

MRS. ULFAT AZIZ - US - SAMAD

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**THE  
GREAT  
RELIGIONS  
OF  
THE  
WORLD**

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## About the Author

Mrs. Ulfat Aziz-us-Samad was born on November 2, 1932, in the well-known Qazi family of Peshawar. She was educated at St. Xavier's college (Peshawar), and then at the University of Peshawar, from where she obtained her Master's degree in English Literature. During her stay in England in the fifties she took keen interest in the activities of the Working Muslim Mission.

Mrs. Ulfat Samad is fond of reading books on a variety of subjects and collecting works of art. Her modest collection of antiques includes some rare pieces of original Gandhara Buddhist sculpture of the first and second centuries C.E. and Aryan pottery of about 1400 B.C.

She is the author of several books. Her *Islam and Christianity* was first published from Lahore in 1958 and several times reprinted. A revised and somewhat abridged edition of *Islam and Christianity* was brought out from Karachi (1970 and 1974) and Kuwait (1987). In 1975 she rewrote the book, and a considerably enlarged edition, entitled *A Comparative study of Christianity and Islam*, was published by Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, in 1976 (second edition 1980). In 1976 Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i-Islam, Lahore, brought out the first edition of her book *The Great Religions of the World*. Mrs. Ulfat Samad says that it was the unfair (often offensive) criticism of the Prophet and Islam by the teachers of the Presentation Convent School, where she received her early education, that aroused her to take interest in Comparative Religion and study the different religions of the world.

Mrs. Ulfat Aziz-us-Samad is a member of the University women's Federation and takes active part in the social welfare activities of the Federation.

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## **PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION**

The first edition of the **Great Religions of the World** was published from Lahore (Pakistan) in 1976. Since then many new books on the living religions have been published throwing new light on them. I have had the good fortune of reading some of these books and also re-reading and pondering deeply over the Sacred Books of the world. I think I have gained deeper insight into the faiths that men live by and come closer to seeing them from inside, as the believers see them. In the light of this deeper sympathy and better understanding -- better than what I had before -- I have thought it necessary to make some additions and alterations in the book. It is still not as satisfactory as I would have liked it to be. The fact is that the book needs to be thoroughly revised, even rewritten, and for that unfortunately I did not have the time.

I am grateful to Mr. Abdul Razak of Bombay for his decision to bring out this new edition of **The Great Religions of the World** from India, thus providing me with the opportunity to make some necessary changes in the book.

Peshawar

June 15, 1990

ULFAT AZIZ-US-SAMAD

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

There are several histories of religion. Most of them have been written by Christian authors, who invariably tend to present the non-Christian faiths in an unfavourable light, so that they might prove Christianity to be the only true religion. The one or two Muslim authors who have made the effort to write about the great religions of the world have generally followed in the footsteps of, and even depended for their material on, the Christian authors, except in their chapters on Islam. Whereas the Christian authors treat Islam as they treat the other non-Christian religions ----- that is, without any earnest attempt to understand and appreciate it ----- the Muslim authors naturally present Islam as a true revealed religion. But their treatment of religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism etc., is not very different from that of the Christian writers. My attitude and aim is different from that of my distinguished predecessors in this field. I am more interested in discovering the revelation of truth in the various living religions and to appreciate their beauties. My study of the Scriptures and authentic works about the great religions of the world has led me to the conclusion that they all have truth in them; that, in fact, the original gospels in these faiths had so much in common that they might almost be considered identical. In writing about the various religions, therefore, I have been led to make a distinction between the original messages as they were conveyed to the world by their respective founders and the theological formulations and systems that developed later on, very often by importing alien elements into them and distorting the original messages. For my information I have depended on :-

Firstly, the Scriptures of the various religions. Fortunately, very good translations in English of most of the sacred books, prepared by scholars who actually believe in them, are available. To them I have turned more than to any other books to gain understanding of the different faiths. The study of the Scriptures, held in great reverence by millions of people all over the world, has been a source of great happiness and inspiration to me. They have helped to broaden my outlook and deepen my sympathies. It was impossible for me not to rise above all that was petty and mean while reading them, be they the Bible or the Qur'an, the Bhagvad Gita or the Dhammapada, the Gathas of Zarathushtra or the Analects of Confucius.

Secondly, the books written in exposition of the various religions by scholars who acknowledge them and have faith in them. Whenever I have depended upon any book by an author who does not believe in the religion concerned, I have made sure that the views expressed by him are fully supported by the letter and spirit of the scriptures of that faith. In all cases I have maintained an independent and critical attitude. My aim has been to find the truth, and not to support any preconceived thesis.

I hope and pray that this little book will lead to a better understanding of the great religions of the modern man and bring their followers closer together. For, while religion has often been used by interested persons to divide and create hatred among human beings, I know of no other force which can bring human beings together and unite them in bonds of sympathy and love as religion, when rightly understood, can do. Religion alone can make man sacrifice his own interests for those of others and create in him the conviction that the eternally true and right are realities which must take precedence of everything in our allegiance. Thus it can lead to, what Confucius described as, "the evolution of True Manhood" and make man "the Vicegerent of God on earth", as conceived by Islam; apart from bringing to the human soul and the world the peace that the modern age so desperately needs.

No one can be more conscious than I am myself of my limitations for the task that I have undertaken in this book and of its many imperfections. Not the least serious of these is my inability to read the Scriptures in the original languages and exclusive dependence on their English translations, which, even when excellently done, cannot take the place of the originals. For reasons of space I have been compelled to leave out of discussion several aspects of the religions I have described in this book and to deal with some other aspects very briefly, thus introducing a certain amount of vagueness at places and making the presentation as a whole not so satisfactory as I would have wished it to be.

I am grateful to my husband for his loving co-operation. Without his help this book (particularly the chapters on the Indian religions) could never have been written. My thanks are also due to Mr. Nasir Ahmad, of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i-Islam (Lahore), for giving the suggestion to write such a book in the first place, and his continuing interest despite the inordinate delay on my part. Finally, I must acknowledge my indebtedness to many distinguished scholars who have written about the different religions; some of them I have mentioned in the bibliography at the end of this book. There are, however, many more whose works I have read and from whom I have learnt a great deal, even though I did not always agree with them.

Peshawar

ULFAT AZIZ-US-SAMAD

March 9, 1975

## INTRODUCTION

Religious consciousness seems to be ingrained in human nature. If we go down into the depths of man, despite the variety of religious expressions and structures, we reach the *humus* from which the religious question proceeds. Psychological, ethnological and sociological researches are coming ever more to recognise the presence of this original space in man. Beyond the systems, and together with the differences between religion and religion, there is a historically constant disposition which orientates man in a specific way and tends to express itself in religious forms.

A description of this religious dimension of man can be attempted by following various routes and with the help of various ways of speaking. On one hand can be seen the movement of the human mind which does not cease from questioning itself about its source and beginning, the radical need of the spirit to discover the ultimate meaning of his existence and of his action in the world, and to understand his relationship with everything. On the other hand the will discovers itself directed closely towards a good, which attracts it under the form of absolute and which transcends every time 'the goods' which are offered it, and towards which it feels able to organise relationship.

Whatever way one looks at man in the sources of his interior dynamism, one arrives always at a problem and at a tendency to integration: with himself, with the world and society, with the Absolute. All this denotes an opening of the finite human being towards the infinite and absolute, a gap in the human psyche which no partial reality can fill.

It is true that this search often remains in the confused state, like a question hidden in the mind. For many it is no more than an indistinct feeling of uncertainty, anxiety, instability, an obscure desire for fullness, which is sometimes aroused under the impact of certain events or impressions, while for the most part it lies inert, overwhelmed by the problems of daily living. It is also true that it emerges only in privileged circumstances, under the stimulus of particular conditions, but we cannot deny to human beings the opening on to these horizons which represent an ultimate and necessary point of reference to his existence. It is this autonomous region of human consciousness and this specific inclination that has made religion possible.

Religion as it exists in history is, however, a very complex phenomenon. It includes a vast number of beliefs and practices of extremely diverse nature. Belief in and propitiation of the



so-called spirits of trees and rivers, worship of the tombs of the dead, ceremonial feeding of the ghosts of ancestors, totem and taboo, ritual eating of some kinds of food and abstaining from other kinds, self-flagellation and starving of the body in the hope of purifying and strengthening the soul as well as ceremonial feasts, belief in many gods as well as belief in the one and only God, worshipping gods of stones having the shapes of animals and freaks as well as the worship of God as an unseen and omnipresent spirit, life-long chastity and nunnery as well as temple-prostitution -- all these and many more are termed religious beliefs and practices.

The mistake of the anthropologists lies in attempting to trace the origin of all the religious beliefs and practices to a single factor. For instance, Grant Allen, following Herbert Spencer, thinks that religion sprang from the worship of a Deified man.<sup>1</sup> In his book *The Evolution of the Idea of God* he traces three stages of man's conception of the dead. In the first stage the difference between life and death is but ill or inadequately perceived; the dead are thought of as yet bodily living. Hence the corpses are preserved and eventually mummified. During this stage gods as such are for the most part unknown; it is the corpses of friends and ancestors that are worshipped and revered. In the second stage death is recognised as a physical fact, but is regarded as only temporary. In this stage, men begin to bury the corpses, look forward to the resurrection of the body and expect the life of the world to come. In the third stage the soul is regarded as a distinct entity from the body; it survives it in a separate and somewhat shadowy form: so that the opinion as to the future, proper to this stage, is not belief in the Resurrection of the Body, but a belief in the Immortality of the Soul. And just as the idea of Resurrection arose from and is closely bound up with the practice of burial, the idea of Immortality arose from and is closely bound up with the practice of burning the dead. The idea of God, says Grant Allen, took birth during the second and third stages, when the ghosts or spirits of the dead ancestors began to be worshipped as household-gods and the ghosts of the dead chiefs or rulers of the tribe as tribal gods. Later on with the rise of kingship came the conception of the Supreme God and polytheism gradually gave way to monotheism. "In almost every case where we can definitely track him to his rise", writes the author of the *Evolution of the Idea of God*, "the deity thus begins with a Deified Man,

1. Grant Allen, *Evolution of the Idea of God*. (The Thinker's Library. London, 1931.)

elevated by his worshippers to divine rank (after his death) and provided with a history of miraculous incident."

Sir James Frazer, on the other hand, believes that religion developed out of magic, or rather as a result of the realization of the inefficacy of magic.<sup>2</sup> Everywhere, he argues, the Age of Magic comes before the Age of Religion. In the Age of Magic man believed that merely by performing certain ceremonies, accompanied by certain spells, he could control nature and the course of events and produce the desired results. In this age there were no gods. It was only when man discovered that very often the magical ceremony though properly and exactly performed, did not produce the result that it was designed to produce, that he began to think that there must be "other beings, like himself, but far stronger, who, unseen themselves, directed its course and brought about all the varied series of events which he had hitherto believed to be dependent on his own magic." Thus arose the belief in gods, and the primitive man instead of or in addition to, his magic ceremonies began appealing to these superior beings to intervene and grant him the favours that he wanted. Frazer defines religion as "a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life." Thus defined, he continues, "a religion consists of two elements, a theoretical and a practical, namely, a belief in powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them. Of the two, belief clearly comes first, since we must believe in the existence of a divine being before we can attempt to please him."

Another great anthropologist was Sir E. B. Tylor. In *Primitive Culture* he expounds a theory of the origin of religion which is different from both the theories mentioned above. He thinks that the earliest religion was Animism, that is, the belief that everything, in the animate as well as the inanimate world, has an indwelling soul.<sup>3</sup> The primitive man was led to adopt this view first of all on the basis of his experience of dreams. He was, of course, totally incapable of making any sharp distinction between the real things of his waking moments and the things which he saw in his dreams. So when the primitive man awoke from his sleep, he thought he had really somehow been away, doing the things which he saw himself doing in the dream. But as he well

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2. Sir J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (abridged edition), Macmillan, New York, 1959.

3. Sir E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*. (Harper Torch books). New York, 1929.

knew by experience that his body did not go on these excursions, the natural explanation that came to his mind was that every man must be having within him a spirit or a phantom-likeness of his outer self, which could go out of his body and see and be seen itself in dreams. While his body was lying in the cave where he had fallen asleep, his inner self or spirit had gone to other places, met the spirits of other men and engaged in diverse activities. Even waking men in broad daylight sometimes saw these human phantoms, in what are called visions or hallucinations. The primitive man was further led to believe that the soul did not die with the body but lived on after quitting it, for although a man was dead and buried, his phantom-figure continued to appear to his friends in dreams and visions. On precisely the same grounds, the primitive man concluded that his horse and dog, his spear and shield, the sun and the moon, the rivers and mountains also had phantom-likenesses of their bodies or outer forms. Now, some of these spirits -- for instance, the spirits of storms and rivers -- were far stronger than man and could, when angry, destroy his dwellings and cause immense harm to him, and also, when pleased, confer great benefits on him. To these, therefore, and to the spirits of powerful chiefs, the primitive man began addressing his prayers and making offerings and sacrifices to propitiate them and get them onto his side. These became his gods. So, says Sir E.B. Tylor, "Animism, in its full development, includes the belief in souls and in a future state, in controlling deities and subordinate spirits, these doctrines practically resulting in some kind of active worship". Thus according to him all religious beliefs and practices, from the primitive to the most exalted, developed out of Animism.

Other anthropologists and social psychologists have thought of religion as a normal psychological adjustment by which societies build a protective barrier of fantasy against fear. Emile Durkheim, the French sociologist, regards religion as the most primitive of all social phenomena. It is out of religion, he writes, "that there have come, by successive transformations, all the other manifestations of collective activity, law, morality, art, science, political forms etc. In the Beginning all is religious".<sup>4</sup> According to Durkheim, the origin of all religious experience was to be sought in the collective elevation of feeling (euphoria) that occurred when individuals came together in the larger gatherings of the tribe, which was a reaction to the comparative flatness of secular life.

4. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Form of the Religious Life*. Chicago, 1947.

Sigmund Freud, the famous founder of Psycho-analysis, also regards the world of religion as a world of fantasy or illusion.<sup>5</sup> According to him, the need for a faith in God and religion arises from man's feeling of helplessness in relation to the external world. For the individual, as for mankind in general, life is hard to endure. The culture in which he shares imposes on him some measure of privation, and other men occasion him a certain degree of suffering, either in spite of the laws of this culture or because of its imperfections. Added to these are the evils that unvanquished nature inflicts on him. "One would expect," says Freud, "a permanent condition of anxious suspense and severe injury to his innate narcissism to be the result of this state of affairs". Man seeks consolation against this feeling of helplessness, and even to some extent masters it, by the humanization of nature. It is by so doing that he can feel at home in the face of the supernatural, and deal psychically with that frantic anxiety. He can also exorcise, appeal to and bribe humanized Nature, which is his god, and thus rob him of part of his power. Freud says that there is nothing new in this situation, for it has an infantile prototype and is really only the continuation of this. Once before man has been in such a state of helplessness : as a little child in relation to his parents. When he was a child, his father commanded admiration and fear and, at the same time, gave him protection. The child as he grows up soon realises that his father is a being with strictly limited power and by no means endowed with every desirable attribute. He, therefore, looks back to the memory-image of the over-rated father of his childhood, exalts it into a Deity, and brings it into the present and into reality. "When the child grows up and finds that he is destined to remain a child for ever, and that he can never do without protection against unknown and mighty powers, he invests these with the traits of the father-figure; he creates for himself the gods". Thus according to Freud, "Religion is an attempt to get control over the sensory world in which we are placed, by means of the wish-world, which we have developed inside us as a result of biological necessities."

The theories referred to so far regard religion as a natural growth. They maintain that man is naturally and instinctively religious. Now we come to an anthropologist who considers religion to be a historical phenomenon, and declares that the primitive man had no religion. Professor A.C. Hocart links the origin of religion with kingship. He writes :

5. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*. (The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis), London, 1962.

"The earliest known religion is a belief in the divinity of kings. I do not say that it is necessarily the most primitive; but in the earliest records known, man appears to us worshipping gods and their earthly representatives, namely kings.

"We have no right, in the present state of our knowledge, to assert that the worship of gods preceded that of kings; we do not know. Perhaps there never were any gods without kings, or kings without gods".<sup>6</sup>

Lord Raglan also considers religion to be something which men acquire and adopt because of certain historical factors, and not as something inborn or natural.<sup>7</sup> He is of the view that religion is originally and primarily a rite. Beliefs, mythology and theology are invented later on to 'explain' the rite. Men first do something, hoping thereby to obtain favourable results for themselves and the world, and afterwards invent 'explanations' for what they do. The first religion of man -- that is, the earliest rite -- had a symbolical significance and presupposed a certain level of sophistication and civilization. It could not have originated in the primitive or pre-civilized societies. The primitive people borrowed their rights from the civilized people, just as they borrowed some other features of civilization. They, however, mechanically imitated the different movements of the rite without having any idea of their symbolical significance.

The first religious rite, from which the other features of religion evolved in the course of years, was a sort of restoration rite. In very ancient times there was the custom in several communities to choose a young man as the destined sacrificial victim and to keep him with divine honours for a year. He was treated as a privileged guest of the whole community and all his wishes were satisfied. At the end of the year, however he was ritually slaughtered and portions of his flesh and blood were scattered over the fields to give them fertility and to revive the world. The remaining portions of the flesh were eaten and blood drunk to give new life to the participants. It was believed by them that if this ceremony was not performed, the world would grow old and die.

In the course of time the chosen sacrificial victim, who even in the midst of pleasures was haunted by the thought of his destined gruesome end, conspired with the priests to have a substitute slaughtered in his place. The man originally chosen would abdicate for a short while, the substitute would be

6. A.C. Hocart, *Kingship*. (The Thinker's Library, London 1941).

7. Lord Raglan, *The Origins of Religion*. (The Thinker's Library, London, 1919).

compelled to take his place, and be sacrificed. He would then resume his place of honour, thus becoming a sort of permanent ruler. Lord Raglan traces the origins of the idea of God as well as of kingship to the sacrificial victim. The man who had been originally chosen to be the sacrificial victim, but had thus managed to become the permanent guest of the community, while his substitutes were slaughtered year after year, was the first king as well as the first living God. When later on his *divinity* came to be regarded as something separate and distinct from him, though residing in him, the idea of the invisible God took birth, and the man who was king and living God began to be regarded as the incarnation of the invisible God or as his son. In the course of years several myths of saviour-god were invented on the basis of this rite. It was believed that by his death and resurrection in some, remote time, God had given new life and salvation to man. The most important ceremony connected with the cult of the saviour-god was the symbolical eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood, which was supposed to bring the partaker into communion with him.

It must be admitted that each one of the theories mentioned above contains some element of truth. These theories do give satisfactory explanations of the origins of many religious beliefs and customs even now found among different communities. But none of them can be said to have explained away the whole of religion. There are many religious beliefs and practices, on the origins of which these theories, taken individually or collectively, can throw no light. Each one of these theories takes it for granted that religion has evolved from the crude to the refined, from primitive polytheism to moral monotheism. This, however, is not supported by many facts placed before us by several other anthropologists. For instance, Andrew Lang, on the basis of some indisputable facts about pre-historic and primitive societies, puts forward the "hypothesis of an early Supreme Being among savages, obscured later by ancestor-worship and ghost-gods".<sup>8</sup>

Pater W. Schmidt adopted Lang's thesis and has written largely about the conception of a transcendent, all-good God among prehistoric people. Schmidt claims that definite evidence is now available to prove that "these High Gods, in their oldest form, come before all other elements of religion, be they naturism, fetishism, ghost-worship, animism, totemism, or magism, from one or other of which the earlier evolutionistic theories had

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8. Andrew Lang, *The Making of Religion*. London, 1998

derived the origin of religion".<sup>9</sup>

From this it is clear that the more exalted religious ideas, such as belief in a transcendent, all-good God and the obligation to shun all forms of evil and to do good in obedience to Him, have existed side by side with primitive and crude customs, like ancestor-worship, fetishism, totemism, etc., from the very beginning and in all ages. It would not be right to say that the former have evolved from the latter. This can lead to only one conclusion that there have been two entirely different sources of religious beliefs and practices; that, in fact, there have always been two kinds of religion -- the Man-made and the Revealed.

Man-made religion includes animism, corpse-worship, ancestor-worship, king-worship and magical and unedifying rites and sacrifices. The innate and natural religious urge in man has led him to attribute sacredness to several things, to invent and adopt many objects of worship and to find religious expression in performing all sorts of rites. But as man's mental faculties were not adequate to the task, the religions that he invented lacked truth and were not very ennobling. At best they were only vague guesses at truth. It is only this part of the complex whole called religion which the anthropologists have succeeded in accounting for.

The more sublime and exalted religious ideas and practices are beyond the scope of anthropological study. They were revealed to man by God. The one and only God not only creates and sustains the world, but also reveals Himself to man and guides him to the right path. He has not left the people of any country or of any age without true guidance, for He is the Lord and Cherisher of all mankind. All revealed religions in their original forms preached faith in the one and only God, Who is All-good, All-loving, All-knowing, Almighty; and exhorted men to submit themselves to His will and to do good. For, what pleases God is not rituals and sacrifices, but truth, sincerity and kindness. The proof that He wants from them of their love for Him is that they should love and serve His creatures.

These two types of religion -- the Man-made and the Revealed -- are, therefore, very different from each other. God has been sending His prophets and messengers to make the people give up man-made religions and adopt the revealed religion. But old habits die slowly. Some elements of the man-made religions

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9. Pater W. Schmidt, *High Gods in North America*, p.3; Oxford, 1933.

survive and are absorbed into the revealed religion. The priests of the old religion and the half-hearted believers of the new find it convenient and perhaps profitable to carry on with the old practices. They revive them after the passing away of the prophets and mix them up with the beliefs and practices of the revealed religion. With the passage of time the spirit departs from the revealed religion, it becomes corrupt, and novel interpretations begin to be given to it. Thus, we find that most of the existing religions are mixtures of elements taken from man-made and revealed religions.

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## Chapter I

# HINDUISM

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Hinduism is the oldest among the great religions of the world. Unlike other world religions, such as Buddhism, Christianity or Islam, Hinduism did not have any one founder. It grew gradually over a period of five thousand years absorbing and assimilating all the religious and cultural movements of India. The two main religious streams that originally met and mingled in Hinduism are those of the Dravidians and Indo-Aryans.

### THE RELIGION OF THE DRAVIDIANS

The Dravidians had reached a very high level of civilization long before the appearance of the Aryans in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. There is evidence that by 2,500 B.C. the Indus Valley civilization, established by the Dravidians in what is now Pakistan, was already quite advanced. It was an urban and literate culture, using copper and bronze, but not iron, for making tools and weapons, and having regular trade contacts with Sumer and Akkad. The ruins of its twin capitals, Harappa in the North and Mohenjo-daro in the South, laid out to a common ground plan, provide evidence of a highly organized and developed community under some strong system of centralized government. Some very beautiful works of sculpture, engraved seals, painted pottery, toys, ornaments, and objects used in outdoor and indoor games have been found at the Dravidian archaeological sites.

We do not know as much as we would like to about the religion of the Dravidians. Their inscriptions in a kind of pictographic script have not been deciphered. However, several relics found in Harappa and Mohenjo-daro give us some clue to the nature of their religion. The numerous clay figurines of women suggest that there was some form of worship of a mother-goddess among them. There is also a seal which bears a representation of a female form, from whose womb a plant is shown coming out, which suggests the idea of an earth-goddess concerned with vegetation. Such goddesses are common in present-day Hinduism. There are several representations on seals of the Indus Valley of a male god, horned and three-faced, sitting in the posture of a *yogi*, his legs crossed, flanked by antelopes and surrounded on one seal by four beasts -- elephant, tiger, rhinoceros and buffalo. This is the prototype of the great Hindu god Shiva as Lord of Beasts and Prince of Yogis.

There is also evidence among the Indus Valley people of phallic worship, with representations of the male and female generative organs; of tree worship, particularly the *pipal* tree; of the worship of the so-called sacred animals, such as the humped bull, cow and serpent. All these features passed into Hinduism; as did also image-worship, asceticism, the practice of yoga and meditation, religious gatherings on banks of rivers and tanks, and mass ritual bathing. It is also likely that the doctrines of the incarnation (*avatar*) and transmigration are Dravidian contributions to Hinduism.

The Indus Valley Civilization came to a sudden end sometime between 2000 and 1500 B.C. The last phase of this civilization was a time of insecurity and trouble. There is unmistakable evidence of violence, plunder and destruction by foreign invaders. The culture of these new people, the destroyers of the Indus Valley civilization, who came in large groups and successive waves, was much more primitive, and their way of life, religious beliefs and practices, entirely different from those of the Dravidians of the Indus Valley.

### THE VEDIC RELIGION

The historians speak of these new-comers as a people belonging to the Indo—European family, who called themselves Aryans. For our information about the culture and religion of the Indo-Aryans we depend almost entirely on the Vedas, four very remarkable collections of hymns. These are the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda. Of these, the Rig Veda, which is a collection of 1028 hymns, is the earliest and by far the most important.

The religion of the Indo-Aryans, as found in the Rig Veda, may be described as Nature-worship. The Vedic gods are personifications, more or less anthropomorphic, of the various powers of Nature. Agni is the god of fire, Vayu the god of wind, Surya the god of the sun, and so on. They are looked upon as higher beings and it is man's duty to worship, obey and propitiate them. Thus, there were many gods that the Aryans worshipped. K. M. Sen writes : "Now the religion of the Aryans as it appears from the Vedas, was on the whole, polytheistic, and the Vedic mythology seems to reveal some similarities with its European counterpart".<sup>1</sup>

Although the Vedic pantheon is quite large, there are some deities who are more important than the others. The most important is Indra, and about one-quarter of the hymns in the Rig Veda are addressed to him. He is the god of the blue sky, the gatherer

1. K.M. Sen, *Hinduism*, Penguin Books, p.18.

of the clouds, the giver of rain and the wielder of the thunderbolt. He helps his Aryan devotees in vanquishing their foes in battle. He is uncommonly fond of an intoxicating drink extracted from a creeper called *soma*. Morally far above the other gods stands the awe-compelling deity Varuna, another representative of the highest heaven. "This god", writes Max Muller, "is one of the most interesting creations of the Hindu mind, because though we can still perceive the physical background from which he rises, the vast, starry, brilliant expanse above, his features, more than those of any of the Vedic gods, have become completely transfigured, and he stands before us as a god who watches over the world, punishes the evil-doer, and even forgives the sins of those who implore his pardon".<sup>2</sup>

There is one aspect of the idea of divinity to which we should call particular attention, viz., its intimate association with what is described as *rta*. *Rta* means "cosmic order", the maintenance of which is the purpose of all the gods; and later it also came to mean "right", so that the gods were conceived as preserving the world not merely from physical disorder but also from moral chaos. The one idea is, in fact, implicit in the other; and there is order in the universe because its control is in righteous hands. Of this principle of righteousness, Varuna is the chief support. But the other gods also, not excluding Indra, show it in some degree or other.

The chief form of worship enjoined in the Vedas is *Yajna* -- i.e., sacrifice to the gods. The performance centred around a sacrificial fire and offerings were thrown into it. The offerings consisted of butter, milk, meat, grain cooked in milk, intoxicating drinks, and other such items. The animals chiefly sacrificed were goats, sheep, cows, buffaloes and, occasionally, horses. The sacrifice was primarily looked upon as a method of pleasing the gods and obtaining favours from them.

In the later hymns of the Rig Veda we notice a development towards monotheism. It grows around the god Prajapati, the Lord of Creation. "But", in the words of Dr. Radhakrishnan, "this monotheism is not as yet the trenchant clear-cut monotheism of the modern world".<sup>3</sup> While a few hymns recognise Prajapati as the Supreme God and Lord of all creatures, the reality of the other gods is not denied. As Max Muller says, "With this conception of Prajapati as the Lord of created things and the supreme deity, the

2. Max Muller. *India, what It Can Teach Us?* pp. 169-170 (Longman, Green and Co., Calcutta, 1934).

3. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol I, p. 26 (George Allen and Unwin, London, 1923).

monotheistic yearning was satisfied, even though the existence of other gods was not denied."

Nevertheless, in the following verse of the Rig Veda we do find the germ of a true monotheistic religion and a monistic philosophy.

That which is ONE, sages name it in various ways -- they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan" (The Rig Veda, I. 164 : 46).

There is no mention in the Vedas of many typical Hindu doctrines and practices. There is no idolatry, nothing about ritual bathing in sacred rivers, no reference to forest-dwelling hermits, no asceticism or yoga exercises. There is no authority for the Hindu doctrines of *Avatars* and metempsychosis. The Indo-Aryan society was divided into three classes -- the warriors, priests and artisans -- but, as Max Muller points out, there was no system of caste. Women enjoyed a much higher status than in later Hinduism.

When we pass from the Rig Veda to the Atharva Veda, we notice a great decline in religion, which now becomes another name for dark superstitions and magical practices. Dr. Radhakrishnan writes :

"The religion of the Atharva Veda is that of the primitive man, to whom the world is full of shapeless ghosts of dead. When he realises his helplessness against the natural forces, the precariousness of his own existence so constantly subject to death, he makes death and disease, failure of monsoon and earthquake, the playground of his fancy. The world becomes crowded with goblins and gods, and the catastrophes of the world are traced to dissatisfied spirits. When a man falls ill, the magician and not the physician is sent for, and he employs spells to entice the spirit away from the patient. The terrific powers could only be appeased by bloody sacrifices, human and animal. The fear of death gave a loose rein to superstition".<sup>4</sup>

### BRAHMINISM

With the passage of time the Indian Aryans advanced beyond the Punjab and entered the valley of the Ganges and the Jamuna. They succeeded in subduing the local inhabitants, whom they reduced to the position of Sudra slaves. During this period a struggle was also going on within the Aryan society itself -- between the warriors (*Kshatriyas*) and the priests (*Brahmins*). So far the warriors were on top, but now the priests emerged as the highest and most powerful class. They came to enjoy in course of

4. *The Indian Philosophy*, Vol.I, p. 119-120.

time an almost divine status and honour and gave rise to an invidious caste system. This coincided with the emergence of a new kind of religion among them. This new religious phase has been aptly designated 'Brahminism'.

The books in which this religion is enshrined are the *Brahmanas*. They were composed by the Brahmin priests about 8th century B.C. to explain the supernatural origin and power of the sacrifices. They give long and minute details of how the sacrificial ritual was to be performed and abound with curious legends, human and divine, in illustration of the sacrificial rites.

The sacrifice, to quote Professor Hopkins, "became a mere mill mechanically worked to ground out future rewards as well as present blessings." It came to be regarded as a magical ceremony and its efficacy depended on its exact performance. "More noteworthy than this elaboration," writes Professor Hirianna, "was the change that came over the spirit with which the offerings were made to the gods in this period. What prompted the performance of sacrifices was no longer the thought of prevailing upon the gods to bestow some favour or to ward off some danger; it was rather to compel or coerce them to do what the sacrificer wanted to be done. This change of spirit is explained by many among modern scholars as the importing of magical elements into the Vedic religion, and is taken by them as a sign of the transfer of power from the gods to the priests".<sup>5</sup>

In Brahminism we find for the first time the exaltation of the Vedas as divine books. The Vedas themselves had made no such claim.

### THE RELIGION OF THE UPANISHADS

The next phase in the development of religious thought in India brings us to the first great revolt against Brahminism. The teachings of the Rishis, or Divinely-inspired sages, who were responsible for this amazing development, are preserved in the *Upanishads*. Professor Hirianna writes :

"Broadly speaking, the teaching of the Upanishads marks a reaction against that of the Brahmanas which, as already pointed out, inculcate an elaborate system of ritual. In more than one place, they decry the value of sacrifices".<sup>6</sup>

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5. M. Hirianna, *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy*, p. 17. (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London 1948.)

6. *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy*, P. 18.

The inspired sages of the Upanishads condemned the Brahmin priests and their rituals in no uncertain terms :

"Finite and transient are the fruits of sacrificial rites. The deluded, who regard them as the highest goal, remain subject to birth and death. Living in the abyss of ignorance, yet wise in their own conceits, the deluded go round and round, like the blind led by the blind. Living in the abyss of ignorance, the deluded think themselves blest. Attached to works (of sacrifice), they know not God" (Mundaka Upanishad, I. 2 : 7-8).<sup>7</sup>

An important dogma of Brahminism was the belief in the eternity and Divine origin of the Vedas. The sage Angiras has no hesitation in rejecting this dogma :

"Those who know Brahman (God)," replied Angiras, "say that there are two kinds of knowledge : the higher and the lower. The lower is the knowledge of the Vedas -- the Rig, the Sama, the Yajur, and the Atharva -- and also of phonetics, ceremonials, grammar, etymology, metre, and astronomy. The higher is the knowledge of that by which one knows the changeless reality". (Mundaka Upanishad, I. 1 : 3-4).

The main theme of the Upanishads is the Unity of God. The Upanishadic name for the One true God is *Brahman*. It is written:

"He is the eternal among things that pass away, pure consciousness of conscious beings, the ONE who fulfils the prayers of many ... He is the never-created creator of all : He knows all. He is pure consciousness, the creator of time : all-powerful, all-knowing. He is the Lord of the soul and of nature... He is the God of light, immortal in His glory, pure consciousness, Omnipresent, the loving protector of all. He is the everlasting ruler of the world : could there be any ruler but he ? ..." "I go for refuge to God who is ONE in the silence of Eternity, pure radiance of beauty and perfection, in whom we find our peace." (Svetasvatara Upanishad. VI : 13:19).

"Unmanifest to the senses, beyond all thought, infinite in form, is God. He is the doer of all good; He is for ever tranquil : He is immortal. He is One, without beginning, middle or end; He is all-pervading. He is infinite wisdom, and He is bliss" (Kaivalya Upanishad, verse 5).

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7. *The Upanishads*, translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester (Mentor Books). Other translations of the Upanishads consulted and quoted in this chapter are by (i) F. Max Muller (Sacred Books of the East); (ii) Juan Mascaro (Penguin classics).

He is both transcendent and immanent; not only in the universe and souls of men, but also beyond the universe :

"Self-luminous is that Being, and formless. He dwells within all and without all. He is unborn, pure, greater than the greatest, without breath, without mind". (Mundaka Upanishad, II. 1 : 2).

Another term which frequently occurs in the Upanishads is *Atman*. It means the "individual self", as distinct from *Brahman*, the "Universal Self". *Atman*, however, is not the body, nor the senses, nor life, nor yet the mind. It is the soul, the inmost essence of one's own self. The Upanishads at several places make the somewhat startling statement that "Atman is Brahman" (or, in the words of the Chandogya Upanishad, "That art Thou"), but this is no more startling than the statement of Jesus, "I and the Father are one", or of the Muslim mystic Mansur al-Hallaj, "Ana'l Haqq" (I am the Truth). These statements mean that God is manifest in each individual soul, or as the Qur'an puts it, that God has breathed His spirit into every man. They imply the possibility of soul's union with God, and are, in fact, expressions of that oneness. It is God Himself who speaks through the mouth of the mystic when, in his ecstasy of God-consciousness and self-forgetfulness, he cries : "I am the Truth".

The Upanishads tell us that the goal of a spiritually-awakened person is to find God, to know Him by becoming one with Him :

"Brahman is the end of the journey. Brahman is the supreme goal. This Brahman, the Self, deep hidden in all beings, is not revealed to all, but to seers, pure in heart, concentrated in mind - - - - to them is He revealed". (Katha Upanishad 3 : 11-12).

And this is what the Katha Upanishad says about the way leading to the goal of union with God :

"By learning a man cannot know Him, if he desist not from evil, if he control not his senses, if he quiet not his mind, and practice not meditation" (Katha Upanishad 2 : 24).

The Way may be divided into four stages : (1) the stage of moral endeavour and purity of heart, (2) the stage of discipleship and study with an enlightened *guru* (*sravana*), (3) the stage of reflection (*manana*), and (4) the stage of meditation (*dhyana*).

The Isha Upanishad (verses 12-14) makes it quite clear that the true way is not the way of self-mortification or renunciation and withdrawal from the world. It is the Middle Path.

### THE RELIGION OF SRI KRISHNA

We now come to the second great religious movement that rejected the Vedas and developed independently of and in opposition to Brahminism. It was called the Bhagvata Religion, and its prophet was Krishna. Professor Garbe traces five different stages in the history of the growth of the Bhagvata Religion.<sup>8</sup> In the first stage it flourished outside Brahminism. It was a monotheistic religion which emphasized righteousness and disinterested performance of one's duty. Krishna was regarded at this stage as a prophet, a man who was inspired by God to preach the true religion. In the second stage Sri Krishna was deified after his death by his credulous and ignorant followers. In the third stage, which commenced about 500 B.C., the Brahminising of the Bhagvata Religion took place and Sri Krishna was identified with the Hindu god Vishnu. Professor Hiriyanna writes :

"The monotheistic creed came, in the course of time, to be combined with the Vedic cult of Vishnu-Narayana; and it was this combination that chiefly contributed to make the God of Vaisnavism even more personal than that of Saivism. Somewhat later Sri Krishna, the prophet of the Bhagvata religion, was deified and identified with Vishnu-Narayana, as an incarnation of him".<sup>9</sup>

The fourth stage in the transformation of the Bhagvata Religion was that of Vaisnavism, the chief characteristic of which was the intense devotion to the personal god Vishnu, who was accepted not only as the preserver, but also as the creator and destroyer of the universe. Thus, Vaishnavism set aside the original triune equality of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva in favour of the god Vishnu. His two manifestations in human form were said to be Krishna and Rama. Last of all came the philosophical systemization of Vaisnavism attempted by the great theologian Ramanuja, the exponent of Modified Monism (*Visistadvaita*).

The *Bhagvad Gita*, the scripture of the Bhagvata Religion, in its present form belongs to the fourth stage. As such, Sri Krishna appears in it as the Supreme God, the incarnation of Vishnu. The *Bhagvad Gita* underwent a great deal of alteration, revision adaptation and interpolation before it reached its present form and was incorporated in the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata*.

8. Richard Garbe, *Philosophy of ancient India* (Open Court, Chicago, 1899).

9. M. Hiriyanna, *The Essentials of Indian Philosophy*, p. 35



Like the inspired Rishis of the Upanishads, Sri Krishna also rejected the Brahminical sacrificial system and belief in the Divine origin of the Vedas. He said that the Vedas were of as little use as was a small tank in a place covered all over with water.<sup>10</sup>

The religion of Sri Krishna was clearly monotheistic :

"Those whose minds are ever serene win the victory of life on this earth. God is pure and ever one, and ever one they are in God" (Bhagvad Gita 5 : 19).

The Bhagvata Religion was the religion of self-surrender to God:

"When a man surrenders all desires that come to the heart and by the grace of God finds the joy of God, then his soul has indeed found peace" (The Bhagvad Gita 2 : 55).

Sri Krishna, the Prophet of the Bhagvata Religion, taught his followers to perform all actions sacramentally or as worship of God. The Bhagvad Gita calls this *Bhakti-Yoga* :

"The world is in the bonds of action, unless the action is consecration. Let thy action then be pure, free from the bonds of desire" (The Bhagvad Gita 3 : 9).

"Offer all thy works to God, throw off selfish bonds and do thy work. No sin can then stain thee, even as waters do not stain the leaf of the lotus" (Bhagvad Gita, 5 : 10).

He also called upon his followers to go on doing their duty, irrespective of its consequences. Their concern should be with doing what they believed to be right, not with its rewards or fruits: "Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on its reward. Work not for a reward; but never cease to do thy work (Bhagvad Gita, 2 : 47.) The Bhagvad Gita describes this disinterested performance of one's duty as *Karma-Yoga*. There is, however, no real difference between *Bhakti-Yoga* and *Karma-Yoga*.

The Bhagvad Gita stands for the Middle Path (6 : 16). It exhorts men to have goodwill for all, to love all human beings, to control desires and passions, to root out egoism, to be devoted to truth, to cultivate purity of heart and serenity, to be gentle, modest, and forgiving (16 : 1-4). The ultimate goal of a man's life, it says, is to "find peace in the peace of his God" (2 : 71-72).

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10. *The Bhagvad Gita*, 2: 42-46, translated by Juan Mascaro (Penguin classics). Other translations of the Bhagvad Gita consulted and quoted in this chapter are by (i) K.T. Telang (Sacred Books of the East) ; (ii) Mrs. Annie Besant (Theosophical society) ; (iii) Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood (Mentor Books).

### THE EMERGENCE OF HINDUISM

India is a land of many races, cultures and religions. We have described some of these religious movements in the foregoing pages. Now we have reached that stage when we witness an amazing attempt to include all these diverse religious beliefs, philosophies and practices into one system, which we call Hinduism. We see the manifestation of the peculiar Hindu spirit -- spirit of synthesis and compromise. Hinduism absorbs into itself the religious ideas, images and practices of the Dravidians, the Vedic Aryans, the Brahmanas, the Upanishads, the Bhagvata Religion of Sri Krishna, and also the animistic and primitive practices and fancies of the aborigines of India. It organizes this heterogeneous and apparently incongruous material into one system, but it does not kill variety or demand rigid adherence to any creed or to any one religious conception or any particular mode of worship.

The Dravidians have given to Hinduism many of their deities (including Siva and the mother-goddesses), their religious customs of image-worship, asceticism and ritual bathing in sacred rivers, and their doctrines of transmigration and *avtars*. Siva was first identified with the Vedic storm-god Rudra, and later on rose to be one of the three chief gods. The Vedic religion has contributed its sacrificial system and nature-gods. From the Brahmanas have come the belief in the eternity of the Vedas, the caste system and a number of elaborate rituals and ceremonies. The Upanishads, which were originally composed to decry and condemn Brahminism, were made to compromise with it, and their sublime conception of the Ultimate Reality and path of union with God were included in Hinduism. Sri Krishna, who had founded a separate religion, was also taken into Hinduism and made an *avatar*, or incarnation, of the Hindu god Vishnu; his Scripture, the *Bhagvad Gita*, was incorporated after appropriate revision into the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, and his monotheism and exalted moral teaching became a part of Hinduism.

Apart from the Dravidians and Aryans, there were in India a large number of aborigines. They had a very low level of culture. They worshipped demons and ghosts, and also rivers, mountains, trees and animals. Their modes and objects of worship have also entered Hinduism. Among the deities that appear to have come from the cults of the aborigines are the terrible goddess Kali, (who is described in the Hindu mythology as the wife of Siva), and the god Ganesh, half elephant half man, who is said to be one of the sons of Siva and Parvati.

It is sometimes said that Hinduism is a store-house of all kinds of religious experiments, and not a single religion. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru :

"Hinduism, as a faith, is vague, amorphous, many-sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed to say definitely whether it is a religion or not, in the usual sense of the word. In its present form, and even in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to or contradicting each other".<sup>11</sup>

While his religion allows a Hindu freedom to believe in any conception of the Divine (polytheism, pantheism, or monotheism) and to adopt any object and manner of worship (with or without images), it demands strict conformity in the observance of certain rules of conduct as they affect the Hindu social fabric and caste system. Mrs. Annie Besant writes :

"Freedom of opinion, but orthodoxy in life, these have been characteristic of Hinduism through its long evolution....A Hindu may think as he will about God -- as one with the universe, separate from the universe, or may even exclude Him entirely -- and yet be orthodox; but he must not intermarry with another caste, nor eat polluted food".<sup>12</sup>

We have so far studied the evolution of the Hindu religion and the origin and growth of the different faiths that were finally absorbed into Hinduism. We shall now examine the different aspects of this religion -- its theology, its philosophy, its social institutions, its moral values.

### THE ONE AND THE MANY

In Hinduism, as stated earlier, there is absolute freedom in matters of belief. There are many different interpretations of the Scriptures, all of which are regarded as equally orthodox. A Hindu may believe in any conception of God that he finds convincing or comforting. A large number of philosophically-minded Hindus believe that the Ultimate Reality or God is an absolute unity — "One only, without a second." It is infinite, eternal, changeless, absolute.<sup>13</sup> It contains all, therefore, no particular thing can be said of It, It is all, therefore no one thing can be ascribed to it. Hindus of

11 Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, p. 52 (Signet Press, Calcutta 1947.)

12. Annie Besant, *Hinduism*, p.5 (Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras 1935.)

13. Hinduism uses the pronoun IT or THAT, and not He, for the impersonal Absolute Being or God.

this school of thought do not define the one Ultimate Reality, or World Soul, in terms of a personal God. It is impersonal and attributeless (*nir-guna*). However, not all Hindus believe in this concept of God; as the one impersonal, attributeless Absolute (*nirguna Brahman*). There are several schools or sects of Hinduism which believe in God as the Supreme Person, having attributes (*sa-guna*), with whom man can enter into a meaningful relationship. The one true personal God is called *Ishvara* or *Bhagavan*. He is declared to be in His nature *Sat* (Infinite Being), *Chit* (Infinite Consciousness), and *Anand* (Infinite Bliss). *Ishvara* (God) manifests Himself in three personal forms (the Trimurti) : Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. These three forms, though separated by their functions, are one in essence. They are, in fact, personifications or mythological representations of the three primary aspects or attributes of God.

Brahma is the Creator. In Hindu mythology, Brahma is said to be born of the Golden Egg, which appeared in the beginning in infinite space. After lying in it for a year he divided it into two parts, one half of the shell became the heavens and the other half the earth. Between them was the sky. During his life Brahma sleeps and wakes periodically. When he wakes the world flourishes; when he sleeps all beings cease to exist. His wife is Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom. All creation comes from the union of these two. He rides on Hansa, the swan, and his heaven, Brahma-loka, is on Mount Meru, surrounded by the waters of the sacred river Ganges.

Vishnu is the Preserver. He is a dark god, with four hands, one holding a club, another a shell or conch, the third a discus, and the fourth a lotus. His wife is Lakshmi, the goddess of happiness and prosperity. He rides on the divine bird Garuda. There are ten incarnations (*avtars*) of Vishnu; the two most important being Rama, the hero of the epic *Ramayana*, and Krishna, the God-man of the other great epic, the *Mahabharata*. Not only was Krishna, the prophet of the monotheistic Bhagavata religion, made the incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, but what is even more surprising, he was also identified with the boy-god of a nomadic tribe of cowherds, whose name perhaps was also Krishna, and many tales were told of his pranks and love affairs with *gopis* (milkmaids); his favourite mistress of his youthful years was Radha. He is said to have had 16,108 wives.

Shiva, the third god of the Hindu Trinity, is the Destroyer. He is pictured as an ascetic. He rides on the sacred bull and his dwelling is at Kailasa. He has four hands and is always dressed in tiger skin, with braided hair and a serpent around his neck. His

symbol is Linga or Phallus. His wife is Parvati; Durga and the terrible goddess Kali are both manifestations of Parvati. Ganesha, the elephant-headed god of success, is the best-known of the many sons of Shiva.

Apart from the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the Hindus also believe in and worship many *devas* or nature-gods. They are supposed to guide the whole course of Nature and direct all its activities. The favour of the *devas* may be obtained by what is literally exchange : men supplying them through sacrifice the objects that they enjoy, and they, in return, granting men that which they desire. Thus we read in the Bhagavad Gita :

"With this (i.e., sacrificial offering) nourish you the gods, and may the gods nourish you. For nourished by sacrifice, the gods shall bestow on you the enjoyments you desire" (3 : 11-12).

