced. Mortality (*Fana*) is ended and immortality (*Baqa*) is made perfect. Weariness and care cease, the elements perish and there remains what will not cease as time that is timeless ceases not.

The spirits of those who know God rejoice in communion with the Unseen abiding in the Presence of the All-Glorious, the Pre-Eminent, in the cloud of glory which envelops Him, in the shadow of His holiness. They have attained to a high station and they pass on thence to yet greater perfection, to an absolute glory which is immaterial, and they walk, clad in the mantle of Unification."

Al-Hallaj (around 920 AD). Al-Hallaj was a Persian. His nickname Hallaj means carder of consciences. His teaching was considered to be heretical and he was put to an agonising death. The following passage is one to which his opponents took exception.

"The Sufi is he who aims, from the first, at reaching God, the Creative Truth. Until he has found what he sought, he takes no rest, nor does he give heed to any persons. For thy sake I haste over land and water: over the plain I pass and the mountain I cleave and from everything I meet I turn my face, until the time when I reach that place where I am alone with thee.

I am He Whom I love and He Whom I love is I,
 We are two spirits in dwelling one body.
 When thou seest me, thou seest Him,
 and when thou seest Him, then thou dost see us both".

Al-Hallaj was trying to express his sense of the Sufis unity with God. His opponents chose to regard his words as a claim to be divine.

Ibn Sina (Avisenna) (around 1037 AD).

"The Beauty of God is shown by His Countenance and His Bounty by what He gives. His Beauty surpasses all other beauty, but it is the veil of His Beauty, and its outward manifestation is linked with its inmost reality. So the revelation of his glory is linked with its concealment, as the sun, if it is lightly veiled, is revealed more plainly, and when it is revealed in its splendour, it is veiled by its own glowing light, yet the King manifests His glory to His creatures and does not withhold from them the right to meet with Him, but they can only approach Him according to their capacity.

The true interior prayer is the contemplation of God by a pure heart, detached from all worldly desires, concerned not with bodily attitudes, but with the movements of the soul. Such a soul invokes the supreme being, for its own perfection, through the contemplation of Him, and for its highest happiness, through its immediate knowledge of Him. Upon such a soul the Divine Grace descends, while it is at prayer.

Every creative thing, by its nature, longs for the perfection which means its wellbeing, and the perfection that One Who is essentially perfect. The most perfect object of love is the First Cause of all things: for His Glory is revealed except to those who are not able to receive the revelation. He is hidden only from those who are veiled by shortcomings and weakness and defect.

But those who know God have stripped off the veils of their bodies and have devoted themselves to concern with God...the soul then has reached the light of the sun and is able to receive the Divine Illumination when it wills, free from all worldly distractions, until it is wholly sanctified. The one who knows God desires God only, none other and adores Him as the only Object worthy of adoration and He is moved not by hope of recompense nor by fear of punishment nor anything else, for his eyes are fixed upon his lord alone.

There are stages and degrees in the contemplative life, to which the one who knows God alone in this world attains. The first step is called Will, which means certainty as to the Way. Through this the one who knows God will discipline his soul, through his faith, and will direct it towards God, so that he may attain the joy of union. The second stage is that of self discipline, which is directed towards three things, removing all save God from the choice of the one who knows God, subduing his carnal soul with his rational soul, so that the imagination and intellect shall be attracted to the higher things, not the lower, and making the conscience mindful of admonition. The third stage means that the soul now free from sensual desires, is filled with good thoughts and gives itself up to the spiritual love which seeks to be ruled by the qualities of the Beloved.

Now appear flashes of the Divine Light, like fleeting gleams of lightning, which pass away. By those who experience them, these are called "mystic states" and every state brings joy and becomes more frequent, as the one who knows God is more able to receive them. In the fourth stage the mystic sees God in all things, and then in the fifth stage he becomes accustomed to God's Presence, the brief flashes of lightning become a shining flame and he attains to direct knowledge of God and is continually in fellowship with Him.