Educated Hindus maintain that this large number of gods and goddesses — the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, their wives and children (whose idols are worshipped in Hindu homes and temples), the incarnations of Vishnu and the pantheon of deva-gods— does not amount to a denial of the unity of God. They are only different manifestations or symbolic forms in which the same one and only God is worshipped. Thus, Swami Vivekananda writes:

"At the very outset, I may tell you that there is no polytheism in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence, to the images. It is not polytheism, nor would the name henotheism explain the situation".<sup>14</sup>

Louis Renou, however, takes a different view. According to him:

"Hinduism is fundamentally polytheistic, not only at the exoteric level but also in the speculative order where the role of the concrete and the figurative god is never abolished. Undoubtedly there are variations in this feeling for a plurality of gods. The philosophers combine it (on another plane) with a belief in one supreme principle, sometimes personified as Lord (Ishvara), sometimes conceived as a neuter deity or an impersonal Absolute (Brahman). This absolute principle may itself be composed of a 'qualified form' (*saguna*) which is at times considered to be of prime importance while at others is reduced to the level of 'inferior knowledge'. The common believer is not conversant with the notion of divine unity, which belongs rather to the sphere of the

14. Swami Vivekananda, *Essentials of Hinduism*, p. 40 (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta 1966.)

philosophers and is not represented in any direct cult. For the non-philosophers, diversity appears normal. From this diversity the believer selects his chosen god (*istadevata*); his choice implies that he recognizes the importance of other divine forms such as the divine couple or *paredres*. Such a choice is concomitant with the hierarchization which can be observed in the *dharma* on the social, moral or ritualistic planes".<sup>15</sup>

### KARMA AND TRANSMIGRATION

Hindus are not agreed on the question of the origin of the world. Some believe that the world was created by God out of nothing, but those who hold this view are not many. A much larger number believes that the world is the manifestation of God, that which was inward has become outward. There are also many who think that the material world is an illusion (*maya*) and exists only because of cosmic ignorance (*avidya*), that in reality nothing exists but the ONE (Brahman). The followers of the Samkhya and Yoga schools of Hindu philosophy, and also the Arya Samajis, are of the view that both matter (*prakriti*) and spirit (*purush*) are uncreated and eternal. The world is the result of the interplay (with or without God's intervention) of matter and spirit.

Individual spirits or souls (*jiva*) appear in this world to work out their salvation by slow course of evolution, through countless births and deaths. This present life of each individual is not his first in this world. He has had countless lives in the past, his soul having inhabited many different bodies, and he will probably have many more lives in the future. With each bodily death, the immortal soul receives a new body in which to start a new life in this world. This is what we read in the Bhagavad Gita :

"As a man leaves an old garment and puts on one that is new, the spirit leaves his mortal body and wanders on to one that is new" (2 : 22).

All that a man is in this life, the kind of body that he has, his position in society, his caste, his intelligence, his happiness or sorrow, is the result of his actions in his past life. This is the doctrine of *Karma*. As a man soweth so shall the reap :

"According as a man acts and walks in the path of life, so he becomes. He that does good becomes good; he that does evil becomes evil. By pure actions he becomes pure (and happy); by evil actions he becomes evil (and unhappy)" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV, 4 : 4).

15. Louis Renou, *Hinduism*, p.19.(Washington Square Press Book, N York, 1963)

If he faithfully performs his duty, his *dharma*, in this life, he will be born in a better body and a higher caste and lead a prosperous life in the next birth. But if he neglects his *dharma* and does evil, he will be reborn in worse condition, may be even in the body of one of the lower animals.

But on the death of one mortal body the soul does not immediately reappear in a new body in this world. It first goes to heaven (*svarga*) or hell (*naraka*), depending on the deeds of the man. There he will suffer pain or enjoy pleasures till he has earned the full fruits of his deeds. Having exhausted the fruits of his good or evil deeds, he will be reborn in a new body :

"Reaching the end of the journey (in heaven or hell) begun by his works on earth, from that world a man returns to this world of human action. Thus far for the man who lives under desire" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad IV. 4: 6).

To the wheel of births and deaths is a man bound by desire and ignorance. But when he conquers his desires and destroys ignorance, he gains his salvation, *Mukti* or *Moksha*; for him there is no rebirth in this world. He becomes one with God; some believe that the individual soul is absorbed in the World Soul, but others are of the view that even in union with God, each soul retains its separate identity and self-consciousness.

### THE THREE PATHS

Hinduism believes that there are different paths to God for different types of men. Generally speaking there are three types of men. Some are basically reflective and philosophical. Some others are primarily emotional. The third type are essentially active. For each of these personality types Hinduism proposes a different path or *marga* to salvation. All paths begin with certain moral preliminaries, such as cultivating the habits of and practising non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, self-control, contentment, and a compelling desire to reach the goal.

The *Jnana-Marga* (the path of union with God through knowledge) is intended for a spiritual aspirant who has a strong intellectual bent. For him Hinduism proposes a series of meditations and logical demonstrations to develop in him the power of discrimination between the real and the unreal. With true knowledge he destroys illusion (*maya* or *avidya*) and realizes his oneness with God.

The *Bhakti-Marga* (the path of union through love and devotion) is for him in whom emotions predominate. While the man of intellect conceives God primarily in impersonal terms, the man of

emotions is drawn towards one or more of the personal gods. He adores and worships either Siva, or one of the incarnations of Vishnu (Rama or Krishna), or their consorts, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Durga, Kali and Radha. He expresses his love for them by performing devotional rites, or by making offerings of food and flowers to their idols, or through dance and song. Gradually the soul of the devotee takes on the qualities of the god he worships, becoming that which he adores. Finally the love that worshipped finds the object of its worship embracing it, and feels itself merging into complete unity with its Beloved.

The *Karma-Marga* (the path of union through work) is for him who is primarily active. The man of action learns to perform action as duty without desire for the fruits of work. He performs his duty as a soldier or as a practical man of the world with scrupulous fidelity. This path also leads to the same goal as the first two paths, that is the goal of salvation or union with God.

### THE FOUR ASHRAMAS

According to Hinduism, the ideal life for the twice-born (that is, men of the three higher castes) is divided into four stages for *Ashramas*.

The first stage is that of the student, bound to celibacy (*Brahmachari*); it begins after the rite of initiation, between the ages of eight and twelve, and lasts for twelve years. During this period the student usually lives in the house of his teacher and serves him in return for the instruction he receives. His duty is to acquire the knowledge of the *Dharma* and the Scriptures.

The second stage is that of the householder (*Grahastha*); it begins with marriage. The householder's duty is to beget children, strive after wealth and succeed in his chosen career. He must also discharge his duty to the community to which he belongs. He is expected to perform a large number of daily and seasonal religious ceremonies and rites and to make offerings to the gods and the spirits of his ancestors.

The third stage is that of the forest-dweller (*Vanaprastha*); it begins when a man is growing old and has grandchildren. He must retreat to the forest to loosen the bonds of the world and devote himself completely to religious exercises.

The fourth and last stage is that of the hermit (*Sannyasin*). In it a man lives alone, renounces everything, even his family, gradually reduces his food to a morsel a day, and waits and prepares for death.



## THE CASTE SYSTEM

The Hindu Scriptures (*Shruti*) and law books (Dharma Shastra) divided the entire body of Hindus into four separate and socially unequal castes -- the *Brahmins* (priests), the *Kshatriya* (nobles and warriors), the *Vaishya* (traders and artisans), and *Sudras* (serfs). Today, however, this fourfold classification has been blurred and complicated by the development of more than three thousand separate caste groups. Caste is a system by which the accident of birth determines once for all the whole course of a man's social and domestic relations. According to Sir Edward Blunt:

"The basic principles of caste are endogamy and heredity. A man must marry a woman of the same caste as himself; their son is born of the same caste as his parents, and all his life must remain a member of it. Every caste, moreover, lays down from what castes a man may select companions to share his meal, a cook to prepare his food, and an *abdār* (butler) to bring him water. Very often a caste is composed of subcastes which are themselves endogamous, in which case what has been said of the caste applies to the smaller sections."<sup>16</sup>

The caste system presupposes a belief in the fundamental inequality of men because of their actions in the previous birth; people of different castes are by birth unequal and must throughout their lives retain their higher or lower social and religious status.

The Indo-Aryan society, as already pointed out, was divided into three classes, but there was no caste system in the Vedic age. The system of castes appeared for the first time in the Brahminical age, which also saw the rise of the Brahmin priests to the position of highest power and honour in India. Ever since then it has become a peculiar feature of the Indian society. In no other country does anything of the kind exist.

The basis and nature of this system and the rules governing the various castes are described in detail in the *Dharma Shastra* (books dealing with *dharma* or religious laws), particularly in the *Manu Smṛiti*. According to Manu, there are three sacred or "twice-born" castes. Of these the Brahmins are the highest and most respectable, then come the Kshatriya, and then the Vaishya. Below these come the Sudras. They are not admitted to the sacrifices or to the reading of the Vedas, and their sole function is to humbly serve the twice-born. At the very bottom are the Untouchables, men of no

<sup>16</sup> Sir Edward Blunt, *Social Service in India*, p. 44 (His Majesty's Stationery Office, London 1939)

caste, some 100 million people, described as "the largest subordinate racial group in the world". They are the menials of India, doing the dirty and degrading tasks, being the scavengers, the tanners, washers of dirty clothes, and handlers of dead carcasses. Untouchability has been defined as "Jimcrowism on a fantastic scale". Untouchables must live apart, segregated from the rest of their fellow villagers. Their touch, contiguity, and sometimes even their shadows are considered to be polluting to the higher-caste Hindus. They are denied access to Hindu temples, they cannot draw water directly from the village wells, and their children cannot attend school along with the other Hindu students.

The Hindu conception of *dharma*, or duty, in its one aspect is intimately bound up with that of caste. If *karma* (or a man's deeds in the previous birth) determines his position in the caste network, *dharma* tells him what to do in that position. *Varnashrama Dharma* does not coincide with the Christian or Muslim idea of duty, since it is not related to any fixed principle. A Hindu's *dharma* is the occupation and behaviour appropriate to his caste and it is his moral duty to follow the rules of that caste and no others through life. So the moneylender is expected to be a keen businessman and the warrior a brave soldier. However, there is also a general *Dharma* (*Sadharana Dharma*), righteousness or moral code incumbent on all. This includes injunctions to perform meritorious acts such as going on pilgrimages, honouring Brahmins, and making charitable endowments, as well as prohibitions against causing injury, lying, dishonesty, etc.

### HINDU SECTS

The various Hindu sects are the products of the *Bhakti* movement. The orthodox Hindus (Sanatan Dharmis) are divided into three sects, depending on which god or gods they regard as Supreme.

(1) The Vaishnav sect — the worshippers of Vishnu, his incarnations and their wives and mistresses. This sect includes the followers of Ramanuja, Ramananda, Kabir, Chaitanya and Vallabhacharya.

(2) The Shaiva sect — the worshippers of Shiva and his consorts. Perhaps the greatest thinker and preacher of this sect was the philosopher Shankara (9th century C. E.), the famous exponent of Absolute Monism (*Advaita Vedantism*). The Hindu religious mendicants, ascetics and yogis belong to this sect.

(3) The Shakta sect — those devoted to the worship of female deities only, such as Sarasvati, Lakshmi, Radha, Sita, Parvati.

Durga and Kali. This sect appears to have been based on the persistent worship of the mother goddess, which has remained an enduring feature of religion in India. The worship of female deities became the nucleus of a number of magical rites which in a later form are called Tantricism. This sect rejects the scriptures of the other sects (including the Vedas) and has its own sacred books, the *Tantras*.

In comparatively recent years three new (unorthodox) sects have come into existence, as a result of the influence of Islam and Christianity.

(1) The first among them is the Brahmo Samaj, which was founded in Bengal by Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1774-1833), who was a distinguished scholar of Arabic and Persian. His first book, *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahiddin* ("A Gift to the Monotheists"), was written in Arabic. The Brahmo Samajis believe in the unity of God and respect the prophets of all religions, but they do not believe in Divine revelation. They take a rational and progressive attitude towards social questions and are pioneers among Hindus of modern education and rights of women. The world-famous Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore belonged to this sect.

(2) Another modern sect which believes in the unity of God and condemns idolatry is the Arya Samaj, which was founded by Swami Dayanand Sarasvati (1824-1883). This sect, however differs from the Brahmo Samaj in its extremely hostile attitude towards the other religions. Not only does it consider religions like Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam to be false, but it also takes great pleasure in making scurrilous attacks upon their founders.<sup>17</sup> The Arya Samajis believe the Vedas to be divine, uncreated and eternal, and base their faith exclusively on them, though they interpret them in a manner which the orthodox Hindus (the Sanatan Dharmis) find most peculiar and unwarranted. They do not believe in caste system. Their aim is to purify (*Shuddhi*), or reconvert to Hinduism, by persuasion, temptation or force, those Hindus, and their descendants, who had embraced Islam or Christianity. They are in the forefront of all militant Hindu movements.

(3) The third Hindu sect of recent growth is a modern version of Sankara's Advaita Vedantism, which believes in absolute monism and regards the world as an illusion (*maya*). The founder of this sect was Ramkrishna Paramhansa, but the man who popularised and spread it all over India, and even in some foreign

17. Swami Dayanand's *Satyarth Prakash*, translated by Chiranjiva Bhardwaja (The Arya Samaj, Madras).

countries, was his highly talented and dynamic disciple Swami Vivekananda. The followers of this sect believe Brahman alone to be real. He is Absolute Being, an impersonal God, and the various gods of the Scriptures and mythology are His manifestations or forms. In and through all forms it is He alone who is worshipped. This sect also considers the Vedas to be divine and eternal but when they speak of the Vedas they mean not only the hymns (*Samhita*), but also and primarily the Upanishads. They consider all religions to be true — as different paths to the same God — but Hinduism is for them the most perfect path.

## Chapter II

# BUDDHISM

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### THE BACKGROUND

In the chapter on Hinduism we attempted to describe two very remarkable movements -- those of the Upanishadic Rishis and Sri Krishna -- that arose in India in opposition to Brahminical polytheism and ritualism. They were, however, ultimately absorbed into Hinduism and their distinctive character was lost through compromise with the system which they had set out to oppose. Buddhism was yet another revolt against Brahminism, but this great movement could not be absorbed into Hinduism. It emerged as a distinct religion, a positive system, and after a period of wide success and popularity, it declined and was exiled from the land of its birth by revivalistic Hinduism. But before that happened it had already spread to many countries beyond the borders of India and become one of the great universal faiths.

India in the sixth century B.C. was not one vast kingdom or empire. It had a number of princes of particular tribes and clans, who ruled over small states. Several dialects were in use, though Sanskrit was the sacred language. The Vedas had already gained mysterious sanctity as divine books. The Brahminical sacrifices and rituals were widely performed with full faith that through them the man, on whose behalf they were performed, would gain all that he desired in this world as well as in the next. The Brahmin priests were revered and feared as demigods. The society was divided into four rigid castes, with the Brahmins enjoying a position of privilege, at one end, the Sudras and untouchables, at the other, leading a life in conditions far worse than those of domestic animals. The Hindu law books declared: "The ears of a Sudra who listens intentionally when the Veda is being recited should be filled with molten lead; his tongue should be cut out if he recites it; his body should be split in twain if he possesses it in memory".<sup>1</sup> Should a Sudra do even so much as offer a piece of advice to a Brahmin, burning oil should be poured into his ears.

The Hindus had developed great fondness for philosophical hair-splitting which had nothing to do either with search for truth or edification of man. It was an age of speculative chaos, full of

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1. T Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 3 (Putnam's New York, 8th edition, 1959).

inconsistent theologies and vague wranglings. Moral life suffered, since metaphysical subtleties and theological disputes absorbed the energies of the people. In forests and caves there lived many ascetics and hermits, who practised self-mortification and denied themselves nourishment for incredibly long periods, believing this to be the way to spiritual emancipation.

The people worshipped anything from the sun to a common stone, from high gods to frightful ogres and ghosts. "In the vast continent of India," writes Dr. Radhakrishnan, "man's marvellous capacity for creating gods, the stubborn impulse of polytheism had free scope. Gods and ghosts, with powers to injure and annoy, as well as to bless and glorify, governed the lives of the peoples. The multitude esteemed highly the Vedic religion with its creeds and rituals, rites and ceremonies".<sup>2</sup>

It was in this world that Siddhartha, whose family name was Gautama and who was later to become the Buddha, took his birth.

### THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

No biography of the founder of Buddhism was written for several hundred years after his passing away, and the available source for such information are such a mixture of history and legend as to prove the despair of all historians. Of all that has been written about him there is so little which can be shown to be historically true that even a sympathetic scholar like Ananda Coomaraswamy is inclined to believe that the Buddha was not a man, but a Solar Myth:

"These considerations," he writes, "raise the question whether the 'life' of the 'Conquerer of Death' and 'Teacher of Gods and men', who says that he was born and bred in the Brahma-world and who descended from heaven to take birth in Maha Maya's womb, can be regarded as historical or simply as a myth in which the nature and acts of the Vedic deities Agni and Indra have been more or less plausibly euhemerised".<sup>3</sup>

Similar doubts have been expressed about the historicity of Jesus Christ and Lao Tzu. While they underline the difficulty of the task of the scholar who seeks to recover the historical facts about the Buddha, Lao Tzu and Jesus from the mass of legends

2. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 354 (George Allen and Unwin, London 1923.)

3. Ananda Coomaraswamy and I.B. Horner, *The Living Thoughts of Gautama the Buddha*, p 1-2 (The Living Thoughts Library, Cassell and Co. London 1948)

that have gathered around them, to completely dismiss them as myths is an extreme attitude to which not many scholars would subscribe.

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha-to-be, was born in the year 563 B.C. in the Lumbini grove, near Kapilavastu. His father, Suddhodana, was Raja of the Sakya clan, whose country lay along the south edge of Nepal, with Kapilavastu as its capital.

His mother Maya died when he was only seven days old, and the child was brought up by his mother's sister Prajapati. In *Sutta Nipata* we have the story of the seer Asita, who came to the palace of Suddhodana, thirsting for the true *Dharma*. We read of how he recognised on his person the signs of the Buddha and, more or less in the manner of Simeon, prophesied the future greatness of the child. He wept at the thought that he himself would not live to see the day and hear the new gospel.

The father was anxious that his son should know nothing of the woes of the world. He surrounded him with beauty and pleasures of every kind. Siddhartha, however, was not like other young men. He was not free and gay and enamoured of sports, battles and women. His father had him married to his beautiful cousin Yasodhara. Siddhartha loved his wife, but even she could not cure the inner restlessness of his heart.

He felt like a captive in the palace and gardens of pleasure that his father had built for him. He set his heart on making a journey outside to see the real world. We read in the sacred records of how he went out with Channa, his charioteer, and saw one after another a decrepit old man, a sick man and a dead man. Siddhartha felt extremely disturbed at the sight of human suffering and death. He then saw a recluse with shaven head and a tattered yellow robe, and the sight of this man inspired him with the desire to seek in the religious life peace and serenity and the cure for human suffering. That very night he bade farewell to his sleeping wife and babe and left his home. At the edge of the forest he put on the ascetic's garb and started his career as a wandering seeker of truth. This was the Great Renunciation.

He wandered in the forest from one teacher to another, learning all that they had to teach him, but finding no satisfaction. He next started a series of severe fasts, practised exercises of meditation and inflicted on himself terrible austerities, hoping in this way to find the truth. This was the Great Effort. Though often during this period he found himself at death's door, he got no glimpse of the riddle of life. He therefore concluded that

asceticism was not the way to enlightenment. He decided to eat again, and the five ascetics, who had attached themselves to him, intending to follow him if he found the Way, left him in disgust. He finally sat down cross-legged in what is called the lotus posture under the sacred fig tree, fully determined to gain enlightenment. Legends tell us that, at this crisis, Siddhartha was assailed by Mara, the tempter, who sought in vain, by all manner of terrors and temptations, to shake him from his purpose. He persisted in his meditations and at last the veil was lifted from his eyes and the blessed assurance overwhelmed him. This was the Great Enlightenment. Siddhartha Gautama had attained *bodhi*, or illumination, and become the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

For seven days more he stayed there. Mara, the evil one, assailed him again. The temptation to accept at once the fulfilment of his own emancipation and to pass immediately through death to *Nirvana* was the most subtle of his temptations. The idea that if he proclaimed his doctrine men would not accept it and he would only lose his own quietude, this too threatened to turn him aside. But the Buddha-heart of compassion awakened to man's eternal need, and he felt that his own deep sense of blessing called him to the service of his fellow-men. The Buddha decided, therefore, to go out to proclaim to the world the path of peace and immortality.

The first persons to whom he decided to proclaim his Message were the five ascetics who had deserted him when he had given up austerities. He found them near Varanasi, and there, in the Deer Park, he preached to them his first sermon of 'Setting in Motion the Wheel of Righteousness.' He taught them the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths, and the Eight-fold Path to salvation. They became his first disciples and *Arahants* (perfect saints.) The Buddha gave mankind the message of love, non-violence, peace, tolerance, kindness and selfless service to fellow-human beings, and himself practised these virtues in all his actions and dealings with people of all classes and creeds.

The number of converts rapidly increased and he sent them forth into the world with a heart full of compassion for mankind to proclaim the *Dharma* (Pali, *Dhamma*), the True Faith or Law, for the salvation of many.

The Buddha himself went to Uruvella. On the way he met a band of young men who were picnicking with their wives. One of them had brought a concubine with him and she had run away with his belongings. The young man asked the Buddha whether



he had seen such a woman. "What do you think, young man", asked the Buddha, "which were better for you, to seek for the woman or to seek for the Self"? In this way he won over the young men from their sensual pleasures to the path of religion and virtue. At Uruvella, the Buddha met a group of Fire-worshippers, and he preached to them his famous Fire Sermon. They too were converted and became his disciples.

At Rajagraha the Buddha converted King Bhimsara and received from him the Park known as the Bamboo Grove for the use of the Order as a permanent retreat. He then went to Kapilavastu and met his father, wife and son. His son Rahula and foster-mother Prajapati joined the Order. The Buddha was reluctant to receive women into the Order, but was persuaded to do so by his cousin-disciple Ananda. The *Buddhacarita*, an early biography of the Buddha, written by Asvaghosa, contains an account of many miracles which the Buddha is said to have performed and also of his journey to heaven to preach the Dharma to the souls of the departed.

So the Buddha continued for forty years to move from place to place, preaching the Dharma and the Way to eternal peace and immortality. At last the time came for him to lay aside his mortal body. An account of the last days of the Buddha is given in the *Mahaparinibhana Sutta* of *Digha Nikaya*. He told his followers to make "the Self their refuge, the Eternal Law their refuge". His last words were, "Corruptible are all things composite; in sobriety work out your goal." The sublime figure of the Buddha has cast a spell over millions of people for nearly twenty-six centuries and won the respect and admiration of, not only believing Buddhists, but also many who have not seen their way to join the Faith. Even M. Barthelemy St. Hilaire, by no means a friendly critic of Buddhism, writes the following about the Buddha :

"His life is flawless. His constant heroism is equal to his conviction.... He is the living model of all the virtues he preaches; his abnegation, his charity, his unchanging gentleness never fail for even a moment. Silently he prepares his doctrine, in six years of retreat and meditation; he propagates it solely by the power of the word and of persuasion for more than half a century, and when he dies in the arms of his disciples it is with the serenity of a sage who has practised goodness all his life and is assured of having found the truth." (Quoted by Sir Edwin Arnold in the preface to his famous book the *Light of Asia*.)

### THE TEACHING OF THE BUDDHA

The Buddha himself wrote nothing. None of his teaching was written down for at least four hundred years after his death. To make things worse, it was the practice of his followers, when expounding Buddhism, to put their own words and commentaries into the mouth of the Great Teacher. It is, therefore, impossible to separate the genuine sayings of the Buddha from the large number of spurious sayings and discourses that have been attributed to him in the Buddhist Scriptures. The distinguished Buddhist scholar Christmas Humphreys writes:

"We therefore do not know what the Buddha taught, any more than we know what Jesus taught; and today at least four schools, with subdivisions in each, proclaim their own view as to what is Buddhism".<sup>4</sup>

The late Mrs. Rhys Davids submitted the earliest Buddhist scriptures to something like "higher criticism", and on the basis of her findings an attempt will be made here to present the original message of the Buddha.

"The Buddha was the Buddha because he was *Buddha*, Awakened, Enlightened, made Aware". The highest truth was *revealed* to him. Siddhartha Gautama was not the first Buddha. He himself says that there were many Buddhas, or fully enlightened teachers of truth, before him, and that many more would come after him.

The essence of the teaching of the Compassionate Buddha is contained in the Sermon of "Setting in Motion the Wheel of Righteousness." He exhorts those who wish to lead a religious life to avoid the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification and to follow the Middle Way. He enunciates the Four Noble Truths: (1) the first truth is about the existence of suffering and unhappiness in the world; (2) the second truth declares that the cause of suffering and unhappiness is selfish craving; (3) the third truth gives the assurance that selfish craving and unhappiness can be destroyed; (4) the fourth truth shows the way leading to the removal of sorrow and unhappiness and the realization of peace and happiness. The Buddha gives a wonderful exposition of the Eightfold Path leading to the end of suffering and unhappiness. These are: Right view, right purpose or aspiration, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindfulness, and right contemplation. Right View means the

4. Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism* Pelican Book, p. 11 (Harmondsworth 1959)

knowledge of the Four Noble Truths. But so far as the truths are known only by the intellect they have no life. They must be discovered and proved by every man in the depths of his own being. The first step, therefore, is an awakening, a summons to abandon a way by which we miss our truth and destiny. The Right Aspiration is to renounce sensual pleasures, to bear no malice, and to do no harm. Right Speech requires us to abstain from lying, slander, abuse, harsh words and idle talk. Right Action is to abstain from taking life, or taking what is not given, or from carnal excesses. Right Living is to abstain from any of the forbidden modes of living, which are those of a trader in weapons, slave dealer, butcher, publican, or poison-dealer. Right Effort consists in suppressing the rising of evil states, in eradicating those which have arisen, in stimulating good states and perfecting those which have come into being. Right Mindfulness is to achieve self-mastery by means of self-knowledge. Right Contemplation takes the form of the four meditations. It is the end and the crown of the eightfold path. It is the substance of the highest life when ignorance and selfish craving become extinct and insight and holiness take their place. It is peaceful contemplation and ecstatic rapture which accompanies the union of the individual self with the Universal Self.<sup>5</sup>

Buddha's method of teaching is well illustrated by the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Kisa Gotami, a poor woman, had lost her only son. Full of inconsolable grief she came to the Buddha and begged him to restore her son to life. The Buddha agreed to do so if she would fetch a few tiny grains of mustard seed from a house in which no one had ever died. She went from house to house, but wherever she went she was told that there was no house where no one had died. In this way she gained understanding and sympathy. She came back to the Buddha, not to ask him to bring her son back to life, but to give her peace and refuge. This touching story teaches two of the Buddha's most important doctrines. The first is that everything in the realm of phenomenal existence is in change and is transitory. Whatever becomes passes away, whatever is born must die. Every living creature is a compound of elements, sooner or later they must dissolve. Hence a realistic acceptance of death is an essential part of true adjustment to reality. The second is the essential connection, in the Buddha's experience and teaching, between a realistic acceptance of death and the realization of an outgoing compassion

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5. F.L. Woodward (Translator), *Some Sayings of the Buddha*, pp. 7-13 (The World's Classics, Oxford University Press, London, 1939)

towards all living beings, who, like ourselves, are subject to such ills and suffering.<sup>6</sup>

The Buddha preached universal love and sympathy:

"Never in this world can hatred be conquered by hatred,; it can be conquered only by love -- this is the Law Eternal" (The Dhammapada 1:5).

"Let a man overcome anger by love, let him overcome evil by good, let him overcome the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth".<sup>7</sup>

There is little of what we call dogma in the Buddha's teaching. With a breadth of view rare in that age and not common in ours he refuses to stifle criticism. Intolerance seemed to him the greatest enemy of religion. Once he entered a public hall at Ambalattika and found some of his disciples talking angrily of a Brahmin who had just been accusing the Buddha of impiety and finding fault with the Order he had founded. "Brethren," said the Buddha, "if others speak against me, or against my religion, or against the Order, there is no reason why you should be angry, discontented, or displeased with them. If you are so, you will not only bring yourself into danger of spiritual loss, but you will not be able to judge whether what they say is correct or not correct." He denounced unfair criticism of other creeds. There was never an occasion when the Buddha flamed forth into anger, never an incident when an unkind word escaped his lips. He had vast tolerance for mankind. According to Rabindranath Tagore, the way of the Buddha is the "elimination of all limits of love," it is "the sublimation of self in a truth which is love itself."

The Buddha was undoubtedly the greatest social reformer of India. His most noteworthy achievement was the abolition of caste system. He declared that a man is a Brahmin, not because he is born of Brahmin parents, as taught by Hinduism, nor because he performs the rituals and observes the outer forms of the Brahminical caste, but he is a Brahmin by virtue of his devotion to truth and his righteous life:

"A man is not a Brahmin by reason of his matted hair or his lineage or his caste: in whom are to be found Truth and Law, he is pure, he is a Brahmin." (The Dhammapada, 26:393).

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6. E. A. Burt (Editor), *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, pp. 43-46, Mentor Book, New York, 1955. )
  7. *The Dhammapada* (17:223), translated by N.K. Bhagwat (The Buddha Society, Bombay) Other translations of The Dhammapada consulted and quoted in this chapter are by (i) S Radhakrishnan (Oxford University Press) ; (ii) Narada Thera (Wisdom of the East series) ; (iii) F. Max Muller (Sacred Books of the East). (iv) Juan Mascaro (Penguin Classics).

The Buddha had no faith in the so-called saviours and vicarious atonement. He taught that a man is personally responsible for his own actions. His happiness or unhappiness, his sinfulness or sinlessness, is the result of his own thoughts and deeds. No other person can save him from sin:

"Evil is done by self alone, by self alone is one stained; by self alone is evil left undone, by self alone one is purified. Purity and impurity depend on one's own self. No man can purify another." (The Dhammapada, 12:165).

In short, we reap as we sow, both in this world as well as in the next. The good shall go to heaven and the wicked to hell:

"Those sages who are without violence, and who are ever controlled in body, attain to the eternal Abode, where having gone a man is freed from sorrow." (The Dhammapada, 17:225).

"Like a fortified city situated on the borderland, and well-guarded both within and without, let a man guard his own self; let indeed not a moment pass unguarded, for those who let a moment slip come to grief as they are consigned to hell." (Ibid., 22:315).

The Buddha refused to get involved in futile and unedifying metaphysical disputations. Many doctrines that are now considered essential parts of Buddhism did not form part of the original teaching of the Buddha. Mrs. Rhys Davids, H.J. Jennings and Ananda Coomaraswamy are agreed in declaring that the doctrines of transmigration, as enunciated by Hinduism, the "no-self" (*Anatta*), and monasticism were not included in the original gospel of Buddhism. There can be no doubt about the Buddha's belief in the immortal soul. When he talked of destroying the "self" he meant the lower self. It was the lower self that the Buddha declared to be impermanent and unreal. He had no doubt about the reality and immortality of the higher self:

"If a man knows the self as precious, he should ever guard it and watch it well". (The Dhammapada, 12:157).

"Through Self one should urge on the self, one should restrain the self by Self; the Bhikkhu thus guarded by Self and unmindful, will fare along to happiness." (Ibid., 25:379).

In nothing has the Buddha been more misunderstood than in his attitude towards God. It is often said that the Buddha remained silent whenever he was asked about God, and his supposed silence is interpreted as a denial of the existence of God. However, Mrs. Rhys Davids and Sir Francis Younghusband, have both pointed out that the Buddha was brought up on the

doctrines of the Upanishads. He was familiar with their religious thought and terminology. When the Upanishads use the word "Self" it is often in the sense of the Universal Self or God, the metaphysical principle of existence -- "this Brahman, the Self, deep hidden in all beings." The Buddha was obviously using the word "Self" in the same sense when he said: "I have taken refuge in the Self". (*Digha Nikaya* 2:120), and in the following sayings:

"Self is the Lord of self; what higher Lord could there be? When a man subdues well his self, he will have found a Lord very difficult to find." (The *Dhammapada*, 12:159).

"Self is the Lord of self. Self is the goal of self; therefore control thy self as a merchant controls a horse of noble breed" (*Ibid.*, 25:380).

The Buddha often referred to the Dharma (Pali, *Dhamma*), the True Faith, as *Brahmacariyam*, or the Way of Brahman, the immutable will of God. And on one occasion he remarked that when a man led a noble and pure life, "with heart of love, far-reaching, grown great and beyond measure," such a man was approaching union with Brahman, and that "he will after death, when the body is dissolved, become united with Brahman, who is eternally the same" (*Tevijja Sutta*). Brahman is of course the name given in the Upanishads to the one true God. Ananda Coomaraswamy writes:

"The Law, Dhamma, had always been a nomen Dei, and is still in Buddhism synonymous with Brahman."<sup>8</sup>

And this is what Sir Francis Younghusband writes on this subject :

"It is, however, in his attitude towards the idea of God that Buddha is most misrepresented. Because he refrained from making any sharp definition of God . . . he is put down as an atheist and Buddhism is contemptuously tossed aside as unimportant. But it may have been because Buddha had too great, not too small, an idea of God that he refused to restrict himself to a sharp definition of the Deity. There are certain things which are too great to be put into words. Who, for instance, would care to define love? Buddha did not presume to define God, but both he and his disciples were saturated with the conception of a Power behind the eye that sees and the ear that hears, and behind all the phenomena of Nature."<sup>9</sup>

8. Ananda Coomaraswamy and I.B. Horner, *The Living Thoughts of Gautama the Buddha*, p. 25 (The Living Thoughts Library, Cassel, and Co., Ltd., London 1948)

9. F.L. Woodward (translator), *Some Sayings of the Buddha* ; Introduction by Sir Francis Younghusband, page xv (Oxford University Press, 190

Thus the goal of Buddhism, as of all religions, is Nirvana (Pali, *Nibbhana*), which in the original message of the Buddha, means the soul's return to God, the union of the finite with the infinite.

### THE HISTORY OF BUDDHISM

It is unfortunate that the leadership and popular exposition of Buddhism fell to the lot of a man named Sariputra. He was, as Edward Conze has pointed out, inclined to be a sceptic. He may truly be called the St. Paul of Buddhism. He put his own stamp on the message of the Buddha and interpreted it in his own way. He suppressed many things and over-emphasized other things in the teaching of the Buddha. To quote Edward Conze:

"The influence Sariputra exerted was due to the shape which he gave to the teaching, and which determined not only the training of the monks for a long time, but also decided which aspects of the Buddha's doctrine should be emphasized, and which should be relegated into the background."<sup>10</sup>

The Old Wisdom or Hinayana school of Buddhism adopted Sariputra's interpretation, and hence its scepticism.

It is commonly believed that soon after the death of the Buddha, a Buddhist Council was held at Rajagraha to settle the contents of the three *Pitakas* or Baskets of Canon. A second council is said to have been held at Vaishali about a hundred years later to settle certain differences that had arisen in the Order.

About two hundred years after the passing away of the Buddha the first major split occurred among the Buddhists. The followers of what is called the Old Wisdom School split into two sects: the Theravadins and the Sarvastivadins. The Theravadins gained support in the Eastern regions of India and today they dominate Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma and Thailand. Their scriptures, the *Tripitika*, are in Pali.<sup>11</sup> The Sarvastivadins flourished in the West, with Mathura, Gandhara (Peshawar Valley) and Kashmir as their centres. This sect became extinct about 1100 C.E. However, its scriptures are still available in Sanskrit.<sup>12</sup>

By about 240 B.C. we witness the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, as a reaction against the Theravada school, which the Mahayanists nicknamed *Hinayana*.

10. Edward Conze, *Buddhism : Its Essence and Development*, p. 91 (Harper Torch Books, New York, 1959)
11. *The Road to Nirvana - A Selection of the Buddhist Scriptures in Pali*, translated by E. J. Thomas, (Wisdom of the East series, London, 1950.)
12. *The Quest of Enlightenment - a Selection of the Buddhist Scriptures in Sanskrit* translated by E. J. Thomas, (wisdom of the East series, London 1950.)

The third council of Buddhism was held at Pataliputra in the third century B.C. It was a sectional conference of the Hinayana sect and its purpose was to condemn the 'heretical' tendencies of the Mahayana sect. It is claimed that this Council was called by Ashoka, one of the noblest kings of the world, who renounced violence, pursued the policy of peace and rendered invaluable service to Buddhism and to humanity.

The next important event in the Buddhist history is the conversion to Buddhism of Menander (Milinda), a king of a Bactrian dynasty of Greek origin. An important post-canonical book of Hinayana Buddhism, entitled *Milinda-Panha* (Questions of King Milinda), is said to have been written by the distinguished Buddhist philosopher Nagasena in response to certain inquiries made by King Menander. It is an apologetic for the Hinayana school, designed, it has been suggested, to win the wavering minds of the day from the new corrupt elements that had entered Buddhism.

With the rise of the Sakas to power in India a gap appears in our knowledge of the Buddhist history. But in the first century the Sakas were defeated by another race of people from Central Asia, the Yueh-chi or Kushans. The greatest king of this line, Kanishka (reigned 120-162 C.E.) became a Buddhist, and, like Ashoka and Menander before him, rendered great service to his new religion. It was about this time that Buddhism went through a series of changes that made it very different from the Buddha's original doctrine. It came under the various influences of Hellenism, Central Asian paganism and Brahminism. The Buddha was deified and his image became the object of religious veneration. Sometime before this the first statues of the Buddha had been made, and, as a result of the patronage of Kanishka, the great Gandhara school of art flourished. Among the great writers of this period a mention may be made of the poet Asvaghosa, the author of *Buddhacarita* and *Mahayana Sraddhopada* (The Awakening of Faith). This period also saw the rise to great heights of two famous Buddhist Universities, the University of Taxila and the Nalanda University in Magadha (Bihar). The great philosopher Nagarjuna, the founder of the Madhyamika school of Buddhism and author of *Mahaprajna-Paramita Shastra*, was associated with the Nalanda University. The famous Chinese pilgrims, Hiuen-Tsian and I-Tsing, spent many years in this University and expressed unbounded admiration for it in their writings.



Kanishka imitated the example of Ashoka by calling another Buddhist Council -- the fourth. This council, it appears, was only attended by the Sarvastivadins and its purpose was to attempt to harmonise the growing divergence of teaching in the two main schools.

Buddhism continued to flourish and display a great deal of intellectual and moral vigour in the glorious Gupta period. The famous caves of Ajanta and Ellora were sculptured and painted during this age. With the coming of the Huns and the Gujars in India in the sixth century the Buddhist monasteries and seats of learning suffered grievous destruction. But Buddhism again rose to glory during the reign of King Harsha and the age of the Palas. But soon after this Buddhism began to show signs of exhaustion and decadence. The decline of Buddhism in India corresponded with the rise of militant Hinduism, an early manifestation of which was the cutting down of the sacred Buddh tree at Gaya and the burning down of Buddhist monasteries by some misguided Hindu rajas of Bengal and Bihar. The preaching of Hinduism by the great Vedanta philosopher Shankara also had a great deal to do with the fall of Buddhism. By about the eleventh century Buddhism was all but dead in the land of its birth.

Long before its decline in India, Buddhism had spread to and taken deep roots in many lands outside India. It had spread to Ceylon during the reign of Ashoka. In the course of years Ceylon (Sri Lanka) became a great centre of Theravada Buddhism. Buddhism reached Burma in the fifth century and Thailand in the eighth century, and both these countries have ever since then remained loyal to this faith. Buddhism reached China from Central Asia (about 50 C.E.), and from China it spread to Korea (372 C.E.) and Japan (552 C.E.). The Buddhism that was introduced in China was the Mahayana Buddhism, which was already saturated with many pagan and Brahminical ideas and practices, and in China it became further corrupted by admixture with elements taken from the native Taoism. Two new schools of Mahayana Buddhism developed in China. The first was the Pure Land School (Japanese, *Jodo*). It is also called Amitabha School (Japanese, *Amida*) and was founded about 350 C.E. by Hui-yuan on the basis of the *Sukhavati Sutra*. The second was the Chan School (Japanese, *Zen*), which developed in China in the sixth century as a result of the teaching of Bodhidharma (Chinese, *Tamo*; Japanese, *Daruma*), an Indian Buddhist from Madras. Another important Buddhist country is Tibet. Buddhism was introduced in Tibet by King Strongtsen Gampo in the middle of

the seventh century. Tibetan Buddhism, sometimes called Lamaism, is a mixture of Tantric Buddhism and the local Bon religion. An attempt was made in the eleventh century to reform the Tibetan Buddhism by removing from it the Bon elements, and the result was the birth of the Gelugpa sect, to which both the Dalai Lama and the Tashi (Panchen) Lama belong.

### BUDDHIST SECTS

Buddhism is divided into two major sects : the *Hinayana* (or Theravada) and the Mahayana. The terms *Hinayana* (the lesser vehicle) and *Mahayana* (the greater vehicle) were coined by the followers of the Mahayana, who claimed that theirs was a "career or course of life large enough to bear all mankind to salvation." Thus, while the Hinayana regards Mahayana as a corruption of the original Buddhism, or at the best a false and decadent branch, Mahayana regards Hinayana not as false or contrary to true Buddhism, but simply as an incomplete or superficial form of the teaching of the Buddha.

The Buddhist beliefs and practices are centred in, and traditionally guided by, three components, called *Tri-ratna* (three jewels). They are : (1) the Buddha, (2) the Dharma (Pali, *Dhamma*), and (3) the Sangha.

When the Theravadins speak of the Buddha, they mean the human Siddhartha Gautama, who first achieved enlightenment and has shown the way to Nirvana. Quite early in history of Buddhism, a sort of Buddha-cult grew up, and the Buddha's symbols and relics began to be religiously venerated, but the Theravadins never made the Buddha into a God. For them he is a *Sattha* (a teacher), a *Bhagava* (a blessed one), a *Tathagata* (one who has experienced and transcended the imperfections of life) and a *Buddha* (the fully enlightened one). In short, he is a Great Man (*Mahapurusa*), and nothing more.

By the Dhamma, the second of the "three jewels", the Theravadins mean the essential doctrines about suffering, its cause and cure. The Theravada Buddhists believe that the universe generally, and all forms of life in particular, have three characteristics in common (The Three Signs of Being) : impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and an absence of personal soul which separates each from the other forms of life (*anatta*). They are of the view that there is no principle of permanence or unity in or behind the universe. All is flux. There is nothing but a ceaseless becoming and a never-ending change. There is no Being. The Theravadins deny the existence of God, and also of a permanent personal self, or soul, in man. Man is made up of

impermanent and ever-changing qualities, which are illusory, being born of desire. As long as a man has selfish desires, these illusory, ever-changing qualities, of which he is made, will remain, and as long as these remain man will be born again and again in this world of sorrow (*samsara*). Man can free himself from the wheel of births and deaths by destroying desire. Nirvana, the goal of Buddhism, means "the extinction of desire, the extinction of hatred and the extinction of illusion." In the words of Christmas Humphreys, "Nirvana is the extinction of the not-self in the completion of the Self." This can be achieved even after the present life. The person who has done this is called an *Arahant*. When he dies he will be born no more.

The ideal moral life, according to the Theravadins, is that of a Buddhist monk, and hence the importance of the *Sangha*, or the monastic order, the third of the "three jewels". The life of a householder is almost incompatible with higher levels of the spiritual life. Only a monk can attain Arahantship and win Nirvana.

The Mahayana Buddhists differ with the Theravadins in declaring that Becoming is illusory and Being is real. The Ultimate Reality is one and changeless. It is altogether beyond the conception of human intellect. For want of another name it is called Such-ness (*Tathata*). The Mahayana Buddhism is a form of absolute idealism. The Mahayanists regard the Buddha as an incarnation of the One Absolute Reality, which may also be called the eternal Buddha-principle or Godhead.

The Mahayana doctrine of the unity of all beings implies that the fate of each individual is linked with the fate of all. Individuals may purify themselves and thereby escape the miseries of sinful existence, but the salvation of a man is imperfect so long as and so far as there remain any who are not saved. In the words of Masaharu Anesaki, "To save oneself by saving others is the gospel of universal salvation taught by (Mahayana) Buddhism."<sup>13</sup>

The Theravada ideal of *Arhantship* is replaced in Mahayana Buddhism by that of the *Bodhisattva*. A Bodhisattva is one who having attained the state of purification and emancipation, refuses to enter Nirvana and gain salvation for himself, out of devoted love for those who still remain behind and a consuming zeal to help them. He postpones his own entrance into perfect

13. Masaharu Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, p. 54 (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. London; reprinted 1963.)

bliss because his sense of spiritual oneness with others leads him to prefer to wait with them and lovingly serve them until all are ready to enter together. In Anesaki's words, he feels that his own salvation would be imperfect, and even impossible, so long as any living being remains unsaved.

Nirvana, according to Mahayana Buddhism, is the true state of spiritual perfection. It is a state in which compassionate oneness with others has transcended all thought of oneself as a separately distinguishable entity. Paradoxically put, it means that by renouncing Nirvana for oneself, in love for others, one is already in Nirvana as it is truly understood. For Nirvana and Samsara are not two different realms. Nothing is outside Nirvana.

There is one more sect of Buddhism which deserves to be briefly considered here. It is Zen Buddhism. Zen views the traditional aspects of Buddhism with hostility. It holds up images and scriptures to contempt and flouts convention. It is also hostile to metaphysical speculation, averse to theory and intent on abolishing reasoning. Direct insight is prized more highly than the elaborate webs of subtle thought. The truth is not stated in abstract and general terms, but as concretely as possible. It believes that enlightenment and the state of oneness with the One cannot be achieved unless the mind of logic is destroyed. It has developed a very peculiar technique of meditation (*zazen*) to destroy the normal habits of thinking and reasoning and to achieve sudden enlightenment (*satori*).

### BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES

The scriptures of the Theravada sect are the *Tripitaka* (The Three Baskets) in Pali. They are *Vinaya Pitaka*, *Sutta Pitaka*, and *Abidhamma Pitaka*.

1. The *Vinaya Pitaka* deals with the ecclesiastical discipline and prescribes rules and regulations to govern the lives of the monks. It has three main divisions : (a) the *Patimokha*, (b) the *Khandhakas* and (c) the *Parivara*.

2. The *Sutta Pitaka* is the "Basket" of discourse and doctrine. It is divided into five parts, called *Nikayas* : (a) *Digha-nikaya*, division of long discourses containing 34 Suttas. Some of these Suttas are : the *Samannaphala Sutta* (dealing with the rewards of asceticism), the *Ambattha Sutta* (dealing with the Buddha's attitude to caste), *Kutadanta Sutta* (dealing with the relations of Brahminism and Buddhism), *Tevijja Sutta* (contrasting the Brahminical culture with Buddhist ideals) *Mahaparinibbhana Sutta*

(which gives an account of the last days of the Buddha); (b) *Majjhima-nikaya*, division of medium-long discourses, containing 152 Suttas, dealing with all points of Buddhist religion; (c) *Samyutta-nikaya*, division of connected discourses. It contains a version of the famous sermon of Setting in Motion the Wheel of Righteousness; (d) *Anguttra-nikaya*, which has over 2300 suttas in eleven groups; (e) *Khuddaka-nikaya*, division of minor discourses. It contains much of the finest material in the Scriptures. It begins with the *Khuddaka patha*, which might be described as a Manual of Buddhist life. Next comes the *Dhammapada*, the most famous of all Theravada Scriptures and one of the most perfect ethical manuals of the world. Other famous works included in this Nikaya are the *Udana*, the *Itivuttaka* and the justly famous *Sutta Nipata*. Then there are the *Jataka* tales, a collection of stories dealing with the previous lives of the Buddha.

3. *Abidhamma Pitaka*, which is the "basket" of further Dhamma, dealing with psychology and ethics and only incidentally with metaphysics.

The Mahayana sect, as stated earlier, is not a rejection, but a further extension of the Hinayana or Theravada school. The Mahayanists, therefore, accept the *Tripitaka*, but to them they add some additional scriptures of their own. The *Tripitaka* of Mahayana are not in Pali, but mostly in Chinese. They were translated from the Sanskrit version of the Sarvastivada sect. The special Mahayana Sutras of course have no parallel in the Pali *Tripitaka*. These are arranged into groups, such as prajnaparamita group (which contains such famous Sutras as the *Vajracchedika* or *Diamond Sutra*) and the Avatamsaka group. The most famous Mahayana Sutras are the *Lankavatara Sutra*, the *Lotus of the Perfect Law*, the *Surangama Sutra* and the *Sukhavati-Vyuha Sutra*. There are also a large number of Shastras among the Mahayana scriptures. These were composed by the great doctors of the Mahayana sect, like Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu and Asvaghosa. Among the better known Shastras, the *Mahaprajnaparamita Shastra* of Nagarjuna and the *Mahayana Sraddhopada* (the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana) of Asvaghosa deserve to be specially mentioned.

The material contained in the Buddhist Scriptures belongs to widely different dates. The Pali Canon was settled in the third Council (third century B.C.) and for the first time committed to writing in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the first century B.C., that is more than four hundred years after the passing away of the Buddha. The scholars are unanimous in dismissing the claim

that all the sayings put in the mouth of the Buddha in these scriptures were actually uttered by him. This is what the great scholar Dr. E.J. Thomas writes about the *Tripitaka* :

"It contains much which does not claim to be in any sense Buddha's utterance. This is recognized by the Buddhist commentators themselves as when they explain that certain sentences or whole verses had been added by the revisers at one of the Councils."<sup>14</sup>

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14. Dr. E.J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as legend and History*, pp. 249-250 (A.A. Knopf, New York, reprinted 1952.)

## Chapter III

# SIKHISM

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### THE BACKGROUND

The Indo-Pakistan subcontinent is the home of many religions. In the earlier chapters we have described two of the faiths that took birth and developed in this subcontinent. The next religion to rise in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent was Sikhism, but between it and Buddhism there is a gap of many centuries. In the meantime Islam had taken birth in Arabia and spread to many parts of the world, including the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Nearly the whole of this subcontinent was under Muslim rule. The Muslim rulers, however, showed very little zeal for spreading their religion. Islam was spread in India, as Sir Thomas Arnold has shown in his admirable book *The Preaching of Islam*, by Muslim saints and Sufis. These godly men settled away from the capitals and in areas which had no Muslim population. By their preaching, example and saintly life they attracted attention and people flocked to hear them. Their teaching was simple and easy to understand; they told the people of the love of God, of the supreme importance of loving and serving God's creatures and of the beauty of a pure heart. The Islamic doctrines of the unity of God and equality and brotherhood of all men appealed to a large number of people who were dissatisfied with the Hindu polytheism and idolatry or had been the victims of the Hindu caste discrimination and untouchability. Speaking of the conversion of the common people of Bengal by the Sufis, Sir W.W. Hunter writes, "To these poor people, fishermen, hunters, pirates, and low-caste tillers of the soil, Islam came as a revelation from on High. It was the creed of the ruling race, its missionaries were men of zeal who brought the Gospel of the unity of God and the equality of men in its sight to a despised and neglected population. The initiatory rite rendered relapse impossible, and made the proselyte and his posterity true believers for ever...It was not to force that Islam owed its permanent success in Lower Bengal. It appealed to the people, and it derived the great mass of its converts from the poor. It brought in a higher conception of God, and a nobler idea of the brotherhood of men. It offered to the teeming low castes of Bengal, who had sat for ages abject on the outermost pale of the Hindu community, a free entrance into a new social organization."<sup>1</sup>

1. Quoted by Sir T.W. Arnold in *The Preaching of Islam*, pp. 282-283. (Reprinted by Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1961.).

The most notable product of the influence of Islam on India was the strangely attractive North Indian mysticism. Sir T.W. Arnold writes :

"As the Mohammadan power became consolidated, and particularly under the Mughal dynasty, the religious influences of Islam naturally became more permanent and persistent. These influences are certainly apparent in the Hindu theistic movements that arose in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and Bishop Lefroy has conjectured that the positive character of the Muslim teaching attracted minds that were dissatisfied with the vagueness and subjectivity of a Pantheistic system of thought."<sup>2</sup>

One of the greatest of these mystics was Ramananda, about whom Evelyn Underhill writes, "Living at the moment in which the impassioned poetry and deep philosophy of the great Persian mystics, Attar, Sadi, Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, and Hafiz, were exercising a powerful influence on the religious thought of India, he dreamed of reconciling this intense and personal Mohammedan mysticism with the traditional theology of Brahminism."<sup>3</sup>

Another great mystic was Kabir, who may be regarded as the direct forerunner of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. Kabir had experienced the ecstasy of union with God, his heart was full of love, and he sang of that love out of a full heart in the language of the common people.

"How could the love between Thee and me sever?

As the leaf of the lotus abides on the water : so Thou art my Lord, and I am Thy servant.

As the night-bird Chakor gazes all night at the moon:  
so Thou art my Lord and I am Thy servant.

From the beginning until the ending of time, there is love between Thee and me; and how shall such love be extinguished?

Kabir says As the river enters into the ocean, so my heart touches Thee."<sup>4</sup>

He gave expression in his songs to the oneness of God. He achieved what Evelyn Underhill has called the "synthetic vision." He had resolved the perpetual opposition between the personal and

2. Sir T. W. Arnold. *The Preaching of Islam*, pp. 261-262.

3. Introduction to Tagore's translation of the *Poems of Kabir*, p. vii. (Macmillan, London, 1915)

4. *Poems of Kabir* (No. XXXIV), translated by Rabindranath Tagore (Macmillan, London, 1915)



impersonal, the transcendent and immanent, static and dynamic aspects of the Divine Nature between the Absolute of philosophy and the 'sure true Friend' of devotional religion. He sings:

"O how may I ever express that secret word?

O how can I say He is not like this, and He is like that?

If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed :

If I say that He is without me, it is falsehood.

He makes the inner and the outer worlds to be indivisibly one;

The conscious and the unconscious, both are His footstools.

He is neither manifest nor hidden.

He is neither revealed nor unrevealed :

There are no words to tell that which He is."<sup>5</sup>

Kabir believed in the oneness of humanity and strongly condemned the Hindu caste system. He also rejected the Hindu doctrine of the incarnation (*Avatar*) and would have nothing to do with idolatry and ritual bathing in sacred rivers :

"There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places; and I know that they are useless, for I have bathed in them.

The images are lifeless, they cannot speak; I know, for I have cried aloud to them."<sup>6</sup>

He was against the Hindu practices of self-mortification and monasticism. He himself was married, had a son and a daughter, and continued his life as a humble weaver. He says :

"It is not the austerities that mortify the flesh which are pleasing to the Lord.

When you leave off your clothes and kill your senses, you do not please the Lord :

The man who is kind and who practises righteousness, who remains passive amidst the affairs of the world, who considers all creatures on earth as his own self.

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5. Ibid., No. IX.

6. Ibid., No. XLII.

He attains the Immortal Being, the true God is ever with him.

Kabir says : He attains the true Name whose words are pure, and who is free from pride and conceit."<sup>7</sup>

Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was a product of the same spirit and imbibed the same influences and gave the same teaching, very often using the same words and expressions. He was, like Kabir, a Sufi.

### THE LIFE OF GURU NANAK

Nanak was born on April 15, 1469 at Talwandi Rai Bhoie, now known as Nankana Sahib, about forty miles to the south-west of Lahore, in Pakistan. His father Mehta Kalu was a village accountant (*patwari*) in the service of Rai Bular, the Muslim landlord of the village. His mother's name was Tripta. In the *Janam Sakhis* we come across many miraculous stories about his birth and childhood.

At the age of seven Nanak was sent to a village teacher to learn the alphabet and elementary arithmetic. His intelligence and keen interest enabled him to finish his education in a very short time. He was then sent to a village Maulvi to learn Persian and Arabic. It is also written that Nanak studied the Qur'an and Islamic literature with Syed Hasan, a devout Sufi. A few more years passed and Nanak reached the age when, according to Hindu custom, he must be invested with the sacred thread. But to the consternation of all he flatly refused to go through the Hindu initiation ceremony and wear the sacred thread.

From the very beginning Nanak was of a deeply religious bent of mind. His father was keen to put him to some profession or trade, but all his attempts failed to turn the mind of Nanak away from religion and spiritual matters. At last his sister brought him over to her home in Sultanpur, and through her husband's influence got him a job as a storekeeper with Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi, a distant kinsman of the reigning Sultan of Delhi. Although Nanak took over the post with some reluctance, he discharged his duties diligently and won the affection of his employer. Shortly after his appointment as storekeeper, Nanak got married to Sulakhani, the daughter of Mul Chand of Batala. Very little is known of his married life except that two sons were born of this union.

Nanak had been in the service of Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi for about twelve years when he had his first mystic experience. He was

7. *Poems of Kabir*. No. LXV.

at that time in the midst of his early morning ablution by a river, the *Janam Sakhis* say that he disappeared and could not be traced for three days. When he did come home he was a changed man. He was heard saying again and again, "There is no Hindu, there is no Muslim," meaning thereby that the two major communities of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent had departed from the true spirit of religion and stopped practising righteousness. The Nawab was very much surprised at this change in his storekeeper and asked him why he thought there was no Muslim. Nanak replied, "Nawab Sahib, it is very difficult indeed to be a Muslim," and added in explanation :

"He who is firm in his faith  
 Has a right to be called a Muslim.  
 His acts must accord with his faith in the Prophet.  
 He must clean his heart of pride and greed.  
 No more troubled by the two impostors -- life and death.  
 Resigned to the will of God,  
 Knowing Him as the Doer,  
 Freed from the domination of the self,  
 Compassionate to all things,  
 Such a one may call himself a Muslim."

(*Var Majh*, 8. se 1)<sup>8</sup>

He left the service of the Nawab and decided to devote himself completely to the reformation of the people. He made no attempt to proselytise; he only exhorted the people to fill their hearts with the love of God and to be kind, honest and upright in their dealings with their fellowmen. The *Janam Sakhis* report that he undertook five extensive missionary tours (*Udasis*). Although there is some uncertainty about the exact itinerary, the *Janam Sakhis* are more or less agreed about the incidents that took place during the travels.

His first tour took him eastward, as far as Assam. At Hardwar he saw a large number of Hindus who were bathing in the sacred waters of the Ganges, believing that this would wash away their

8. *The Adi Granth*, translated by Dr. Gopal Singh Dardi (Gur Das Kapur, Delhi, 1962.) Other translations of the *Adi Granth* consulted and quoted in this chapter are by (i) Trilochan Singh. (George Allan and Unwin, London, 1960.) and (ii) Manmohan Singh (Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, 1969.)

sins. While standing in the river they also threw handfuls of water towards the east as an offering to the Sun and to their departed ancestors. Nanak also entered the river and began to throw water towards the west. The Hindus gathered around him and asked what he was doing. He replied that he was throwing water in the direction of his newly-sown fields in the Punjab. The people laughed at him and one of them said, "How could anyone send water so many miles away?" Guru Nanak replied with a smile, "If this water cannot reach my farm which is only a few hundred miles away on this very planet, how can the handfuls of water that you are throwing reach the Sun, thousands of miles away, and your ancestors in the world beyond?" He then delivered a sermon on the utter futility of their superstitious practices.

On his arrival at Gorakhmatta, a temple of Gorakh, some twenty miles north of Pilibhit, he had long disputations with the ascetics and yogis of that place. He told them:

"Religion consisteth not in a patched coat, or in a Yogi's staff, or in ashes smeared over the body;

Religion consisteth not in ear-rings, or shaven head, or in the blowing of horns and conches.

Abide pure amid the impurities of the world; thus shalt thou find the way of religion." (*Rag Sūhi*, 8:1).

Passing through Varanasi, Gaya and many other places, Guru Nanak arrived at Kamrup (Assam), where, according to the *Janam Sakhis*, some witches tried to enchant and tempt him with magic, wealth and beauty. But he defeated their designs and convinced them that true beauty and real wealth lay in achieving excellence in one's character.

On the way back he stopped at Jagannath Puri. There at the famous temple of Jagannath, he saw the priests performing the *Arti* ceremony before the image of the god by waving with their hands salvers containing flowers, incense and lighted lamps. Guru Nanak delivered an enlightening sermon to the priests and worshippers on the utter folly of idolatrous practices.

He spent some years travelling in the Punjab, paying more than one visit to the Sufi establishment at Pak Pattan. He also visited the Sufis of Pasrur, Panipat and Multan. Guru Nanak recognised them as his spiritual brothers and felt very happy in their company.

Guru Nanak's second tour was Southwards through Tamilnad down to Ceylon (Sri Lanka). He is said to have come back along the Western coast through Malabar, Konkan, Bombay and Rajasthan, preaching and performing miracles wherever he went. The third

tour was in the Himalayan regions as far as Laddakh.

Guru Nanak's last long journey was the Hajj Pilgrimage to Mecca. From there he went to Medina, the City of the Prophet, and further westwards to Baghdad, where he spent some time with the local Sufis and saints.

He returned to the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent at the time of Emperor Babar's invasion. According to the *Janam Sakhis*, he was taken prisoner by the Emperor's troops at Syedpur (now called Eminabad, in the Gujranwala district) but was later released. The Emperor is said to have been very much impressed by him and asked him for his blessings. Nanak advised him to rule with justice and mercy and promised Babar: "Your empire shall remain for a long time."

Guru Nanak spent his last years at Kartarpur, where large crowds flocked to hear him preach. Everyone who saw him or heard him preaching was impressed by his outstanding piety and saintly character. He was indeed a devoted servant of God and mankind. On his demise, which occurred on September 22, 1539, a dispute is said to have arisen between Hindus and Muslims, each party, desiring to dispose of his earthly remains according to its own religious rites -- the Hindus saying that Nanak was a Hindu because he was born in a Hindu home; the Muslims claiming that he was a Muslim because he believed in the Islamic Creed. When, however, the covering was removed from the body, they only found a heap of flowers, which was divided between the parties.<sup>9</sup>

### THE TEACHINGS OF GURU NANAK

Guru Nanak was a strict monotheist. He believed in the one and only God, who is eternal, self-existent, formless and the Creator of all. The God that Nanak believed in was not an abstract idea or an impersonal moral force; He was a personal Being, capable of being loved and honoured. He denied the reality of all other gods, saying that the one true God alone should be worshipped. Guru Nanak's conception of God is well brought out in the *Mul-Mantra* of the *Japji*, the opening lines of the *Adi Granth*:

"There is but one God, Whose name is True, the Creator,  
devoid of fear and enmity, Immortal, Unborn, Self-existent,  
Great and Bountiful :

The True One was in the beginning; the True One was  
in the primal age.

9. Raja Sir Daljit Singh, *Guru Nanak*, pp. 155-156 (Lion Publication, Lahore, 1943)

The True One is now also, O Nanak; the True One also shall be."<sup>10</sup>

Nanak refused to accept any compromise on the concept of the unity of God. He is indivisibly one, far above every other being, however highly conceived. Nanak rejected the doctrine of the Trinity or Trimurti, declaring that the division of the Godhead into three persons was contrary to the oneness of God :

It is generally supposed that the Divine Mother by a mysterious scheme conceived and gave birth to three deities :

One that creates the second that supports, and the third that adjudges destruction.

But in reality it is God, Who directs the world according to His will, and no other.

The thing that astonishes the people most is that, while He sees them, they cannot see Him.

All hail to Him! All hail!

The Primal Being, Who is pure, Who never began, Who never dies, and through the ages remains the same." (The *Japji*, XXX).

He would have nothing to do with the doctrine of the incarnation. Since God was infinite, argued Nanak, He could not take birth in the womb of a woman and die, nor could He assume human form which was subject to imperfections, decay and death:

"He has no father or mother. He is born of none. He has no form or features, nor does He belong to any of the castes. He feels no hunger or thirst, He is ever-satisfied." (*Var Malar*, p. 22).

"Nanak! he who meditates on the everlasting Reality become everlasting, but he who worships those who died after being born is pursuing the false path." (*Var Asa* 5. 1. p. 2).

Guru Nanak rejected the Hindu monism (*Advaita Vedantism*), which declared that the world was an illusion, as well as the Hindu dualism (*Sankhya-Yoga*) which taught that the world and God were both uncreated and eternal. Like the followers of Islam, he believed that though the world was real, it was created and is not eternal. It is real because it is the expression of God's will and command and because of God's presence in it :

"By His will and command (*hukum*) all forms come into being

10. The *Japji*, translated by Teja Singh (The Sikh Tract Society, Amritsar 1924.) Another translation of *Japji* consulted and quoted in this chapter is by Puran Singh. (Taran Taran, Third edition, 1938.)

-- the working of that Will cannot be described -- It is by His Will that the forms develop life in them, and then they grow exalted" (The *Japji* Hymn No. II).

Guru Nanak exhorted the people to follow the way of obedience and submission to God. Salvation, he said, is for him who has attuned his will to God's supreme will; who thinks and acts just as God wishes him to think and act. To give the Guru's own words :

"The way of obedience brings him at last to the door of salvation.

First he becomes the spiritual support of his family;

Then as a teacher, who has saved himself, he also saves his followers.

Nanak, the man who obeys the Word shall not wander begging from door to door.

Such is the Word immaculate!

O, if one knew how to obey it with all the heart and soul.

(The *Japji*, XV).

Guru Nanak laid great stress on the love of God. The grace of God, he said, comes to the soul which loves Him for Himself alone, and finds all joy in Him alone. Such a devotee indeed lives in God, starves without Him, bathes in Him as the fish in the mighty sea:

"O heart, let your love for God be such as the fish has for water; the more it has, the more intense its happiness and greater the peace in its mind and body; without water it does not live for more than a few minutes."  
(Granth: Shri Ashtapadi 11.2)

Like Kabir before him, Guru Nanak disapproved of the Hindu practices of idolatry and bathing in sacred rivers. Here are two quotations from the *Japji*, in the first of which we have his rejection of idolatry, and in the second his criticism of ritual bathing :

(1) "He cannot be created and set up as an image;

For, He is all in all Himself, devoid of material conditions. Whoever serves Him is honourable.

Nanak, let us, therefore, sing of Him, for He is full of all excellences" (The *Japji*, V).

(2) "I would bathe at sacred places, if by so doing I could please Him; otherwise, what is the use of bathing?"

How can I please Him by merely bathing, when in the whole wide world that I see created nothing can be got without exertion?" (The *Japji* Hymn VI).

Guru Nanak declared the whole humanity to be one. He said that a man was to be honoured, not because he belonged to this or that caste or creed, but because he was a man. He strongly opposed the practise of caste and untouchability. Not only did he establish the equality and brotherhood of man, he also raised the status of women. "How can they be called inferior," said Guru Nanak, "When they give birth to kings and prophets." He laid the foundation of man's uplift not on such short-cuts as *mantras*, miracles, or mysteries, but on man's own humanity, his character and conduct :

"Of no avail is caste and birth: go and ask those who know the truth.

A man's caste or descent is determined by the works he performs" (*Parbhoti* 4, 10).

The way of worshipping God, according to Guru Nanak, was to sing His praises and meditate on His name :

"We have heard that the Master is true and is manifest in Truth; that infinite are the ways in which He is described;

And that when creatures pray to Him for gifts, He the Giver gives.

Well, then, what shall we offer to Him in return that we may behold His council-chamber?

What shall we utter with our lips, which may move Him to give us His love?

In the ambrosial hours of the morn meditate on the grace of the true Name" (The *Japji*, IV).

"He who enshrines the Name in his heart and has the nectar of the Name in his mouth, him the Name of God makes desireless as God Himself is" (*Gauri* 1. 6).

### GURU NANAK AND ISLAM

It is often claimed that the aim of Guru Nanak was to bring about a reconciliation between Islam and Hinduism by combining elements taken from these two faiths into his own religion. Thus, Sardar Khushwant Singh, the distinguished Sikh scholar and novelist, writes in his *History of the Sikhs* : "Sikhism was born out of a wedlock between Hinduism and Islam after they had known



each other for a period of nearly nine hundred years."<sup>11</sup> This, however, is not quite correct. There is almost nothing that is common between the teaching of Guru Nanak and Hinduism. He had a different conception of God, a different theory of creation, a different view of the universe and of God's relation to the universe, a different attitude towards man, a different idea of salvation. Moreover, he strongly condemned the Hindu caste system and the Hindu practices of image-worship and ritual bathing in sacred rivers in the hope of washing away the sins. In all that he accepted, as well as in all that he rejected, he showed himself to be the follower of Islam. Guru Nanak differed with the Hindus over the fundamentals of their faith; but he differed with the Muslims, not over Islam, but rather over the neglect of the true spirit of Islam by the Muslims. This comes out very clearly in a large number of anecdotes about him. For instance, once he was invited by Nawab Daulat Khan Lodhi to join the Muslims in their Friday congregational prayers. Nanak readily agreed. He went to the mosque and joined the service, but when the faithful knelt, Guru Nanak did not kneel with them. When the service was over, the Nawab asked him why he had not knelt with them. Nanak replied: "I had agreed to join you in prayers, but since you were not praying there was no purpose in my kneeling."

"What do you mean?" enquired the Nawab.

Guru Nanak said: "Now tell me, does Namaz (prayers) merely consist in kneeling and bowing?"

"No," said the Nawab, "it is only the outward expression of humility."

Guru Nanak asked: "Then tell me what is the inner expression?"

"The worship the spirit offers in terms of the words of the prayers," replied the Nawab.

"That is why I said, neither you nor the Qazi leading the prayer service was praying, for while your body was bowing your spirit was occupied with other things."

The Guru told them exactly what they were thinking. The Qazi was worried about the new-born filly at his house, and the Nawab in his imagination had gone to Kabul to purchase some horses.<sup>12</sup>

11. Khushwant Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Volume I, p. 17 (Princeton University Press 1963.)

12. Raja Sir Diljit Singh, *Guru Nanak*, pp. 25-26 (The Lion Press, Lahore 1943.)

The Guru then turned to the congregation and said : I will tell you how to offer prayers and follow the Holy Script of the Qur'an:

"In the Mosque of love  
 Spread the carpet of faith,  
 Enjoy only your rightful earnings,  
 Follow the Holy Script.  
 Make restraint and modesty your circumcision,  
 Moderation your fast,  
 Right action your pilgrimage to Ka'ba.  
 Make truth your spiritual guide,  
 Good works your creed,  
 Thus become a Muslim.  
 Repeat His name on your rosary,  
 He will exalt you" (*Var Majh*, p. 140).

He exhorted them to purify their minds, so that the words of the prayer may become meaningful, and make them godly and virtuous :

"The five periods of the day  
 Are associated with five prayers  
 And they have five separate names.  
 Their first requirement is truthfulness.  
 The second is to live on lawful earning.  
 The third is to give in God's name.  
 The fourth is to discipline the mind  
 With right resolution.  
 And the fifth is to praise God.  
 He whose deeds precede the words of prayer  
 Has the right to call himself a Muslim.  
 They wander in the wilderness of untruth  
 Who follow the word and ignore the spirit"

(*Var Majh*, p. 142).

Guru Nanak often used to read the Qur'an and to guide the people in the light of what he had read in the Holy Book. He is reported in the *Adi Granth* to have said : "The age of the Vedas and the Puranas is gone : now the Qur'an is the only book to guide the

world." The copy of the Qur'an from which he used to read out the Divine Message is still preserved at Guru Har Sahai in Ferozepur District.

The gown (*Chola Sahib*) which Guru Nanak used to wear on solemn occasions can be seen at Dera Baba Nanak in the Indian Province of Punjab. It is profusely illustrated with verses from the Qur'an, and on top, just below the collar, is embroidered the Islamic Kalima (or declaration of faith) : "There is but one God, and Muhammad is His Messenger." On the right sleeve, among other verses from the Qur'an, is the following verse : "The religion with God is Islam."

Nanak journeyed all the way to Mecca to perform the Hajj pilgrimage. The Adi Granth contains the following saying of the Guru : "The saints, reformers, martyrs, pirs, shaikhs and qutubs will reap untold benefits if they invoke *daruds* (God's blessings) on the Holy Prophet."

### HISTORY OF SIKHISM

Guru Nanak, as we have seen, preached a religion which was very different from Hinduism. His religious ideas were almost the same as those of Islam. He was a Sufi. But, due to an irony of history, as time passed the Sikhs, who claimed to be the followers of Guru Nanak, began coming closer to Hinduism and became more and more estranged from Islam. Three factors appear to have been responsible for this.

First, though Guru Nanak had not come with a new religion and had no intention of forming a separate religious community, sometime after his death those who claimed to follow him organised themselves into a distinct sect.

Secondly, nearly all the converts to this new sect of Sikhism came from Hinduism, and they continued to follow some of their old ideas and practices, which, in the course of time became part of Sikhism. The converts were also more friendly towards their former co-religionists than towards the Muslims.

Thirdly, the political conflicts of the Sikhs (who by the time of the fifth Guru had organised themselves into a political faction) with the Mughal rulers made them hostile to Islam and Muslims generally. In their hatred of the Mughal rulers they came so close to the Hindus that for all practical purposes they became a sect of Hinduism.

The first successor of Guru Nanak and the second Guru was Eliaí Lehna, later called Guru Angad (1539-1552). He was a devoted follower of Guru Nanak and led a simple life, like his great master. By his tact he was able to prevent a schism between his followers and those of Guru Nanak's son, Sri Chand, who thought he had a better claim to his father's *gaddi*. Guru Angad's greatest contribution to the Sikh history and religion was the devising of the Punjabi script, *Gurmukhi*, and the recording in it of the hymns and sayings of Guru Nanak. This formed the nucleus of the Sikh scriptures, which later on developed into the *Adi Granth*.

The third Guru was Amar Das (1552-1574). He organised Sikhs into 22 *Manjis*, or parishes, and established the institution of free community kitchen, called *Guru-ka-Langar*, where people of all castes took their meals together. It is claimed that Guru Amar Das was a great social reformer and that he forbade the Hindu practice of *Sati*, the burning alive of widows on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands, and advocated the remarriage of Hindu widows.

The fourth Guru was Ram Das (1574-1581). He began the excavation of a great lake, called Amritsar (the Lake of Nectar) and also planned the construction of the Golden Temple in the midst of the lake. The site of the lake was granted by Emperor Akbar and the foundation stone of the temple was laid by a Muslim Sufi saint, Hazrat Mian Meer of Lahore. Ram Das began collecting regular offerings or tithes for the management of the Sikh community and appointed special officials, called *Masands*, to organise worship and collect tithes. Ram Das was the first Guru to appoint his own son as his successor, and thus he made the office of the Guru hereditary.

The fifth Guru, Arjun (1581-1606) played a decisive role in the history of the Sikhs. First of all, he completed the construction of the Golden Temple, and thus provided the Sikhs with a centre and rallying place. Secondly, he compiled the Sikh Sacred Book, the *Adi Granth*, in which he included his own compositions, together with those of his four predecessors. He was a gifted writer and poet. His themes are ever love, devotion and union with the Beloved after the long agony of separation. Thirdly, he organised the Sikhs into a separate community, with their own scriptures, written in their own special script, their own holy lake and their own sacred temple. This was the beginning of the Sikh state and Guru Arjun began to be addressed by his followers as *Sachcha Padshah* (the true Emperor). He was a great statesman, peaceful organizer and distinguished philosopher. He found the Sikhs a mere religious

sect; he left them a nation. Arjun was the first Guru to take active part in politics and to become involved in a conflict with the ruler of the land, Emperor Jehangir. The cause of the quarrel was the refuge and aid which Guru Arjun gave to Emperor Jehangir's rebel son Khusru. On the failure of Khusru's rebellion, Arjun was heavily fined by Jehangir and when he refused to pay the fine, he was arrested, tortured and imprisoned for high treason. The historians have written that Guru Arjun became the victim of a personal vendetta of Jehangir's Hindu Finance Minister, Seth Chandu Shah, who played the malicious role of inciting the Emperor against Guru Arjun. One day, when Arjun had been allowed by the jailor to go out for a swim in the Ravi, which ran alongside the prison, he was accidentally drowned. His death, while still a prisoner, infuriated the Sikhs and provided Sikhism with its first martyr.

The sixth Guru, Har Gobind (1606-1645), surrounded himself with a bodyguard and ordered his followers to take up arms. He lived and ruled as a temporal as well as spiritual leader, keeping court and enjoying hunting. In the Sikh temples, to quote Khushwant Singh, "instead of chanting hymns of peace, the congregation heard ballads extolling feats of heroism, and instead of listening to religious discourses, discussed plans of military conquests." He raised a large, well-equipped standing army, consisting of infantry, cavalry and artillery units. Under the leadership of Har Gobind, they engaged the imperial troops of the Emperor Shah Jehan in several fierce battles.

The seventh Guru, Har Rai (1645-1661) was the grandson of Har Gobind. He kept up the military spirit of the Sikhs. He befriended Emperor Shah Jehan's liberal-minded son Dara Shikoh and helped him in the war of succession against Aurangzeb.

Har Rai ignored his eldest son Ram Rai, because the latter had friendly relations with the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, and appointed his second son Hari Krishen (1661-1664) to succeed him. Hari Krishen was but a child when he became the Guru. His elder brother Ram Rai broke away from him and formed a separate sect. Hari Krishen died when he was only nine.

On the death of Guru Hari Krishen several persons put forward their claims to the *gaddi* of the Guru. The person who was finally made the ninth Guru was Tegh Bahadur (1664-1675). Ram Rai, his closest rival, became his mortal foe. The people of India were dissatisfied with emperor Aurangzeb's religious policy. Guru Tegh Bahadur was among those who opposed the Emperor for his religious discrimination and intolerance. Cunningham writes that

Guru Tegh Bahadur had taken to organising plundering expeditions and levelling forcible exactions on the villagers.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, he was arrested and executed in Delhi. He is revered by Sikhs as a martyr who died not only for the Sikh faith but also for the principal of religious liberty.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's son Gobind Singh became the next Guru. For twenty years he remained in retirement, nourishing the feeling of revenge against those whom he held responsible for his father's death. He began building his image as the champion of the Hindus against the Moghul rulers and wrote several stories of the Hindu gods and goddesses. The recitation of the Hindu religious epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, together with the Granth, was introduced in the Sikh temples.<sup>14</sup> In his autobiographical work, the *Bichitra Natak*, he wrote: "God commanded me to go to the earth. My mind at that time was fixed on the lotus feet of the Lord. I did not wish to go. God, however, sent me to the world with a mandate, saying: 'I cherish thee as My son and send thee to establish virtue and save the people.' "

Guru Gobind Singh held a ceremony called *Khandu-di-Pahul* (the Baptism of the Sword) in which he baptised five chosen disciples, called *Piyaras*. He sent for an iron bowl and put some sugar and water in it. He then stirred it with a two-edged dagger and called the solution *Amrita* (nectar). The five *Piyaras* drank the *Amrita* and then ate a kind of porridge called *Karah Parshad*. Guru Gobind Singh told them that they had become members of a new church and that they were to regard him as their father and the youngest of his several wives, Sahib Devan, as their mother. They were told to assume the name of 'Singh' (lion)<sup>15</sup> and carry arms on their person, and also to wear garments suited to the life of a soldier. They were to wear five articles, the name of which all began in Punjabi with a K. These were *Kes* (unshorn hair and beard), *Kangha* (a comb), *Kirpan* (a sword), *Kach* (a knee-length pair of breeches), and *Kara* (a steel bracelet). Guru Gobind Singh told them that wherever and whenever in the future five Sikhs gathered, his spirit would be with them. "If we read the Sikh history aright," writes Teja Singh, "the Sikh community would appear as an organized unit to have undergone a course of discipline in the hands of the ten Gurus, until its character was fully developed and the Guru

13. J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, London, 1849.

14. Bhagat Lakshman Singh, *The Life and Work of Guru Gobind Singh*, p. 23 (The Tribune Press, Lahore, 1909.)

15. The Sikh women were told to adopt the surname Kaur (Princess).

merged his personality in the body of the nation thus reared."<sup>16</sup>

Following the five *Piyaras*, many disciples of Guru Gobind Singh were baptised in the same fashion. The new church was called "Khalsa Panth" (the Pure Way) and the persons thus baptized were called "Khalsas" (the pure ones). The aim of Guru Gobind Singh in introducing this new form of baptism was clearly to give the Sikhs a separate identity and to make them into a nation of soldiers. He completely changed the character of Sikhism and the Sikh community. Some Sikhs, however, refused this baptism and were known as "Sahajdharis" or livers at ease. They formed a separate sect.

The Khalsa Sikhs gradually became a powerful military force. The people who joined them, particularly the Jats, were inspired by an intense hatred of the Muslims. Bhagat Lakshman Singh, an ardent admirer of Guru Gobind Singh, writes: "To them to be a Sikh was to avow open hatred of Brahmins and Mussalmans. Men with a strong arm, ready to strike a blow on the Mussalmans and fit to suffer great physical hardships, were principally in demand and when these people succeeded in crushing the Muslim power they only demanded adherence to the outward symbols of Sikhism."<sup>17</sup>

The Guru first attacked the semi-independent Hindu Rajas of the Shivalik hills (now Himachal Pradesh), who were feudatories of the Mughal Emperor. Later on, at the suggestion of the hill-Rajas, he joined hands with them to resist the Mughal tax-collector. The Hindu Rajas, however, double-crossed him. On the one hand, they fought against the Mughal officer under the Guru's leadership and, on the other, made terms with the officer behind the Guru's back. Guru Gobind Singh and his allies were badly defeated, but Emperor Aurangzeb showed great magnanimity and pardoned the Guru and his Sikhs, leaving them unmolested for twelve years. This gave Guru Gobind Singh the time to carry out his programme of reorganising the Sikhs and to give them a sense of nationhood and military power. When the Emperor was away on a long campaign in the Deccan, the hill-Rajas attacked the Sikhs at Anandpur and also applied, as feudatories, to the Imperial troops for help. It was during this war that the Guru suffered a terrible defeat and lost everything. Two of his sons died fighting, while the younger two are arrested and brutally executed under the orders of the governor of Sirhind. He himself managed to escape alone and took ref-

16. Teja Singh, *The Sikh Religion*, p. 24. (Jabalpur, 1948)

17. Bhagat Lakshman Singh, *The Life and Work of Gobind Singh*, p. 163. (Tribune Press Lahore, 1909)

uge among the Malwa Jats. From there, says Khushwant Singh, he wrote a letter to the Emperor Aurangzeb, describing the calamity that he and his followers had suffered at the hands of the Imperial troops at the instigation of the "idolatrous hill-men" and appealing to the Emperor, as a "Godfearing man", to intervene on his behalf. (The *Zafar Nama*, included in the *Dasam Granth*, is a mutilated Gurmukhi version of the original letter in Persian.) Aurangzeb immediately sent orders to the Governor of the Punjab to stop troubling the Guru and also invited the latter to a personal talk. The Guru immediately set out to visit the Emperor, but before they could meet Emperor Aurangzeb died. The Guru was received with much kindness by the new Emperor, Bahadur Shah. But this did not prevent Guru Gobind Singh from taking advantage of the weakness of the Mughals and ordering one of his most fanatical disciples, Banda, to raise an army and massacre the Muslims in the Punjab to avenge the defeat of the Sikhs at Anandpur. The atrocities and barbarities committed by Banda have few parallels in history. Meanwhile Guru Gobind Singh's end also drew nigh. He was assassinated by a Pathan, whose father he had earlier slain over a matter of trade, a mere trifle.<sup>18</sup>

All the sons of Guru Gobind Singh having died in the wars, he announced that he would appoint no successor, but the Khalsa and the Granth between them would carry on the work.

After Guru Gobind Singh's death, the Sikhs withdrew into the fastnesses of the Punjab, where they lived in separate bodies, under local chieftains. But in the early years of the nineteenth century, after the decline of the Mughal power, Maharaja Ranjit Singh again united the Sikhs into a great nation and established his own authority over the Punjab. He was determined to extend his kingdom south of the Sutlej, where a couple of small Sikh states had sprung up. The latter applied to the British for help, and Lord Minto, the British Governor General, sent Lord Metcalfe to the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to persuade the latter to give up his plan. Ranjit Singh agreed and signed a treaty of friendship with the British. As long as Ranjit Singh ruled over the Sikhs they remained a strong and powerful nation. After his death in 1839 the Sikhs came into conflict with the British and there were two deadly wars. At last the Sikhs were defeated and their territory became part of the British Indian Empire.

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18. Annie Besant, *Sikhism*, p.76 (Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras).



### THE SIKH SCRIPTURES

The Sikh Scriptures include (1) the *Adi Granth* and (2) the *Dasam Granth*. The *Adi Granth*, or the *Guru Granth Sahib*, was compiled by the fifth Guru, Arjun, at Amritsar. There are three versions of this Granth : *Kartar Vali Bir*, *Bhai Banno Vali Bir*, and *Dam Dama Vali Bir*. The last mentioned is a revised version by Guru Gobind Singh, who inserted the compositions of his father, Guru Tegh Bahadur, among the hymns of the first five Gurus included in the original version. There are three categories of writings in the *Adi Granth*. Firstly, the hymns of the Sikh Gurus. Of these the largest number 2218, are by Arjun, followed by Guru Nanak 974, (including his famous *Japji*), Amar Das 907, Ram Das 679, Tegh Bahadur 115, and Angad 62. Secondly, hymns by Hindu and Muslim mystics. Of these the largest number is by the Muslim Sufis Kabir and Farid. Thirdly, panegyrics in praise of the Sikh Gurus by official bards. The hymns of the *Adi Granth* are not arranged by authors or subject matter, but are divided into 31 *ragas* or musical modes in which they are meant to be sung.

The *Dasam Granth*, or *Dasvin Padshah ka Granth*, is a collection of the writings of Guru Gobind Singh. The compilation can be conveniently divided into four parts : the mythological, the philosophical, the autobiographical, and the (narrative). The largest portion is the mythological and contains Guru Gobind Singh's retelling of the tales of the Hindu gods and goddesses. The philosophical section includes such well-known works as the *Jap Sahib* (distinct from Guru Nanak's *Japji*), the *Akal Ustat*, *Gyan Probodh* and *Sabad Hazare*. The autobiographical portion includes *Bichitra Natak* and *Zafar Nama*. The narrative section, which comprises *Pakhyan Charitr* and the *Hikayats*, includes among others the tales told by Guru Gobind Singh of the wiles of women.

In addition to the Granths, there are also the *Janam Sakhis* or traditional biographies of Guru Nanak. They contain much legendary matter and abound with stories of miracles and wonders. Of these the best known are (i) the *Janam Sakhi* of *Bhai Bala*, (ii) the *Vilayat Vali Janam Sakhi*, said to have been written in 1588 by one Sewa Das, and (iii) *Hafizabad Vali Janam Sakhi*.

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## Chapter IV

# ZOROASTRIANISM

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### THE BACKGROUND

The Iranians are very closely allied to the Indo-Aryans, who invaded the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent about 1500 B.C. and wrote the Vedas. They had lived together for centuries in Afghanistan, Bactria and North Iran. The language which these people originally spoke was the ancient Aryan language of which the language of the Vedic hymns and of the Gathas of Zarathushtra are both branches. The exceedingly close resemblance between the two has been noted by every student of Aryan philology.

These two branches of the Aryans (the Iranians and the Indo-Aryans) had a common religious tradition. Religion for both meant the performance of sacrifices to win the favour of the gods. Fire was lighted on a specially constructed altar and into it were thrown flesh of animals, grain and milk products, while the priests chanted the sacred hymns to the gods. What specially delighted the gods was the offering of the intoxicating juice of a plant, called *soma* in the Vedic hymns and *homa* in the Avesta.

The worship of ancestors was another prominent feature of the ancient Aryan faith, which both the branches inherited in common. The ritual pertaining to this worship took the form of offering to the spirits of ancestors a cake called *darun* among the Iranians and *purodasha* among the Indo-Aryans.

The Iranians, like the Vedic Aryans, were polytheists. They worshipped a large number of nature-gods -- the gods of the elements, fire, water, air and earth, and of the lights of heaven : the Sun, the Moon and the stars. Among the gods that figure prominently in the religious traditions of both these peoples, we may particularly mention Mithra, the god of the Sun; Vayu, the god of wind; and Aramaiti, the goddess of the earth. There are other names, however, which stand for diametrically opposed powers among the two communities. The most important of these is *Ahura*, which is the name of the Supreme Lord in the Avesta, but which in the Sanskrit form *Asura* signifies a demon. On the other hand, *Deva*, which in the Avesta denotes the demon, in Sanskrit means god. Indra is one of the greatest deities in the Vedic pantheon; in the Avesta he is the chief helpmate of the Evil One. Apparently there was a religious conflict between these two branches of Aryans, which resulted in the inversion of some of the ancient deities into demons among the Iranians, and the Indo-Aryans appear to have repaid the compli-

ment. It also led to the Indo-Aryans being forced to leave the land which they had shared in common with the Iranians and to their migration to the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. Max Muller is of the view that this schism started with Zarathushtra, who sought to dislodge the so-called nature-gods from their divine pedestal and to introduce the worship of the One True God, who was primarily conceived as righteous.

### THE LIFE OF ZARATHUSHTRA

The personal name of the great Prophet of Iran was Spitama. Zarathushtra (of which *Zoroaster* is the Greek form) was the title by which he was known after he had proclaimed his Message, just as the Prince Siddhartha Gautama, after his enlightenment came to be known as the Buddha, and Jesus as the Christ or the Messiah. Dr. Taraporewala explains the significance of the name Zarathushtra as "He of the Golden Light", which is quite an appropriate name to be given to one of the greatest light-bringers of the world.

There is a wide difference of opinion among the scholars regarding the date and place of Zarathushtra's birth. Professor Jackson and Dr. West are of the view that Zarathushtra was born sometimes between 600 and 583 B.C. The tradition among the Parsis, however, takes him at least a couple of millenia earlier. This may seem fantastic, but it is interesting to note that even among the ancient Greeks it was believed that Zoroaster had lived several thousand years earlier. Thus, Xanthus of Lydia, who lived in the fifth century B.C., wrote that Zoroaster lived 6000 years before Xerxes. This was accepted by the subsequent Greek and Roman writers. But if what Max Muller says is correct -- that the split between the Iranians and the Indo-Aryans occurred because of Zarathushtra's insistence on the Unity of God and condemnation of the Aryan polytheism and sacrificial system --- then Zarathushtra's date would be just before the first wave of Aryan migration to the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, that is, about 1700 B.C.

As with several other religious teachers, many legends have gathered around the birth and life of Zarathushtra. It is said that his mother felt impregnated by some divine glory. His birth was accompanied by the joy of Nature and the tremor of the terror-stricken demons. The little child's entrance into the world was marked by a laugh instead of the usual wailing of the new-born. The wicked tried to destroy him while he was yet an infant, but time and again he was saved as if by supernatural intervention. In the midst of these weeds of legends, however, we have a goodly crop of sober history.

He belonged to a respectable and illustrious family. His father was the venerable Porushaspo, and his mother was the pious and virtuous Dughodhova. At the time of his birth the eastern Aryan

world was plunged in chaos; wickedness went unchecked, truth seemed to have left the world, selfishness and oppression of the weak was the order of the day. The priests ruled over the lives and minds of the people, spreading dark superstitions to serve their own purpose. The opening verses of the first Gatha (the *Gatha Ahunavaiti*) describe the general prevalence of wickedness and superstition in the world in a poetic manner. The Spirit of the Mother-Earth appears before the throne of the Almighty and appeals to Him to send a saviour to the world. Thus the cry of the oppressed reached the throne of God and He in His mercy raised Zarathushtra to set things right and bring relief to the soul of the Mother-Earth :

"One such, here present, is well-known to Me,  
The only one who kept all My commands --  
The Holy Zarathushtra Spitama;  
Eager is he and willing to proclaim  
Through songs and hymns Mazda's Eternal Law;  
Sweetness of speech, therefore, to him I grant."  
(The *Gathas*, Yasna 29 : 9)<sup>1</sup>

At the age of fifteen (when the youth of ancient Iran used to enter upon their worldly life) young Spitama went into absolute seclusion to commune with his Maker and to prepare for his great task. In one section of the Avesta (*Vendidad*, 19) we have an account of his temptation by Angro-Mainyu (the Evil One) -- just as the Buddha was tempted by Mara and Jesus was tempted by Satan. The Evil One offered the sovereignty of the world to Spitama for one blessing from his lips upon the "creation of evil"; but Spitama stood firm against the Evil One.

When he was thirty years of age he emerged as the Prophet of God, and from that time onwards, according to the Zoroastrian traditions, he received several revelations from Ahura-Mazda and his great mission began. After the first revelation he started preaching the true religion. During ten weary years he toiled on and succeeded in having but one convert, his own cousin Maidhyoi-maonha. He faced persecution and what looked like certain failure. The anguish of his heart comes out unmistakably in the Gathas. At last in the twelfth year of his ministry he left his native province and travelled eastwards, first to Seistan, and then to Bactria, where ruled the wise Vishtaspa. Zarathushtra's desire had always been to convert some wise and powerful ruler to his cause. Commenting on this, Professor Jaques Duchesne-Guillemin writes :

1. *The Gathas of Zarathushtra*, Translated by I.J.S. Taraporewala (published by the author from 7, Vatchagandhi Road, Gamdevi Bombay, 1947.)

"Instead of a Buddha who breaks with the world, a Socrates who shocks those in office, a Jesus who renders unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's, one would compare him with Confucius travelling from one Chinese province to the other in search of the prince who will apply his maxims of wisdom."<sup>2</sup>

King Vishtaspa received Zarathushtra kindly and showed himself inclined to his message. Zarathushtra is said to have performed several miracles in the presence of the king and his court and held long discussions with the learned men there. Slowly and surely the truth he proclaimed, won the hearts of the king and his nobles. The masses followed in the wake of their leaders and Zoroastrianism was soon established as the religion of Iran.

The very success of the new religion paved the way for bitter wars between Iran and Turan. Zarathushtra did not believe in the use of force to convert men to his religion. He only allowed defensive wars to protect his religion and followers from the violence of others. Professor Wadia writes :

"Zoroaster himself was not for force in matters religious. He left it to the good sense of the people. If they were converted, he naturally rejoiced, but if they did not, he only pointed out the evil consequences that would accrue."<sup>3</sup>

After forty-seven years of very strenuous effort for the establishment of the truth, the great Prophet of Iran passed away at the age of seventy-seven. He led a life of undivided loyalty and devotion to the God of righteousness and to truth. He was a man of singular piety, and his religion breathes nothing but pity for the suffering and love for the righteous.