Then the mystic passes on to the stage of contemplating God in Himself: he is absent yet present, he is departing yet abiding. Then he turns to the world of Reality and his contemplation of God is stable and continuous, and when he passes from striving to attainment, his inmost soul becomes a polished mirror reflecting the Face of God. Then he passes away from himself and contemplates only the Divine Glory and if he looks upon

himself, it is only as the one contemplating, and when he has come to this, he has attained complete union with God".

Al-Hujwiri (around 1079 AD).

"Know that I have found the universe to be the shrine of the Divine mysteries, for to create things as God entrusted Himself and within that which exists as He hidden Himself. Substances and accidents, elements, bodies, forms and dispositions are all veils of these Mysteries. In the doctrine of the Unity of God, the existence of all these would be polytheism, but God Most High has ordained that this universe, by its own being, should be veiled from His Unity. Therefore, the spirits of men are concerned only with their own phenomenal existence, so that their minds fail to perceive the Divine mysteries and their spirits that dimly apprehend how wonderfully near to them is God. Man is engrossed with himself and heedless of everything else, and so he fails to recognise the Unity behind all things and is blind to the Beauty of Oneness and will not taste the joy offered to him by the One, and is turned aside by the vanities of this world from the vision of the Truth and allows the animal soul to predominate, though it is the most potent of all veils between himself and God.

The new sanctuary is the place where contemplation is, and only that one to whom the whole world is the meeting place where he draws near to God and a place of retreat where he finds fellowship with Him, knows what it is to be the friend of God. When the veil has been removed, the whole world is his sanctuary, but while he is still veiled, the whole world will remain dark to him, for the darkest of things is the dwelling place of the Beloved, without the Beloved.

Human satisfaction is equanimity under the decrees of Fate, whether it holds or whether it gives and steadfastness of the soul in regarding passing events, whether they are a manifestation of the Divine Majesty, or of the Divine Beauty. It is all the same to the true servant, whether he is in want or receives bounteously, he remains equally satisfied thereby, and whether he be consumed in the fire of the wrath of the Divine Majesty or whether he is luminated by the light of the mercy of the Divine Beauty, it is all one to him. Both are manifestations of God and whatever comes from him is altogether good.

The true mystic, in seeing the act, beholds Him Who acts and since the human being, whatever his qualities, whether he be full of faults or free from them, whether he be veiled or whether he has received illumination from God, belongs to God and has been created by Him, to quarrel with the human act is to quarrel with the Divine Agent.

To Him belong Beauty and Majesty and Perfection. His Perfection can be attained only by those who are themselves perfect and whose imperfection has passed away. He whose evidence in the knowledge of God is the Beauty of God, longs continually for the Vision of Him and he whose evidence is the Majesty of God is always hating his own qualities and his heart is filled with awe. Now longing is the result of love and the hatred of human qualities likewise, since the unveiling of human qualities is due only to love. Therefore faith and the knowledge of God are love and the mark of love is obedience.

Since the Beloved is subsistent, the lover must be annihilated, for the jealousy of the Beloved requires that the subsistence of the lover be annihilated, so that His own dominion be made absolute and the annihilation of the lover's attributes can only be accomplished by the establishment of the Essence of the Beloved. The lover cannot remain in possession of his own attributes, for in that case he would have no need of the Beauty of the Beloved, but since he knows that he lives by the Beauty of the Beloved, he seeks of necessity to annihilate his own attributes since by retaining them he is veiled from the Beloved. So out of love to his Beloved, he becomes an enemy of himself".

Al Ghazali (Abu Hamid Muhammad) - 1058-1111 CE.