### THE TEACHINGS OF ZARATHUSHTRA

The religion preached by Zarathushtra has come to be known as Zoroastrianism, but the name which he himself gave to it was *Mazdayasna* -- the worship of Mazda, the one true All-knowing God.

Zarathushtra did not claim to be the first prophet of Mazdayasnism. Among the earlier prophets mentioned in the Zoroastrian scriptures we come across the names of Yima (later called Jamshed), Tharaetaona (Faridun) and Kavaushan. One may read the stories and legends about these ancient Iranian prophets in the Persian poet Firdawsi's famous epic poem, the *Shahnama*.

2. Jaques Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Hymns of Zarathushtra*, Introduction, p. 5 (The Wisdom of the East series, London 1952.)
3. A. R. Wadia, *The Life and Teaching of Zoroaster*, p. 15 (G. A. Natesan and Co. Madras 1933.)

At the time of Zarathushtra's birth the pure religion of these prophets had been all but forgotten and its place had been taken by polytheism and unedifying ritualism. It was the mission of Zarathushtra to revive the true religion and affirm the high values of life as represented by the triad of *hoomtā*, *hookhta*, and *huvereshta*, that is, pure thoughts, pure words and pure deeds. And how was this to be achieved? Only through belief in Ahura-Mazda (later Ormuzd), the God of Righteousness. The name Ahura-Mazda, given to the One True God in the Avesta, is made up of two words, *Mazda* meaning Wise, All-knowing, and *Ahura* meaning the Supreme Lord.

In a series of questions, which are quite rhetorical as he who puts them knows the answer beforehand, Zarathushtra expounds the oneness and universal providence of God, Ahura-Mazda is the Creator and Lord of all that exists :

"This do I ask, Ahura, tell me true :  
 What Great Creator the place of Righteousness assigned?  
 Who was First Father of Eternal Law?  
 What Being laid down paths for sun and stars?  
 Who caused the moon to wax and wane betimes?  
 All this and more, I fain would ask, O Lord.  
 "This do I ask, Ahura, tell me true :  
 Whose might doth hold the earth and sky apart?  
 Who keeps the waters and plants in place?  
 Who guides the winds in their uncharted course?  
 Who wafts from far the dark clouds charged with rain?  
 And who inspires the love of Good Mind?  
 "This do I ask, Ahura, tell me true :  
 What Architect did fashion realms of light,  
 As also realms of dark? Who wisely planned  
 For us both sleep and waking -- rest and work?  
 Who hath created dawn and day and night,  
 To teach the wise the purpose of all life?"  
 (The *Gathas*, Yasna 44 : 3-5)

And here in his own words is the essence of his religion -- the submission of one's whole self to the One True God and the doing of good :

"This do I ask, Ahura, tell me true :  
 How dedicate my whole self unto Thee  
 In holy service done with all my strength?

This the religion wisdom taught to me.  
 Thy devotee below'd shall dwell with Thee,  
 Strong in his service, love of man and truth."  
 (The *Gathas*, Yasna 44 : 9)

The six chief attributes of Ahura-Mazda, according to Zarathushtra are *Asha* (the righteous and true), *Vohu-mano* (the Good Mind), *Kshatra* (the Almighty), *Armaiti* (the Faithful, the All-loving), *Haurvatat* (the Perfect or the Holy) and *Ameretatat* (the Immortal).

Zoroastrianism is said to be a dualistic faith; but this was not true of the original doctrine of Zarathushtra. It is true that Zarathushtra speaks of two spirits -- *Spento-Mainyu* (the Good Spirit) and *Angro-Mainyu* (also called *Ahriman*, the Evil Spirit) but they were created by Ahura-Mazda, who is beyond and above these two spirits. To quote from the *Gathas* :

"The first-created were the spirits twain,  
 As twin co-workers they reveal themselves;  
 Yet in each thought and deed these two  
 Are never agreed; one is good, the other bad;  
 And of these two the wise do choose aright,  
 The unwise choose not thus, -- and go astray."  
 (The *Gathas*, Yasna 30 : 3)

While commenting on these verses, Dr. Taraporewala writes the following in his book *The Religion of Zarathushtra* :

"Zoroaster preached about the two Spirits, but his philosophy is by no means dualistic. This idea of dualism did, indeed, creep into the religion during the later stages of its development; but in the Teacher's own days and in his own words, the idea developed is most emphatically not dualistic. It is not dualistic in the sense usually understood, *viz.*, of conceiving two *co-eternal, co-equal* powers, one good and one evil, who are for ever at war with each other. The concept of Zarathushtra is something essentially different. He tells us that there are the two spirits -- the good and the evil -- at war with each other. They form the antithesis of each other in every respect. But in two most important respects his teaching differs from the popularly conceived idea of dualism. In the first place *the conflict is bound to have an end*. The books, even the later books which were responsible for all this later confusion of thought, speak of the ultimate triumph of the good spirit and of the hiding of the evil one underground. And the Prophet himself categorically declares....that Evil shall ultimately perish. If, therefore, one of the two powers in the so-called 'dualistic' system is ultimately to perish, we cannot in reason say that the system teaches that these two powers are either

*co-equal* or *co-eternal*. And yet in another aspect and perhaps in a more fundamental respect is the system of Zoroaster not dualistic. The two spirits are not *self-created* as may be expected in a truly dualistic system. For both these emanate from and are *the creations of Ahura-Mazda*.<sup>4</sup>

The religion of Zarathushtra has been defined as the Path of *Asha*. The Avestan word *Asha* seems to have the same signification as the Vedic word *Rta* and the Chinese word *Tao* (as used by Lao Tzu in *Tao Te Ching*). Dr. Taraporewala defines it thus :

"What then is this *Asha*? Scholars translate it variously as 'purity', or 'righteousness' or 'truth', but it is far more than any of these words in their ordinary sense. It is the Eternal Truth, the one Reality, which is the mainspring of all manifestation and of all evolution. It is very hard to express the concept in mere words; it has to be meditated upon and realised within ourselves. It is the Truth which upholds the Throne of God Himself. It is the *Great Law*, the Plan of God, according to which He fashioned the universe."<sup>5</sup>

To follow the path of *Asha* is thus to be in harmony with the decrees of the Creator. Ahura-Mazda is the God of Righteousness and Zoroastrianism is primarily a moral religion. Zarathushtra, therefore, abolished the old religion of unedifying rituals and sacrifices and introduced the new religion of righteousness -- the Path of *Asha*. Professor Jaques Duchesne-Guillemin writes :

"Zoroaster rejects the blood sacrifice and the offering of the sacred liquor. The gods who have been taking part in these sacrifices are now starved. He eliminates them, together with the myths concerning them."<sup>6</sup>

And this is what Professor Wadia writes on the same subject:

The greatest reform achieved by Zoroaster was in the realm of morality. By identifying it with the will of Ahura-Mazda, he put it on a religious basis and freed it from idol-worship as well as from ritualism."<sup>7</sup>

According to Professor Wadia, the Zoroastrian ethics is (1) non-ascetic and (2) heroic. By the first he means that there is no room in Zoroastrianism for monasticism, celibacy and self-mortification. About the second characteristic of Zoroastrian ethics, he writes:

4. Dr. I.J.S. Taraporewala, *The Religion of Zarathushtra*, pp. 49-50 (Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras 1926)
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
6. Jaques Duchesne-Guillemin, *The Hymns of Zarathushtra*, Introduction, p.14. (The wisdom of the East series, London, 1952.)
7. A. R. Wadia, *The Life and Teachings of Zoroaster*, p. 21. (G. A. Natesan and Co., Madras, 1938)



"As for the other characteristic, the heroic, what is implied is that man is not born sinful nor is he so weak by himself that he cannot expect to attain salvation except through the grace of God or of Christ as in Christianity. Zoroaster himself does not claim any power to save men, his mission is to show the right path and it is for each man and woman to follow that path and carve out his or her own destiny."<sup>8</sup>

God has endowed human beings with *urwan* -- that faculty within them that enables them to *choose* for themselves. Every man is personally accountable for his own actions and none can atone for another's sins. Zoroastrianism is the religion of action. It stands for a straight fight against evil. The true follower of Zarathushtra is he who is always ranged on the side of truth and justice and who is always ready to help in the hour of another's need. The virtues most highly extolled in the Gathas are pure thoughts, pure words and pure deeds and the service of humanity. Then come kindness to animals and cultivation of land. It is written in the Gathas :

"Keep hatred far from you; let nothing tempt your minds to violence; -- hold on to love : the holy teachers (i.e., the prophets) build the bridge to Truth, and they shall lead our band to Thine Abode, O Lord, where righteousness ever dwells."

(The *Gathas*, Yasna 48 : 7).

"Thou art Divine, I know, O Lord Supreme; Thou wast the first, I know, when life began; all thoughts and words and deeds of men shall bear fruit, as laid down in Thy eternal law -- evil to evil, blessings good to good -- Thy wisdom thus ordains till end of time."

(The *Gathas*, Yasna 43 : 5).

The reward of the good and the punishment of the evil is not confined to this world. There is a life after death. In the Gathas Zarathushtra holds out the promise of heaven to the good, and of hell to the wicked. He also speaks of the judgment at the Chinvat Bridge which the soul of the dead has to cross. For the righteous the Bridge offers an easy passage, but for the wicked it narrows to the edge of a sword and they fall into hell.

### LATER ZOROASTRIANISM

The devotion and enthusiasm of Vishtaspa, the King of Bactria, led to the acceptance of the Religion of Zarathushtra by the whole of Iran in a very short time. In the course of years it produced one of the greatest civilizations of the world, the Achaemenid civilization. Both Cyrus the Great (558-529 B.C.) and Darius the Great (521-485 B.C.) were devoted Zoroastrians. It is said that Darius had all the sacred scriptures of Zoroastrianism collected and inscribed on parchments in letters of gold. The whole collection was divided

8. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

according to the subject matter into 21 books, called *Nasks*, and deposited in the Imperial Library at Persepolis.

It is not possible to say for how long the Religion of Zarathushtra retained its original purity. But even at the time of the composition of the later Yasna, Zoroastrianism had departed considerably from the Divinely-inspired teaching of Zoroaster. From the Gathas to the later portions of the Yasna, from the Yasna to the Vispered, from the Vispered to the Yashts, from the Yashts to the Vendidad, from the Avestan sacred books as a whole to the Pahlavi religious books, there is unmistakable evidence of continuous degeneration of the Zoroastrian religion. Professor Wadia writes :

"It is one of the tragedies of religion that the purity of the founders is not kept up by the followers and the freshness of the faith is lost through endless excrescences. Zoroastrianism is no exception to the rule. In the course of the centuries the prophet's teaching was considerably modified in various ways."<sup>9</sup>

Sometime after the passing away of Zarathushtra we see the emergence of the doctrine of the two creators, or dualism. Not only was Ahura-Mazda identified with Spento-Mainyu, but Spento-Mainyu and Angro-Mainyu began to be regarded as co-eternal and co-equal. They were believed to be the joint creators of the universe. Some things in the world were the creation of Spento-Mainyu and were inherently good, others were the creation of Angro-Mainyu and were inherently bad. Zarathushtra's doctrine of monotheism was corrupted by the adoption of belief in a large number of imaginary deities. The six chief attributes of Ahura-Mazda were personified and made into separate gods. They were called *Amesha Spentas*, the Holy Immortals. The old Nature-gods, whom Zarathushtra had rejected as mere figments of the superstitious mind, were revived and began to be worshipped as *Yazatas* or minor gods (or angels). There was also the revival of ancestor-worship. The anniversaries of the dead began to be observed more or less elaborately and the last ten days of the Zoroastrian year were dedicated to the worship of the *Fra-vashis*, i.e., the souls or guardian-angels of the dead relatives and friends.

With the passage of time the religion of Zarathushtra became more and more formal and ritualistic. There arose a widely-spread priesthood (*atharavans*), who systemised its doctrines and organised and carried on its worship, and laid down the minutely elaborate laws of the *Vendidad* regarding ritual purity. The whole life was dominated by the idea of purity and defilement; the great business of life was to avoid impurity and when it was involuntarily contacted to remove it in the correct manner as quickly as possible. Worship

9. *The Life and Teachings of Zoroaster*, p. 67.

in later Zoroastrianism was centred round the holy fire. While it would not be quite correct to describe the Zoroastrians as fire-worshippers, there is no doubt that the Zoroastrians came to look upon it with excessive veneration and a galaxy of sins came to be formulated round the purity of fire. In the *Vendidad* and in *Jamyad Yasht*, Fire is spoken of as the Son of God. It was made the symbol of God and used in worship as the representative of God. Professor Wadia writes :

"As we have already seen before, Zoroaster emerged as a great religious reformer by dethroning these spurious nature-gods and establishing the worship of one God, the God of righteousness. With the conversion of King Vishtaspa, this new faith took root in the Iranian soil, but the spirit of his teaching was not kept up in purity, and the priestly class accustomed to worship the elements of nature reintroduced all the old gods in a new garb by making them the arch-angels or angels of Ahura-Mazda. It was a masterly stroke of eclecticism so that the new was grafted on the old, or if one so prefers to put it, the old was grafted on the new. In this scheme fire came to have a central place and the worship of fire as a symbol of God was given a fresh lease of life, which has continued right down till our own times so far as the Parsis are concerned."<sup>10</sup>

In the sanctuaries of the Zoroastrian temples the various sacrifices and the high and low masses began to be celebrated. As offerings, meat, milk, show-bread, fruits, flowers and consecrated water were used. In the worship the drink prepared from the *homa* plant again began to have a prominent place.

Thus, at the time of the conquest of Iran by Alexander the Great (330 B.C.), Zoroastrianism had already lost its original vitality and purity. In a drunken fit the great Macedonian conqueror set fire to the palace of Persepolis and the whole of the library, including the Holy Scriptures of Zoroastrianism, perished in the conflagration. It was a severe blow and for nearly two centuries after Alexander's conquest we have no record of the Zoroastrian religion. Doubtless the learned and devoted priests, who had survived the invasion, kept the faith alive in the hearts of the people and they must have also preserved in their memory the greater part of the Scriptures.

The rise of the Parthians or Arsacids (249 B.C.) marks a fresh era in the history of Persia. The Parthians were not Zoroastrians in the beginning, but later on they appear to have adopted the Zoroastrian faith. The later Parthian rulers did much to bring together the sacred remnants of the old scriptures. The Parthians were overthrown by the Sassanians in 226 C.E. The new rulers played a vital role in

10. *The Life and Teachings of zoroaster*, p. 34.

reviving the Zoroastrian religion, but of the vast library of Zoroastrian sacred books only a small portion could be recovered. They were translated into Pahlavi, the language of the Sassanians, and long commentaries were written on them. But in spite of the piety and zeal of the early Sassanian rulers and clergy, the Zoroastrianism that was revived was not the religion of Zarathushtra, but the decadent Zoroastrianism of later times. Dr. Iliffe writes :

"A second notable achievement of the Sassanian Empire was the creation of a powerful State Church. This was Mazdaeism, a revival of old Zoroastrian religion of the Achaemenids, which had always remained the traditional religion of Iran, although thrust into the background during the agnostic Parthian period. In its new form it was no longer a monotheism, with Ahura-Mazda as sole God: several other deities, of whom traces appeared at an earlier date, including Mithras and Anahita, now take a far more prominent place in the Mazdaean pantheon. As a State Church Mazdaeism possessed a supreme head and a powerful hierarchy of clergy, the Magi, whose word was law. The central feature of the religion was the Sacred Fire, which was maintained in every community and household, and also in three particularly venerated shrines in widely scattered parts of the empire."<sup>11</sup>

The last period of the Sassanian rule was an age of religious dissatisfaction and political and social confusion. The Zoroastrian faith had lost its purity and nobility. To quote from Dr. Taraporewala's book *The Religion of Zarathushtra* :

"No nation can maintain its spiritual life upon such washings and mortifications and upon such an obsession of the 'demon of the corpse', such as we read of in the *Vendidad*. The human heart needs the bread of divine love and grace, and the *Vendidad* offers merely a stone instead. It is not denied that the older *Yashts* and the *Yasna* and the *Gathas* with their far more satisfying ideals did also exist at that period, but even with these their Pahlavi interpretations seem to have been largely tinged by the spirit of the *Vendidad*."<sup>12</sup>

There was just one exception to the general rule of corrupt and self-seeking rulers during the last period of Sassanian rule in Iran. This was Khusrav I, better known as Noshirvan the Just, who ruled from 531 to 578 C.E. He was a great, just and benevolent ruler. It was in his time that the Prophet Muhammad was born in Arabia. Indeed, the great Prophet of Islam is reported to have referred with pride to the fact that he was born in the age of this distinguished monarch.

11. Dr. J. H. Iliffe in the chapter on "Persia and the Ancient World" in *The Legacy of Persia*, p. 31 (The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1953.)
12. Dr. I.J.S. Taraporewala, *The Religion of Zarathushtra*, p. 144 (Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1926.)

After the death of Noshirvan there was rapid decline and complete chaos in Iran, which facilitated the conquest of this ancient land by the Arabs and the conversion to Islam of its people. Dr. I.J.S. Taraporewala, a great and distinguished Zoroastrian scholar, is of the view that it was the simplicity and nobility of the Islamic doctrine and the practice of real brotherhood by the Muslims that won over the people of Iran to the Islamic fold. He is certain that there was no use of force by the Muslims :

"In the early days of Islamic rule in Persia the Zoroastrians were not persecuted on account of their faith nor were they forcibly converted. Though zealous and eager to spread their own faith the Arab leaders did possess a great deal of tolerance and their inborn spirit of democracy undoubtedly helped them to accord to others the same religious liberty they themselves wished to enjoy."<sup>13</sup>

However, after the withdrawal of the Arabs about the end of the ninth century, the Persian Muslims began to harass and persecute the Persian Zoroastrians and a large number of them migrated from Iran to India, and so we witness the rise of the Parsi community of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. They settled down, first in the island of Div, and later on in South Gujarat on the West coast of India. Here they built their great fire temple for the Iran-Shah. Though few in number the Zoroastrian Parsis have played and are still playing a very admirable role in the cultural and economic life of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. They are distinguished by their gentle, civilized ways and great public charities. Zoroastrians number about a hundred thousand in India and Pakistan and fifteen thousand in Iran.

### ZOROASTRIAN CEREMONIES

The three most important Zoroastrian ceremonies are connected with initiation, marriage and death.

The initiation ceremony or *Naujot* (literally, the New Birth) is the occasion when the child is admitted into the Zoroastrian fold, and is then invested with the outward symbols of the faith -- the shirt (*sudreh*) and the girdle (*kusti*). This ceremony takes place between the age of seven and fifteen. After the investiture every Zoroastrian, male and female, has to wear this special shirt and girdle day and night, and these constitute the dress of the body when it is carried to the last resting place.

The second ceremony is connected with marriage. It is the bounden duty of the Zoroastrian to marry and bring up children. The essential part of the marriage ceremony consists of the recital three

13. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

times of the marriage contract by the officiating priest, followed by the invocation of the blessings of God, the Amesha Spentas and the Yazatas upon the newly-joined couple.

The most distinctive Zoroastrian ceremony is connected with death. As soon as the breath has left it, the body is regarded as impure. It must be destroyed as quickly as possible. It must not touch any of the pure elements -- fire, earth and water. Hence it is neither burnt, nor buried in the earth nor thrown into water. It is left to be devoured by vultures. It is kept in a structure, called the Tower of Silence, exposed to the sun. The Tower being open at the top, gives free access to the birds of prey. They finish off the flesh within half an hour, and the bones are completely bleached by the sun and air within a few days. These are then collected and deposited in the central pit in the Tower, where they crumble to dust. This custom of disposing of the dead did not exist in the time of Zarathushtra or even in the early Achaemenid period. Herodotus refers to the custom of burial among Persians, and the tomb of Cyrus exists even today. The Towers of Silence (*Dokhmas*) came into existence as a result of the influence of the Magi, the priests of the Medes. It is defended by the Zoroastrians on both religious and sanitary grounds.

### ZOROASTRIAN SCRIPTURES

The Sacred Books of Zoroastrianism are called the Avesta. Some scholars refer to them as Zend-Avesta, where *Avesta* stands for the original scriptures in the Avestan language and *Zend* for the translation and exposition of a great part of them in Pahlavi.

The various books of the Avesta belong to widely different times. They are arranged in four groups.

The first and most important part is called the Yasna. It is made up of 72 chapters and contains the texts read by the priests at the solemn *yasna* ceremony, the general sacrifice in honour of all the deities. The arrangement of the chapters is purely liturgical, although their matter in part has nothing to do with the liturgical action. The Yasna is subdivided into four sections, the most important of which are the five Gathas : the *Gatha Ahunavaiti*, the *Gatha Ustavaiti*, the *Gatha Spenta Mainyu*, the *Gatha Vohu-Kshathra*, and the *Gatha Vahista Isti*. They are the oldest part of the Avesta, and it can be said with some certainty that, except for a few changes and interpolations here and there, they come from the mouth of Zarathushtra himself. They contain the discourses, exhortations, hymns and revelations of the illustrious Prophet of Iran. Sandwiched in between the Gathas is the *Yasna Haptanhaiti*, which is, next to the Gathas, the most ancient section of the Yasna.

The second part of the Avesta is called the Vispered. It is a collection of preparatory invocations to be used before prayers and sacrifices.

The third part is the Vendidad, which is the priestly code of the Zoroastrians and was written in the early Sassanian age. It contains a kind of dualistic account of creation (Chapter 1), the legend of Yima and the Golden Age (Chapter 2), and in the remaining chapters the precepts of religion regarding the cultivation of the earth, the care of useful animals, the protection of the sacred elements (i.e., earth, fire and water), the keeping of man's body from defilement, elaborate ceremonies of purification, atonement and ecclesiastical expiation. The three concluding chapters are devoted to sacerdotal medicine.

The fourth part of the Avesta is called the Yashts or "Songs of Praise." They contain invocations of separate Yazatas. They resemble the hymns of the Rig Veda and are a rich source of mythology and legendary history. In the Jamyad Yasht and Farvardin Yasht we have the prophecy of the coming of a great prophet, called Saoshyant, who will eradicate all idolatrous and unedifying practices, raise mankind to the greatest heights, and be a mercy to all the nations.

The last part of the Avesta is called the Khordah Avesta, i.e., the Little Avesta. It comprises a collection of shorter prayers designed for all believers -- and not only for the priests -- and adapted for the various occurrences of ordinary life.

In the Sassanian age a new series of Zoroastrian sacred books were written in the Pahlavi language. Among these are the *Bundahish*, which is an attempt at cosmology, the *Ard Viraf*, which is eschatological, and is perhaps one of the earliest attempts at a description of Heaven and Hell; the *Dina-i-Mainog Khirad*, a sort of apocalypse; and *Shayast al-Shayast*, which concerns ritual. Others worthy of mention are the *Bahman Yasht* and the *Dasatir*.

The Zoroastrian creative activity continued unabated during the Muslim rule over Iran. A further series of Zoroastrian sacred books in Pahlavi were produced during the seventh and eighth centuries. These show the influence of Islamic religious thought. Among these are the *Dinkard*, the *Dadistan-i-Dinak* and the *Zandparam*.

## Chapter V

# CONFUCIANISM

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China has an incomparably long and glorious history. Legend goes back to a very remote antiquity and tells in a shadowy way of the arrival of the Chinese from the West, and of early potentates, patterns to all their successors, who treated the people as their children, and invented for them the arts on which life in China most depended. When history proper begins about 2700 B.C., the character, manners and institutions of the Chinese are already fixed. They are already civilized and have an organized religion; though how all this came about we cannot tell. Ancient fragments subsisting in *Shih Ching* (The Book of Odes) and *Shu Ching* (The Book of History) give the impression that the early Chinese were monotheists. The names they gave to the one true God were Shang-ti (the Supreme Ruler) and Tien (Heaven). He had no idols.

With the passage of time the Chinese religion degenerated and the worship of ghosts and spirits of Nature was added to the belief in Shang-ti. In every house there was a hall of ancestors, where worship and sacrifice was offered to the ghosts. But it was not only in the family that the ancestors were adored. The Emperor sacrificed in a public capacity to all the ancestors of his own line, and to all his predecessors on the throne; a magistrate to all who had occupied his office before him. Ancient China possessed an elaborate ritual, and occasions for sacrifice were frequent. Religion, however, was not separated from life. There was no special class of priests to take care of it; everyone had to attend himself to those sacrifices which were incumbent on him. The ritual was fixed by tradition in every detail, and if a man attended to it he did his duty. Religion was a set of acts properly and exactly done, the proper person sacrificing always to the proper object in the proper way.

By about the sixth century B.C. there was virtual lawlessness in China. Both political life and religion had become corrupt and declined from former excellence. The great civilization established in China by the rulers of the Chou dynasty was now but a shadow of itself. It was in these circumstances that two of the greatest Chinese religions, Confucianism and Taoism, took birth. Of all the religions of China, Confucianism has left the greatest impress on Chinese life and culture. For nearly twentyfive centuries Confucius has been regarded by the Chinese as the First Teacher - not that there was no teacher before him, but because he stands above them all in rank.



### THE LIFE OF CONFUCIUS

Confucius is the Latinized name of K'ung Fu-Tzu or Master K'ung. He was born in 551 B.C. in the principality of Lu in what is now Shantung province. Several supernatural events, dreams and portents have become associated with his birth, as with many other religious teachers. He came of a respectable but impoverished family, and owed all his success to his own merit. It was to public employment that he aspired from an early period of life; but he did not readily find it in the unquiet times in which his lot was cast. He began his career as a granary overseer in his native district, and eventually was placed in charge of the public fields.

In 528 B.C. Confucius gave up his public employment to mourn the death of his mother. During the three years mourning, he devoted himself to study and meditation. He eventually emerged from his seclusion as a public teacher and soon drew towards himself a large number of devoted disciples. His fame increased, but it was not until he was fifty that Confucius entered public life. He was appointed Chief Magistrate of the town of Chung-tu and was soon promoted to the position of Minister of Works and Justice. He thus got a chance to put into practice his teachings and set up a model administration. He brought peace to the land, put down oppression and gave justice without bribery. Crime and immorality almost disappeared. In all his personal life he most punctiliously observed the rules that he taught.

That such a policy of absolute justice would make enemies was inevitable, and the enemies of Confucius worked craftily for his overthrow. The legend is that they presented to the Duke a number of beautiful dancing girls who turned the young man's mind from the affairs of the state to a life of selfish pleasure, which eventually brought forth the rebuke of Confucius and led to a rupture between the Duke and his minister. Confucius was overthrown and banished.

Confucius declared "At fifty I perceived the divine mission." So in the year 497 B.C. prompted by the Divine call, he set forth on his wanderings and for fourteen years with his little band of devoted disciples he went from place to place often in peril of his life, always in neglect and poverty. When at last he was allowed to return to his native state of Lu, he was already an old man of sixty eight. He spent the remaining years of his life in propagating his inspired message and editing the Chinese Classics. He realised that his ideas were more important than any immediate experiment in application. He died in the year 479 B.C.. A vivid picture of his

personality and way of life emerges from the reports of his disciples included in the *Lun Yu* (The Analects of Confucius). It is written :

"In his leisure hours the Master was easy in his manner and cheerful in his looks (7:4). The Master was gentle yet strict, dignified yet not awesome, respectful yet at ease (7:37). When the Master was among his village folks, he looked simple and sincere, as if he were inept at speaking. But when in the ancestral temple or at court, he spoke cautiously (9:1). At court, when conversing with the lower minister, the Master spoke gently and kindly. When conversing with the higher minister, he spoke affably and precisely. When in the presence of the Prince, he was reverent in his movement and solemn in his demeanour (10:2). When a friend died, leaving no relations, he would say : 'Let me take care of the funeral'. For a friend's gift, even though it might be a carriage and horses, he would not bow unless it was meant for sacrifice (10:15)."

### THE TEACHING OF CONFUCIUS

Confucius avoided discussion on metaphysical and abstract issues. Chung Yu, a disciple, once asked the Master about the spirits and Confucius replied, " If you cannot even know men, how can you know spirits?" When he enquired about death, the reply came: "When you do not yet know about life how can you know about death?" It is also said about him: "The Master never spoke of anomalies, feats of strength, rebellion, or divinities." But there is no doubt about the fact that Confucius believed in God and was an ethical monotheist. He claimed that the Will of God had been revealed to him and that it was his mission to make it prevail in the world. Here are a few of his sayings :

"He who offends God has none to whom he can pray." (The *Analects*, 3:13)

"There are three things of which Great Man stands in awe : the commands of God, important people, the words of the sages. Petty Man, not knowing the Commands of God, does not stand in awe of them; he is disrespectful to the important people; he mocks the words of the sages." (The *Analects*, 16:8).

"God has entrusted me with a divine mission. What can Huan T'uei (a military officer who was driving him away) do to me?" (The *Analects*, 7:23).

"If it be the Will of God that this divine system come to nought, posterity shall never again share in the knowledge of this Faith. But

1. James R. Ware (translator). *The Sayings of Confucius*, (Mentor Religious Classic, New York, 1955.)

if it be the Will of God that this system shall not come to nought, what can the people of Kuang do to me?" (The *Analects*, 9:5).

Confucius believed that the world was built on moral foundations. When men and states become morally corrupt, nature's order is disrupted. There are wars, floods, earthquakes, long droughts and epidemics. "Thus", writes Alfred Doebelin, "in contrast to our materialistic line of thought, which makes man the helpless object of a stupid, meaningless course of events, our actions are capable of influencing and do influence world happenings, for we have here spiritual power influencing spiritual power, and a chance human destiny independent of Heaven is about as impossible as a world-course independent of man. Trouble, misfortune, terrible events are the warning cries of a suffering world, cries urging man to restore order and return to the 'right path'. Thus Confucius and the orthodox teaching elevate us. We gain a profound obligation to act which is natural and not directed by fear of punishment. Confucius makes us the guarantors of a regular world order and we must not forget our responsibility for a moment, because one move follows directly on the other, and only a cash trade is carried on."<sup>2</sup>

Confucius had the highest respect for man, believing him to be endowed with a divine light. He said : "It is man that makes systems great, and not systems that make man great" (*Analects*, 15:29). He believed that man was naturally good and would return to virtue once a good example was set by the upper and ruling classes. He would have nothing to do with the metaphysical charge of original sin, inherited guilt. He was the friend of life and of man, who was, as he well knew, even without the burden of this guilt already sufficiently plagued and continually threatened by two dangers: damaging destructive elements and wicked sovereigns. Confucius stood for man, neither an animal nor a bad being, considered him good natured and was anxious that he should not be ruined. He believed that man did not stand in need of saviours who claimed miraculously to take away his sins. What man needed was a teacher of righteousness, who by fully practising his own precepts, could become a model for other men. Confucius himself was one such teacher, raised by God.

The *Analects* tell us of his faith in the evolution of True Manhood. Here is his description of the true or superior man:

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2. Alfred Doebelin, *The Living Thoughts of Confucius*, p. 14 (The Living Thoughts Library, Cassell and Company, London. 1942.)

"He first practises what he preaches, and then preaches what he practises" (The *Analects*, 2:13). "The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell" (4:16). "The superior man loves his soul; the inferior man loves his property. The superior man always remembers how he was punished for his mistakes; the inferior man always remembers what presents he got" (4:11). "The superior man blames himself; the inferior man blames others" (15:20). "The superior man is dignified and at ease, but not proud; the inferior man is proud but not dignified" (13:26). "The superior man is liberal towards others' opinion, but does not completely agree with them; the inferior man completely agrees with others' opinion but is not liberal towards them" (13:23). "Great man, being universal in his outlook, is impartial; Petty Man, being partial, is not universal in outlook" (2:14).

On the ethical side, Confucius emphasized fellow feeling or reciprocity, cultivation of sympathy and cooperation, which must begin in the family and then extend by degrees into the larger areas of association. He stressed the importance of the five cardinal human relationships which were already traditional among the Chinese; (1) ruler and subject, (2) father and son, (3) elder brother and younger brother, (4) husband and wife, and (5) friend and friend. Confucius had seen chaos arise in China when the prince did not act as prince; subjects did not act as subjects; the father did not act as father, and so on. Thus he felt that the first step towards the transformation of a disordered world was to have everyone recognise and fulfil his own proper place.

Confucius was once asked, "Is there one single word that can serve as a principle of conduct for life?" He replied : "Perhaps the word 'reciprocity' will do. Do not do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you." (The *Analects*, 15 : 24).

The virtue which, according to Confucius, must be cultivated above all is human-heartedness (*Jen*). His ethics, his politics, his life ideal, all flow from this supreme virtue. It stands for Confucius' ideal of cultivating human relations, developing human faculties, sublimating one's own personality, and upholding human rights. Tzu Chang asked him about *Jen*, and he replied, "To be able to practise five virtues in the world constitutes *Jen*." On being asked what they were, he said : "They are respect, magnanimity, sincerity, earnestness and kindness." (The *Analects*, 17 : 6). He also said that *Jen* consists in "loving others."

Confucius wanted the people's progress along "Civilization's right path" to be assured by a good sovereign to take the lead and

set an example and good officials to enforce the law within the prescribed religious frame. He wanted the whole state arranged as an educational institution; the work should begin at top, with the sovereign; for, if the sovereign would set a bad example, he would plunge the people into misfortune. All through Confucius' doctrine there is never the slightest doubt that the sole purpose of the state is to promote the welfare of the people according to the rules of God.

"Government is merely setting things right. When you yourself lead them by the right example, who dares to go astray" (*The Analects*, 12:17).

"When the ruler himself does what is right, he will have influence over the people without giving commands, and when the ruler himself does not do what is right, all his commands will be of no avail" (13:6).

"If the ruler rectifies his own conduct, government is an easy matter, and if he does not rectify his own conduct, how can he rectify others?" (13:13).

"Guide the people with governmental measures and control or regulate them by the threat of punishment, and the people will try to keep out of jail, but will have no sense of honour or shame. Guide the people by virtue and control or regulate them by rules of propriety, and the people will have a sense of honour and respect" (2:3).

### CONFUCIANISM AFTER CONFUCIUS

The spread of the doctrine of Confucius began not long after his death. After having mourned together their Master's death, the disciples separated and went each his own way to carry on his work and spread his message. Although the disciples all revered their Master's words, it was but natural that they should each lay particular emphasis on certain aspects of the teaching of Confucius. With the passage of time these differences grew greater as they developed their respective systems of thought in accordance with their own interests and convictions. In consequence, according to one source, no less than eight different schools of Confucianism emerged.

The most important of these schools owed its origin to the exposition of confucianism by Tseng Ts'an, the arch filial pietist, who stressed moral cultivation, rather than the observance of ritual, as the basis of human endeavour. He is the reputed author of several books, including the *Classic of Filial Piety* and the *Great Learning*. Another great scholar of this school was Confucius'

grandson Tzu-ssu (Kung Chieh). He is the author of one of the great scriptures of Confucianism, the *Doctrine of the Mean*. It is a collection of the sayings of Confucius, together with Tzu-ssu's explanation of the same. The comments become eloquent towards the end of the work when he discourses about the reality (*cheng*) of God and realness in man: "It is the way of God to be the real. It is the way of man to attain the real. To be real is to hit the mean without effort, to possess it without the exercise of thought, and to be centred in the way with a natural ease -- this is to be a sage. To attain the real is to choose the good and hold fast to it. This involves a thorough study of what is good, inquiring extensively about it, cogitating over it carefully, making it clear through contrast, and earnestly putting it into practice."<sup>3</sup> In particular the book stresses 'human realness and sincerity in action', with its capacity to transform and to give full development to man's nature.

The last two hundred years or so of the Chou dynasty have been aptly designated the period of Warring States. It was an age of political chaos, lawlessness and bloodshed. The authority of the Chou sovereign was challenged by several feudal lords, who even assumed the title of King. Thus seven big states emerged, which were continually at war with one another. On the debris of fallen cities and mounds of the dead, there rose to eminence and power intriguing politicians, ruthless generals, and autocratic rulers, who all wallowed in wealth at the expense of the common people. While the kings and nobles of the warring States indulged to the utmost their appetites and lusts, the peasants were completely crushed under the triple weight of war, taxation and conscription.

The period of the Warring States is, however, remarkable for its freedom of thought. It saw the rise of the so-called 'Hundred Schools' of philosophy and religion which struggled with Confucianism for the allegiance of the people. Had it not been for the appearance of Mencius, Confucianism might well have been overwhelmed by its rivals. Posterity has rightly honoured Mencius as the Second Sage, next only to the great Master himself.

### THE TEACHINGS OF MENCIUS

Mencius (Meng Ko) is the Latinized form of the Chinese name of Meng Tzu, or Master Meng. He lived in the fourth century B.C. With his eloquence, moral courage and deep conviction, he widely popularised Confucianism. He commanded great respect among kings and princes. He visited several states, and wherever he went

3. Chu Chai and Winberg Chai (translators). *Essential Works of Confucianism*, Part VI. p. 315. (Bantam Book, New York, 1965.)

he was received with honour and respect. His advice was eagerly sought, and once or twice even followed.

The contribution of Mencius to Confucianism lies in his emphasis on the innate goodness of human nature. According to him, man possesses four inborn virtues : human-heartedness (*Jen*), righteousness (*Yi*), propriety (*Li*) and wisdom (*Chih*). He said :

"It is by virtue of its innate quality that human nature can be considered good. That is why I say it is good. If it becomes evil, it is not the fault of its innate quality. The sense of compassion is common to all men; the sense of shame is common to all men; the sense of respect is common to all men; the sense of right and wrong is common to all men. The sense of compassion constitutes humanity; the sense of shame constitutes righteousness; the sense of respect constitutes propriety; the sense of right and wrong constitutes wisdom. Humanity, righteousness, propriety and wisdom are not taught; they are inherent in our nature."<sup>4</sup>

Human nature can, however, become depraved, as a result of the rough contacts of life. "A gentleman,," said Mencius, "is one who has not lost the heart of a naked child." The infant heart, so to speak, is a symbol as well as the source of all that is good in our nature, to which we should hold fast. Nevertheless, the irony of life is that "when our dogs and chicken go astray we make every effort to find them; but very few of us are interested in recovering our natural goodness."

The next problem to which Mencius paid special attention was that of good government. True to the tradition of Confucian school, he maintained that good government depends not upon brute force but on the example set by the ruler :

"All men have a heart which cannot bear to see the suffering of others. The ancient kings had this compassionate heart, and they therefore, had likewise a compassionate government. Then the rule of the world was as easy as turning things around in the palm of one's hand."

Growing out of this concept of "humane government" was Mencius' recognition of the importance of the role of the people in government :

"The people rank highest, in a state, the spirits of the Land and Grain come next, and the sovereign is of the least account."

4. Chu Chai and Winberg Chai (translators), *Essential Works of Confucianism*, Part II: *Meng Tzu*, p. 96 (Bantam Book, New York, 1965.)

Good government should work upwards from the people instead of downwards from the ruling class. The people are not only the root but also the final judges of the government. The aim of the government should be to educate and enrich the people and to improve their overall welfare.

### THE TEACHINGS OF HSUN TZU

Soon after Mencius there appeared another great champion of Confucianism. His name was Hsun Tzu; he was at one and the same time a professed exponent of the principles of Confucius and a critic of Mencius. If Mencius be taken as representing the idealistic wing of Confucianism, Hsun Tzu may be said to represent the realistic wing.

Unlike Confucius, Mencius and many others, Hsun was an agnostic. He did not believe in Tien (Heaven) as a personal Divine Being. Tien was no more than the unvarying law of Nature, and all changes in the universe, such as the movement of the stars, alteration of the sun and moon, the succession of the seasons, etc., were the operations of that great law. Hsun Tzu said that it was man himself, and not Heaven, who was responsible for his own life as well as for the prosperity and calamity that come to him.

"When food and clothes are sufficiently stored and used economically Heaven cannot impoverish the country. When the people are adequately sustained and their energies are employed in keeping with the seasons. Heaven cannot afflict the people. When the Tao is followed and there are no deviations from it. Heaven cannot send misfortunes."<sup>5</sup>

Hsun Tzu rejected all such superstitions as divination, fortune-telling and physiognomy. He also questioned the efficacy of prayers: "If man prays for rain and then it rains, how is that? I would say: Not strange. It would rain all the same even if no man prayed for rain."<sup>6</sup>

Another peculiar idea of Hsun Tzu was that the human nature was evil and that man's goodness was acquired. In this connection he made a direct attack on Mencius, accusing him of failing to distinguish between what is congenital and what is acquired. While the virtues which Mencius considered to be the most important for the proper development of man were human-heartedness (*Jen*) and righteousness (*Yi*), the way on which Hsun Tzu laid the greatest

5. Chu Chai and Winberg Chai (translators) *Essential Works of confucianism*, part III: *Hsun Tzu*, p. 226 (Bantam Book, New York, 1965.)

6. *Ibid.*, p. 230.



stress was that of ritual (*Li*) and music (*Yeo*). He considered ritual and music as the most effective means of counteracting what he alleged to be the inherent baseness of human nature.

### LATER HISTORY OF CONFUCIANISM

During the Chin period (221-207 B.C.) there was an inevitable reaction against the freedom of thought of the late Chou years, as characterized by the "Hundred Schools". It was in the spirit of this reaction that the Emperor Shih Huang Ti sought to control thought by his notorious decree for burning all writings of the Hundred Schools, with the exception of works on medicine, divination and agriculture. As a result of this decree a large number of Confucian books were burnt and no less than 460 scholars put to death.

However, with the rise of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.:220 C.E.) freedom of thought returned to China. Tung Chung-shu, who was the greatest of the early Han reformers, proposed to the Emperor that unity be sought in the Empire by elevating Confucianism at the expense of the other schools of thought. The first Chinese university was founded in the Han capital of Chang-an for the purpose of "transmitting the sacred ways of the ancient rulers and achieving the moral and intellectual advancement of the empire." Another important measure to promote the Confucian doctrine was the introduction of an examination system based upon the Five Classics. The purpose of these examinations was to produce government officials of education and moral integrity and devoted to the Confucian doctrine.

Tung Chung-shu tried to revive the original Confucianism, not merely as a philosophy, which it had become in later years, but as a full-fledged religion, with its spiritual, moral and cultural aspects -- concerned as much with the soul's eternal quest for salvation and with God's ways in dealing with man and the universe, as with the principles of right conduct and social justice. He believed that man's superiority to the other creatures lay in his capacity to receive revelation from God and mould his own conduct and character according to it. He said :

"Man receives the Decree of God, and therefore is superior to other creatures. Other creatures suffer troubles and distress, and are unable to practise *Jen* (human-heartedness) and *Yi* (righteousness); man alone is capable of practising them."<sup>7</sup>

7. Chu Chai and Winberg Chai (translators). *Essential Works of Confucianism*. Part VIII; *Chun Chiu Fan-lu*. p. 366

Tung's view of human nature was something like a compromise between the views of Mencius and Hsun Tzu. He agreed with Mencius that man's "innate quality" contains the beginnings of goodness, but he thought that these beginnings were not, in themselves, sufficient evidence that man's nature itself is good, for man's innate quality contains not merely his nature, but also his feelings. Man must subject his urges and feelings to the commands of God to become good.

He also emphasized the connection between man's actions and the universal course of Nature. Man's wicked deeds, he pointed out, would culminate in catastrophes and anomalies :

"God first sends warnings, and if man, being thus warned, fails to understand, then he is made to feel awe through such anomalies....The genesis of all such catastrophes and anomalies is the direct result of the errors that exist within the nation."<sup>8</sup>

While the victory of Confucianism was almost assured in the early Han period, there raged at the same time within the rank of Confucian scholars a bitter controversy over the interpretation of the Classics and the status of Confucius. The New Script School raised Confucius to the status of a Divine Saviour. In opposition to this view the Old Script School continued to believe that Confucius was a prophet and sage. It was, however, the New Script School which gained ascendancy during this period. As early as 59 C.E. a beginning was made with the cult of Confucius when Emperor Ming of the later Han dynasty ordered sacrifice to Confucius, hitherto confined to the temple in Lu, to be made in all government schools in the cities. This clearly established Confucius as the patron deity of education.

After the collapse of Han there followed a long period of moral and political chaos in China, in which the teaching of Confucius somewhat lost its hold on the intellectuals, many of whom turned to Taoism and Buddhism for inspiration. But the effort to accelerate the deification of Confucius was redoubled on the part of his followers, perhaps as a result of the keen competition of the rival religions. In 178 C.E. a likeness of Confucius was used for the first time in his shrine in place of the simple tablets. This led further to the addition of wooden images in 505 C.E. In the same year the first temple in Confucius' honour was built at Nanking. Half a century later, temples of Confucius rose in almost every major city throughout the Empire. At the same time a complete code of sacrificial

8. *Ibid.*, p. 365.

ritual had been drawn up for the worship of Confucius. When China was reunited by the Tang rulers in the seventh century, the cult of Confucius was already well established.

The period of the Sung (960-1280 C.E.) and Ming (1368-1644 C.E.) dynasties is noted for the rise and development of *Li Hsueh Chia* or the school of study of *Li*, usually known in the West as Neo-Confucianism. However the term "Neo-Confucianism" is a misnomer since it does not stand here for a genuine revival of Confucianism. The Neo-Confucianists were doubtless Confucian scholars, but their intellectual activity was stimulated and determined by the speculations of Ch'an (Zen) masters. Thus, Neo-Confucianism was a kind of summing up or revision of the ethics, morals and beliefs of the past, its principles of Confucianism being thoroughly tinged with Buddhism and Taoism. It is nevertheless one of the most important systems that China has developed. The intellectual influences that had acted upon China in the past, the culture and thought that had been brought from foreign lands, all permeate this body of thought and crystallize within it.<sup>9</sup>

### THE SACRED BOOKS OF CONFUCIANISM

The book which is of supreme importance for the understanding of Confucius the man and his teaching is *Lun Yu* (The Analects of Confucius). It is a collection of the sayings of Confucius made by his disciples sometime after the passing away of the Master. There are three versions of this book : the Lu version, the Sh'i version and the Ancient Script version. These three versions do not wholly agree in scope, contents and arrangement of the text. The version current today is the Lu version, which is divided into twenty chapters.

Next to the *Analects*, we have the Six Confucian Classics, said to have been either written or edited by Confucius. These are :

1. *Shu Ching* (The Book of History). It originally contained 100 historical documents of the ancient dynasties of China and covered a period extending from twenty-fourth to eighth centuries B.C. Confucius is said to have arranged these documents chronologically and written prefaces to them. All these documents were permeated with religious and moral teachings. Confucius edited the documents in order to make the students conversant with the facts concerning the causes of the rise and fall of dynasties. Of the 100 documents that he had compiled only 28 are extant in the current Book of History.

9. For details see Lin Wu-chi, *A short History of Confucian Philosophy*, (Pelican Book), chapters 10 and 11. (Penguin Books, 1955.)

2. *Shih Ching* (The Book of Poetry). It is a collection of popular poems written during the first five hundred years of the Chou dynasty. Confucius' purpose in editing this book was to make his followers cultured and skilful in the use of words and to stress the moral value of the poems. He selected 305 poems out of more than 3000 pieces that he had collected.

3. *Yi Ching* (The Book of Changes). This book propounds a highly fanciful system of philosophy. It throws light on what it calls the *Yin* (female) and *Yang* (male) principles of nature.

4. *Li Chi* (The Book of Rites). Confucius approved of some of the traditional rites for disciplining the people and bringing refinement, grace and propriety into their social behaviour. He threw light on the origin and significance of the ancient ceremonies and recalled that *li* was an expression of sentiment. Criticising the debased practice of later times, he said that *li* without sentiment was nothing but a mock ceremony.

5. *Yeo* (The Book of Music). In Confucius' time, music was closely related to poetry. Thus, when he edited the ancient poems, he also arranged a musical setting for each of the poems he had selected. He either revised the old tunes or composed new ones. None of this music has however survived.

6. *Ch'un Ch'iu* (The Spring and Autumn Annals). It is a chronological record of the chief events in the state of Lu from the first year of Duke Yin's rule (722 B.C.) to the fourteenth year of Duke Ai's rule (481 B.C.). "The central theme of this book", writes Chu Chai, "is to set up the norms of good government, to put the usurping princes back in their proper places and to condemn misbehaving ministers, so that the cause of world peace and unity might be upheld."

Also important for the knowledge of Confucianism are three other books, which contain very early exposition of the Confucian doctrine. These are :

1. *Ta Hsueh* (The Great Learning). This book is traditionally attributed to Tseng Tsan, one of the chief disciples of Confucius. Its central theme is self-cultivation; the three guiding principles (or the three "main cords") being : (a) manifestation of illustrious virtue, (b) loving the people, and (c) rest in the highest good. The eight ethico-political items (or the eight "minor wires") leading to self-cultivation are (i) investigation, (ii) extension of knowledge, (iii) sincerity in one's thoughts, (iv) rectification of one's heart, (v) the cultivation of one's person, (vi) the regulation of one's family, (vii) the governing of one's state and (viii) insurance of world peace.

2. *Chung Yung* (The Doctrine of the Mean). This book was written by Confucius' grandson Tzu-ssu and is a systematic exposition of the doctrine of Mean (*Chung*) and of Normality (*Yung*). To secure the mean and normality is not merely to pursue a middle course; it means rather to be in harmony with the universe. Thus the way to mean and normality involves a sense of justice, a spirit of tolerance, a state of harmony and a doctrine of equality. It is a way of action, which avoids going to extremes. It is also a state of mind in which human reasoning and feeling reach a perfect harmony.

3. *Hsiao Ching* (The Classic of Filial Piety). This book is in the form of a colloquy between Tsung Tzu and Confucius. The Master is made to expound the view that "filial piety is the basis of virtue and the source of culture." According to him, filial piety is not merely a domestic virtue; it diffuses its influence through all actions of life, whether moral, political or social. It originates with the bonds of a common parentage and extends to other relationships, until it reaches the stage of *jen*, human-heartedness and love due to all men.

For later expositions of Confucianism we turn to three other books :

1. The Book of Mencius. This consists of a series of discourses which Mencius had with the feudal lords, ministers, friends and disciples. It ranks as one of the Four Scriptures of Confucianism; the other three being the *Analects* of Confucius, the *Great Learning* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*.

2. The Book of Hsun Tzu. It originally consisted of three hundred and twenty-two articles, but after being edited and condensed the articles in the standard edition now available are thirty-two.

3. *Ch'un Ch'iu Fan-lu* (The Copious Dew in Spring and Autumn). This book was written in the early Han period by Tung Chung-shu, who revived and established Confucianism as a full-fledged religion. It contains some really thoughtful discourses on the Nature of Man, the Philosophy of History and the Science of Catastrophes and Anomalies.

## Chapter VI

# TAOISM

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Confucianism and Taoism complement each other. They emphasize two different aspects of religion -- both equally important. Confucius emphasizes the social aspect, and is primarily interested in building a just social order in which there would be no evil and exploitation and every man would perform his duty in harmony with the plan of God. Lao Tzu, on the other hand, emphasizes the individual aspect and is concerned with the discovery and exposition of the Way of God and of the soul's lone way which leads it to find eternal peace in union with God. While Confucius was a man of action, Lao Tzu was a mystic.

### THE FOUNDER OF TAOISM

Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, was born about 570 B.C. in the Li village of the state of Chu. He was thus an elder contemporary of Confucius. Lao Tzu means the "Grand Old Master", and is a title rather than a name. The old master's name was Lai Tan.

Apart from the thick crop of legend and myth which soon gathered around his name, very little is known about the life and personality of Lao Tzu. It came to be believed by his followers that the Master was born of a virgin mother, who conceived him at the sight of a falling star. According to another legend, he remained in his mother's womb for eighty-one years and was already wise and white-bearded when he was born.

The lack of authentic information about him has led some scholars to regard Lao Tzu as merely a mythical figure. Similar doubts have also been expressed regarding the historicity of Krishna, Buddha and Jesus. However, on the basis of the short biography in *Shih Chi* (The Historical Records) of Ssu-ma Chien, the Herodotus of China, who lived in the second century B.C., most scholars now accept Lao Tzu's historical existence.

Lao Tzu worked as the keeper of the imperial archives in the royal capital of Lo, where Confucius is said to have visited him. Unlike Confucius, who travelled from state to state campaigning for political reform, Lao Tzu preferred to do his work in anonymity. Apparently he remained in this position at Lo for a considerable period until the time when he recognised the signs of decay in the Chou house. At first, he merely resigned, but dismayed by the increasing disintegration and chaos, he shortly went into exile. It

is said that before he entered what is now Tibet, he was stopped at the Hankao Pass by a guard, who requested him to commit his teachings to writing. He is supposed to have remained there long enough to write his small book *Tao Te Ching*. After that he disappeared, and nothing further is known of him although he is supposed to have lived in seclusion to a great age.

There is very little that Lao Tzu says about himself in *Tao Te Ching*. However in a tone of irony he does point out how he was different from other men:

"Other men have plenty, while I alone seem to have lost all, I am a man foolish in heart, dull and confused. Other men are full of light, I alone seem to be in darkness. Other men are alert, I alone am listless. I am unsettled as the ocean, drifting as though I had no stopping-place. All men have their usefulness; I alone am stupid and clownish. Lonely though I am and unlike other men, yet I value drawing sustenance from Mother Nature."<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the book, in a somewhat different mood, he observes:

"My words are very easy to understand, very easy to put into practice; yet the world can neither understand nor practise them. My words have a clue, my actions have an underlying principle. It is because men do not know the clue that they understand me not. Those who know me are but few, and on that account my honour is greater. Thus the sage wears coarse garments, but carries a jewel in his bosom" (*Tao Te Ching*, LXX).

### THE TEACHINGS OF LAO TZU

The very title of the book that Lao Tzu wrote, *Tao Te Ching*, suggests the nature and scope of his teaching. There are two important words in the title. The first is *Tao*, which means the Way; it has been used by Lao Tzu to mean the Way of God, the Ultimate Reality. *Tao Te Ching* gives a unique insight into the Way of God (*Tao*), firstly in its transcendental aspect, and then in its imminent aspect as revealed in Nature and in the innermost essence of man's self. It also tells us about the way that man should follow. The other important word in *Tao Te Ching* is *Te*, which means virtue. Thus the sole concern of Lao Tzu in this book is to enlighten men regarding the Way of God and to teach them the virtue which comes from

1. *Tao Te Ching*, XX, Translations from which quotations have been given in this chapter are by (i) R.B. Blackney (Mentor Books, New York), (ii) Lionel Giles (Wisdom of the East Series, London), (iii) Arthur Waley (Allen and Unwin, London), (iv) Witter Bynner (John Day, New York).

faithfully and sincerely working in harmony with it. Lao Tzu believed in the Oneness of God and said that every thing owed its existence to Him :

"Of old these received the living touch of the One : Heaven in virtue of the One is limpid; earth in virtue of the One is settled; the spirits in virtue of the One are energised; the valley in virtue of the One is full; the myriad creatures in virtue of the One are alive; the dukes and princes in virtue of the One become leaders in the empire. It is the One that makes these what they are" (*Tao Te Ching*, XXXIX).

He taught that the true religion is to know God and to bring one's will in complete harmony with the Will and Purpose of God. Deep in all, he said, is a stillness, where the root of life is, and that root is God, from whom destiny proceeds. Without knowledge of that root, the eternal root, a man is blind and will therefore work evil:

"Touch ultimate emptiness, hold steady and still. All things work together. I have watched them reverting, and have seen how they flourish and return again, each to his roots. This I say is the stillness: a retreat to one's roots; or better yet, return to the Will of God, which is I say to constancy. The knowledge of constancy I call enlightenment and say that not to know it is blindness that works evil" (*Tao Te Ching*, XVI).

In its transcendental aspect the Way of God (*Tao*) is a mystery. It cannot be described in words. It is in fact beyond all thought. It can be known only through spiritual insight, unclouded by selfish desires.

"The Tao which can be expressed in words is not the eternal Tao; the name which can be uttered is not its eternal name. Without a name it is the Beginning of Heaven and Earth; with a name, it is the Mother of all things. Only one who is ever free from desire can apprehend its spiritual essence, he who is ever a slave to desire can see no more than its outer fringe. These two things, the spiritual and the material, though we call them by different names, in their origin are one and the same. This sameness is a mystery, -- the mystery of mysteries. It is the gate of all wonders" (*Tao Te Ching*, I).

Though the Way of God (*Tao*) ultimately is transcendent, it is also imminent. It is the driving power in all nature, the ordering principle behind all life. The Way of God brings everything into being, nourishes and sustains it and leads it to its preordained goal of perfection :



"The Way of God (*Tao*) produces all things; it nourishes them; each is formed according to its nature; each is perfected according to its strength. Hence there is not a single thing but pays homage to the Way of God and extols its virtue. This homage paid to the *Tao*, this extolling of its virtue, is due to no command, but is always spontaneous. Thus it is that *Tao*, engendering all things, nourishes them, develops them, and fosters them; perfects them, ripens them, tends them, protects them. Production without possession, action without self-assertion, development without domination; this is its mysterious operation" (*Tao Te Ching*, LI).

God gets what He wants in His own way, the Way. He does not issue words, but His master plan is to be seen unfolding like a great net which encloses all and from which not one escapes :

"God's Way is bound to conquer all, but not by strife does it proceed. Not by words does God get answers. He calls them not and all things come. Master plans unfold but slowly, like God's wide net enclosing all. Its mesh is coarse but none are lost" (*Tao Te Ching*, LXXIII).

The Way of God is no respecter of persons, but when a man is good, the Way is on his side :

"The Way of God is impartial. It sides only with the good man" (*Tao Te Ching*, LXXIX).

We can know only as much of the Way of God as is revealed to us and is necessary for us to know God and attain nearness to Him, and hence it is called the "preface to God".

"The Way is a void (all-pervading), used but never filled : an abyss it is, like an ancestor from which all things come. It blunts sharpness, restores tangles; it tampers light, subdues turmoil. A deep pool it is, never to run dry! Whose offspring it may be I do not know : it is like a preface to God" (*Tao Te Ching*, IV).

It has been repeatedly revealed to mankind through the prophets or "the excellent masters of old" (literally, "Those of the Way"), who themselves lived by it and became models for men. They were mortals like us. They lived in this world, but remained uncontaminated by the wickedness of the world. They were men of God, true, sincere, upright.

The excellent masters of old,  
 Subtle, mysterious, mystic, acute,  
 Were much too profound for their times.  
 Since they were not then understood,  
 It is better to tell how they looked.

Like men crossing streams in the winter,  
How cautious!

As if all around there were danger,  
How watchful!

As if they were guests on every occasion,  
How dignified!

Like ice just beginning to melt,  
Self-effacing!

Like a wood-block untouched by a tool,  
How sincere!

Like a valley awaiting a guest,  
How receptive!

Like a torrent that rushes along,  
And so turbid!

Who, running dirty, comes clean like still water?

Who, being quiet, moves others to fullness of life?

It is he who, embracing the Way, is not greedy;

Who endures wear and tear without needing  
renewal. (*Tao Te Ching*, XV)

Those who follow the prophets and the Way revealed to them believe in and love the one true God; they strive to develop spiritual insight, so that they might know Him with absolute certainty; they want to become innocent like the new-born babe; they seek to become perfect themselves and make others also perfect : they are always engaged in doing good to God's creatures :

"In cherishing the One with your soul, can you never forsake the Tao? In controlling your vital force to achieve gentleness, can you become like a new-born child? In cleansing and purifying your mystic vision, can you strive after perfection? In loving the people and governing the kingdom, can you rule without interference?" (*Tao Te Ching*, X).

Those who follow the Way become of the Way and are filled with its virtue :

"If you work by the Way, you will be of the Way; if you work through its virtue, you will be given the virtue. Abandon either one and both abandon you. Gladly the Way receives those who choose to walk in it; gladly too its power uphold those who choose to use it well; gladly will abandon greet those who to abandon drift. Little faith is put in them whose faith is small" (*Tao Te Ching*, XXIII).

The Way of God is the restorer and mender of inequalities. Let man follow the Way, by completely attuning his will to the Will of God, and then, through him, the Way will take care of the needs of all.

"He that humbles, himself shall be preserved entire. He that bends shall be made straight. He that is empty shall be filled. He that is worn out shall be renewed. He who has little shall succeed. He who has much shall go astray. Therefore the sage cherishes the One (believes in and loves the one true God), and is a model for all under heaven. He is free from self-display, therefore he shines forth; from self-assertion, therefore he is distinguished; from self-glorification, therefore he has merit; from self-exaltation, therefore he rises superior to all. Insomuch as he does not strive, there is no one in the world who can strive with him" (*Tao Te Ching*, XXII).

Lao Tzu taught men the doctrine of *Wu-wu-wie* (literally, "to do without doing"), that is to be still, passive, emotionally calm, so that the Way of God may act through them without let or hindrance. He gave the lesson of humility, quietude and non-interference, and condemned force, pride and self-assertion. He who follows the Way, the man of virtue, is like water :

"The best of men is like water; water benefits all things and does not compete with them. It dwells in the lowly places that others disdain -- wherein it comes near to the Tao. In his dwellings, the sage loves the lowly earth; in his heart he loves what is profound; in his relations with others, he loves kindness; in his words he loves sincerity; in his government he loves peace; in business affairs, he loves ability; in his actions he loves choosing the right time. It is because he does not contend that he is without reproach" (*Tao Te Ching*, VIII).

Lao Tzu taught men to return good for evil and to love all God's creatures. He said :

"Requite injury with kindness" (*Tao Te Ching*, LXIII).

"Alike to the good and bad I must be good, for virtue is goodness. To honest folk and those dishonest ones alike, I proffer faith, for virtue is faithful" (*Ibid.*, XLIX).

"World sovereignty can be committed to that man who loves all people as he loves himself" (*Ibid.*, XIII).

"For love is victorious in attack, and invulnerable in defence. God arms with love those He would not see destroyed" (*Ibid.*, LXVII).

The man of the Way, the Taoist, is selfless. He cares more for others than for himself :

"The universe is enduring. The reason why the universe can endure is that it does not live for self. Therefore it can and will live long. Therefore the sage puts himself last and finds himself in the foremost place; regards his body as accidental, and his body is thereby preserved. Is it not because he does not live for self that his self achieves perfection?" (*Tao Te Ching*, VII).

The Taoist is, therefore, blessed with self-knowledge, self-mastery, quietude and acceptance of one's place in the scheme of nature :

"One who knows others is clever, but one who knows himself is enlightened. One who conquers others is powerful, but one who conquers himself is mighty. One who knows contentment is rich and one who pushes with vigour has will. One who loses not his place endures. One who may die but will not perish, has life everlasting" (*Ibid.*, XXXIII).

The Taoist teaches the Way to others, not by delivering empty sermons, but by putting into practice what he preaches and setting an example for others:

"Indeed the wise man's office is to work by being still; he teaches not by speech but by accomplishment; he does for everything and everyone, neglecting none; their life he gives to all, possessing none; and what he brings to pass depends on no one else. As he succeeds he takes no credit, and just because he never takes it credit never leaves him" (*Ibid.*, II).

Lao Tzu deprecated scholarly hair-splitting and unedifying forms and ceremonies. These, he said, are not to be compared to striving after righteousness and moral perfection :

"Be done with rote learning and its attendant vexations; for is there a distinction of a 'yes' from a 'yea' comparable now to the gulf between evil and good? 'What all men fear I too must fear' -- how barren and pointless a thought. The revelling multitude at the feast of Great Sacrifice, or up at the terrace at carnival in spring, leave me, alas, unmoved, alone, like a child that has never smiled" (*Ibid.*, XX).

He also condemned aggressive wars and the ambition to conquer and build a large empire.

"If Tao prevails in the world, horses will be used for the purpose of agriculture. If Tao does not prevail, war horses will be bred on the common" (*Tao Te Ching*, XLVI).

"Where troops have been quartered, brambles and thorns spring up. In the track of great armies there must follow lean years" (*Tao Te Ching*, XXX).

"When opposing warriors join in battle, he who has pity conquers" (*Ibid.*, LXIX).

"The virtuous man is for patching up, the vicious is for fixing guilt" (*Ibid.*, XXIX).

"Weapons at best are tools of bad omen, loathsome and avoided by those of the Way...But when it cannot be avoided they use them with calm and restraint. Even in victory's hour these tools are unlovely to see; for, those who admire them truly are men who in murder delight" (*Ibid.*, XXXI).

Lao Tzu gave a message of Return to Nature. It was not that he advocated retirement from the world, but what he did point out was that in the contemplation of mists and mountains, clouds and streams, lay true happiness; the mysterious and wonderful ways of God could best be realised in the acceptance of Nature. Thus Taoism seeks to be in tune with Nature and condemns unwarranted interference and meddling with God's creation:

"As for those who would take the whole world to tinker it as they see fit, I observe that they never succeed: for the world is a sacred vessel, not made to be altered by men. The tinker will spoil it; usurpers will lose it" (*Ibid.*, XXIX).

When this love for Nature was made the basis of Chinese painting it produced the greatest landscape art that the world has ever known. Indeed we cannot understand Chinese art without this background of Taoist philosophy.

Lao Tzu wanted men to lead a simple, natural way of life and to preserve and keep pure the original simplicity of human nature. "Reveal thy simple self," he said, "embrace thy original nature, check thy selfishness, curtail thy desires" (*Ibid.*, XIX).

He condemned luxury and artificial way of life. These, he said, were sure to result in injustice, inequality and human misery:

"When the palaces are very splendid, the fields will be very waste, and the granaries very empty. The wearing of gay embroidered robes, the carrying of sharp swords, fastidiousness in food and drink, superabundance of property and wealth -- this I call flaunting robbery; most assuredly it is not Tao" (*Ibid.*, LIII).

It was in the same spirit that he expressed himself against "too much government." Politically the small village State was his ideal, and all centralised government was undesirable. Indeed the less the government of any kind the better; men should not even be aware that they were being ruled. Lao Tzu's advice was: "Ru a big country as you would fry a small fish" (*Tao Te Ching*, LX) -- that is,

by letting alone as far as possible. He wanted the people to enjoy maximum freedom:

"As restrictions and prohibitions are multiplied in the Empire, the people grow poorer and poorer. When the people are subjected to overmuch government, the land is thrown into confusion. When the people are skilled in many cunning arts, strange are the objects of luxury that appear. The greater the number of laws and enactments, the more thieves and robbers there will be" (*Ibid.*, LVIII).

The doctrine of *Wu-wu-wie* ("to do without doing") was for the rulers as well as ordinary citizens. It was valid both as state policy and as moral principle.

"The Tao never does, yet through it everything is done. If kings and barons can keep the Tao, the world will of its own accord be reformed. When reformed and rising to action, let it be restrained by the nameless pristine simplicity. The nameless pristine simplicity is stripped of desire for contention. By stripping of desire quiescence is achieved, and the world arrives at peace of its own accord" (*Ibid.*, XXXVII).

### THE TEACHINGS OF CHUANG TZU

The religion of Lao Tzu shared the fate of many great religions. At first it was neglected, except by a few faithful disciples. Then came powerful advocates who crystallized and to some extent popularised it, but in doing so made significant alterations in it. They made known the letter but at the cost of the spirit. About two centuries after the founder, when Mencius was giving a new life to Confucianism, there appeared another great reformer, Chuang Tzu, to revive Taoism. Chuang Tzu expounded in detail the truths which Lao Tzu had conveyed in the form of epigrams. His writings show profound insight combined with great beauty of poetic imagination. They have also at times a quaint humour. He wrote a book, called after him *Chuang Tzu*, which in its present form contains thirty-three chapters, all of them a mixture of philosophic disquisition and anecdotes or parables. Chuang Tzu, following Lao Tzu, his master, affirmed the supreme reality of Tao (the Way of God). All else in the universe is impermanent and subject to change. Tao alone endures and is ever the same.

"For Tao has its inner reality and its evidences. It is devoid of action and of form. It may be transmitted, but cannot be received. It may be obtained, but cannot be seen. It is based in itself, rooted in itself. Before heaven and earth were, Tao existed by itself from all time. It gave the spirits and rulers their spiritual powers and gave heaven and earth their birth: To Tao, the zenith is not high,

nor the nadir low; no point in time is long ago, nor by the lapse of ages has it grown old."<sup>2</sup>

Hence the height of wisdom is to know God and to live one's life in accordance with His will and pleasure :

"He who knows what is of God and who knows what is of Man has reached indeed the height of wisdom. One who knows what is of God patterns his living after God. One who knows what is of Man may still use his knowledge of the known to develop his knowledge of the unknown, living till the end of his days and not perishing young. This is the fullness of knowledge" (*Chuang Tzu*, chapter "The Great Supreme").

According to Chuang Tzu there are two levels of knowledge : that which is learned through our senses is known as the "lower knowledge"; that which is revealed directly to our mind and heart is known as the "higher knowledge". Chuang Tzu bewailed the fact that man is easily content with the former, thereby neglecting the latter. He also believed in the relativity of all values in this world of manifestations, and, as the correlate of this principle, the identity of contraries. This polarity sums up all life's basic oppositions : active-passive, positive-negative, light-dark, male-female, life-death. This doctrine of relativity is well illustrated in the following autobiographical statement by Chuang Tzu:

"Once upon a time, I, Chuang, Tzu, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Chuang Tzu. Soon I awoke and there I was, veritably myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man" (*Chuang Tzu*, the chapter "On Levelling All Things").

In the end all opposites and tensions are resolved in the harmony and unity of the Way of God. In the words of Chuang Tzu:

"The words of arguments are all relative; if we wish to reach the absolute, we must harmonize them by means of the unity of God, and follow their natural evolution, so that we may complete our allotted span of life. But what is it to harmonize them by means of the unity of God? It is this. The right may not be really right. What appears so may not be really so. Even if what is right is really right, wherein it differs from wrong cannot be made plain by argument.

2. *Chuang Tzu*, chapter "The Great Supreme". The translation of the Book of Chuang Tzu, from which quotations have been given in this chapter, is by Lin Yutang (*Wisdom of China*, Michael Joseph, London).

Even if what appears so is really so, wherein it differs from what is not so also cannot be made plain by argument. Take no heed of time, nor of right and wrong. Passing into the realm of the Infinite, take your final rest therein" (*Chuang Tzu*, chapter "On Levelling All Things").

Like his great master, Chuang Tzu also idealized Nature and natural way of life. He said that in the original state of nature men were ideally happy :

"Have you never heard of the Age of Perfect Nature? In the days of Yung Ch'eng, Tat'ing, Pohuang, Chungyung....the people tied knots for reckoning. They enjoyed their food, beautified their clothing, were satisfied with their homes, and delighted in their customs. Neighbouring settlements overlooked one another, so that they could hear the barking of dogs and crowing of cocks of their neighbours, and the people till the end of their days had never been outside their country. In those days there was indeed perfect peace" (*Chuang Tzu*, chapter "Opening Trunks or a Protest Against Civilization").

People brought suffering and misery into their lives by meddling with Nature and adopting an artificial way of life. Just as men became unhappy when they lost the natural, child-like state, so society went astray when it fettered men with ceremony and artificial restraints. Men should be left free to lead a simple, natural way of life:

"I think one who knows how to govern the empire should not do so. For the people have certain natural instincts -- to weave and clothe themselves, to till the field and feed themselves. This is their common character, in which all share. Such instincts may be called 'Heaven-born'. So in the days of perfect nature, men were quiet in their movements and serene in their looks" (*Chuang Tzu*, Chapter "Horses' Hoofs").

Chuang Tzu went further than his Master in condemning civilization and advocated retirement from the world. He had almost no use for government :

"There has been such a thing as letting mankind alone and tolerance; there has never been such a thing as governing mankind. Letting alone springs from the fear, lest men's natural dispositions be perverted and tolerance springs from the fear lest their character be corrupted. But if their natural dispositions be not perverted, nor their character corrupted, what need is there left for government?" (*Chuang Tzu*, chapter "On Tolerance").



He gave a charming exposition of the principle of *Wu-wu-wie*, "letting alone" or inaction, and ended the discourse by calling it the Way of God :

"He who does not understand God will not be pure in character. He who has not clear apprehension of Tao will not know where to begin. And he who is not enlightened by Tao, -- alas indeed for him! What then is Tao? There is the Tao of God, and there is the Tao of man. Honour through inaction comes from the Tao of God: entanglement through action comes from the Tao of man. The Tao of God is fundamental: the Tao of man is accidental. The distance which separates them is great. Let us take heed thereto!" (*Chuang Tzu*, chapter "On tolerance").

The ideal life, which Chuang Tzu called the "Happy Excursion" is a state where man "will bury gold in the hillside and cast pearls in the sea. He will not struggle for wealth, nor for fame. He will not rejoice at long life, nor will he grieve over early death. He will not find pleasure in success, nor will he feel pain in failure. He will not account the throne of a state as his personal gain, nor will he claim the empire of the world as his personal glory. His glory is to have the insight that all are one and that life and death are the same."

Chuang Tzu had faith in the Hereafter or the life-after-death. He regarded the fear of death as one of the principal sources of human unhappiness. However, through the understanding he preached, this fear could become meaningless. The story of Chuang Tzu and the skull is well worth recalling in this connection.

On his way to Ch'u, Chuang Tzu saw a skull by the roadside. Striking it with his riding whip, he leant over it and asked: "Sir, was it some insatiable ambition and inordinate desire that brought you to this? The fall of a kingdom that made you perish by the axe and halberd? Or had you lived an evil life and left a blot on the family name, and so were brought to this? Was it hunger and cold that did this, or was it that you were brought to this by the natural course of old age?" Then he picked the skull up, and placing it under his head as a pillow went to sleep. At midnight, the skull appeared to him in a dream and told him of the happiness of the dead. Chuang Tzu, however, did not believe this, so he asked whether the skull would like to be restored to life and sent back to his home. At this the skull opened his eyes wide and furrowed his brows, saying: "How can you imagine that I would cast away happiness greater than that of a king only to go back again to the toils and troubles of the living world?"

And here is Chuang Tzu's description of the True Man:

"The true men of old appeared of towering stature and yet could not topple down. They behaved as though wanting in themselves, but without looking up to others. Naturally independent of mind, they were not severe. Living in unconstrained freedom, yet they did not try to show off. They appeared to smile as if pleased, and to move only in natural response to surroundings. Their serenity flowed from the store of goodness within. In social relationships, they kept to their inner character. Broad-minded, they appeared great; towering, they seemed beyond control. Continuously abiding, they seemed like doors kept shut; absent-minded, they seemed to forget speech. They saw in penal laws an outward form; in social ceremonies, certain means; in knowledge, tools of expediency: in morality, a guide. It was for this reason that for them penal laws meant a merciful administration, social ceremonies, a means to get along with the world; knowledge a help for doing what they could not avoid; and morality, a guide that they might walk along with others to reach a hill. And all men really thought that they were at pains to make their lives correct. For what they cared for was One, and what they did not care for was One also. That which they regarded as One was One, and that which they did not regard as One was One likewise. In that which was One, they were of God; in that which was not One, they were of man. And so between the human and the divine no conflict ensued. This was to be a true man" (*Chuang Tzu*, chapter "The Great Supreme").

### THE LATER HISTORY

During the Han dynasty, Taoism received so much encouragement at the Court that it might be said for a time to have become the official religion. King Tai, who reigned from 156 B.C., ordered Lao Tzu's book, *Tao Te Ching*, to be studied at the court, and thus gave it royal standing. But by this time Taoism had been badly corrupted; the element of magic had submerged its original truth and simplicity. The search was not now so much for virtue as for a formula of immortality, some elixir of life. One of the Han Emperors fitted up an expedition to search for the Isles of the Blest, where men could be found who lived for ever and who were never ill. Attempts to become genii led men to strange experiments with drugs, and to a number of physical experiments closely akin to the Hindu practice of Yoga. Professor Soothill, writing in 1923, says of the relapse of Taoism into a system of magic:

"A charge cannot be laid at the door of Laocius (a Latinized form of the name Lao Tzu), and it is a pity that the lofty moral teaching of Laocius and Chuang Tzu proved to be beyond the capacity of

their successors. Even in Chuang Tzu we find elements of the bizzare, men who could walk through solid rock, leap down terrifying precipices unharmed, walk through fire unsinged, travel thousands of miles through the air, absenting themselves for many days, men who did not die, but were translated and so on...Taoist devotees today walk up ladders of swords, pass through blazing fire, push long needles through their cheeks...They are called upon to clear haunted houses, expel demons, rid a town of cholera spirits, pour magical curses on the thief, and undertake incantations for rain."<sup>3</sup>

The man who was responsible for organising Taoism with all these elements into a Church was Chang Tao-Ling -- said to have been born in 34 C.E. He made himself a kind of pope, the first of a long line of celestial preceptors who have continued up to the present century and who, till the establishment of the People's Republic of China, had considerable political influence. Chang Tao-Ling, with a band of followers, set up a miniature State, based on Taoist principles, in a remote district, and his work was carried on in different parts of China by other members of his family. He was supposed to have possessed miraculous powers, and one of his descendants is credited with having discovered the elixir of life and become an immortal. The sacred office was handed down from father to son, and in course of time the Emperor granted a kind of Papal State in Kiangsi, which was till recently the centre of the Taoist Church.

The later history of Taoism is thus one of ever-increasing complexity and accretion. The arrival in China of Buddhism, already corrupted by admixture with Brahminism, Tantrism and Central Asian paganism, was a further complication, and resulted in imitation, adaptation, and absorption of many ideas which originally came from India. Temples, convents, and monasteries were set up; saints and deities, often even national heroes, came to be worshipped. Finally a Taoist Trinity emerged, which consisted of Lao Tzu himself, the Jade Emperor (a mythical figure symbolizing the Supreme Ruler of the Universe), and an ancient primal deity - - Chaos or the Demi-urge. Vaguely there was a First Principle higher than these. Beneath these "Celestial Preceptors" innumerable genii fairies operated, including the "Eight Immortals" who figure so often in Chinese art. The Way of God (Tao) and the moral values of the original Taoism had been completely obscured and mattered scarcely at all besides the occultism and magic which

3. W. E. Soothill, *The Three Religions of China*, (Oxford University Press).

went on at the temples and monasteries. The incredible superstitions of simple and illiterate peasants were catered for on a definitely cash basis by monks who had become notorious for their laziness. The principle of inaction advocated by Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu for the sake of spiritual growth had become mere inaction. In a progressive deterioration Taoism became a breeding ground of superstitions, its chief task the warding off of evil spirits.

Before we leave the history of Taoism we must note that the religions of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism are not mutually exclusive in China. It would be unthinkable in Christendom that a man should describe himself as a Roman Catholic and also a Methodist. Yet a Chinese might quite easily say that he is a Confucianist, a Buddhist and a Taoist -- that, in fact, he belonged to all the three religions at the same time. Buddhist priests are often in charge of Taoist temples. Confucius himself is represented in the writings of Chuang Tzu as expounding the theories of Taoism; some Taoists even adore Confucius as a god. The combining of the three religions is amusingly illustrated by Dr. Carpenter :

"As early as the sixth century a famous Buddhist scholar was asked by the Emperor if he was a Buddhist and he pointed to his Taoist cap. 'Are you a Taoist?' he showed his Confucian shoes. 'Are you a Confucian?' he wore a Buddhist scarf."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Dr. Carpenter, *The Panorama of Religions*.

## Chapter VII

# JUDAISM

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The history of the Hebrews begins when a Bronze age Semitic people migrated from the comparative civilization of the Euphrates valley, following the destruction of the ancient city of Ur, and settled down in the secluded hill-country of central and southern Canaan on the Mediterranean coast. The leader of this family was a man named Abram (later called Abraham), who had set his face against the paganism and polytheism of his people and, following a revelation from God, had begun to believe in ethical monotheism. Because of his implicit trust in the One and Only God and righteous way of life, Abraham was given the promise that he and the righteous from among his descendants would become a perennial source of blessing to the nations of the earth.

Abraham's work for God was carried on after him by his sons Ishmael and Isaac, and after them by Jacob, who after a mysterious experience of wrestling with an angel was renamed Israel, a term denoting the 'champion of God'. Jacob had twelve sons who became the progenitors of the Twelve Tribes, who for some time constituted the people of Israel. Through a combination of events and circumstances Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, rose from slavery to become the governor of Egypt at the time when Egypt was under the dominion of the Hyksos, a foreign Semitic people, closely akin to the Hebrews. The Israelites thereupon migrated in large numbers to Egypt and for some time enjoyed considerable prosperity and influence there. But following the revival of Egyptian nationalism under the leadership of the princes of Thebes and the overthrow of the Hyksos by Aahmes about 1580 B.C., the children of Israel were reduced to slavery. "Now there rose up," says the Bible, "a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph...and the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigour. And they made their lives bitter with bondage, in mortar, and in bricks, and in all manner of service in the fields: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour."<sup>1</sup>

When the lot of the Israelites became absolutely unbearable under Pharaoh Rameses II, God raised a great leader named Moses to deliver them from their bondage and unite them as a nation. Moses was adopted and brought up by an Egyptian princess. But

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1. Exodus, Chapter 1.

when he grew up he was forced to flee the country for the grazing land of Midian, where he married and worked for several years as a shepherd. One day as he was feeding his flock in the Sinaitic wilderness he came to Mount Horeb, and there, from the wondrous spectacle of a flaming but unconsumed desert bush, he heard the voice of God bidding him to go back to Egypt in order to deliver his brethren from their bondage and lead them towards the Land of Promise.

Accordingly, Moses returned to Egypt and eventually persuaded the children of Israel to depart with him. They were pursued by Pharaoh and his hosts. The Israelites were helped by what they regarded as God's miraculous intervention to cross the Red Sea somewhere near Suez, while the Egyptians were drowned. "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord and believed the Lord, and His servant Moses."<sup>2</sup>

In the wilderness of Sinai, where the children of Israel had arrived after escaping from Egypt, Moses received the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Torah through a series of revelations from God. But while he was away, the children of Israel forgot Yahweh (Jehovah), the one true God, and began worshipping a golden calf, which they had themselves fashioned out of their ornaments. For this transgression they had to suffer and wander in the wilderness for forty years. Moses, the great prophet, died before he could lead his people into the Promised Land; for, to quote a Jewish author, "Neither were the people ready for the land, nor was the land ready for the people."

At last the children of Israel entered Canaan (Palestine) after crossing the Jordan near the Dead Sea, under the leadership of Joshua. But it was only after long and bitter warfare with the local Arab inhabitants, lasting for many years, that they could bring the best part of the country under their dominion. Soon after the death of Joshua, the children of Israel turned their back upon the ethical monotheism which Moses had preached to them under Divine inspiration and began worshipping the local Baals and Astartes. "The Israelites were naturally prompted," writes Rev. Allan Menzies, "to adopt what they could of the religion of the Canaanites. The old sacred places of the land they could not help adopting; it would have been strange indeed, if, when they became

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2. Ibid., 14 : 30-31.

agriculturists, they had not adopted the agricultural festivals; and if, as was natural, they regarded the Baal of the Canaanites as the lord of the land and the giver of fertility, their thanks for the harvest would be addressed to him. Their worship of Jehovah could not be left poorer and meaner than that which their neighbours addressed to Baal; for it also they erected asheras and made use of standing stones, and of Jehovah also they had images. One of these, which was destroyed by Hezekiah, was in the form of a serpent : in other places Jehovah was worshipped in the form of a bull. Where an image of him was kept, he could be consulted by means of lots or in other ways. The ark or chest which was kept at one of the more important shrines, represented him more fully; it was carried into battle, and he was thought to go with it."<sup>3</sup>

These idolatrous practices, however, did not go entirely unchallenged. Brave leaders called 'Judges', some twelve in number, set their faces against these soul-destroying practices and beliefs; and appearing on the scene as liberators from enemy pressure, they tried to recall the people to the pure worship of Yahweh. But these Judges were not national figures; they were more or less tribal heroes and their influence did not outlast the crisis which brought them to the forefront as leaders.

By the time Samuel, the last of the Judges, was born practically all the surrounding Canaanites had been subdued; but a new danger appeared for the Israelites in the shape of attacks by the Philistines, who destroyed many Israelite towns and captured the Ark. Thus there arose the clamour among the Israelites for a king, who would unite them as a nation under a strong central authority and lead them in their wars against their enemies. The man to be chosen as the first king of Israel was Saul. But it was under the second king, David (1012-972 B.C.) that the Israelites reached the height of their power and glory. David united all the tribes into a strong nation and won several brilliant victories on the battlefield, thus extending the boundaries of the kingdom of Israel. He captured Jerusalem and made it the capital of his empire. He purged the religion of Israel of the pagan elements and reorganised the ritual of the sanctuary. His reign was indeed the golden age of Israel.

David's policy of political and religious centralization was carried on by his son Solomon, who built in Jerusalem a magnificent Temple, which became the only shrine, superseding all other shrines in the land. Solomon's reign was a period of unparalleled

3. Allan Menzies. *History of Religion*, p. 180 (John Murray, London, 1895.)

peace for Israel. It was also remarkable for great material and cultural progress. Solomon's merchant fleets ploughed the seas for distant lands and brought to Israel the wealth of the nations. The arts and sciences flourished, Solomon himself contributing by his wisdom, wit, brilliance and consummate literary gifts, to their growth.

The political and religious unity of the Israelites did not last very long. After Solomon they became divided into two kingdoms: the ten Northern tribes forming the kingdom of Israel with Samaria as its capital and Jeroboam as its first king; and the two southern tribes (of Judah and Benjamin) forming the kingdom of Judah, whose capital remained Jerusalem.

The people of Israel drifted away from the monotheistic moral religion of Moses and the other prophets. Under Ahab and his dominating foreign wife Jezebel, the worship of Yahweh the one true God, was dominated by the worship of Baal, the divinity of Tyre with its fertility ritual and human sacrifices. Prophet Elijah appeared among them to warn the people of Israel against the decay of religion and morals. He was followed by the Prophet Amos, who denounced the luxury and corruption of the age. He declared that God took no delight in feast days and solemn sacrifices, but His joy was in right conduct and justice. But the warnings of these prophets fell on deaf ears, and finally God sent the Prophet Hosea to deliver to them the message of doom. Return to God and to righteous life was no longer possible and there was nothing left for Israel but to suffer the severest retribution -- defeat and exile for her sins and follies. In 738 B.C. the armies of the all-conquering Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III attacked the kingdom of Israel and reduced it to bondage and misery. In 721 B.C. Sargon II, seeing signs of insubordination and rebellion among the people of Israel, punished them by deporting almost the entire population to the remotest parts of his great empire. Thus did the kingdom of Israel pass out of history.

In the kingdom of Judah the dynasty founded by David continued undisturbed for some time. The first few kings were faithful to the religion of Moses. But when Jehoram came to throne corruption set in. Jehoram's wife was the daughter of Jezebel, and under her influence he introduced in Judah the same kind of Tyrian Baalism that had been the ruin of the kingdom of Israel. Religious and moral corruption became universal.

But not all the kings were equally bad. When, Hezekiel became the king, he tried his best to abolish idolatrous practices and



reform the religion. In this he was helped by the prophets Isaiah and Micah. Taking up the same burden as their predecessors, Amos and Hosea, they attacked the moral corruption and enervating luxuries that were rife in Judah. They both insisted that sacrifices, however meticulously offered, were no substitute for justice and righteousness. They threatened Jerusalem with the fate of Samaria, unless the people repented and amended their way of living.

Another noble king was Josiah, who succeeded to the throne in 640 B.C. The Book of Kings tells us that in 621 B.C. Hilkiah, the high priest, sent word to king Josiah that he had discovered the true book of the Law of Moses in the House of Yahweh. Most critics consider this book to be substantially the same as the present Book of Deuteronomy. It was declared to be a transcript of the laws given to Israel by Moses more than eight hundred years earlier. Armed with this book Josiah instituted a drastic reformation of religion in Judah. Polytheistic worship was suppressed, idols were destroyed, sacred prostitution and human sacrifices forbidden, and all local sanctuaries abolished.

But about this time world-shaking events were taking place which destroyed the hopes raised by Josiah's reforms. The Assyrian Empire soon came to a sudden end, and Egypt and Babylonia became engaged in a mighty struggle to fill the place thus left vacant in West Asia. Judah became a victim of the rivalries of these mighty powers. The Prophet Jeremiah appeared at this time to attack the iniquity and folly of the people of Judah and to warn them against the hopeless ruin they were bringing down upon their own heads. His fulminations and warnings went unheeded. In 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, attacked Jerusalem, razed it to the ground, and deported to Babylon all the chief families of Judah. Thus did Judah also suffer the fate of the Ten Tribes -- captivity and humiliation. But whilst the other tribes vanished and became scattered over many lands, Judah alone survived. Judaism derives its name from the tribe of Judah, and its followers from this time onwards came to be known as the Jews.

When in 538 B.C. Cyrus, the great Persian king, became the master of Babylon, the Jews found themselves in contact with a nation more sympathetic than their former masters. One of the first acts of Cyrus was to allow the return to Judaea of such as so desired; and several thousands availed themselves of the permission. Under a prince of royal house, Zerubbabel, accompanied by Joshua the high priest, the exiles came back, and after some delay

rebuilt the Temple and re-established the services. Prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and later on, Malachi (with whom the Hebrew prophecy came to a close) appeared among them to revive and re-establish the true religion.

In 458 B.C. Ezra the Scribe came to Jerusalem, armed with a royal warrant which he had obtained from the Persian king Artaxerxes I Longimanus to introduce and enforce a new Priestly Code which had been developing in Babylonia. Ezra waged a relentless war against mixed marriages and, with the help of priests and scribes, compiled and gave the final shape to the Pentateuch or the five books ascribed to Moses in the Bible. This period witnessed the rule of priests and the rise of the Jewish theocratic state in Judaea under Persian suzerainty.

Persian rule came to an end in Judaea in 333 B.C. when the all-conquering Macedonian, Alexander the Great, burst with ease into Asia and took possession of Palestine. Alexander's mission was to propagate the Hellenic ideals and culture, but he did not believe in the use of force. He left the Jews free to follow their religion and way of life. When Alexander died, Palestine came at first into the hands of the Greek kings of Egypt, the Ptolemies, whose rule also was for the most part tolerant and mild. Later, however, the Seleucids of Syria obtained the suzerainty, and under one of these kings a tyranny at once crafty and violent, attractive and repellent, came in. Antiochus IV made it his mission in life to Hellenize and civilize the barbarians, the Jews of Judaea among them. For this purpose, he suppressed the Jewish religious practices, desecrated their Temple and burnt their Scriptures, persecuting those who resisted his efforts. He was not, of course, without allies among the Jews themselves. A large party favoured what appeared to very many the side of culture and progress; they already spoke Greek, and often called themselves by Greek names; some of them, indeed, occupied high positions in the priesthood. At last the orthodox Jews rose up in revolt against the tyrant and under the leadership of Mattathias and his sons, the 'Maccabees', they won an astonishing series of victories. Three years after the desecration, the sanctuary was purified and restored. Antiochus died in the Persian city of Tabae, and his general, Lysias, granted toleration to the Jews.

Some of the Jews were satisfied with gaining religious freedom, but others wanted to overthrow the Seleucid rule and achieve political freedom also. For twenty years the struggle for political freedom went on, claiming in its course one after another of the Maccabean brothers as victims. Finally, in 143 B.C. Simon, the last

of the surviving brothers, expelled the Syrians from Jerusalem. Simon was elected as the first High Priest and civil ruler, with the title of Nasi, of the newly-established Jewish state.

Simon's son John Hyrcanus, who became the next ruler, was an ambitious man and he started on a course of warfare with his neighbours to build an empire for himself. In his aggressive nationalism, John Hyrcanus was strongly opposed by the Pharisees who, together with the Sadducees, formed the two principal parties that made their first appearance during this period. The Sadducees gave him their full support.

In the course of years the Jewish state was weakened by internal dissensions and civil war. There were two claimants to the throne and both appealed to Rome for help. Pompey answered the call; advanced towards the capital, captured it, and conquered the land (63 B.C.), Judaea was now a Roman province, placed under the charge of Hyrcanus III, one of the two claimants to the throne, whom Pompey had recognised as the High Priest, but without the title of king. When Caesar became the master of Rome, he appointed Antipater, a convert to Judaism, as the Procurator of Judaea. Antipater, in turn appointed his son Herod as the governor of Galilee. In 39 B.C. Herod was made the King of Judaea by the Roman Senate. Nominally still independent, Judaea was actually in bondage to Rome. Herod was an able ruler and did a lot for the land and people over whom he ruled. But the Jews felt that, as a puppet of Rome, he placed Roman interests above those of his subjects.

The Jews during this period were divided into many parties and sects. There were, first of all, the Sadducees -- a pro-Roman group, led by the priests of Jerusalem. It was probably not a large party, and contained in addition to the Jerusalem hierarchy and those immediately connected with it, only the aristocrats and farmers. The Sadducees took their religion lightly and their politics seriously. They did not believe in the life-after-death and were worldly-minded, desirous of avoiding trouble and extremely eager to be prosperous.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, were the popular party, more concerned with religion than with politics. The only political issue about which they cared deeply was religious freedom; and they looked forward to national liberation, not through revolt but through the coming of a "Son of David", a Messiah who would not be divine but would receive from God authority to rule the nations. They were scrupulously exact in their interpretations and

observance of the Jewish law and were often haughty and uncharitable.

The chief differences between the Sadducees and the Pharisees were as follows: (1) The Pharisees believed in the life-after-death, heaven and hell, a general resurrection and a Messianic kingdom; the Sadducees rejected all these doctrines as innovations. (2) The Sadducees believed only in the written Torah, but the Pharisees believed also in the oral traditions and interpretations of the Elders, considering them to be as much divinely-inspired and binding on the faithful as the written Torah. (3) The Sadducees held the Hellenic doctrine of free-will, whereas the Pharisees contended that free-will was limited by the predestinate purposes of God.

With the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the role of the Sadducees was ended and they disappeared; but the Pharisees who no longer needed the Temple but had concentrated on the Synagogue, survived and flourished, and provided the basis for the rabbinical tradition that endures in modern Judaism.

Another sect, the Zealots, had broken away from the Pharisees, believing that the latter were not sufficiently devoted to the cause of national independence. The Zealots were deeply ardent patriots who combined with an intense love of their country a devotion to Torah, and were ready to fight and die for both. For them God was the Lord God of Israel, and Israel His Chosen People, and their land His land, where the presence of the heathen was a defilement. They thought it a moral sin for a son of Israel to submit to the Romans and to recognise their lordship. They sought by military action to liberate Palestine.