The epithet 'al Ghazali' means "the Spinner". Sufis (coming from the word 'wool') favoured the metaphorical use of terms in spinning and weaving - spinning the material (doctrine) which forms the foundation of the garment (faith). Born at Tus (Iran), he studied at Nishapur and he reached a position equivalent to Professor in Baghdad (the Nizamiyya madrasa ("school")) whilst in his early thirties - at a newly formed training establishment for theologians. Al Ghazali left his post after only 4 years in 1095, disillusioned by philosophy and theology, and sought illumination as a mystic. The auto-biography of his spiritual search was *Al-munquidh min ad-datal*, The Deliverer from Error. The most accessible version in English is by W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* (1953). (See also Watt's *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazali* (Edinb. 1963). His main contribution was a bringing together of philosophy (based particularly on the works of the Greek philosophers) and the Muslim tradition. *Tahafut al-falasifah*, The Inconsistency of Philosophers identified 17 heretical doctrines, and 3 doctrines which could only be described as 'unbelief'.

He confronted (intellectually) the Shiite Ismailis, "the people of esoteric meaning "(batiniyya), their doctrine of the infallible imam, and their activities as "Assassins". He also criticized Legalistic scholars, so concerned with the outward detail of the law but who "can tell you nothing about the simpler things of the spiritual life, such as the meaning of sincerity towards God our trust in Him" (Watt 1963, 113). Al Ghazali then studied the mystical tradition, at first academically rather than practically. He set up a hostel for young disciples back home in Tus, and spent 4 years teaching in Nishapur.

His greatest work was *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, "Bringing Religious Sciences to Life" The *Ihya'* has four parts: -

- a) the service of God - ritual, prayer, almsgiving, fasting etc.
- b) social customs (food, marriage, property)
- c) vices - how to control the mind
- d) the mystical life, and virtues.

He taught that scrupulous observance of the externals of faith greatly assists mystical insight. Some Sufis had expressed themselves heretically, and others minimized the need to continue with Muslim practice. Al Ghazali steered clear of both "errors" and forced Muslim intellectuals to look seriously at Sufi insights.

All that we behold and perceive by our senses bears undeniable witness to the existence of God and His power and His knowledge and the rest of His attributes, whether these things be manifested or hidden, the stone and the clod, the plants and the trees, the living creatures, the heavens and the earth and the stars, the dry land and the ocean, the fire and the air, substance and accident, and indeed we ourselves are the chief witness to Him ..but just as the bat sees only at night, when the light is veiled by darkness, and cannot therefore see in the daytime, because of the weakness of its sight, which is dazzled by the full light of the sun, so also the human mind is too weak to behold the full glory of the Divine Majesty.

God is One, the Ancient of Days, without prior, Eternal, having no beginning. Everlasting, having no end, continuing for evermore..He is the First and the Last, the transcendent and the immanent, Whose wisdom extendeth over all..He cannot be likened to anything else that exists nor is anything like unto Him, nor is He contained by the earth or the heavens, for He is exalted far above the earth and the dust thereof..The fact of His existence is apprehended

by men's reason and He will be seen as He is by that gift of spiritual vision, which He will grant unto the righteous, in the Abode of Eternity, when their beatitude shall be made perfect by the vision of His glorious Countenance.

[Note: Ghazali taught that theological understanding should be based on reason; that spiritual vision was a gift to the righteous - that is those who keep Islamic law.]

He is the exalted, Almighty, puissant, Supreme, Who slumbereth not nor sleepeth: neither mortality nor death have dominion over Him. His is the power and the kingdom and the glory and the majesty and to Him belongs creation and the rule over what He has created: He alone is the Giver of life, He is Omniscient, for His knowledge encompasseth all things, from the deepest depths of the earth to the highest heights of the heavens. Not the smallest atom in the earth or the heavens, but is known unto Him, yea, He is aware of how the ants creep upon the hard rock in the darkness of the night: He perceives the movement of the mote in the ether. He beholds the thoughts which pass through the minds of men, and the range of their fancies and the secrets of their hearts, by His knowledge, which was from aforetime. All that is other than Him - men and jinns, angels and Satan, the heavens and the earth, animate beings, plants, inorganic matter, substance and accident, what is intelligible and what is sensible - all were created by His power out of non-existence. He brought them into being, when as yet they had no being, for from eternity He alone existed and there was no other with Him."

Al Ghazali's writings are studied today as immense contributions to Muslim thought and spirituality, combining together the outward form with the inner spiritual meaning.