There was yet another Jewish religious party, called the Essenes. The recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Qumran valley of Jordan has thrown new light on the beliefs and customs of this sect.<sup>4</sup> The Essenes, though comparatively few in number, identified themselves not only with a culminating role in history but even with a pivotal position in the entire drama of the cosmos. The Jews were God's chosen people with whom He had made an exclusive covenant. Not all Jews, however, were faithful to this covenant. Many of them, as the Essenes saw it, did not even understand rightly the provisions that the covenant enjoined. It was, therefore, this particular sect of the Chosen People that God would use "to prepare the way in the wilderness for the new world

4. (i) Edmund Wilson, *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea*, (Fontana Books, 1957);  
 (ii) A Powell Davies, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Mentor Books, New York, 1956.)

order", which He would bring about through the Messiah, the divinely-appointed ruler of Israel -- and through Israel, of the rest of mankind. For this purpose the Essenes joined together in a "New Covenant" (which it may be noted, is synonymous with "New Testament"), apparently at Damascus. It was a covenant to return to the true teachings of Moses and the prophets, guided, however, by a Teacher of Righteousness. Who was this Teacher of Righteousness? Unfortunately there is no sure way of identifying him, and the attempts to do so have led to considerable controversy. Some scholars have suggested that the Teacher of Righteousness was no other than Jesus.<sup>5</sup> A. Powell Davies in his book *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* has drawn attention to the many intimate parallels between the Essenic and the primitive Christian communities.

The Essenes abstained from the sacrifice of animals, regarding "the reverent mind as the only true sacrifice", engaged in agriculture and other peaceful arts, and were strongly opposed to slavery. They had no time for discussions of abstract questions of philosophy, unless they contributed to ethical teaching. They preached the love of God, of virtue, and of men. Members of this sect were widely noted for their kindness, their equality, their indifference to money and to worldly aims and pleasures. They lived in colonies where they had a common storehouse, common treasury into which each placed his earnings and from which expenditures were made on behalf of all. The full members did not marry, but adopted the children of others, training them in Essenic doctrine and practice.

The Jews were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, a descendant of the great king David, who would deliver them from Roman bondage and usher in the Golden Age of Israel. But when the Messiah came they failed to recognise him. Jesus, who claimed to be the Messiah, declared that he had come to deliver them, not so much from bondage to Rome as from sin and folly, and that his mission was to lead them not to any kingdom of this world but to the Kingdom of Heaven. The Jews rejected him and even went to the extent of handing him over to the Roman authorities to be executed for sedition. The cup of their iniquity was full to the brim and the wrath of God overtook them. Following a rebellion headed by the Zealots in 70 C.E., the Roman forces led by Titus brutally crushed the Jews. The Temple was burnt and the Jewish state ceased to be.

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5. See in this Connection, Dr. J.L. Teicher, *The Dead Sea Fragments*, the Literary Supplement of *The Times*, London, March 21, 1958.

The Jews were at first stunned; they could not think of an existence without their state and Temple. The Rabbis, however, managed to keep some unity and sense of purpose among them through the academic Sanhedran, first at Jabneh and, after the Hadrian persecution, in Galilee. It was in Galilee that the great Rabbi, Judah the Prince, flourished. He edited and compiled the oral traditions of the Jews in the form of the *Mishnah*.

In the course of years the Jews became scattered all over the earth, but wherever they lived they remained united by their loyalty to the Torah and the traditions of the Elders, and escaped absorption into the neighbouring communities through strict observance of their peculiar laws and rituals. In Christian countries they were forced to live under sub-human conditions in ghettos, where they were frequently robbed of their possessions and brutally persecuted. It was only in Islamic countries, including the Muslim Spain, that they could live in freedom and dignity. Whenever they had the opportunity, they made important contributions to the intellectual and cultural life of the people among whom they lived. Referring to this, Lewis Browne writes in his preface to *The Wisdom of Israel*:

"The Jews, it must be realized, have been learners as well as teachers throughout their wanderings. They learned from the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Babylonians, the Greeks, the Parthians, the Romans, the Arabs, and every other people with whom good or ill fortune brought them in contact... The curve of that growth was of course highly uneven. It had its sharp ups and downs, and also its flat places, depending on the nature of the relations between the Jews and their neighbours. When these were more or less cordial, the growth was swift and salutary; when they were hostile, it was slow and toxic. Contrast for example, how Jewish wisdom flowered during the noon-tide of Islamic tolerance, and how it shrivelled during the night of mediæval Christian bigotry."<sup>6</sup>

Great Jewish poets, like Solomon ibn Gabirol, Judah Halevi, and Moses ibn Ezra; distinguished philosophers, like Saadiya ben Joseph, Bachya ben Joseph ibn Pakuda, Abraham ibn Daud, and the famous Musa ibn Maimun (Maimonides); eminent Jewish statesmen, like Hasdai ibn Shaprut, the principal Minister and court physician to the Spanish Caliph Abd al-Rahman III, and Samuel ibn Nagdela, the Grand Vazier of Granada,..... all these and

6. Lewis Browne (editor), *The Wisdom of Israel* p. 11. (Four Square Books), (London, 1962.)

many more were born and flourished in the free atmosphere of the Islamic world. In the words of Isidore Epstein:

"Thus did the lot of the Jews begin to improve wherever the Crescent bore rule. This improvement was very marked in Palestine and Egypt where the Christian Byzantine rulers had interfered not only with the economic and social life of the Jews but also with the internal affairs of the Synagogue and its services. But nowhere did this phenomenon display itself more brilliantly than in Spain, where Jews had been settled for centuries. The Christian Visigothic kings were pitiless, harsh and cruel. But their Muslim successors not only brought the Spanish Jews relief from their oppressors, but also encouraged among them a culture which in richness and depth is comparable to the best produced by any people at any time."<sup>7</sup>

With the coming of Enlightenment to Europe, the Jews gained some measure of freedom and human dignity in Western countries also. To this period belongs Moses Mendelssohn, one of the greatest Jews of modern times. But after the fall of Napoleon anti-semiticism was revived and the Jews were faced with the choice: back to the ghetto or become Christian. Many chose the latter alternative; others submitted to the reimposition of restrictions but remained loyal to their faith. It was during the period of renewed persecution that the idea of striving for a Jewish state, where they would be sovereign and free to follow their own way of life, came into the mind of Theodore Herzl (1860-1904). This idea was at first received with suspicion, but later spread like wildfire among the Jews, both orthodox and reformed, and soon crystallised in the form of the modern political Zionism. The British, who after the First World War had become the rulers in Palestine under the League of Nations mandate, favoured the establishment of a national home for the Jews of the world in Palestine. Following the Balfour declaration, thousands of Jews from all over Europe began pouring into Palestine and, with the British aid and connivance, deprived the Muslim Arabs of their lands and drove them out as homeless refugees. Then came the massacre of the Jews in Hitler's Germany and the Jewish migration to Palestine naturally reached unprecedented proportion. Finally in 1947 the United Nations Assembly, dominated by the Big Powers, callously and unjustly passed a resolution for the establishment of the State of Israel by partitioning Palestine. Thus the Jews were provided a home by

7 Isidore Epstein, *Judaism—A Historical Presentation* (Pelican Books, 1959), p. 181.

making the Muslim Arabs, who had lived in Palestine since times immemorial, homeless. Hundreds of thousands of these Muslim Arabs have been since then living in sub-human conditions in refugee camps in the neighbouring Arab countries of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. The Jews, not satisfied with this monstrous injustice, have made no secret of their expansionist designs, and have actually enlarged the boundaries of their state to several times its original size, following a series of wars with the Arabs. It is amazing how these people, who have themselves been the victims of prolonged and repeated oppression, have been displaying uninhibited and unrestrained tendencies to persecute and massacre others---not their erstwhile persecutors (the Christians of the West) but, ironically enough, those who had always helped and befriended them (the Muslims).

### THE SACRED BOOKS OF JUDAISM

The Holy Scriptures of Judaism (*Kiswe Ha-Kodesh*) comprise all the books contained in the so-called Old Testament of the Christian Bible. In the Hebrew Canon they are arranged in three sections, as follows:

(1) *The Torah* ("Law") - comprising the Pentateuch ("Five Books") attributed to Moses; namely: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

(2) *The Neb'im* ("Prophets") - comprising (a) the Former Neb'im (*viz.*, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings); (b) the Later Neb'im consisting of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and "The Twelve" (*viz.*, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obediah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi).

(3) *The Kethubim* ("Holy Writings") - comprising (a) Psalms, Proverbs and Job; (b) the Five Megilloth, *i.e.*, the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther'; and (c) Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.

*The Torah* is considered by orthodox Jews and Christians to consist of the books of Moses, revealed to him by God. But even a casual reading will show that this cannot be so. Moses---to give just one example --- could not have written the account of his own death in Deuteronomy chapter 34. In its present form the *Torah*, or Pentateuch, dates from the fifth century before Christ. It is difficult to say which part of it, if any, was revealed by God to Moses (15th century B.C.). Modern scholars have been able to distinguish at least four main elements in the *Torah*. (i) The *Jahwestic* (J),



deriving originally from the Hebrew tribes settled in the south of Palestine about 9th century B.C., and so named because among them the Deity was known as Jahweh. This element shows the clearest traces of primeval religion, with an anthropomorphic conception of God, developed by these tribes while still in the desert. (ii) The *Elohists* (E), deriving from the tribe settled in the North, where the Deity was known as Elohim ("God" or, more literally, "gods"). Here in a region primarily agricultural rather than pastoral, the tribes were compelled to abandon their desert way of life and with it many of their original beliefs and taboos. (iii) The *Deuteronomic* (D), a far more advanced code compiled, it is thought, under the influence of the great prophets, and discovered by Hilkiah the High Priest in the year 621 B.C., when Josiah was the king of Judah. Some parts of it may indeed have come down from Moses. (iv) The *Priestly* (P), apparently a still later code reflecting the influence of the priest-ridden Babylonians in whose midst the Judaeans were held captive for fully a half-century. This mass of social and religious legislation, partly of ancient and partly of recent date, was falsely attributed to Moses by the priests. It comprised the Book of Leviticus and large parts of Genesis, Exodus and Numbers and was brought to Jerusalem by Ezra in 458 B. C. It is this heterogeneity that explains the numerous discrepancies within the *Torah*, and the difficulties of those who have sought to find equal worth in all its commands

The hands of the writers of J, E, D and P are also traceable in the Book of Joshua. Hence the critics often speak of the "Hexateuch" ("Six Books"), which implies that Joshua once formed a single work with the other five.

All the books of history, or the so-called *Former Nebi'im* are of composite authorship. Judges, Samuel and Kings, in their present forms, belong to the early post-exilic period. The general picture drawn in them may be regarded as historical. In the Book of Samuel, however, incongruous stories are told of Samuel, Saul and David, its principal figures.

Coming now to the *Later Nebi'im*, the works of the Hebrew prophets are not wholly the divinely-inspired writings of the men whose names they bear. In the Book of Isaiah only sixteen out of the sixty-three chapters are considered by the Biblical scholars to contain any writing by the Prophet Isaiah. The remaining chapters were written by at least two other men of much later times, who inserted their own writings into the Book of Isaiah.

The Book of Jeremiah also is composite. It probably contains many of the inspired writings of the Prophet Jeremiah, but as these were not compiled till after his death, they also contain many interpolations. In the words of Archibald Robertson:

"Unfortunately the work of Jeremiah, most human of prophets, has come down to us in fragmentary and confused state, with very little chronological arrangement and many interpolations."<sup>8</sup>

The book the Ezekiel was till recently considered to be the work of the prophet of that name, but some modern critics have detected in it the hands of at least two men and part of it is attributed by them to a period earlier than the traditional Ezekiel.

The books of the so-called "Twelve Minor Prophets", which form a single scroll in the Hebrew Canon, contain the revelations sent down to them by God and probably written by themselves, with the exception of *Jonah*, which was, of course, not written by him. There is no doubt, however, that these books also contain many interpolations. Nevertheless, the books of these prophets, together with those of Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel, contain some of the most exalted literature mankind has produced, and many of their pages are afire with hatred of oppression and injustice. Briefly the ideas to which they give expression are these: (i) God cares for all peoples, not just the Israelites; (ii) He will show the latter no special favour unless they show special diligence in following His ways; (iii) His ways are the ways of righteousness, and they can be followed only by doing good, not by performing rites; (iv) Unless the Israelites do follow them and at once, God Himself will devour their lands.

The book of Jonah was written about 350 B.C. The lesson of mercy and compassion taught in this little book gives it a very high ethical value.

This brings us to the *Kethubim*. The Book of Psalms consists of five collections of hymns. Though it is possible that a few of these psalms may have been written by David (1012-972 B.C.), the collections as we now have them are almost wholly post-exilian, i.e., late sixth or early fifth century B.C.

The Book of Proverbs is also composite, like the Book of Psalms. Solomon may have been the author of a few of the maxims in it. Archibald Robertson writes:

8. Archibald Robertson, *The Bible and its Background*, vol.1, p. 35 (The Thinker's Library, London, 1942.)

"Just as all Jewish law was ascribed to Moses and all Jewish psalmody to David, so it became a convention to ascribe 'wisdom' books, such as Proverbs, to Solomon. The book, however, is one of the latest in the Old Testament and shows the influence of Greek thought."<sup>9</sup>

Two other books are ascribed to Solomon. The first of these, Ecclesiastes, is, in fact, the book of a cynical pessimist, composed in the second century B.C. - - i.e., about eight hundred years after Solomon; and the second, the so-called Song of Solomon, is an anthology of love-lyrics sung at wedding festivities. According to A.D. Howell Smith :

"The so-called Song of Solomon is not a religious poem. It is a collection of bridal songs, probably all late in the present form. According to Rabbinic tradition, Jews sang these songs in taverns, and only after much dispute did the book enter the Canon."<sup>10</sup> The Song of Solomon was, however, given an allegorical interpretation, and the love of Solomon for the Shulammitte damsel was said to symbolize the love of God for His people, Israel.

The Book of Lamentations, though ascribed to Jeremiah in the Bible, is not his. It is a collection of five poems, the first four of which are acrostics. Chapters two and four may belong to the period of the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar (586. B.C.) while chapters 1 and 3 are later, and chapter 5 would fit several periods of natural distress.

The Book of Ruth is a novelette. Primarily historical in aim and concerned to trace the ancestry of David, this charming tale of loyalty and kindness also seeks to teach the common humanity of Jew and Gentile.

The Book of Esther, which may be a work of the third century before Christ, is a fiercely patriotic romance. The unknown author lays the scene of his story in the court of the Persian king Xerxes. "The story," comments Archibald Robertson "unfolds itself in an Arabian Nights atmosphere and teems with extravagances and impossibilities."

The Book of Job is the supreme achievement of the Hebrew literary genius. In form the work is the drama of the tragic struggle between man and fate. Its central theme is the problem of evil: how

9. Archibald Robertson, *The Bible and its Background*, vol. I, pp. 69-70 (The Thinker's Library, London, 1942)

10. A. D. Howell Smith, *In Search of the Real Bible*, p. 74 (The Thinker's Library London, 1943.).

it can be that the righteous suffer while "the eyes of the wicked stand out with fatness." Job, the central character of the drama, was a prophet; he is mentioned by Ezekiel as one of the proverbially just and righteous men of old. He is, nevertheless, overtaken by one calamity after another. He comes to believe that pain and suffering are necessary to prove and purify the righteous, and learns to accept these as of Divine appointment.

The Book of Daniel is a political manifesto, in pseudo-historical and apocalyptic form, directed against Antiochus the Seleucid ruler of Syria who tried to force Hellenic ideas and customs on the Jews. It was written about 165 B.C. in the name of a much earlier prophet to screen the subversive writer from the attention of the government.

The Book of Chronicles appears to be the work of a priest, who takes liberties with his sources and often falsifies history. The Book of Ezra-Nehemiah (which once formed a part of the Chronicles) contains genuine memoirs of those reformers, but much of the matter comes from the Chronicler who has reshaped everything to suit his conception of the past.

This is what the Rev. Allan Menzies writes with regard to the authenticity and historical value of the Scriptures of Judaism:

"The Old Testament literature has suffered in a high degree of what seems to be the predestined fate of every set of sacred books. Old materials and new are mixed up together in it; many works have been revised by later editors, and so much changed that laborious critical processes are necessary before they can be used by the historian."<sup>11</sup>

After the Holy Scriptures (*Kiswe Ha-Kodesh*) comes the Apocrypha. The Apocryphal books were written after the Jewish Canon had been closed. Most of them, however, are ascribed to very ancient and hallowed Hebrew worthies - - - for instance, Enoch, Abraham, Solomon, Daniel - - - but this, it seems, was done only in order to make those writings appear venerable and therefore deserving of devout study. They claim to be apocalypses - - - that is, 'revelations' - - - and tell in burning fervid words about the 'End of Days', the 'Final Judgment', the 'Messianic Age', and all the other spectacular wonders of eschatology. These books formed part of the earliest Greek version of the Hebrew Bible, called the Septuagint, prepared for the Jews of the Dispersion. They are still in-

11. Allan Menzies, *History of Religion*, p. 175 (John Murray, London, 1895.)

cluded in the Roman Catholic Bible, between the Old and the New Testaments, but have been omitted from the Protestant Bible.

More important, from the Jewish point of view, than the Apocrypha is the *Talmud*. Interpretations of the Torah and expositions of new laws and precepts had been going on ever since the times of Ezra. These were at first not written down but were handed down orally from one generation to another. As a matter of fact, the Jewish scholars trace the origin of this oral tradition to much more remote times and claim the existence of an oral Torah which, like the written Torah, had come down from Moses. "The Torah of God," writes Alan Unterman, "is not merely identical with the text of *Pentateuch*, or even with the whole Hebrew Bible (The so-called Old Testament), which is also considered to be divinely inspired, but includes the oral teachings of Judaism, which are thought in essence to go back to the revelation to Moses."<sup>12</sup> *Pirke Abot* (The Wisdom of the Fathers), an important book of the Talmud, opens with these words:

"Moses received the (oral) Torah from Sinai and handed it on to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets handed it on to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: be deliberate in judgment, raise many disciples, and make a hedge about the Torah."<sup>13</sup>

After the Men of the Great Assembly the oral traditions passed on to the Fathers, whose sayings are contained in the *Pirke Abot*, and from the Fathers to the Rabbis. Then came the crisis of 70 C.E., when their holy city, Jerusalem, was razed by the Romans, and the Jews were left without a home either for themselves or their God. It was at this time that the Rabbis decided to commit these oral traditions to writing. Thus they created the Talmud, and with it so walled in the Jews that they were able not merely to survive as a people, but even thrive.

The project began with a number of fragmentary note-books containing some of the countless new ordinances derived by 'interpretation' from the original 613 set down in the ancient Torah. Being uneven in their scope and authority, and also largely discrepant, these note-books were finally supplanted - - - around 200 C.E. - - - by a master digest which came to be known as the *Mishnah*.

12. John R. Hinnells (editor), *A Handbook of living Religions*; the chapter on "Judaism" by Alan Unterman, P.29. (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1985.)

13. *The Living Talmud - The Wisdom of the Fathers*, edited and translated by Judah Goldin (Mentor Religious Classic New York, 1957.)

the 'Repetition'. This consisted of six well-organised volumes, giving some 4000 legal decisions regulating every phase of Jewish life.

No sooner, however, was the Mishnah compiled than this in turn became a subject of 'interpretation'; whereupon further compilation became imperative, and thus a work called the *Gemara* emerged. When the *Gemara* was finally reduced to writing - - - around 500 C.E. - - - it was combined with Mishnah and called the *Talmud*. There are two versions of the Talmud, the Jerusalem version and the Babylonian version. Thus the Talmud is the source of the Oral Torah and is considered by the orthodox Jews to be as much divinely-inspired as the written Torah itself.

But even this did not exhaust the memorabilia of the Rabbis. The Talmud, despite its diffusiveness, was primarily a legalistic anthology. Its compilers tried hard to include in it only such discussions as related more or less directly to the statutes and customs which a Jew must observe in daily life. That left out an enormous amount of academic discourse of a broader and often more diverting nature. For example, the legends and folklore with which the Rabbis loved to regale themselves, the homilies they preached, the parables they invented, and the wealth of curious information and casual wisdom which they kept handing down from one generation to the next. Once the Talmud was completed, this other material was gathered together, and a series of works appeared called the *Midrashim*, the 'Expositions'. They were usually organised in the form of homiletic commentaries on various books and passages in the Bible.

### THE ESSENCE OF JUDAISM

The essence of Judaism is contained in the famous Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments, which were revealed to Moses by God. In the second book attributed to Moses, called Exodus, these commandments are given as follows:

"I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

"Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

"Thou shalt not kill.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery,

"Thou shalt not steal.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's". (Exodus, 20 : 2-17.)

There is also the further commandment in Leviticus:

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". (19:18)

### THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

The Jews look upon themselves as the Chosen People of God. In fact they go to the extent of regarding God as in a special sense theirs, and refer to Him as the "Lord God of Israel". He has revealed His true religion to them alone. To quote a modern Jewish author:

"The truest key to understanding Judaism in its own terms is to be found in its concept of the 'chosen people'. This doctrine of 'chosenness' is a mystery - - - and a scandal. It was already a mystery in the Bible itself, which ascribed the Divine choice, not to any inborn merits of the Jews, but to unknowable will of God. It soon became, and has remained, a scandal to the Gentiles - - - and even to some Jews"<sup>14</sup>

According to the Bible Yahweh, the one true God, entered into a covenant with the Children of Israel, which made Him the God of

14. Arthur Hertzberg (editor), *Judaism*, Introduction p. xv (Washington Square Press Book, New York, 1963.).

Israel, and Israel the people of Yahweh. They are called "the children of God" and are said to be superior to all other nations:

"Ye are the children of the Lord your God - - - For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (The Bible: Deuteronomy, 14:1-2).

"And what one nation in the earth is like Thy people Israel whom God went to redeem to be His own people, to make Thee a name of greatness and terribleness, by driving out nations from before Thy people, whom Thou hast redeemed out of Egypt? For Thy people Israel didst Thou make Thine own people for ever; and Thou, Lord, becamest their God" (I Chronicles, 17:21-22).

Even the land given by God to the children of Israel, the land of Canaan (Palestine) was declared to be like no other land on earth:

"Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel". (Numbers, 35:34).

And in the Talmud it is written:

"Whoever lives in the Land of Israel is considered to be a believer in God - - - Whoever lives outside of the Land is considered to be in the category of one who worships idols - - - Whoever lives in the Land of Israel lives a sinless life, as it is written (in the Bible), "The people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity" (Isaiah, 33:24) - - - "Whoever is buried in the Land of Israel is considered as though he were buried beneath the Altar - - - Whoever walks a distance of four cubits in the Land of Israel is assured of a place in the world to come". (*Mishnah*, Ketubot 110b-111a)

Fundamental to God's Covenant with Israel at Sinai was the divine exhortation, "And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus, 19:6). However, it cannot be denied that the Jews have always considered this Covenant as binding only upon themselves as a race. Not only do the Jews fail to preach their faith to others but they do not welcome converts. Whenever a rare convert does enter the Jewish fold (which is almost always due to marriage, since the Jewish law does not recognise the marriage of a Jew to a non-Jew), his motivations are suspect. The narrowly national and racialistic character of Judaism is apparent from the fact that the Jews expelled the Samaritans from the Jewish community, although they professed implicit faith in the Torah, merely because they had been guilty of intermarriages with non-Jews.



### THE CONCEPTION OF GOD

The Creed of Judaism, known as the *Shema*, runs as follows:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might". (Deuteronomy, 6:4-5)

Judaism rests on two broad doctrines: the belief in the unity of God, and the election of Israel to be the bearers of this belief. Both these doctrines have received their classic formulation in the *Shema*. "What is here affirmed," writes Isidore Epstein, "is (i) that there is but one God, with none other beside Him, and (ii) that the one and only God is the one whom Israel confesses and worships. The negations are as emphatic and insistent as the affirmations. They negate all embodiments and notions of the Deity which, however refined and sublimated, veil the one and only God of Israel more than they reveal Him. Thus are excluded, not only all dualistic no less than polytheistic creeds, but also the 'Trinity in Unity' of Christianity which, however much it may be explained away so as to make it compatible with the one God in the metaphysical sense, remains a direct denial of the *only* God who, from the beginning, had chosen Israel in His service."<sup>15</sup>

Next to the doctrine of His unity is that of His omnipotence. God is, in the Talmudic phrase, "The Might - - - omnipotent and powerful?" His power has no other limit than His will. Judaism also emphasises God's omnipresence, but this does not mean that He is identical with the world or limited by it. All pantheistic doctrines, that would identify or compound God with nature, are ruled out. Closely connected with the idea of the transcendence of God is that of divine incorporeality. He is pure spirit, free from all limitations of matter and weaknesses of the flesh. Other attributes of God stressed by Judaism are his omniscience, justice and mercy. He is, moreover, 'living and existing to eternity.' There is, thus, no place in Judaism for any notions of the incarnation, and of the death and resurrection of God.

It must, however, be pointed out that this sublime conception of God is not found uniformly in all the books of the Bible. In the earlier books Yahweh is no more than a tribal deity. He is the God of the Hebrews alone; other nations have their own Gods (Elohim). The reality of these other gods is not denied, though Yahweh is said to be the most powerful among them: "Who among the Elohim is

<sup>15</sup> Isidore Epstein *Judaism - A Historical Presentation*, p. 134 (Penguin Books, 1959)

like unto thee, O Yahweh?" (Psalms). Polytheism also peeps out of such texts of the Bible as "The man is become *as one of us*, to know good and evil". (Genesis, 3:22).

The conception of God in many texts of the Bible is anthropomorphic. He is, in the phrase of Matthew Arnold, "a magnified and non-natural man". He is wifeless and childless, but lives up in the sky with other beings inferior to himself, who are also named gods or Elohim (Exodus, 15:11; Psalms, 86:8; Psalms, 97:9). Sometimes he walks about the earth to enjoy the cool evening (Genesis, 3:8), descends to verify rumours he has heard (Genesis, 11:5; 18:20, 21), eats and drinks with men and argues with their wives (Genesis, 18: 1-5,) gets the worst of it in a wrestling match until he practises a foul trick on his opponent (Genesis, 32:24-30), shows his back to Moses because his face is death-dealing (Exodus, 33:20-23), is dissuaded from yielding to vengeance by an appeal to his vanity and pride (Exodus, 32:10-14), enjoys wine-drinking (Judges, 9:13), is jealous (Exodus, 20:5), revengeful (Deuteronomy, 32:42), and regrets what he has done or intended to do (Genesis, 6:6; Exodus, 32:14).

### Other Basic Doctrines

An important aspect of Judaism is the belief that God communicates to man through the medium of prophecy. He cares about man and reveals Himself and His Law to His favourite creation. For this purpose He has chosen the Children of Israel and raised His prophets only from and among them. Jews believe that Moses was the greatest of the prophets to whom God communicated in the most direct manner; that the whole of the Torah (i.e. the Pentateuch) was revealed to Moses by God; and that the Torah will not be changed or supplanted by another revelation from God.

Man is, according to Judaism, created in the image of God. He can descend to great depths, but he is not by nature irretrievably sinful. Sin is rebellion against God, but more seriously yet, it is the debasement of man's proper nature. Repentance is man's turning back to his truest nature. God is merciful and forgives the sins of the repentant man altogether.

Judaism believes that God knows every deed of men and all their thoughts. He rewards those who keep His Commandments and punishes those that transgress His commandments. In the Bible itself the arena of man's life is this world. But Judaism came in the course of time to believe in the resurrection of the dead, and in heaven and hell.

Another basic doctrine of Judaism is about the coming of the Messiah (or the anointed one), a descendant of the line of David, who will usher in the messianic age when the Jews will be gathered once again to the Land of Israel. Some believe that the Messiah will come as the result of cataclysms and cosmic miracles. But others take a more realistic view. They believe that the Messiah, when he comes, will defeat the enemies of God and His people, set up the Davidic throne and the sovereignty of the children of Israel, and establish peace and justice in the world, but there will be no radical or miraculous change in the order of creation.

### THE ETHICS OF JUDAISM

The basis of Judaism as a system of religious and moral laws is holiness, which has two aspects: negative and positive. The religious holiness demands, negatively, the abhorrence of idolatry; and, positively, the adoption of a cult and ritual that the Jews claim was revealed to them by God. In morals, holiness demands, negatively, resistance to every urge of nature which makes self-serving, at the expense of others, the essence of human life; and, positively, submission to an ethic which places service to others at the centre of its system. Fundamental to the moral law of holiness are the two principles of justice and righteousness; justice being the negative aspect of holiness, and righteousness its positive aspect. Regarding justice the Torah says:

"Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift; for the gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous. That which is altogether just shalt thou follow, that thou mayest live, and inherit the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee". (Deuteronomy, 16:19-20).

Justice means the recognition of six fundamental rights: the right to live, the right of possession, the right to work, the right to clothing, the right to shelter, and the right of person.

Righteousness manifests itself in the acceptance of duties, especially in the concern for the poor, the weak and the helpless. The golden rule, as formulated by the Rabbi Hillel, is as follows:

"Do not unto others that which is hateful unto thee". And this is what we read in the Gemara:

"The highest wisdom is kindness". (Berakot, 17a)

"If two men claim thy help, and one is thy enemy, help him first". (Baba Metzia, 32b)

"Almsgiving and deeds of loving-kindness are equal to all the commandments of the Torah, but loving-kindness is greater". (Sukkah, 49b)

"Whoever gives a small coin to a poor man has six blessings bestowed upon him, but he who speaks a kind word to him obtains eleven blessings : (Baba Batra, 9b)

Kindness must be extended not only to human beings, but also to the animals :

· "Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rab : A man is forbidden to eat anything until he has fed his beast". (Gittin, 62a)

### THE CIVIL AND CRIMINAL LAWS

The Torah is a collection of commandments revealed by God to the children of Israel. A large number of these commandments are of the nature of civil and criminal laws. The interest of the Scribes and Pharisees, who commented on the Torah, was primarily legalistic and the Talmud which they compiled was in the main a collection of legal judgments (*Halachoth*). Thus Judaism is pre-eminently a religion of laws and judgments. Some of the laws of Judaism, compared to the laws of the other ancient civilizations, are remarkably humane. For instance, the employer was forbidden to exploit his workmen or to withhold the payment of their wages when due (Leviticus, 19:13). The creditor was not allowed to affront the dignity of the person of the debtor by entering his house to take a pledge (Deuteronomy, 24:10-11), much less was he permitted to deal violently with him as was sanctioned by other systems of law. Even the slave, provided he was a Jew, had the right of the person and was never recognised as an absolute possession:

"If thou buy an Hebrew slave, six years shall he serve, and in the seventh year he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's and he (the slave) shall go out by himself. And if the slave shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife and my children, I will not go out free; then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever" (Exodus, 21:2-6).

In some cases the benefit of the humane laws is enjoyed by the Jews alone and does not extend to the non-Jews or Gentiles. There are unfortunately, double standards in the law code of the Jews --- a lenient one for dealing with the Jews and a much more severe one for dealing with the non-Jews. For instance, the law prescribing kind treatment to the slave is applicable only to the Jewish slave, the non-Jew slave is treated much more harshly and

remains a slave for life (Leviticus, 25:44-46). Similarly, the law prohibiting usury is valid only when the borrower is a Jew. The Jewish law code allows the Jew to lend money on usury to non-Jews:

"Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury, but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all thou settest thy hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it". (Deuteronomy, 23:20).

Some of the laws of Judaism appear to be unusually severe. Take, for instance, the following:

"And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall surely stone him: as well the stranger as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death" (Leviticus, 24:16).

"For every one that curseth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death: he has cursed his father or his mother: his blood shall be upon him". (Leviticus, 20:9).

"And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the aduress shall surely be put to death." (Leviticus, 20:10)

"If a damsel that is a virgin be betrothed unto a husband, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her, then ye shall bring them both unto the gate of that city, and ye shall stone them with stones that they die: the damsel, because she cried not, being in the city; and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbour's wife: so thou shalt put away evil from among you" (Deuteronomy, 22:23-24).

"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus, 22:18).

"A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones; their blood shall be upon them" (Leviticus, 20:27).

But the most cruel of all the laws of Judaism are those pertaining to warfare and treatment of enemy war-prisoners. It is written in the Torah:

"When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace unto it - - - And if it will make no peace with thee, then thou shalt besiege it; and when the Lord thy God hath delivered it unto thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword; but the women, and the little ones, and the

cattle, and all that is in the city, even all the spoil thereof, shalt thou take unto thyself; and thou shalt eat the spoil of thine enemies, which the Lord thy God hath given thee. Thus thou shalt do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not the cities of these nations. But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth, but thou shalt utterly destroy them: Namely, the Hittites, the Amorites; the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee" (Deuteronomy, 20:10-17).

### FORMS AND CEREMONIES

Sacrifice occupies the central place in the Torah and in the history it records. The temple service is set forth as the great end and aim for which God created the world, settled the nations in it, and called Israel to be His people. The sacrificial ritual as it was observed down to the destruction of the Temple may be studied in Exodus and Leviticus. We read of orders and companies of priests who offered daily and other sacrifices according to a rule in which the smallest details are carefully arranged. The following is the description of just a small part of the sacrificial ritual:

"Thou shalt also take one ram, and Aaron and his sons shall put their hands upon the head of the ram. And thou shalt slay the ram, and thou shalt take his blood, and sprinkle it round about upon the altar. And thou shalt cut the ram in pieces, and wash the inwards of him, and his legs, and put them upon his pieces, and unto his head. And thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar. It is a burnt offering unto the Lord ; it is a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the Lord" (Exodus, 29:15-18).

To an outside observer, the Jewish ritual of sacrifice would not appear to differ very much from that in use among the Greeks or Romans; the Jews certainly conducted it on a larger scale. What purpose or end precisely was aimed at in it, the Jews would have found it perhaps hard to say. It was done, he would say, because the Law so ordered it, and the Law must be obeyed even if one did not quite understand what was enjoined. The daily sacrifice, which was offered twice every day, was intended to remove the impurity of the temple staff, and to enable the people to be sure that the favour of God continued with them. Many sacrifices aimed at the removal of particular sins ; thankfulness was also expressed in them, and other feelings may have also ascended with the smoke from the altar.

In the Jewish religion the notion of holiness is closely

connected with worship. Everything pertaining to the sacrificial worship, - - - the sanctuary, the priests, the vessels, and the sacrifice itself - - - is designated as holy. Things and persons are holy which belong to Yahweh and are withdrawn from common use. These it is dangerous to touch unwarily. Connected with the notion of holiness is that of purity. In the later Persian religion, as was pointed out in the chapter on Zoroastrianism, the distinction has always to be remembered by the believer between what belongs to the good spirit and what has fallen under the power of the evil spirit. The Jew also, who is called to be holy and separate from other men, lives in constant dread lest he should touch something unclean, and so forfeit his own purity. There are clean animals, and unclean ones which he must not eat; various washings of the hand and of domestic utensils are needed in order to keep up the state of purity; many trades involve contact with substances which make purity almost impossible. Above all, it is defiling to eat what heathen has cooked, or to sit at the same table with the heathens. Thus the Jew was confirmed in the belief of his own superiority to men of the other races; and was prevented by many barriers from mingling with them, or even regarding them as brothers.

After the destruction of the Temple the sacrificial ritual had to be given up and its place was taken by daily prayers. The ceremonial law expects each Jew to pray three times every day, if possible at the synagogue; to recite a blessing before and after each meal; to thank God for any special pleasure, such as a curious sight, the perfumes of a flower, or the receipt of good news; to wear a fringed garment (*tzitzith*) about his body; to don amulets (*tifillin*) during the morning prayers. Moreover, as a symbol of God's covenant with Abraham, every male Jew must be circumcised when he is eight days old. When he attains the age of thirteen the Jew boy reaches his legal majority (*Bar Mitzvah*) and is confirmed in his duties and privileges by putting on the *tifillin* and being 'called upon' to the public reading of the Torah.

An important feature of the religious life of the Jew is the 'Appointed Seasons' - - - the Feasts and Fasts. Foremost among these is the Sabbath, the weekly day of rest. According to a central Rabbinic image, man is God's partner in the work of creation. God laboured to create the world in six days and then He rested; man labours to perform his daily tasks and he too must rest. The Torah ordains absolute abstention from work.

In addition to the weekly Sabbath, the Jews celebrate annually three great holidays which are also days of rest. Associated with the harvest of the Holy Land, these festivals are also believed to

commemorate historical events in the life of Israel. At the head of these festivals is the Passover which, falling on the 19th of *Nisan* (March-April), lasts seven or eight days. As the spring festival, the season of Nature's rebirth, Passover celebrates the birthday of Israel as a nation on the exodus from Egypt.

Seven weeks after Passover the Jews celebrate *Shavouth*, the Feast of Weeks, the wheat-harvest festival. It is associated with Israel's harvest - - - namely, the Revelation of God to Moses at Sinai, where he received the Ten Commandments. In ancient days it was marked by bringing the first fruits of the harvest to the Temple.

The third festival is that of *Sukkoth* (booths). This festival, which falls on the 15th of *Tishri* (September-October) lasts seven days and is celebrated at the close of the vintage season. It is supposed to commemorate the forty years of wandering by the Jews in the desert.

The Jewish New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*), which falls on the first of *Tishri*, is considered to be the anniversary of the Creation. The ten days from *Rosh Hashanah* through *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement) are known as the "Ten Days of Repentance". These are the most solemn days of the year, for in this period all the world is judged before God's heavenly throne. On *Yom Kippur* the Jew neither eats nor drinks anything at all, observing the strictest of fasts, and he spends all his waking hours in prayers.



## Chapter VIII

# CHRISTIANITY

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### THE BACKGROUND

At the time of Jesus' birth, Palestine formed part of the Roman Empire. The Roman senate had appointed Herod as the king of Palestine under Roman suzerainty. Herod tactfully strove to retain the favour of Rome, on the one hand, and to gain popularity with his Jewish subjects, on the other : a task which was not always very easy. "His reign has been compared", writes Dr. Morton Scott Enslin, "with that of Solomon. Actually it far surpassed it."

After the death of Herod in 4 B.C., when Jesus was only two or three years of age, his kingdom was divided among his sons. Archelaus became the king of the largest part, including Judaea, Samaria and Idumea; Antipas became the ruler of Galilee and Perea; and Philip of the remaining territories. After ruling as a king for about ten years, Archelaus was removed and banished for gross mismanagement by Augustus. His dominion was made a province of Rome and placed under direct Roman rule, with a governor, called procurator, at its head. Pontius Pilate was the fifth procurator of Judaea. Archelaus's brothers, Antipas and Philip, fared somewhat better. Philip remained in office till his death in 34 C.E.; Antipas a little longer till 39 C.E. Both of them were thus ruling throughout Jesus' life and ministry, while it was in Antipas' territory that almost all his life was spent.

Jesus' own people, the Jews, were scattered over many parts of the world; those who lived in Palestine comprised but a small fraction of all Jewry. In Alexandria - - - which was in those days the chief centre of the intellectual and religious, as well as of the economic, world - - - there were at least a million Jews. The Jews of the dispersion, particularly those living in Alexandria, had come under various influences. Though they still retained their religious loyalty and ceremonial observances, they had readily assimilated the alien culture and philosophy of the Greeks. They had forgotten the Hebrew tongue and read the Bible in the Greek translation. The greatest Jewish philosopher of the Hellenistic world was Philo of Alexandria (25 B.C. - 40 C.E.). He was the first to set himself the task of reconciling the Jewish scriptural theology with Greek

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1. Morton Scott Enslin, *Christian Beginnings*, Part I, p 47 (Harper Torchbooks, The Cloister Library, New York, 1956.)

philosophy. His most important contribution to the history of philosophic-religious thought was his conception of the Logos (Word). He developed the Greek notion of Logos, which he had taken over from the Stoics and Plato, and conceived it as a personality whom he called the 'second God' and also sometimes 'Son of God'. The Logos (Word) was the mediator between God and man, and the instrument of God's creation and revelation. In the philosophy of Philo, he was inferior to the Absolute God. It needs no saying that the doctrine of Logos was totally alien to Judaism or revealed religion.

The Jews of Palestine in those days were divided into several parties or sects. The two most important were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. They had divided the Sanhedran between them; the Sadducees controlling the political Sanhedran and the Temple, and the Pharisees dominating the religious Sanhedran and the synagogues. In addition to these there were the Essenes, the Apocalyp- tists and the Zealots. Unlike the other parties, the Zealots sought by military action to overthrow the Roman rule and gain independence for the Jews. All but the Sadducees looked forward to the coming of a Messiah, who would usher in the Golden Age. They, however, held different views regarding the expected Messiah. Some were looking forward to a political Messiah, who would free the Jews from Roman bondage and himself become the king of Israel. Others took a more spiritual view and believed that the coming Messiah would usher in a new World Order - - - the Kingdom of Heaven - - - after a cataclysmic destruction of the present world order.

Apart from the Jews and gentiles, there were also a fairly large number of Samaritans in Palestine. They were the offspring of mixed marriages between Jews and non-Jews and lived mostly in Samaria. Although they accepted the Torah (but not the other books of the Hebrew Bible) and believed in all the fundamental doctrines of Judaism, yet the Jews regarded them as outside the pale of Jewry and refused to share with them in worship or in anything else.

Many of the gentiles and also some Jewish apostates followed the official Roman religion. There were many among the educated intellectuals who had become philosophic free-thinkers, rational- ists, Epicureans, Stoics and Gnostics. The common people were being drawn in ever larger numbers towards the several Mystery Cults that flourished in the Greco-Roman world. Each one of these Mystery Cults was centred round a saviour-god - - - Dionysus of the Greeks, Hercules of the Romans, Mithras of the Persians, Adonis

and Attis of Syria and Phrygia, Osiris, Isis and Horus of Egypt, Baal of the Babylonians, etc. About all or nearly all of these saviour-gods it was believed, as Edward Carpenter has pointed out, that :-

- (i) They were born on or very near Christmas day (25th December)
- (ii) They were born of a Virgin-Mother,
- (iii) And in a cave or underground chamber,
- (iv) They led a life of toil for mankind,
- (v) They were called by the names of Light-bringer, Healer, Mediator, Saviour and Deliverer,
- (vi) They were, however, vanquished by the Powers of Darkness.
- (vii) They descended into Hell or the underworld,
- (viii) They rose again from the dead and became the pioneers of mankind (i.e., of those who believed in their atoning sacrifice and accepted them as the saviours) to the Heavenly World,
- (ix) They founded communion of saints and churches to which disciples were received by baptism,
- (x) They were commemorated by eucharistic meals.<sup>2</sup>

### THE SOURCES OF OUR KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

For the life of Jesus and the stories of the early Christian Church, we have no testimony from secular history. It is true that there is a brief passage in Josephus, mentioning and praising Jesus,<sup>3</sup> but reputable scholarship has long since rejected it as fraudulent. "The forgery," writes Archibald Robertson, "would not deceive a school boy."<sup>4</sup> Our recourse must, therefore, be to the Christian scriptures themselves.

The part of the Christian Bible described as the New Testament contains the following scriptures: The Gospel according to St. Matthew, the Gospel according to St. Mark, the Gospel according to St. Luke, the Gospel according to St. John; the Acts of the Apostles; the Epistles of St. Paul to the Romans, the Corinthians (two), the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, the

2. Quoted by Khwaja Kamal-ul-Din in *The Sources of Christianity* p. 29-30. (Woking Muslim Mission, England, fourth edition 1934.)

3. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XVIII, 3.

4. Archibald Robertson, *Jesus: Myth or History?* p. 21 (Thinker's Library, London, 1946.)

Colossians, the Thessalonians (two), Timothy (two), Titus, Philemon, and the Hebrews; the Epistle of James; the Epistles of Peter (two); the Epistles of John (three); the Epistle of Jude; and the Revelation of St. John the Divine.

The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John give four different accounts of the life and teaching of Jesus. The modern scholars are of the view that these Gospels were written in Greek (It must be remembered that the language which Jesus spoke was Aramaic) between forty and eighty years after the supposed death of Jesus on the cross. It appears that no written record was made of the inspired sayings of Jesus in his lifetime. None of those who had conversed with him wrote any account of what they had seen and heard. But, as the first generation began to die away, a few collections of his 'Logia' or 'sayings' were put together. One such record is known in critical nomenclature as *Q*, a lost Aramaic document, which reached the evangelists in a Greek translation. Another of these early documents is known to Biblical scholars as *L*, a collection of reports about Jesus used only by Luke. Then there was *Urmarcus*, an early draft of Mark's Gospel written, so Papias informs us, on the basis of Peter's discourses. These documents were destroyed or disappeared quite early in the history of Christianity. They were, however, available to the Evangelists, who evidently made use of them in writing their Gospels. But a comparison of the Gospels will show that the Evangelists handled these documents with considerable freedom; they showed no hesitation even to alter their contents to suit their own purpose.

The first Gospel to be written was that of St. Mark (70 C.E.). The author appears to have been a follower of St. Peter. The Gospel as it has come down to us is considered by several scholars to be an expanded version of *Urmarcus*, and it is difficult to say whether the revision and elaboration was done by Mark himself or by some other person. F.C. Conybeare observes: "The greater part of that Gospel (i.e., St. Mark's Gospel) is the work of someone who is by instinct and predilection a miracle monger."<sup>5</sup>

The Gospel according to St. Matthew was written about 90 C.E. According to the widely-accepted "two-document" hypothesis, this Gospel is a blend of *Urmarcus* and *Q* plus matter derived from oral tradition. No independent scholar regards this Gospel as the work of Matthew the Apostle of Jesus. If Matthew wrote anything it must have been only *Q*. Regarding the liberties which the author of this Gospel took with his sources, Dr. C.J. Cadoux writes:

5. F.C. Conybeare, *Myth, Magic and Morals*, pp. 140-141.

"But a close examination of the treatment he gives to his borrowings from St. Mark shows that he allowed himself great freedom in editing and embroidering his material in the interest of what he regarded as the rightful honouring of the great Master. The same tendencies are often visible elsewhere when he is producing Q or providing matter peculiar to himself. Anything, therefore, strictly peculiar to 'Matthew' can be accepted as historical only with great caution."<sup>6</sup>

The third Gospel, the Gospel according to St. Luke, was written somewhere in Greece about 100 C.E. for the benefit of the "most excellent" Theophilus, probably a high official of the Roman Empire. It is an apologetic addressed to non-Jews and is widely admitted to have had "Luke the Physician", Paul's travelling companion on several of his missionary journeys, for its author. St. Luke, it appears, had succeeded in amassing a valuable collection of traditions about Jesus, which the scholars call L. Finding later on, a copy of Q, he is thought to have compiled a complete Gospel-story by interweaving Q with his L. material. This preliminary Gospel is called "Proto-Luke". Later still finding a copy of *Urmarcus*, he inserted nearly the whole of it in large blocks at certain points in his "Proto-Luke", and, by prefixing his narrative of the birth and boyhood of Jesus, produced the Gospel of Luke as we now have it. Scholars have pointed out that the author, who wished to bring his Gospel in line with the Pauline point of view, took even greater liberties with his sources than the writers of the earlier Gospels had done. "As to the work of Luke", writes Ernest Renan, "its historical value is sensibly weaker."<sup>7</sup> And this is what a more orthodox writer, E.E. Kellett, writes:

"Luke is a Greek writer, and writes like a Greek historian. In some cases, it is to be feared, he makes speeches of his own for his heroes; and a beautiful story seems true to him because it is beautiful — — — The whole story is a popular legend, taken over and rewritten with deceptive charm by a man of Herodotean gifts."<sup>8</sup>

The Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke are called "the Synoptic Gospels", because they proceed on the basis of the same document and have much in common. The Gospel of St. John is very different from these. "The first three, or Synoptic, Gospels", writes A. Powell Davies, "tell much the same story. There are

6. C.J. Cadoux, *The Life of Jesus*, p. 13 (Pelican Book). Penguin Books, 1948.
7. Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, p.51 (The Modern Library, New York, 1927.)
8. E.E. Kellett, *A Short History of Religions*, p. 173 (Pelican Books, Harmondsworth, 1962.)

discrepancies, but it is possible, to a considerable extent, to reconcile them. John's Gospel, however, tells quite a different story from the other three. If John is right, the other three are wrong; if the Synoptics are right, St. John's Gospel must surely be in error."<sup>9</sup> The divinity and pre-existence of Jesus are affirmed in this Gospel alone. It was written at or near Ephesus between the years 110 and 115 of the Christian era by some unknown writer. No independent scholar regards it as the work of John, the son of Zebedee, who, according to R.H. Charles, Alfred Loisy, Robert Eisler, and other scholars, was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I, in the year 44 C.E., long before the fourth Gospel could have been written. The modern Biblical scholars question the historical value of this Gospel and reject the genuineness of many of the discourses and sayings put by its author in the mouth of Jesus. This is what C.J. Cadoux writes:

"The speeches in the Fourth Gospel (even apart from the early messianic claim) are so different from those in the Synoptics, and so like the comments of the Fourth Evangelist himself, that both cannot be equally reliable as records of what Jesus said."<sup>10</sup>

The Gospels were written after the early Christians had become divided into various factions. They were in fact written to propagate the views of the different parties and their authors showed no hesitation in tampering with the earlier documents and other traditional material to bring them in line with the teachings of their respective sects. The four Gospels now included in the Bible were not the only Gospels written during the early centuries of Christianity. There were many others, including the Gospel to the Hebrews, the Gospel of the Nazarenes and the Gospel of St. Barnabas - - - three Aramaic works which were regarded as holy scriptures by the early disciples of Jesus, who lived in Jerusalem, denied his divinity and acknowledged him as a great prophet to the Children of Israel. Towards the end of the second century the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were included in the Canon by the Catholic Church and the rest were declared to be heretical or apocryphal. It must be remembered that the writers of the four canonical Gospels claimed no special Divine inspiration for their works. Before they were included in the Canon the Gospels did not have that sanctity which they now have and no one felt any compunction in making alterations in them if anything contained

9. A. Powell Davies, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 106 (Mentor Book; New American library, New York, 1956.)

10. C. J. Cadoux, *The Life of Jesus*, p. 16 (Pelican Book, 1948.)

in them did not suit his purpose or the purpose of his sect. In fact; even after they were canonised changes continued to be made in them, as is clear from the various manuscripts that have come down to us. Finally, while the four Gospels were written between 70 and 115 C.E., the earliest available codices belong to the middle of the fourth century. The modern scholars, therefore, do not consider the Gospels to be very reliable sources of our knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus. They tell us not about the Jesus of history, but the Christ of faith. C.J. Cadoux sums up the position as follows :

"In the four Gospels, therefore, the main documents to which we must go if we are to fill-out at all that bare sketch which we can put together from other sources, we find material of widely-differing quality as regards credibility. So far-reaching is the element of uncertainty that it is tempting to 'down-tools' at once, and to declare the task hopeless. The historical inconsistencies and improbabilities in parts of the Gospels form some of the arguments advanced in favour of the Christ-myth theory. These are, however, entirely outweighed -- as we have shown -- by other considerations. Still the discrepancies and uncertainties that remain are serious - - and consequently many moderns, who have no doubt whatever of Jesus' real existence, regard as hopeless any attempt to dissolve out the historically-true from the legendary or mythical matter which the Gospels contain, and to reconstruct the story of Jesus' mission out of the more historical residue."<sup>11</sup>

The remaining books of the Bible add almost nothing to the little that we can learn about the life and teaching of Jesus from the Gospels. They show no interest at all in the historical Jesus and seldom, if ever, quote any of his sayings.

Regarding the historical value of the Christian scriptures (the New Testament), A Powell Davies writes :

"It is a common supposition that we have in the New Testament a self-consistent story of the life of Jesus, followed by a plain account of the beginnings of the Church he founded. These assumptions are not true. We do not have the story of Jesus; we have only a fragmentary record. It is not self-consistent; it is contradictory. The account of the beginnings of the church is not simple; it is full of problems. And it is not certain that Jesus founded -- or intended to found -- the eventual Christian Church."<sup>12</sup>

11. C.J. Codoux, *The Life of Jesus*, pp. 16-17. (Penguin Books, 1948.)

12. A Powell Davies. *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls. P.85.* (Mentor Books, 1956)

### THE LIFE OF JESUS

From what has been said above regarding the sources of our knowledge of Jesus, it must be obvious that the problem of writing a life of Jesus is not an easy one. The absence of any reference to Jesus in the works of the first-century non-Christian writers and the unreliability of the Christian sources, have led some distinguished scholars to deny the historicity of the reputed founder of Christianity and to regard his story as a myth.<sup>13</sup> Similar doubts have been expressed, as we have pointed out in the earlier chapters, with regard to the historical existence of several other religious teachers. An overwhelming majority of the scholars, however, does not favour this extreme view. After acknowledging that the Christian records do contain some historical facts about Jesus, mixed no doubt with a great deal of pious fiction and myth, the biographers of Jesus have been, for the last century or so, busy in separating the two -- the apparently historical from the legendary elements -- and writing a life of Jesus on the basis of the more historical residue.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately there is no consensus among them regarding what is historical and what is not historical in the Christian tradition. Even such an orthodox work as *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* admits :

"The results of critical study of the records concerning Jesus have often been represented as largely negative. The issue is said to be a fresh sense alike of the fragmentary character of our information and of the strangeness of the figure of Jesus Himself. Today we realize that the life of Jesus can never be written. The material is wanting."<sup>15</sup>

Jesus, it appears, was born sometime between 7 and 5 B.C. Two of the four canonical Gospels state he was born of a virgin mother without the agency of a male parent. Mark and John, however, advance no such claim on behalf of Jesus. And even Matthew and Luke, who begin their Gospels by stating that he was born of a virgin through the agency of the Holy Ghost, go on to

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13. J.M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology*(1900); Couchoud, *The Creation of Christ*(1939); Ryland, *The evolution of Christianity*(1927); Dujardin, *Ancient History of the God Jesus* (1938).
  14. D.F. Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*(1835); Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*(first published 1863); W. Sandey, *The Life of Christ in Recent Research* (1899); A. Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Longman, Green & Co., 1907); J. Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth* (MacMillan, 1926); C.J. Cadoux, *The Life of Jesus* (1948).
  15. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, Art "The Life and Teaching of Jesus," (Nelson).



name Joseph the carpenter as his father. It is significant that both of them give genealogies of Jesus in which his descent has been traced from David the king, not through Mary, but through her husband Joseph. "There is no evidence in the Gospels," writes Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, "apart from the birth stories themselves, that any member of Jesus' family or any of his first disciples ever thought of him as virgin-born."<sup>16</sup> This view, he points out, arose in the later Hellenistic area of the church. As stated in the earlier chapters, several other religious teachers and heroes were also thought of as virgin-born.

It is not possible to state the exact date on which Jesus was born. 25th of December as the date of the Nativity was fixed more than five hundred years after the event on purely hypothetical data. In the words of Professor Wallace K. Ferguson :

"Christian celebrations were created to replace pagan feasts and holidays. For example, the date of Christmas was set on the birthday of Mithras (the unconquered Sun), which had long been a day of joyous celebration in the pagan world."<sup>17</sup>

The Gospels mention Bethlehem as the birth-place of Jesus. But modern scholarship finds itself unable to confirm this or the legends which form part of the Bethlehem story. To quote Dr. Morton Enslin :

"Jesus was born and brought up in the hills of Galilee, in the quiet town of Nazareth, the very name of which is unknown to us in that period outside the Gospels and Acts. The Bethlehem stories, regardless of their homiletic beauty, apparently rest upon no historical foundation, but must be regarded as pure legend."<sup>18</sup>

Regarding his childhood, all one can do is to repeat the statement of Luke that "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men" (2 : 52). The Gospels tell us nothing of Jesus' life before the beginning of his ministry. This serious lacuna in the story of Jesus has led to many conjectures. Jawaharlal Nehru, the late Prime Minister of India, mentions in his *Glimpses of World History* a legend, based on the discovery of a manuscript in Kashmir, regarding Jesus' visit to the Indo-Pakistan

16. Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Man from Nazareth*, p. 118, (Pocket Books, Inc. New-York, 1953.)

17. Wallace K Ferguson, *A Survey of European Civilization*, Part II, p. 112, (Houghton Mifflin Co., Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1947.)

18. Morton Scott Enslin, *Christian Beginings*, Part II, p. 154, (Harper-Torch books, New York, 1956)

subcontinent and his discussions with the Buddhist monks.<sup>19</sup> A. Powell Davies, the late Pastor of the All Souls Church in Washington, D.C. draws on the more recent discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls to suggest that Jesus lived during at least some part of this unknown period of his life in very close association with the Essenes, probably as a full-fledged member of the sect.

When Jesus was between thirty-four and thirty-six years of age, a great prophet appeared in the wilderness of Judaea proclaiming a "baptism of the repentant for the forgiveness of sins." The name of this prophet was John, the son of Zechariah. All ranks and classes of people from Judaea and Jerusalem went out to him and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Among them was Jesus. When he came out of the river Jordan, after receiving the baptism, he was blessed with a wonderful experience. The Holy Spirit descended upon him, declaring that he was God's prophet, commissioned from on High to sound the clarion call to repentance in preparation for the new age soon to dawn.<sup>20</sup>

Immediately after this Jesus withdrew into the desert to pray and fast and to prepare himself for the prophetic task. There, the Gospels tell us, he was tempted by Satan, just as Buddha had been tempted by Mara over five centuries earlier, when he too was about to start on his great mission as the Enlightened One.

From the Synoptic Gospels it appears that the ministry of Jesus was limited to a few months, scarcely more than a single year. But St. John's Gospel tells us that it occupied three years. He began by preaching in the towns of Galilee on the shore of the lake, where crowds flocked to hear him. Reputed miraculous cures attracted attention. The Gospels tell us about several healing miracles (like curing people of leprosy, restoring the eyesight of the blind, driving away the demons from the epileptics and the insane, and raising, the dead) and nature miracles (like stilling the tempest, walking on the surface of a lake, increasing manifold the quantity of loaves and fish, and turning water into wine) that Jesus is supposed to have performed. Similar miracles are said to have been performed by other religious teachers as well. In fact there is not a single miracle attributed to Jesus for which a parallel cannot be found in the records concerning the Hebrew prophets in the Bible.

19. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, p. 84 (Lindsay Drummond Ltd., London).

20. "All Prophets spoke by the Holy spirit. The Holy Spirit is so specifically prophetic inspiration that when Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the last prophets, died, the holy spirit departed from Israel: (G. F. Moore, *Judaism*, Vol. I, 237).

It did not take long for Jesus to come into conflict with the existing Jewish parties, and the opposition to him became more and more bitter as time passed. The Zealots turned against him because he refused to become their tool for raising a rebellion against the Romans. The Pharisees became his enemies because of his disregard of their prized interpretations and his cavalier treatment of them personally. But his most dangerous opponents were the Sadducees. They controlled the political Sanhedran and the Temple and had considerable influence with the Roman rulers. It was to their special advantage that the existing system, which had brought privileges and prosperity to them, should be maintained under the Roman overlordship. They were afraid that Jesus' claim to be the Messiah, who, according to many Jews, would become the king of Israel, would bring the Romans into conflict with their Jewish subjects and disturb the *status quo*.

After a period of itinerant preaching in Galilee and Judea, Jesus turned south to the nation's capital. It appears that in Galilee he had not met with much success; most of those who followed him from place to place were interested only in miracles. He thought that in Jerusalem, at the season of the Passover, Jews from far and near will gather and thus his message would reach wherever the Jews lived. Moreover, Jerusalem occupied a special place in his heart, as in the hearts of all Jews.

Thus he entered the city of Jerusalem riding on an ass. It appears that his reputation had preceded him and a large crowd of pilgrims and others gathered with palm leaves in their hands to receive him. They shouted, "Hosanna : Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord" (St. John, 12:13). However, among the throng there were also many men who had never heard of him, and they asked : "Who is this?" and the people replied. "This is Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee" (St. Matthew, 21:11).

On the first day in Jerusalem he went into the Temple and noted with indignation the traffic that was being carried on in the outer courts of the House of God in money-changing and in birds and animals for sacrifice. This was one of the perquisites of the priestly order and had attained scandalous dimensions. Returning to the Temple the next day, he took the drastic action of turning all the dealers and money changers out of the Temple, together with the objects of their traffic. His enemies realized that if they did not act immediately against him it might be too late. Pharisees and Sadducees, though they did not have any great love for each other, made a common cause against Jesus. One of the inner circle of his

followers, Judas Iscariot, was bribed to conduct the Temple police to his place of retreat. Jesus, it appears, had come to know about the plot of his foes to kill him. It made him very unhappy. "My soul is extremely sorrowful even unto death; wait here and watch," he told his disciples. "And being in an agony," Luke tells us, "he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." He spent the whole night in the Garden of Gethsemane praying to God to save him from death:

"Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt" (Mark, 14:36).

Jesus was arrested by the soldiers and the Jewish police while it was still dark; all his disciples forsook him and fled away. He was taken first before the Jewish high priests, and then before Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator. The charge brought against him was that he had claimed to be the King of the Jews. Pilate, it appears, was not quite convinced of the truth of the charge, yet under the pressure of the Jewish chief priests and elders he passed the sentence of crucifixion on him. The Gospels tell us that Jesus was hung on a cross between two notorious criminals. Death on the cross was a tardy affair; it usually took the condemned man two or three days to die of pain and exhaustion. But Jesus remained on the cross only for three hours (from the sixth hour, i.e., 12 noon, to the ninth hour, i.e., 3 p.m.). It was the Preparation Day, and it being against the Jewish religion that any man should remain hanging on the cross on the Sabbath, the Jews requested Pilate to kill the condemned men and remove their bodies from the cross. Accordingly, the soldiers broke the legs of the other two men who had been crucified along with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus, they thought that he was already dead and broke not his legs. One of the soldiers, however, pierced his side with a spear about three hours after his supposed death, and blood and water immediately flowed out from it, showing that he was still alive. It appears that he had fainted or fallen into a deep swoon.<sup>21</sup> His body was taken away by an influential disciple, named Joseph of Arimathaea, and kept in a cave with a stone rolled over its mouth. The next day he was seen alive, disguised as a gardener, first by Mary Magdalene and then by others of his disciples. The Christian theology states that Jesus "was crucified, died, and was buried: He descended into hell: the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended bodily

21. W. B. Primrose, "A Surgeon Looks at the Crucifixion", (Thinkers' Digest, London - Winter 1949)

into heaven. And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty."<sup>22</sup> What seems more likely is that Jesus had not died on the cross, but was, as we have said, in a deep swoon when he was taken down; and from this he gradually recovered. Thus what was thought to be resurrection was actually a recovery from swoon. Jesus had prayed to be saved, and God heard his prayer. This is exactly what the author of Epistle to the Hebrews tells us:

"When he (Jesus) had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared". (The Bible, Epistle to the Hebrews, 5:7).

The Qur'an, which accepts Jesus as a great prophet of God and claims to confirm the true Gospel of Jesus, also discloses that he did not die on the cross:

"And for their saying: We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of God: and they killed him not, nor did they cause his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them as such. And certainly those who differ therein are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge about it, but only follow a conjecture, and they killed him not for certain" (4:157).

The Qur'an further declares that God gave Jesus and his mother Mary "shelter on a lofty ground having meadows and springs" (23:50). Recent research carried on by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, and some of his followers has shown that the place referred to here is Kashmir, where Jesus went in search of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" after having escaped death on the cross. He died at the ripe old age of 120 years and his tomb is still in existence at Mohalla Khanyar in Srinagar, Kashmir.<sup>23</sup>

### THE TEACHING OF JESUS

Dr. Morton Scott Enslin, one of the greatest Christian scholars of this century, writes:

"All this should make clear that the view, which still persists in some circles that Jesus' aim was to found a Church, distinct from the Synagogue, is quite improbable. The Gospels themselves bear little trace of such a view - - - - Thus attempts to picture Jesus as breaking away from Judaism, of conceiving a new religion in

22. "The Apostles Creed", *Catholicism*, (edited by George Brant), p. 175 (Washington Square Press Book, New York, 1962.).

23. Khwaja Nazir Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth* (Woking Muslim Mission and Literary Trust, England; 1952).

which the Jew and Gentile stood alike, equal in the sight of God, would appear to be in flagrant contradiction to probability."<sup>24</sup>

Jesus himself said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am come not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (St. Matthew, 5:17-19).

He was not the founder of a new religion. He had come to revive the religion of the earlier prophets, to purge and purify it of all the later interpolations and misrepresentations of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and to urge his compatriots to repent and turn to God. Like all prophets, he believed in the one and only God. When a scribe asked him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus answered:

"The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (St. Mark, 12:29-31).

Some of the Jews of his time thought of God as remote and terrible, but Jesus laid special emphasis on His loving-kindness, calling Him "our Father which art in heaven". Jesus was not the first to call God "Father"; that had been done before, and not only by the prophets of his own race; pagans had done the same. At the time of Jesus the term was current in the most earnest religious circles connected with Judaism. It denoted not only the conception of God as Creator but also His benevolent, watchful care of His creatures.

Although Jesus had the most profound respect for the Law of Moses and never opposed it or hinted that it would ever pass away, he seems always to have sought to get at the spirit of it, to stress what true obedience to it entailed. He said:

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment.

24. Dr. Morton Scott Enslin, *Christian Beginnings*, part II, p. 166 (Harper Torchbooks New York, 1958).

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of judgment, and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire - - -

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell" (St. Matthew, 5: 21-22, 27-30).

It is often said that the Jews of the time of Jesus were not so much the followers of the prophets as of the traditions of their elders, which they considered to be as much Divinely inspired as the Torah itself. Jesus accepted the Torah and the prophets but rejected the rabbinical interpretations and traditions which, he complained, had made void the word of God. "Full well ye reject the commandments of God", he told them, "that ye may keep your own tradition". They had absurd rules about the Sabbath. For instance, a man might walk two thousand cubits on the Sabbath, but no more. Some knots and not others could be tied or untied on the Sabbath. Vinegar if swallowed, could be used to relieve a sore throat, but it could not be gargled. No woman was to look in a mirror on the Sabbath lest, seeing a grey hair, she might be tempted to pull it out. No fire could be kindled on the Sabbath. In case death threatened, a physician could be summoned, but a fracture may not be attended to on the Sabbath. The schools of Hillel and Shammai, the two most important rabbis of the time, actually discussed and disagreed about the question whether an egg that a hen had laid on the Sabbath could be eaten. Jesus impatiently brushed aside all such elaborate and artificial regulations. He told them that the Sabbath was for man and not man for the Sabbath, and he warned them:

"Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay the tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matter of the law, judgment, mercy and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess

Thou blind Pharisees, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. --- Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell" (St. Matthew, 23:23-33).

Through his inspired sermons and beautiful parables, Jesus tried to make his people God-conscious and to fill their hearts with the love for men. "Do unto others as you wish them to do unto you," he said. "Return good for evil; love your enemies. God sends His rain on the evil and the good alike; be equally impartial. Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

However some of his teachings appear to be at once too vague to be of practical use when put to the test, and too idealistic for literal acceptance. Take, for instance, the following: "But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee : the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain" (St. Matthew, 5:39-41). And again: "If a man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters. yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (St. Luke, 14:26). "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (St. Luke, 14:33). He even told his followers to "make themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (St. Matthew, 19:12).

Jesus claimed that the message he was delivering to the people was not his own but God's: "I have not spoken of myself, but the Father which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (St. John 12:49). He claimed to be a Prophet of God. Dr. Morton Scott Enslin writes:

"What then was the authority which he claimed for himself? The most obvious answer is not improbably the correct one, namely, the one preserved in the gospels themselves, that he was a prophet of God. This was apparently the impression he made upon his hearers. It is highly probable that this impression was due to his own belief. If this is the case, he must have believed himself to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, for in the thinking of Judaism the Holy Spirit is specifically the spirit of prophecy."<sup>25</sup>

He was God's messenger- - - "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (St. John, 17:3).- - - a man to whom God had revealed His message for the guidance of the children of Israel,

25. Morton Scott Enslin, *Christian Beginnings*, Part II, p. 164.



"Jesus saith unto them, If ye are Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God" (St. John, 8: 39-40).

His mission was not for the whole world, but only for the Israelites, as he himself clearly stated:

"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (St. Matthew 15:24).

He chose twelve special disciples to match the number of the tribes of Israel, and told them:

"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (St. Matthew, 10:5-6)

He was the Messiah of the Jews, and he laid no claim whatever to divinity. On the other hand, he resisted every attempt to glamorize his person. He was a human being and nothing more:

"Why callest thou me good? There is none good but One, that is, God" (St. Mark, 10:18).

He may have occasionally referred to himself as the "son of God", but this did not constitute any claim to divinity. This phrase had been used about other prophets as well.<sup>26</sup> It connoted nothing more than *nearness to God*. If God was "our Father which art in heaven", then all human beings are God's children, particularly those who have sincere love for God and for His creatures. Thus Jesus said:

"Love your enemies - - - that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven", (St. Matthew, 5:44-45).

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God" (St. Matthew, 5:9).

Jesus was not the son of God in any exclusive or unique sense. The phrase which he appears to have used much more frequently for himself was the "Son of Man". What did this phrase mean? The Rev. R.J. Campbell answers this question:

"His favourite self-designation was Son of Man. Much has been said and written about this choice of a title, but it does not seem to have excited any wonderment in the followers, nor is there any obscurity in his use of it. It was an Old Testament phrase used of

26. Psalm, 2:7; I Chronicles, 22:10; Exodus, 14:22.

a prophet as representative of a particular age and people, and as the vehicle of God's message thereto."<sup>27</sup>

Thus Jesus was a prophet of God and his religion was in no way different from that of the earlier prophets. He had come to revive the true religion of God for the Jews of his age and to make them true believers, sincere in their faith and righteous in their dealings with other men.

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY

The followers of Jesus were at first called Nazarenes. The name "Christian" was given to them about a hundred years later in the great gentile capital of Antioch. The Nazarenes formed themselves into a community at Jerusalem and chose James, the brother of Jesus, as their head. They were faithful followers of the religion of Jesus, believing in the one true God and in Jesus as a great prophet of God. They were of the view that though Jesus was the promised Messiah, he was in no sense divine; he was only a man to whom God had revealed His message for the guidance of other men. The Nazarenes strictly observed the Law of Moses, just as Jesus himself had done. Their beliefs found expression in the document called Q and in the Gospels of the Nazarenes, St. Barnabas, etc.,<sup>28</sup>

With the passage of time, as the first generation began to die away, and especially after the destruction of the Temple and expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem in 70 C.E., the new generation of his followers began to idealize the person of Jesus and to add miraculous elements to his story. (It appears that the earlier version of Mark's Gospel, the *Urmarcus*, represented this phase in the development of Christianity). Hero-worship seems to be ingrained in human nature. The hero, especially if he happens to be the prophet of a religion, has been time and again raised to the divine pedestal by his credulous followers. The first sign of the transformation that was coming over the religion of Jesus was a shift in emphasis from the teaching of Jesus to an interest in his person. Dr. Morton Scott Easlin writes in this connection:

"An interest in the person of Jesus, a desire to explain who he was and to interpret everything in terms of him, came gradually to obscure the fact that he had never made such claims for himself, but had been content to proclaim God's purpose to the nation and

27. The Rev. R.J. Campbell, D.D. *The Life of Christ*, p. 61 (Benn's Library London, 1927.)

28. *The Gospel of St. Barnabas*, translated by Lansdale and Laura Ragg, and published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1907.

to call it to repentance. Thus Jesus became more and more one whose person was to be understood and explained rather than one whose teaching was to be believed and obeyed"<sup>29</sup>

This tendency developed further as Christianity spread among the Jews of the dispersion and their gentile neighbours. These people lived in a social and intellectual atmosphere very different from that of the Jews of Palestine. They had adopted many foreign ideas and practices; were familiar with the mystery cults, each with its own saviour god; and had come under the influence of Greek philosophy. So when they accepted Jesus as the Messiah, they soon transformed him into a Saviour and Redeemer upon the pattern of Mithra, Adonis, Tammuz, Osiris, etc. They began believing that he had come down from heaven to pay the price of their sins and redeem them by his blood shed on the cross. In the words of Morton Scott Enslin.

"But the transfer from Jewish to gentile soil brought even more radical changes. Not only did the movement speedily become a separate religion, distinct from Judaism, but, as its message was translated into terms intelligible and appropriate to gentile hearers, it became gradually more and more like the other cults with which it found itself in conflict. By the beginning of the second century - - - and probably much earlier - - - it had become one of the Graeco-oriental cults, and like the others offered salvation to its converts through its divine Lord."<sup>30</sup>

The man who played the leading role in working this transformation of Jesus from God's prophet to the Jews into a divine Saviour and Lord with a mission for both Jews and gentiles was Paul. This is what H.G. Wells writes about him:

"Chief among the makers of Christian doctrine was St. Paul. He had never seen Jesus nor heard him preach. Paul's name was originally Saul, and he was conspicuous at first as an active persecutor of the little band of disciples after the crucifixion. Then he was suddenly converted to Christianity, and he changed his name to Paul. He was a man of great intellectual vigour and deeply and passionately interested in the religious movements of the time. He was well versed in Judaism and in the Mithraism and Alexandrian religion of the day. He carried over many of their ideas and terms of expression into Christianity. He did very little to enlarge or develop the original teaching of Jesus, the teaching of the Kingdom

29. Morton Scott Enslin, *Christian Beginnings*, Part II, p. 172.

30. *Christian Beginnings*, Part II, p. 187.

of Heaven. But he taught that Jesus was not only the promised Christ, the promised leader of the Jews, but also that his death was a sacrifice, like the death of the ancient sacrificial victims of the primordial civilizations, for the redemption of mankind."<sup>31</sup>

Paul bitterly criticised the original disciples of Jesus, was not interested in the historical Jesus and his teaching, concentrated only on his supposed death and resurrection, and declared the Law of Moses to be a curse. He presented Jesus as the divine Son of God who had taken birth in a human body to die for the sins of men. Paul believed that every man is born with a totally depraved and sinful nature, having inherited the original sin of Adam and Eve. No man can save himself by his own efforts and good deeds. Salvation can come only by belief in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. The blood of Jesus alone can wash away the sins of men. As by the offence of one (Adam) all men became sinners, so by the death of one (Christ) all those who believe in him will be saved (Epistle of Paul to the Romans, 5:18-19). Jesus is thus a sort of scapegoat as the author of the Epistle of St. Peter says: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold --- but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter, 1:18-19).

The religion of Paul was, of course, absolutely different from the religion of Jesus. Let me quote in this connection what Dr. Arnold Meyer, Professor of theology at Zurich University has to say:

"If by Christianity we understand faith in Christ as the heavenly Son of God, who did not belong to earthly humanity, but who lived in the divine likeness and glory, who came down from heaven to earth, who entered humanity and took upon himself a human form through a virgin, that he might make propitiation for man's sins by his own blood upon the cross, who was then awakened from death and raised to the right hand of God, as the Lord of his own people who believe in him, who hears their prayers, guards and leads them, who moreover dwells and works personally in each of them, who will come again with the clouds of heaven to judge the world, who will cast down all the foes of God, and will bring his own people with him into the home of heavenly light so that they may become like His glorified body - - - if this is Christianity, then such Christianity was founded by St. Paul and not by our Lord."<sup>32</sup>

31. H. G. Wells. *A Short History of the world*, pp. 129-130 (Penguin Books Harmondsworth; 1946.)

32. Arnold Meyer, *Jesus or Paul*, p. 122 (Harper and Brothers New York.)

There were bitter controversies, and charges and counter-charges between Paul and his associates on one hand, and the Nazarenes on the other. Faint echoes of these controversies can still be heard in the New Testament. In the *Homilies and Recognitions*, which bear the name of Clement of Rome. St. Peter is made to attack Paul, under the name of Simon Magus, for preaching a religion which was nothing but veiled paganism. He says, "Shun any apostle who does not first compare his teaching with that of James, the brother of Jesus, and has not come to thee with witnesses."

Nevertheless, it was the Pauline version of Christianity that proved to be more popular among the Jews of the dispersion and gentiles, spread rapidly over large parts of the Roman empire, and eventually became the official Christianity. Those who were loyal to the original religion of Jesus (the Nazarenes) were reduced to a minority and ultimately wiped out.

Further development in Christianity took place when the author of St. John's Gospel took over the concept of the Logos (Word) from Philo and made Jesus into the incarnation of the Logos: "In the beginning was the Word (Logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made - - - And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.) full of grace and truth" (St. John, 1:1-14).

Controversies about the exact nature of Christ and his relation to God the Father, however, continued for another two centuries. One sect (the Arians) considered Jesus to be a creature, and as such inferior to God. Another sect (the Sabellians) taught that Jesus was merely an aspect of the Father, and that God was Jesus and Father at the same time, just as a man may be a father and an artificer at the same time. Yet another sect (the Catholics) said that Jesus was a distinct person from the Father, but he was of the same substance as Him and equal to Him. At last in the fourth century, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, following the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, the Catholic version was accepted as the official Christianity and all other sects were wiped out by sword and fire. The doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus was finally established as a dogma of Christianity, as expounded in the Nicene Creed (adopted by the First Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. revised by the First Council of Constantinople in 381 C.E.) It stated:

"I believe - - - in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Born of the Father before all ages, God of God, light of light, true God of true God. Begotten not made; being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made."<sup>33</sup>

Once the doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ was accepted, the development of the doctrine of the Trinity became inevitable. For, if Jesus was God, there must be more than one person in Godhead. There was, to begin with, the Father (Jesus had himself said, "The Father is greater than I" - - - St. John 14:28) - - - He was the First Person of Godhead. Then there was Jesus himself the incarnation of the Son of God - - - the Second Person of Godhead. Finally, there was the Holy Ghost -- Jesus had said, "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him, but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come" (St. Matthew, 12 :32). Hence if Jesus was God, the Holy Ghost must also be God - - - the Third Person of Godhead. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. But Jesus had said that God is one. The Christian theologians, therefore, declared that God is both three and one - - - one in three or three in one - - - one God but three persons. But if there are three separate persons and each is by himself God, how can we say "God is one"? "This", answers the Christian theologian, "is Divine Mystery which cannot be comprehended by the human mind."

The doctrine of the Trinity emerged in its final form as late as the last quarter of the fourth century, as the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* admits:

"The formulation 'One God in three persons' was not solidly established into Christian life and its profession of faith, prior to the end of the fourth century. But it is precisely this formulation that has first claim to the title the *Trinitarian dogma*. Among the Apostolic Fathers, there had been nothing even remotely approaching such a mentality or perspective."<sup>34</sup>

In the form in which it is believed by the Christians, this doctrine was defined in the Athanasian Creed (6th century) :

"There is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the glory equal, the Majesty

33. "The Nicene Creed", *Catholicism* (edited by George Bruntl), p. 175, (Washington Square Press Book, New York, 1962).

34. *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (1967), art. "The Holy Trinity", Volume XIV, p.299.

co-eternal - - - The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet there are not three Gods but one God. - - - For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every person to be by himself God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to say there be three Gods, or three Lords."<sup>35</sup>

Thus over the years Christianity went on changing and inventing new dogmas the Divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, the Original Sin, the Vicarious Sacrifice, the Blood Atonement. together with these dogmas it also adopted various religious rituals, the most important being the baptism and the Eucharist. Baptism is a sacramental rite of initiation into the membership of the Christian Church and consists of pouring by a priest of consecrated water over the head of a person in "the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." It washes away the original sin and transforms the person receiving the baptism from a "child of wrath" into a "child of grace." For a person born in a Christian home this ceremony is performed as soon as possible after his birth, lest he die and be deprived forever of God's grace and heaven. The rite of Eucharist is the most sacred ceremony of the Christian Church and its most important part consists of the eating of the consecrated bread and drinking of the consecrated wine by the participant. According to the Catholic Church the consecrated bread actually becomes the body of Christ and the consecrated wine actually becomes the blood of Christ (the doctrine of transubstantiation), so that the participant literally eats the flesh and drinks the blood of the God-man and enters into an organic relationship with him.

It is now widely recognised that the Christianity which became the religion of the Roman empire and which since then continues to be the faith of the various Christian churches, had very little in common with the original religion of Jesus. It had developed over the years by absorbing many pagan elements. In the words of the great historian and philosopher Winwood Reade:

"Christianity had conquered paganism, and paganism had corrupted Christianity. The legends which belonged to Osiris and Apollo had been applied to the life of Jesus. The single Deity of the Jews had been exchanged for the Trinity, which the Egyptians had invented and which Plato had idealized into a philosophical system. The man who had said. 'Why callest thou me good? There is none

35. "The Athanasian Creed", *Catholicism* (edited by George Bruntl). p. 69 (Washington Square Press Book New York, 1962)

good but one, that is, God,' had now himself been made a God -- or the third part of one."<sup>36</sup>

And this is what an eminent contemporary scholar, Thomas Sheehan, writes :

"Today, at the dawn of her third millenium, the Christian chruch is undergoing a theological crisis in what she thinks and believes about Jesus of Nazareth."

"The crisis grows out of a fact now freely admitted by both Protestant and Catholic theologians and exegetes: that as far as can be discerned from the available historical data, Jesus of Nazareth did not think he was divine, did not assert any of the messianic claims that the New Testament attributes to him, and went to his death without intending to found a new religion called 'Christianity'. That is, the theological crisis has to do with the *prima facie* discrepancy between what Jesus of Nazareth apparently thought he was (a special but very human prophet) and what mainline Christian believers now take him to be (the divine Son of God, cosubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit)."<sup>37</sup>

### THE CHRISTIAN SECTS

From the beginning of their history, the Christians were divided into a various contending factions. One of the more important Christian sects, which emerged in about the second century, perhaps as a result of a compromise between two or more earlier sects, was Catholicism. It was this sect which succeeded in winning for itself the support of Emperor Constantine. The chief rivals of the Catholics, the Arians, who rejected the doctrine of the deity of Jesus as believed by the Catholics, were condemned as heretics and wiped out by fire and sword.

The Theodosian Code, which was completed in 438, made it unlawful for any one to differ from the beliefs of the Catholic Church. Those who dared to disagree even on small points were called heretics; they were brutally persecuted and their writings were burnt. If any one was convicted of concealing a heretical book, he was to suffer capital punishment.

A sharp distinction was made between the officers of the Church (who were called the *clergy*) and the common people or *laity*. The clergy administered the sacraments, could listen to

36. Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man*, p. 183-184 (The Thinker's Library, London 1948.)

37. Thomas Sheehan, *The First Coming*, page 5. Vintage Books, Random House, New York, 1988;



confession and absolve a man of his sins and were permitted to receive bequests, so that the Church became incredibly wealthy and enjoyed a far greater income than any state of Europe. Each of the Roman cities had a bishop as the head of the clergy. In 445, when Leo the Great was the Bishop of Rome, Valentinian, the Emperor of the Western Roman Empire, issued a decree declaring the power of the Bishop (or Pope) of Rome supreme, by reason of Peter's headship and the majesty of the city of Rome. However, the real founder of the temporal power and the political influence of the papacy was Pope Gregory the Great (540-604). Soon the popes became the most powerful of the rulers of Europe, and in due course the dogma of papal infallibility was invented.

The Roman Catholic Church regards itself as the Mystical Body of Christ, an organism animated supernaturally by the spirit and presence of Christ. The pope is the supreme head of the Catholic Church, but under his jurisdiction there are the bishops, the successors of the Apostles and teachers of the flock by divine institution. Below these again are priests and laity and monastic and mendicant orders (e.g., the Benedictine, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Jesuits, etc.). Roman Catholics believe that God's revelation to man did not cease with the completion of the Bible; God continues to speak through the Church. The pronouncements of the pope and the Catholic Church have the same authority as the words of the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church claims to be the sole and exclusive teacher of truth, that is dogma which cannot be altered; it is authoritative and infallible. To quote Lactantius, "The Catholic is, therefore, the only one who retains the true worship; this is the source of truth; this is the dwelling-place of faith; this is the temple of God, which whosoever enters not or from which whosoever departs, he is an alien from the hope of life and eternal salvation."<sup>38</sup> As such the Roman Catholic Church is absolutely intolerant of differences even on minor points of interpretation, demands complete surrender to and conformity with the official pronouncements of the Church and popes, and is ever ready to excommunicate those who differ on any matter with the Church. In the Age of Faith the 'heretics' were tried by the Inquisition, tortured and burnt alive.

Catholicism emphasises the continuity of Christian tradition by the use of the ancient Creeds (e.g. the Apostle's Creed the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed), the verdict of the ecumenical councils (the Council of Nicaea, the Council of Constantinople, the

38. Rev. M. C. D'Arcy, S. J. *Catholicism*, p. 32 (Benn's Library, London, 1927.)

Council of Ephesus, the Council of Trent, etc.) the testimony of the Fathers (St. Athanasius, St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine of Hippo etc.) and pronouncements of the popes. It demands belief in the dogmas relating to Christology, the Trinity, the Original sin, the Atonement, the resurrection of the body and everlasting life in heaven or hell. The Roman Catholic Church worships Mary as the Mother of God and believes in her immaculate conception and bodily assumption into heaven. It sanctions prayers to Mary and the saints through their images and icons and venerates their shrines and relics to which it attributes miraculous powers. The dogma of the infallibility of the Pope was proclaimed in July 1870. In Catholic worship the central service is the Mass or Holy Eucharist, in which it is believed, the bread and wine are actually converted into the body and blood of Christ, and the participant is purified of his sins and filled with Divine Grace by eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Christ, the God-man. Catholicism regards the seven Sacraments - - - namely the baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders and matrimony --- as the indispensable means of salvation; these are administered by a special priesthood.

The unity of the Church could not be long maintained. There were minor breakaway sects, such as those of the Nestorians, the Copts, the Jacobites and the Armenians; but the first major schism came with the separation of the Eastern Orthodox Church from the Roman Catholic Church. Ever since the division of the Empire into East and West, following the death of Emperor Theodosius in 395, the Eastern Church of Byzantium had differed in various ways from the See of Rome and by 1054, when papal legates excommunicated Cerularius, patriarch of Constantinople, the break became permanent. The Orthodox Eastern Church, which differs with the Roman Catholic Church on various points of dogma and ritual, includes the ancient patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, and the national churches of Russia, Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Rumania, etc.

Another, and even a more important, break in the unity of the Christian Church came in the 16th century with the Reformation, which saw the rise of Protestantism. The Reformation had a long history before it became, under Luther and Calvin, an accepted fact. The Church officials, from popes to common village priests, had become extremely corrupt. "The Roman Curia," said Luther - - and the statement can be proved up to the hilt -- "is a place where vows are annulled, where a monk obtains leave to quit his

Order, a priest to take a wife, a bastard to become legitimate; where there is such a buying and selling, cheating and lying, robbing and stealing, debauchery and villainy, that Antichrist could not reign worse."<sup>39</sup> Indulgences were sold by the Pope's representatives in the form of documents transferring credits to the purchaser's spiritual account. The mediaeval Church had held (as the Catholic Church holds today) that the sacraments were the indispensable means of salvation. Since these were exclusively administered by the clergy, any movement which attacked clerical abuses was forced by sheer necessity to deny the Church's exclusive control of the means of salvation, before it could become free from dependence on a corrupt priesthood. The Protestant Churches differ among themselves on various points of dogma and ritual, but they are all agreed in rejecting the authority of the Pope. The essence of Protestantism is the acceptance by the individual Christian of his direct responsibility to God rather than to the Church.

The leader of the Protestant Reformation in Germany was Martin Luther (1483-1546). He began his movement primarily in order to reform the Church from its gross abuses and the famous ninety-five thesis nailed to the door of the Church at Wittenberg in 1517 were not primarily theological but moral complaints dealing with the actual behaviour of the clergy rather than Church beliefs. But unlike the earlier reformers, Luther had arrived at the right moment in history when economic individualism and the force of nationalism were bound, sooner or later, to cause the authorities in Germany to line up on his side. Thus he began with the support of the peasants who were genuinely shocked at the abuse of indulgence and other matters, but ended up by being supported by the noblemen who wanted to destroy the power of the pope over the German states and looked forward to confiscating the lands and property of the Church. When the peasants wanted the reform of actual economic abuses relating to the feudal system, Luther took the side of the nobles and, not only denounced the peasants as rebels against God, but also advocated the use of most brutal methods to crush their movement for economic and social justice. Luther's teaching was based on the German translation of the Bible, but he was by no means a fundamentalist. He regarded St. Paul's Epistles as more a Gospel than Matthew, Mark, and Luke. "John's Gospel, St. Paul's Epistles, especially that to the Romans, and the First Epistle of St. Peter", he said, "are the true kernel and marrow of all books". The Epistle of St. James, he regarded as "a

mere Epistle of straw; it has nothing evangelical about it." Thus the authority of Scripture was subject to purely subjective valuation; the most precious books were those in which Luther found his own theology! He emphasised the deity of Christ, the utter depravity of human nature as a result of the fall of Adam and inherited guilt, and salvation by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. By exalting faith and disparaging work, and by using *Glaube*, with its intellectualist associations, he attached more importance to correct belief than even the Catholics had done. Like the Catholics he believed in the theory of transubstantiation, that the consecrated bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. How absurd his belief was on this point is shown by his answer to the question whether, if a mouse swallowed a crumb of the consecrated bread, the mouse would have partaken of the Body of Christ. Luther decided in the affirmative. Like Calvin, Luther was a predestinarian and determinist. The modern Lutheran Church is most active in Germany, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, where it is the established state church, and in the United States.

A more radical Reformation came in Switzerland, when Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), a scholar and Humanist, and also a zealous parish priest at Glarus, advocated return to the New Testament as the basic source of Christian truth and rejected all doctrines and practices of the Church for which no Scriptural support could be found. He read Luther's early writings, and was probably moved by them more than he was willing, after their quarrel, to admit. In most ways the teaching of the two men, especially in relation to the great Church against which both rebelled for much the same reasons, was very similar, whether we call the resemblance parallelism or reciprocal influence. But Zwingli is the father of Liberal Protestantism, as Luther certainly is not. Zwingli was more consistent and clear-headed than Luther in his doctrine of the sacraments. He taught that the Lord's Supper was primarily a commemoration of the death of Christ, and that the means whereby the merits of that death were conveyed to the believer were faith, and not the reception of the material elements. The words of institution, "This is my body", are not to be taken in a literal materialistic sense. The Zwinglian Reformation spread in his life-time to Basle, Berne, Glarus, Mulhausen, and Strassburg. Ultimately it led to a civil war between Catholic and Reformed forces, and Zwingli fell in one of the battles.

A much more influential leader of the Reformation was John Calvin (1509-1564). He was born in Picardy and attained great popularity as a preacher in Paris, but was expelled, and

subsequently lived at Geneva, where he continued to preach the new doctrine. His *Institution of the Christian Religion* provided the first logical definition and justification of Protestantism; he thus became the intellectual leader of the Reformation as the older Martin Luther was its emotional instigator. The distinctive doctrine of Calvinism is its dogma of predestination which states that God has unalterably destined some souls to salvation, to whom "efficacious grace and the gift of perseverance" is granted, and others to eternal damnation. He thus believed in the doctrine of the 'elect' and in salvation by faith only. The God that the Calvinists believe in is more like the jealous and arbitrary Jehovah of early Judaism than the Loving Father of Jesus Christ. Calvin was not a modern theologian, any more than Luther. It is even possible to represent him as a reactionary. The doctrine of total depravity of man belongs to the Middle Ages and is as alien to the thought of the Renaissance as to modern ideas. Calvin was a fundamentalist, who believed in the whole Bible as the literal and infallible Word of God. His doctrine of the Church is nearer to Catholicism than that of Luther. He repeats the favourite Catholic dictum that he who has not the Church for his mother cannot have God for his father; and, unfortunately, his readiness to employ the secular arm to punish ecclesiastical indiscipline was as great as that of the Catholic inquisitor. Religious toleration owes nothing to Calvin. The martyrdom of Servetus, the distinguished Unitarian theologian, has always, and rightly, been considered a blot on the reputation of Calvin. Unhappily, this cruel act was far from an isolated instance of the persecuting spirit. "The registers of Geneva show that a hundred and fifty poor wretches were burnt for witchcraft; that the application of torture was an incident of almost all criminal trials; that thirty-one persons were burnt at one time for the fantastic offence of spreading the plague."<sup>40</sup> In the close-knit merchant community of Geneva, Calvin's thesis that all activities of the elect set forth the glory of God created a link between religion and trade, joining religious fervour to self-interest and giving new impetus to the rise of a capitalist, bourgeois society. R.H. Tawney opines that Calvinism was a result of developing capitalism, being its ideological justification.<sup>41</sup> Calvinism, as defined in the Westminster Confession, is established in the Reformed or Presbyterian churches of France, Holland, Scotland, the United States of America, etc.

The Reformation in England was much more conservative than on the Continent. It is often said that the English Reformation was

40. Rev. W. R. Inge, *Protestantism*, p. 33 (Benn's Library London, 1927)

41. R.H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (Pelican Book).

political, not religious. England became Protestant because Henry VIII was tired of his wife, and fell in love with Anne Boleyn. At first it merely meant making the King of England the head of the Church of England in place of the Pope. Gradually a few other principles of the Reformation were also adopted. Under Mary there was a brief and sanguinary reaction, but Queen Elizabeth I, gave completeness to the work which her father had initiated. To her the Church of England was that of the "middle way" in which human reason and commonsense took their place beside Scripture and Church authority. The extent to which these various factors are stressed creates the distinction between "high" and "low" church. There was little visible break with the past; ceremonies were conducted in English, instead of in Latin, but the outward appearances, vestments and rites, were largely retained. The authority of the pope was abrogated and the marriage of the clergy was allowed. There was widespread feeling among the common people that the Reformation in England had not gone far enough in the way of curtailing the authority of the priests, simplifying the Church ritual, and rejecting the claim of the Church to be the sole depository, guardian and living and infallible interpreter of both the written and unwritten Word of God. It led to the rise, first of the Puritans, and then of the Non-conformists -- that is, those who do not conform to the doctrines of the established Church of England. The more important of the Non-conformist sects are the Baptists, the Quakers (or the Society of Friends), the Methodists, and the Congregationalists.

The Conflicts between the Roman Catholics and Protestants resulted in the long and dreadful wars of religion that split Europe. They provoked, all over the Christian world, atrocities beyond description, revolting forms of hysteria, and the whole tally of horrors that accompany religious persecutions. Furthermore, once Protestantism had given in effect the right to each to interpret the Scripture in his own way, the tendency to fragmentation increased so that, by 1650, there were no fewer than 180 sects, mostly dogmatic and intolerant towards each other. Today there are many more. It will suffice to mention a few of the more peculiar among them.

Mormons, or the Latter-day Saints, are one of the very numerous American sects. It was founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith, who claimed to have been raised as a prophet. In a series of visions he was told of a revelation written on golden plates concealed in a nearby hillside. These he unearthed in 1827 and with the help of "Urim and Thummim" translated the "reformed Egyptian"

characters into English. Described as the *Book of Mormon*, this was published in 1830 and at the same time a little church of those few who accepted his testimony was founded. *The Book of Mormon* purports to be a record of early American history and religion, the American Indians being identified as the ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Jesus Christ is alleged to have appeared in America after his ascension. Soon the Mormons were in trouble with the other sects and with the authorities. They were turned out from one city after another until they found themselves a dwelling-place at Nauvoo, Illinois, on the Mississippi. This would probably have been the end of the story, had not Smith been murdered in 1844 and thereby made to appear a martyr, and had not there appeared Brigham Young, a quite remarkable leader, who announced that it had been revealed to him that he must lead the faithful to Salt Lake, then outside the area of the United States. There followed the famous trek of more than a thousand miles across desert country. By 1851, 30,000 Mormons had reached the Promised Land, where they established their government and held their own in a hostile environment, until their territory was incorporated in the Union. Mormons are millenarians, who believe that soon Jesus Christ will reappear and rule for a thousand years. They perform ritual ceremonies which take the form of morality plays with such actors as God and Satan, Adam and Eve. They also claim to perform miracles. Perhaps the best known of the Mormon doctrines is polygamy, which was made obligatory for all the male members of the sect until it was revoked in 1890, because it had brought the sect into serious conflict with the law-enforcing authorities of the land.

Another peculiar American sect is that of Jehovah's Witnesses, who consider themselves to be the present day representatives of a religious movement which has existed since Abel "offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous." Abel was the first "witness" and among others were Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist. Pre-eminent among the witnesses, of course, was Jesus Christ. Thus they see themselves as "the Lord's organisation", in the long line of those who through the ages have preserved on earth the true and pure worship of God or, as the Witnesses prefer to call Him, "Jehovah-God". So far as other people are aware, the sect was founded by Charles Taze Russell in 1881, under the name of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. Their teaching centres upon the early establishment of God's new world on earth, preceded by the second coming of Christ. Witnesses believe this has already happened, and that Armageddon "will come as soon as

the Witness is completed." The millennial period will give sinners a second chance of salvation and "millions now living will never die." The dead will progressively be raised to the new earth until all the vacant places left after Armageddon are filled. There is, however, some doubt about the "goatish souls" who have made themselves unpleasant to the Witnesses, those who have accepted (or permitted to be accepted) a blood-transfusion, which is contrary to the Scriptures, and others who have committed grave sins. Jehovah's Witnesses regard the doctrine of the Trinity as devised by Satan.

Another American sect which believes in the imminent second coming of Christ (a doctrine fairly widespread in the U.S.A. during the early decades of the 19th century) is that of the Seventh-Day Adventists. William Miller had predicted that the end of the world and the second coming of Christ would take place in 1843. Modern Adventists content themselves with the conviction that the "signs" of the Advent are multiplying, when the believers will be saved. The different branches of the Adventists differ as to whether the unjust will be tortured in hell, annihilated, or merely remain asleep eternally. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church observes Saturday as the true Sabbath.

The most radical of all the Christian sects is that of the Unitarians, who, as the very name suggests, believe in the single personality of God and are anti-trinitarians. This statement of belief is, however, interpreted with varying degrees of subtlety. Thus unitarian belief may range from a sort of Arianism which accepts that, although Christ was not of divine nature, divine powers had been delegated to him by God, to the simple belief that Christ was a man like anyone else, and his goodness was of the same nature as that of many other great and good men. The Unitarians emphasise good deeds, rather than dogmatic belief, and put their faith in the value of love and the brotherhood of man. The Toleration Act (1689) excluded Unitarians, who continued to be persecuted and sentenced to death for their belief, but from 1813 they were legally tolerated in England. Nevertheless attempts were made to turn them out of their chapels on the ground that the preachers did not hold the views of the original founders of the endowments. But this ended with the Dissenting Chapels Act of 1845. In America no such difficulties existed, and in the Boston of the 19th century many of the great literary figures were openly Unitarian both in belief and name: e.g., Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes.



## Chapter IX

# ISLAM

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The great religions that we have described in the earlier chapters were named either after their reputed founders or after the nations or countries in which they were born. Thus, Zoroastrianism is named after its founder Zoroaster, Confucianism, after its founder Confucius, Buddhism after Gautama the Buddha, and Christianity after Jesus Christ. Hinduism is the religion of Hind (India), the land that lies beyond the Indus and its tributaries; and Judaism is so called after the tribe of Judah or the country of Judaea. Islam alone of all the religions is not associated with the name of any particular man or nation. It is not named after any nation or country, because it is the religion of humanity. On the other hand, it does not bear the name of Muhammad, because it is the eternal religion. Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him) was neither the first nor the sole Messenger of Islam. There was, in fact, no period of human history when there was no Islam. Truth, God's truth, is not the accidental discovery or exclusive possession of any people or age; it is universal. Islam is the religion of all the prophets who were raised by God from time to time in different parts of the world to lead human beings to the right path. Muhammad was the last Messenger of Islam.

The word *Islam* means (i) *peace*, and (ii) *submission to the will of God*. It is a very significant name, for it indicates the goal of true religion, as well as the way to achieve that goal. The goal of true religion, it says, is peace -- the ineffable peace of the soul that is in harmony with the Divine, and peace and goodwill among men, and the way to attain peace is for men to submit themselves individually and collectively to the will of Him Who is the Home of peace and the Source of all virtues.

Thus the name *Islam* summarises the true religion (taught by all the prophets and brought to completion by the Prophet Muhammad) in three ways. First, it refers to the spiritual experience underlying the faith, for *Islam* is the Arabic word that describes the process or way of approach to God taught by it. Secondly, it describes the way of life, the whole body of truths upon which the faith and practice are based. Thirdly, in the sense of peace - "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" - *Islam* describes the sense of happiness, security and well-being that is the fruit of a harmonious relationship with God. One feels confident that one

is working with the forces underlying the world and life itself, and that one is moving with the future as it is being unfolded in the present. This is more than self-integration: this is the integration of the individual with the whole stream of life of which he is a part. Only the word *Islam* can describe this state: it is the peace of God.

### THE BACKGROUND

Ever since man became conscious of the wonder of creation and learnt to distinguish between good and bad and began inquiring about the ultimate meaning of his existence and his relationship with everything - - - that is, ever since man became man - - - God began sending His Messengers to inform human beings about their Creator, to acquaint them with the purpose of their creation, to rescue them from sin and error, to reveal to them the right way of life and to inspire them to find peace and the goal and meaning of life in communion with God. As man spread to the different parts of the world and became separated by natural and man-made barriers and developed into distinct communities, God raised His prophets in each community and in every corner of the world, wherever human beings lived. All these prophets, as they were inspired by the same God, taught the same religion (named *Islam* in the *Qur'an*); the essence always remained the same, only the outer forms and details of the law changed to suit the changing needs of the different communities and different ages. However, in those days there were no adequate means of preserving intact the messages and teachings of the different prophets, and again and again it happened that the religion of God was forgotten or became mixed up with the superstitions of man. Whenever that happened, God raised another prophet to revive the true religion through a fresh revelation.

By the sixth century of the Christian era, the true religion had passed into oblivion or become adulterated everywhere in the world. Humanity was facing its worst crisis. The civilization associated with the names of Egypt, Babylonia and Greece were matters of history. They awaited the researches of archaeologists to be rescued from oblivion. The divided and decayed Roman Empire had lapsed into barbarism in the West, and in the East into childish theological squabbles. The two great empires of Iran and Byzantium were interlocked in a struggle which ultimately resulted in death for both. The minds of Persia, India and China were sunk in a profound sleep and had produced nothing of value for many centuries. The waters of life had become stagnant and corrupt in the East as well as in the West. In the words of the *Qur'an*, "Both

land and water had become corrupt on account of the excesses of men."

In the ancient land of China the religions of Lao Tzu and Confucius had lost their purity and moral force and become synonymous with nature-worship and ancestor-worship; the former becoming too mystical and magical, and the latter too worldly and conservative. They had been reduced to bundles of soul-destroying ceremonies and rituals.

The vast subcontinent of South Asia, following the destruction of the Gupta kingdom, had passed into an age of utter darkness, from which it emerged for a few years under King Harsha, only to sink back into deeper gloom and worse chaos after his death in 647 C.E. The religion of the noble and compassionate Buddha had long ago become corrupt as a result of its contacts with Brahminism and Central Asian paganism; it had become divided into two main sects, one of which denied God and soul and the other had made the Buddha himself into a God. It had degenerated into lifeless rituals, idolatry, relic-worship and idle monkery.

The Hinduism that was being revived after the fall of Buddhism in India, had lately absorbed the vulgar and primitive fancies and practices of the aborigines into Brahminism, which already had as its characteristic features gross polytheism, elaborate ceremonies and sacrifices, caste system, and obscurantist priesthood. In this concoction the spiritual monotheism of the Upanishads and the sublime moral teachings of Krishna were all but lost. To make things worse, the Sakti sect, which was fast gaining popularity among the Hindus, particularly in South India, had given religious sanction to many immoral practices, and scenes of the most obscene nature were depicted on the temple walls and enacted in their sacred halls.

In Iran, the Zoroastrian ethical dualism had been converted into the metaphysical dualism of Ahura-Mazda (Ormuzd) and Ahriman, and a large host of nature-gods that the Prophet Zoroaster had rejected were revived and worshipped as superior manifestations of Ahura-Mazda. During the Sassanian period, Zoroastrianism had given rise to a very powerful hierarchy of priests and invented a complicated eschatology and many lifeless rituals.

The Jews still retained the belief in the One and Only God, but looked upon Him as in a special sense theirs and not of the other races, and regarded themselves as His Chosen People. The spirit had departed from the religion of the Hebrew prophets and it had become too formalistic and legalistic in the hands of the rabbis.

Jesus Christ had come to revive the spirit of the true religion among the Jews, but after him, as his religion broke off its links with the parent faith, it adopted many pagan ideas and practices and developed the dogmas of the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, the Original Sin and belief in salvation through the vicarious death of a saviour-god, for none of which was there any sanction in the teachings of the Founder. With the elevation of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Christian priests not only raised themselves to a semi-divine status, but also became corrupt and worldly; heresy-hunting and intrigues being their favourite pastimes. In the words of Duncan Greenless:

"Though paganism had officially died out and was rigorously repressed in fact, most of those who called themselves Christians had plunged back into idolatry, relic-worship, the adoration of the Virgin Mary and countless saints and martyrs (many of them old gods renovated, and some entirely fictitious characters), and endless word-splitting over incomprehensible and useless dogmas. This had broken up Christendom into numberless sects and 'heresies', all busy breaking each other's heads for the greater glory of God, and filling hell in anticipation of each others' souls. Mutual murder was the normal mode of conversion from the 4th to the 14th centuries. Meanwhile, Church and State alike pitilessly exploited the people and ground them down deeper into poverty and ignorance. Art hardly existed, philosophy was banned as pagan, the beginnings of science ruthlessly smothered under a weight of superstition and impossible dogma created out of the unintelligent reading of metaphor as literal history, and literature prostituted to the cause of polemic had almost ceased to be. Morals were everywhere at their lowest, the best men and women being lured from society into convents; though piety abounded, it was hurried away safely out of sight, lest it should lead the people to compare it with the selfish worldliness of the official Church rulers; each life was riddled with corruption, violence and insecurity."<sup>1</sup>

What made the situation really hopeless and the restoration of these religions to their original forms an impossible task was the fact that their Scriptures had been corrupted in the course of years. There was no sure authority to which one could appeal against false dogma. The revealed books having been altered, it was not possible to say what was genuine in those religions and what was the result of later accretion and interpolation.

1. Duncan Greenless. *The Gospel of Islam*, Introduction., pp. xiii-xiv (Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, Madras, 1948.)

There was darkness everywhere, but the darkest spot of the earth was Arabia. It was a land of brigand raids, of merciless vendetta, and unending tribal wars, of drunkenness, grossest idolatry and darkest superstitions, cruel social customs like infanticide, incest and wife-desertion, almost total illiteracy and complete ignorance of the civic arts and sciences.

Everywhere in the known world, the religious and political life of the people was in violent flux and ferment, ready and waiting for some new impulse that might restore the true faith and the hope of a better future and of an evolving society and human moral sense. That was the time in the plan of God to send the World-Prophet to revive the true religion of the earlier prophets and to bring the entire human race into one universal faith and one brotherhood. The Prophet of this new age is Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be on him).

### PROPHET MUHAMMAD

Muhammad is the only one of the world prophets to be born within the full light of history. He was born in Mecca in the year 571 of the Christian era. A few weeks before his birth his father Abdullah had died, and he was only six when his mother Amina also passed away.

In his grandfather's house he grew up, a sensitive, intelligent child, loving, gentle, beloved of all. After his grandfather Abdul Muttalib's death, his uncle Abu Talib, noblest and most affectionate among his kinsmen, took him under his care. Gifted by Nature with a unique mind and soul, he grew up into a youth of wisdom. What made him unique among the youth of his country and age was his pure and spotless character, his love of truth and his compassion for the poor and the downtrodden. His sense of honour, duty and fidelity so impressed his contemporaries that by common consent they conferred upon him the title of *Al-Amin*, the faithful and the trustworthy one.

Muhammad had unbounded love for mankind. Even as a boy he would do all sorts of odd jobs to help others. As a young man he joined the League called *Hilf al-Fudzul* to help the widows and orphans and to protect the helpless victims of injustice and cruelty. To give comfort to men without distinction of rank, class or position was the thought always uppermost in his mind.

In the twenty-fifth year of his life he married Khadija, a widow of noble birth and nobler character, fifteen years his senior in age. His marriage with Khadija gave him not only a loving and beloved wife, but also a devoted friend, who understood him and brought

him solace when he needed it most; who gave him comfort when hunted by his enemies, who ever stood by his side in the darkest hours of his ministry.

Fond of solitude, Muhammad would spend many hours in the desert in communion with his Creator and in meditation on the aim and object of man's life. The people around him were sunk deep in evil and superstition. He longed for them to repent and come to the right path. It was his ambition to "render God unto man and man unto God". When he was forty years of age, the Divine light shone in its full splendence in his heart, the voice of God spoke to his soul in unmistakable notes, and he was chosen by Him as His Messenger to mankind.

He preached to them of the one and only God, the Loving Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds. His greatest desire was that people should enter into right relation with God, and, through Him, to establish right relation with one another. He earnestly exhorted them to shun all kinds of evil and injustice and to live in peace and love with one another. He told them that religion in the true sense was the removal of the want and suffering of others and the selfless service to fellow-men. He struck at the root of the false sense of superiority based on colour, race, caste, sex or nationality, and declared that all human beings are equal and brothers.

The first to believe in him and his message were those who knew him best -- his beloved wife Khadija, his friend Abu Bakr, his cousin Ali, his freedman Zaid. "It is strongly corroborative of Muhammad's sincerity," writes John Davenport, "that the earliest converts to Islam were his bosom friends and the people of his household, who, being intimately acquainted with his private life, would not fail otherwise to have detected those discrepancies which more or less invariably exist between the pretensions of a hypocritical deceiver and his action at home."<sup>2</sup>

Slowly the message spread and the Qureish chiefs of Mecca became alarmed. They feared that the success of Islam, which believed in the equality of man and aimed at establishing a brotherhood embracing people of all races and classes, loyalty to which was bound to replace the traditional Arab loyalty to his tribe, would result in a change in the order of things in which they were highly placed and prosperous. The emphasis on the unity of God and the crusade against idolatry was unbearable to them as an attack on their traditional beliefs and customs, and also because they were

2. John Davenport, *Mohammed and the Teachings of the Quran*, p.5 (Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1945.)

the custodians and head priests of all the idols that were enshrined around the Ka'ba. And so, with the spread of the Movement, their opposition began to increase in its tempo and ferocity. To quote Mrs. Annie Besant: "But with the gathering of others around him, fierce opposition breaks out, and tortures horrible, unbearable almost by human flesh and blood. They tear his followers in pieces; they thrust them through with stakes; they put them on burning sand with faces upturned to the Arabian sun, and with heavy rocks upon their chests; they bid them deny God and His Prophet; and the disciples die murmuring : 'There is but One God and Muhammad is His Prophet.' See! there is one man; they are cutting his flesh bit by bit from off his body, and as they cut it off, they laugh and they say : 'Would not you rather that Muhammad were in your place, and you at home?' 'As God is my witness,' answers the dying man, 'I would not be at home with wife and children and substance, if Muhammad were for that to be pricked by a single thorn.' Such love he inspired in those who died for him."<sup>3</sup>

The Prophet's heart melted at the sight of this brutal treatment of innocent men, women and children, and he advised the poorer and more helpless among his followers to migrate to Abyssinia, where they would be safe from persecution. Later on, when Islam gained a foothold in Yathreb (later called Medina), the Prophet told his followers to take refuge there : and in ones and twos the Muslims quietly slipped out of Mecca, till the Prophet remained alone to face the fury of the irate enemy. In the meantime his loving wife Khadija and his uncle and protector Abu Talib had also died, leaving him helpless and without companion. The enemy decided that unless they struck the fatal blow then and there, it would be too late and they would not be able to check the spread of Islam. They therefore formed a plot to assassinate him, members of all the clans striking him at once, so that the blame would be shared by all equally. The Prophet, however, managed to escape by night, while his house was surrounded by the enemy waiting to kill him. He and Abu Bakr reached Medina after a few days hazardous journey. The Muslim calendar starts from this date.

The people of Medina enthusiastically welcomed the Prophet and swore allegiance to him. They not only believed in him and his message but also made him the head of their state. Thus, a new phase began in the life of Muhammad. But do we find any change in him? "On the whole," writes Professor R. Bosworth Smith, "the wonder to me is not how much but how little, under different

3. Annie Besant, *Islam*, pp. 9-10 (Theosophical Publishing House, Madras).

circumstances, Mohammed differed from himself. In the shepherd of the desert, in the Syrian trader, in the solitary of Mount Hira, in the reformer in the minority of one, in the exile of Medina, in the acknowledged conqueror, in the equal of the Persian Chosroes and the Greek Heraclius, we can still trace a substantial unity. I doubt whether any other man, whose external conditions changed so much, ever himself changed less to meet them : the accidents are changed, the essence seems to me to be the same in all."<sup>4</sup>

He continued to wear patched clothes, sweep the floor and milk the goats with his own hands. His food was of the simplest kind; and very often he went to bed on an empty stomach. At the height of his power he used to work as a common labourer together with the others. Islam does not believe in asceticism or monasticism, and if the Prophet led the simplest of lives it was because, as the head of the Islamic state, he did not wish to place himself on a higher footing than the lowliest of his people and had no desire to put a single morsel in his own mouth till all were fed. He believed in high thinking, hard working and plain living, and found pleasure in denying himself for the sake of others. Moreover, he sincerely believed in the dignity of labour. The Prophet was very fond of children and would often stop in the streets to laugh and play with them.

His days and nights were devoted to making the will of God prevail in the world and working for the mental, moral and material amelioration of the people. In Medina, in addition to his moving appeals for individual change of heart and transformation of character, the Prophet also worked out the social implications of his message and established an egalitarian and just social order. The many revolutionary changes that he introduced included the raising of women to a position of equality with men, taking steps to abolish slavery, total prohibition of all kinds of intoxicating drinks and of gambling, putting an end to exploitation of man by man, levying a tax called *zakat* on the well-to-do for helping and rehabilitating the poor, doing away with priesthood and granting complete religious freedom to all individuals and communities, and the establishment of a welfare state and a form of administration which was an ideal blend of justice and mercy. His covenant with the Jews of Medina and charters to the Christians are the noblest monuments of religious freedom and enlightened tolerance known to mankind. He proclaimed the principle of compulsory education:

4. R. Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, pp. 140-141 (Smith, Elder and Co, London, 1876.)



"Acquisition of knowledge is compulsory on every Muslim, male and female." He brought into being a universal brotherhood in which all men were considered equal and there was no discrimination whatsoever on the basis of race, colour, language, wealth, creed, or sex. The distinguishing feature of those who had joined his fold was zeal for the service to the one and only God and to humanity.

The Qureish of Mecca, who had been frustrated in their plot to assassinate the Prophet, could not passively watch the birth of the Islamic republic at Medina. They lost no time in raising a large army to attack the Muslims. It was clearly the Prophet's foremost duty as the head of the state, to protect the State and save the innocent and harmless citizens from the genocidal fury of the Meccans. The Qur'an had allowed the Muslims to fight (i) to defend their state and freedom against foreign aggressors, (ii) to protect the lives and honour of innocent persons, and (iii) to put a stop to persecution and to establish religious freedom for all.

"Fight in the way of God those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. For God loves not the aggressors" (2:190).

"And what reason have you that you should not fight in the way of God and of the weak among the men and the women and the children who say : Our Lord! cause us to go forth from this town, whose people are oppressors, and give us from Thee a guardian and give us from Thee a helper" (4:75).

"Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed, and God is well able to assist them - those who have been expelled from their houses without a just cause except that they say : Our Lord is God. And had there not been God's repelling some people by others, there would have been pulled down cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which God's name is much remembered" (22:39-40).

- The last of these verses tells Muslims to fight in the defence of the houses of worship, not only of Muslims, but also of Jews, Christians and other communities. It further says : "And fight with them until there is no more persecution, and all religions should be for God" (8:39). For, according to the Qur'an, "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256).

The series of wars that followed the brutal Meccan attacks on Medina ended only with the total collapse of the Meccan power. The Muslim army triumphantly entered Mecca without shedding a single drop of blood. The Prophet's treatment of the defeated enemy stands unparalleled in the history of mankind. Before him stood

men who had shown implacable hatred for him and his followers, who had left no stone unturned to wipe out Islam, and were guilty of brutal crimes against innocent men, women and children. The Prophet not only forgave them but announced : "This day there is no reproof against you. May God forgive you all." Here is a practical example of the precept "Love thine enemy." The gates of love and mercy were opened wide. Bitter enemies of morning became warm friends by nightfall. Well does the Qur'an say: "And not alike are good and evil. Repel evil with what is best, when lo! he between whom and thee was enmity would be as if he were a warm friend" (41:34).

In his last year, the Prophet again went to Mecca to perform Hajj or pilgrimage to the Ka'ba. On the plain of Arafat he delivered his Farewell Sermon. Soon after his return to Medina, he fell ill and died.

The Prophet of Islam led a life which may be described as truly godly. He was the model *par excellence* for men in various situations and walks of life, as the Qur'an says :

"Certainly you have in the Apostle of God an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in God and the Latter day and remembers God much" (33:21).

"O Prophet! We have sent thee as a witness, and as a bearer of good news and as a warner, and as one inviting to God by His permission and as a light-giving sun" (33:45-56).

He lived up to the highest ideals of the Holy Qur'an and exemplified in his life the virtues commended in the Book of God. When his wife Aisha was questioned about his morals, her reply was, "His morals are the Qur'an." Conversely, when she was asked to explain certain ethical injunctions in the Qur'an, she did so by illustrating them from the Prophet's life and behaviour.

To say that he was sinless would be only a negative description of the Man of God who had conquered all temptations and passions and lived only for the sake of God and in complete harmony with the Will of God:

"Say : My prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are all for God, the Lord of the worlds" (6:163).

He was, as the Qur'an describes him, "a mercy to all the nations." His compassion extended to friend and foe alike. "Do you love your Creator? Love your fellow-creatures first", was his constant exhortation to his followers. He felt extremely concerned at the corrupt and depraved state of the people around him. It grieved

his heart very much when, as the head of the state, he had to pass an order of chastisement on anyone for the sake of justice or for the security of the young republic. But for his own sake, he never even lifted his finger against anyone. When at a critical moment some one asked him to curse his persecutors, he replied: "I have not been sent to curse, but as a mercy to mankind. O Lord, guide my people, for they know not." He had come to reclaim and reform the fallen humanity and he won the hearts of the anti-social elements and the outcasts by love and kindness. His charity and readiness to help the people in every way were proverbial. He was the greatest friend of the poor and the downtrodden.

He strove all his life to lead men to the one true God, to make them godly, to rescue them from error, sin and superstition; but in inviting them to the truth he faithfully followed the Quranic injunction, "Let there be no compulsion in religion." His life demonstrates that the greatest things that one can do can be done only in obedience to the transcendent imperatives and inspired by the conviction that the eternally true and right are realities which must take precedence of everything else in one's allegiance. He had imbued himself with Divine qualities and caused his fellowmen to take the greatest step towards the divine. Yet he remained humble and modest, conscious always of his nothingness before, God, and from the highest peak of moral and spiritual perfection to which he had attained, he cried out to the people, "I am but a man like you" (41:6).

"In an age charged with supernaturalism," writes Dr. Huston Smith, "when miracles were accepted as the stock-in-trade of the most ordinary saint, Muhammad refused to traffic with human weakness and credulity. To the miracle-hungry idolaters seeking signs and portents he cut the issue clean: 'God has not sent me to work wonders; He has sent me to preach to you. My Lord be praised : Am I more than a man sent as an apostle?' From first to last he resisted every impulse to glamorize his own person."<sup>5</sup>

Major A. G. Leonard writes about him : "If ever a man on this earth found God, if ever a man devoted his life to God's service with good and great motive, it is certain that the Prophet of Arabia is that man."<sup>6</sup>

Describing Muhammad as the greatest man of history, the great French poet and historian Alphonse Marie Louis de

5. Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, p. 205. (Mentor Books New York, 1951.)

6. A.G. Leonard, *Islam : Her Moral and Spiritual Value*, p. 10. (Luzac, London, 1959.)

Lamartine speaks of him as "Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images; the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask: is there any man greater than he?"<sup>7</sup>

Writing about Prophet Muhammad, John William Draper observes in his classic *The Intellectual Development of Europe*: "Four years after the death of Justinian was born the man who, of all men, has exercised the greatest influence upon the human race." And Arthur N. Wollaston writes in his book *Half Hours with Moham-mad*: "The Prophet of Islam has had a more potent influence on destinies of mankind than has been vouchsafed to any son of Adam who has left footprints on the sands of time."

### THE HOLY QUR'AN

The revelations vouchsafed to the Prophet from the first call to Prophethood, when he was forty, to a few days before his demise twenty three years later, were collected in the Qur'an, which claims to be the Word of God: "And this is truly a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. The Faithful Spirit has descended with it upon thy heart (O Muhammad) that thou mayest be of the warners" (26:192-194)

The Prophet was aware of the fact that false dogmas and practices had taken birth and differences arisen among the religions because the earlier revealed books had not been preserved in their original forms. And so he took good care to safeguard the purity of the text of the Qur'an. As soon as he received a revelation, he used to communicate it to his disciples and ask them, not only to write it down, but also to commit it to memory. On each such occasion he indicated in a precise manner the place to which the revelation belonged. Thus the complete Qur'an was preserved in the memories of hundreds of persons and also written down in the lifetime of the Prophet.

After the passing away of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, charged Zaid ibn Thabit with the task of collecting and compiling the written leaves in the form of a book. As long as the Prophet was alive and the possibility existed of a fresh revelation coming to him, this could not be done. But immediately after the demise of the Prophet, Zaid ibn Thabit prepared the first complete

7. Lamartine, *Historie de la Turqui*, Vol. II, p. 277; quoted by Dr. Z. Ali in *Islam in the World*. (Sh Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 2nd Edition, 7.)

written copy by collecting and arranging the manuscripts, which the Prophet had dictated to his disciples, in the exact order in which they were recited in the Prophet's lifetime.

At the order of Uthman, the third Caliph, seven copies of the Qur'an were made and sent to the different centres of learning of the then vast Islamic world. One of those copies is still in existence at Tashkent. The Czarist government of Russia had published it with facsimile reproduction, and we see that there is complete identity between this copy and the text otherwise in use all over the world.

From the time of the Prophet to our own time the practice of learning the Qur'an by heart has continued unbroken, and the number of *Huffaz* (those who have committed the whole of the Qur'an to memory) can now be counted in the world by hundreds of thousands. The result is that no scholar, Eastern or Western, Muslim or non-Muslim, has ever cast any doubt on the purity of the text of the Holy Qur'an. Even such an hostile critic as William Muir wrote about the Qur'an, "There is probably in the world no other book which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text."<sup>8</sup>

The Qur'an is not the word of Muhammad, it is the Book of God revealed to Muhammad. The Prophet's own sayings, as distinct from that which was revealed to him, were collected later on in several Hadith-books. These two -- first and foremost the Qur'an (the Word of God), and then the Hadith (Sayings of the Prophet) are the universally recognised sources and basis of all Islamic beliefs and practices.

The first chapter of the Qur'an, which is in the form of a prayer, also contains the essence of the whole teachings of Islam:

"All praise is due to God, the Lord of the worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful, Master of the day of requital. Thee alone do we serve, and Thee alone do we beseech for help. Guide us on the right path, the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed grace, not of those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor of those who go astray." (The Holy Qur'an, chapter 1).<sup>9</sup>

### THE CONCEPTION OF GOD

The message of Islam may be summed up in one sentence: "Having devoted the aim to God, do good." The Qur'an says:

8. Sir William Muir, *The Life of Mohamet*, Introduction, p. xviii. (Edinburgh new edition 1923.)

9. Quotations from the Holy Qur'an have been taken from the English translation by Maulana Muhammad Ali (Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i-Islam, Lahore 4th edition 1951.)

"Yea, whoever submits himself to God and he is the doer of good to others, he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for him nor shall he grieve" (2:112).

Faith in God bears fruits in the form of good deeds, and good deeds in their turn strengthen the faith in God and bring man nearer to Him. The Qur'an talks of three degrees of certainty about God -- viz., *Ilm-ul-yaqeen*, or certainty by inference; *'Ain-ul-yaqeen*, or certainty by sight or perception; and *Haqq ul-yaqeen* or certainty of truth or experience or certainty by realization.

A homely illustration will perhaps make this clear. If a man standing on one side of a hill sees a column of smoke rising from the other side, he may from this reasonably infer the existence of fire. But if he climbs up the hill and from the top sees the bright flames of fire, he reaches the second degree of certainty -- the certainty by sight. To attain the third degree and to realise the certainty of truth, he must thrust his hands into the fire and feel it by burning in it. These are also the three stages of human knowledge with regard to God.<sup>10</sup>

The first degree of certainty about God comes when man observes and ponders over the universe. The Qur'an speaks of Nature as the "signs of God." It says:

"And your God is one God; there is no God but He, the All-loving, the All-merciful. In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the ships that run in the sea with that which profits men, and the water that God sends down from the cloud, then gives life with it to the earth after its death and spreads in it all kinds of animals, and the changing of the winds and the clouds made subservient between the heaven and the earth, there are signs for people who understand" (2:163-164).

The study of the "signs of God" leads man to infer that *there must be God*, but at this stage he does not have the assurance to say, *God is*. This degree of certainty (*'Ain-ul-yaqeen*) can come only when he, so to say, sees God with his spiritual eye and hears the voice of God within him saying, "I AM". Man can attain this degree of certainty by love for God and a burning desire to meet Him, together with complete submission to His will and good deeds.

But the highest degree of certainty (*Haqq-ul-yaqeen*, or certainty by realization) can come only when he becomes one with God

<sup>10</sup> Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *The Teachings of Islam* (Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-Il-Islam, Lahore, 6th revised edition, 1968.)

and knows Him directly and intimately as he knows his own self. As a man who thrusts his hand into the fire has direct experience of fire, so the man who has the third degree of certainty about God realises God by burning in the fire of the love of God --- all evils and impurities are burnt away and his nature becomes pure like burnished gold. As a piece of metal when it is in fire displays the qualities of fire, so the man burning in the fire of the love of God displays the qualities of God; he is, in the words of the Prophet, "imbued with Divine qualities". Some religions have mistakenly called such men Gods or His incarnations or His Sons. Islam says that the man burning in the fire of the love of God and manifesting the attributes of God is still man, albeit a perfect and godly man. The Qur'an guides man through these three degrees of certainty about God. Islam wants every man to attain to the certainty by realization and thus to become a new man.

The main theme of the Qur'an is the unity and goodness of God. It says: "Say: He, God, is One. God is He on Whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten; and none is like Him" (Chapter 112).

The Qur'an declares that every prophet taught the unity of God and that this doctrine was the original basis of all religions. However, with the passage of time the different religions deviated from true monotheism (*Tauheed*) and adopted various forms of polytheism (*Shirk*). Some deified their prophets and heroes and began worshipping them as incarnations or *avatars* of God (e.g., Jesus Christ in Christianity, Rama and Krishna in Hinduism, Buddha in Mahayana Buddhism). Some associated other persons with the one and only God and thus came to believe either in plurality of gods or in plurality of persons in Godhead (e.g. the plurality of gods in Hinduism; and the plurality of persons in Godhead in Christianity, created by associating two creatures -- viz. Jesus and the Holy Spirit -- with God in His Godhead). Some personified the different attributes of God into separate Divine Persons (e.g. the Christian Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; the Hindu *Trimurti* of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; and the Zoroastrian *Amesha Spentas*). Some deified the angels and began sacrificing and praying to them for special favours (e.g., the *Devas* in Hinduism, the *Yazatas* in Zoroastrianism, and the Holy Spirit in Christianity). Some thought of God as remote and far off and hence created mediators and intercessors, whom they regarded either as divine beings or as semi-divine beings (e.g., Virgin Mary and the saints in Catholicism). Some thought that God is born and gives birth and has wives and children (e.g., Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, and Mary as the Mother of God in

Christianity). Some even thought of God as having some kind of human form and human passions and desires (e.g., the countless idols of Hinduism and the mythologies of different religions).

The verses of chapter 112, quoted above, and many other verses of the Qur'an completely reject these various forms of polytheism and restore the doctrine of Divine Unity to its original purity.

The God of Islam - the One and Only God - is the Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds, the Almighty, the All-good, the All-holy, the All-knowing, the All-loving, the All-forgiving, the All-compassionate, the Ever-living, the Self-subsisting, the Author of peace, the Grantor of security, the Restorer of every loss, the Friend of the bereaved, the Guide of the erring, the Guardian over all. He is the God of Muslims and non-Muslims alike: "God is our Lord and your Lord; we shall have our deeds and you shall have your deeds". (42:15)

Among the numerous sublime attributes of the Divine Being to which the Holy Qur'an gives expression, the attributes of love and mercy occupy the highest place. It is with the names *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim* that every chapter of the Holy Book opens. "The words Beneficent and Merciful convey to the English reader of the Holy Qur'an only a very imperfect idea of the deep and all-encompassing love and mercy of God as indicated by the words *al-Rahman* and *al-Rahim*." The Prophet Muhammad said: "God's kindness towards His creatures is more than a mother's towards her babe". And in the Qur'an God says: "My Mercy encompasses all things."

He is the Absolute, the Eternal, the Infinite, "Vision comprehends Him not and He comprehends all vision." "Nothing is like the likeness of Him." God, the Cosmic Soul of all existence, is immanent in it but transcends it at the same time. He is immanent in a more intimate and ineffable manner than the artist is immanent in his creation. He is, as the Qur'an says, "the Light of the heavens and the earth" and "closer to man than his own self." He listens to the prayer of every man:

"And when My servants ask thee concerning Me, surely I am very near; I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me that they may walk in the right way" (2:186).

### MAN AND THE WORLD

The doctrine of the unity of God (*Tauheed*) is the axis round which all the teachings of Islam rotate. The whole structure of



Islam rests on this rock. As taught in the Qur'an, monotheism is not a mere religious dogma; it is a principle of action to be carried into practice. It is the basis of the advancement of humanity to a higher goal.

The Islamic doctrine of the unity of God implies that nothing is worthy of worship, by man except God. The first message of every prophet, according to the Qur'an, was: "Serve God, you have no God other than Him" (7:59,64,73,85) and "You shall not serve any but God" (11:25,50,61,84). Before Islam people used to worship the heavenly bodies and other natural phenomena, but the Qur'an said: "Do not make obeisance to the sun nor to the moon; but make obeisance to God who created them"(41:37).

Man is the noblest of God's creation. Everything created by God, including the angels, are subservient to Him. Man degrades and demeans himself by worshipping things to which he is really superior. We read in the Qur'an: "Shall I seek for you a god other than God while He has made you excel all created things" (7:140). Islam thus restores the dignity of man. It says that the so-called gods that man fears and worships are really his servants. It is the destiny of man, says the Qur'an, to conquer the whole universe and rule in the world as the Vicegerent (*Khalifa*) of God:

"God is He who made subservient to you the sea that ships may run therein by His command, and that you may seek of His grace, and that you may give thanks. And He has made subservient to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, all, from Himself: indeed there are signs in this for a people who reflect" (45:12-13).

"And He has made subservient to you the night and the day and the sun and the moon; and the stars are made subservient by His command. Surely there are signs in this for a people who understand" (16:12).

Islam does not allow even great men to be taken for lords. For, that too, says the Qur'an, would lower the dignity of man. It is degrading for man to fall prostrate before and worship men like himself, be they kings or priests, prophets, or the so-called saviours. Says the Qur'an:

"They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for Lords besides God, and also the Messiah, son of Mary; and they were enjoined that they should serve one God only - there is no God but He" (9:31).

Indeed the greatest man of all times (*viz.*, Prophet Muhammad) himself said: "I am only a mortal like you; it is revealed to me that

your God is one God, therefore follow the right way to Him and ask His forgiveness" (41:6).

Islam emphatically repudiates the doctrine of the Original Sin, transmitted by inheritance. There can be nothing more demeaning and degrading to man than to believe that he is born sinful, with a depraved nature. According to the Qur'an, sin is not something which man inherits from the primeval progenitor; it is that which each man acquires for himself when he does what he should not do and does not do that which he should do. Sin is the wilful transgression of the law of God or the law of right and wrong. Man is born with a free will, with the inclination and capacity both to do evil and also to fight against it and do good. It is only when, as a grown-up man, capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, he makes a wrong use of his freedom and falls a prey to temptation that he becomes sinful. In the moral realm no one carries the burden of another: "Whoever goes aright, for his own soul does he go aright; and whoever goes astray, to its detriment only does he go astray. And no bearer of burden can bear the burden of another" (17:15). "And man can have nothing but what he strives for" (53:39).

Islam says that at birth every child is sinless and pure. Man does not start life with perverted instincts. All his instincts, like the instincts of the animal, are the instruments of the preservation of life; it is only with false knowledge and perverted free will that disorder sets in. The Holy Prophet said, "Every child is born with divinely gifted nature, it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian." It is not any inheritance of perverted instincts, but the social environment which presses him to follow artificial man-made creeds. Islam is not a creed in this sense; it is the religion of nature:

"So set thy face for religion, being upright, the nature made by God in which He has created men. There is no altering of God's creation. That is the right religion" (30:30).

Human spirit is the partialised expression of the Divine spirit. God (says the Qur'an) has breathed His own spirit into man. Man has been created with infinite potentialities to assimilate divine attributes in order to fit himself to be the vicegerent (*Khalifa*) of God on earth. God being Light and Love, the increase of knowledge and increase of love along with it can make man more and more god-like. Islam stands for the intellectual, moral and spiritual progress of man.

And just as, according to, Islam, man is not born sinful, so the world is not evil. There is nothing wrong with the material goods of life as such; but when they are sought for their own sake and are regarded not as instrumental but intrinsic values, as if they were the be-all and end-all of existence, they become hindrances for the life of the spirit. Those who consider these goods only as life, lose real and abiding life in seeking them. Islam stands, not for life-denial but for life-fulfilment. It repudiates asceticism and monasticism. It holds that spiritual elevation is to be achieved by living one's full life in this mundane existence with a spiritual attitude, and not by renouncing the world. Islam keeps a healthy balance between this world and the next world; it does away with the dichotomy of the spirit and the flesh. It says that the spirit cannot grow by crushing the body. Human instincts are not intrinsically bad. They must not be killed, but wisely controlled, channelised and used purposefully to make the life of man on this planet richer and better. This world created by the All-wise and All-good God, has meaning and purpose, and it is only by leading a normal and fruitful life in the world and appreciating and enjoying the beautiful gifts of God that man can come closer to God, be of service to others and prepare himself for the next world. Islam, like the original doctrines of Confucius, Krishna and Buddha, favours the middle path.

### THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

The Islamic belief in the oneness of humanity also follows as a corollary to the belief in the unity of God (*Tauheed*). All men are the creatures of One God - - they are all equal and together form a single brotherhood. "Mankind is a single nation", declares the Qur'an (2:213). The difference of race, language, culture, creed, wealth and sex are all superficial: they do not affect the fundamental unity of human nature. All human beings are equal. Islam severely condemns the sense of superiority based on one's tribe or race or nationality and strikes at the roots of the caste system. Says the Holy Qur'an:

"O Mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female and made you tribes and nations that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with God is the most dutiful of you" (49:13).

And in his famous Farewell Sermon, the Holy Prophet declared:

"No Arab as such is superior to a non-Arab, nor is a non-Arab as such superior to an Arab; no dark man as such is superior to a white man, nor a white man as such superior to a dark man. In

the sight of God the superior is only the one possessing a superior character."

Hence, in Islam there is no place for snobbery, parochialism, chauvinism, or aggressive nationalism. Never in their long history have the Muslims in any part of the world been guilty of racial discrimination, colour bar or apartheid. According to the famous historian Arnold Toynbee:

"The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one of the outstanding achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue."<sup>11</sup>

Nor does Islam recognise the distinction between the so-called clergy and the laity, which is a prominent feature of the other religions. There is no priesthood in Islam. The absence of a specially interested and consecrated class to act as intermediaries between God and man differentiates Islam from all other creeds. "The Islam of Muhammad," writes Syed Ameer Ali, "recognises no caste of priesthood, allows no monopoly of spiritual knowledge or special holiness to intervene between man and his God. Each soul rises to its Creator without the intervention of priest or hierophant. No sacrifice, no ceremonial, invented by vested interests, is needed to bring the anxious heart nearer to its Comforter. Each human being is his own priest; in the Islam of Muhammad no one man is higher than the other."<sup>12</sup>

Islam unites all human beings in love and sympathy as brothers. The brotherhood of Islam transcends all geographical and political barriers and unites as equals and brothers men of many races, colours and nationalities. The Holy Qur'an says:

"And hold fast to the covenant of God all together and be not disunited. And remember God's favour to you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favour you became brethren. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He saved you from it. Thus God makes clear to you His messages that you may be guided" (3:102).

"All God's creatures," said the Holy Prophet, "are His family, and he is the most beloved of God who tries to do the greatest good to God's creatures."

11. Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, p. 205. (London, 1948.)

12. Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 165 (Christophers, London, new edition, 1935).

## THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

There are, according to Islamic theology, five pillars on which the structure of Islam has been built. These are: (1) The *Kalima* (declaration of faith): "There is but one God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God"; (2) Prayer; (3) Fasting; (4) *Zakat* (poor-tax and charity); and (5) Hajj (pilgrimage).

The threefold aim of these devotions is (i) to strengthen the faith in God, (ii) to inspire men to conquer evil desires and practise righteousness, and (iii) to bring all men on a plane of equality and promote the feelings of love and brotherhood among them.

The first part of the *Kalima* ("There is but One God") declares faith in the unity of God (*Tauheed*) which, as we have already pointed out, is the basis of all the teachings of Islam and the spring of all virtues. The second part of the *Kalima* ("Muhammad is the Messenger of God") signifies that God is not only the Creator and Nourisher of the universe but, having made men with conscience and free will, He also guides them to the Straight Path leading to Him. Belief in Prophet Muhammad includes belief in all the prophets raised by God to guide mankind, for the Qur'an expressly requires faith in all the prophets who appeared in different parts of the world before Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be on them all). Prophet Muhammad is the last Messenger of God, who revived the genuine religion of all the Messengers and completed and perfected it for all nations and all ages. He is the Prophet of the final phase of Islam. Faith in the *Kalima* implies the acceptance of the message and code of life that Muhammad (may peace and blessings of God be on him) brought from God for all mankind.

The second pillar of Islam is the prayer-service, which a Muslim must perform at least five times a day, either alone or in congregation. Prayer is communion between man and God; it is the outpouring of the heart to One Who has created us and listens to us and loves us. It deepens the roots of God-consciousness in man and strengthens the resolve to follow in the Way shown by Him through His prophets. It purifies the soul and gives peace and contentment of mind to man. According to the Qur'an, "Now surely in the remembrance of God do hearts find rest" (13:28). And again: "Recite that which has been revealed to thee of the Book and keep up prayer; surely prayer keeps one away from indecency and evil" (29:45). The Prophet said: "He whom prayer prevents not from wrong-doing and evil, increases in naught save in remoteness from

the Lord". Moreover, congregational prayer in which people of all classes and colours stand shoulder to shoulder, equal before God, promotes the feeling of unity and brotherhood.

The third pillar of Islam is fasting, which has been made obligatory for a whole month each year (*i.e.*, during the month of Ramazan). The man who fasts must totally abstain during the daylight hours from all kinds of food and drink and from sexual relations with his spouse. Thus the believer voluntarily abstains from things which are otherwise lawful, only for the sake of God, and so he cannot even think of doing anything which is unlawful or unrighteous. The aim of fasting is to develop self-control and spirit of sacrifice. The Qur'an says, "O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil" (2:180). And the Prophet said: "A keeper of fast, who does not abandon lying and detraction, God cares not about his leaving off eating and drinking (that is, God does not accept his fasting)". The fast places everyone, rich and poor alike on the same level. It makes the rich realise what it means to go without food, and thus brings home to them the plight of the hungry and the starving.

The fourth pillar is *Zakat*. Islam imposes a compulsory tax of 2.5% per annum on the capital and yearly saving of every Muslim. The amount thus collected is to be spent on the poor, the widows, the orphans, insolvent debtors, and for the general welfare of the community. Through it Islam seeks to build a welfare State. In addition to this compulsory tax, Islam urges the Muslims to spend as much as they can for the good of others. "By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend generously out of what you love", says the Qur'an (3:91). The exercise of charity must be free from show and from all sordid motives, such as placing the object of charity under an obligation: "Kind speech and forgiveness is better than charity followed by injury; and God is Self-sufficient, Forbearing. "O you who believe, do not make your charity worthless by reproach and injury, like him who spends his property to make a show of it and does not believe in God and the Last Day" (2:263-264). The Prophet's conception of charity was the broadest possible. He said: "Every good act is charity; and verily it is of the number of good acts to meet your brother with open countenance, and to pour water from your water bag into his vessel. Your exhorting mankind to virtuous deeds is charity; and your prohibiting the forbidden is charity; and your showing men the road, in the land in which they lose it, is charity for you; and your assisting

the blind is charity for you. Doing justice between two people is charity; and assisting a man upon his beast, and lifting his baggage, is charity; and answering a questioner with mildness, is charity; and removing that which is an inconvenience to man, such as thorns and stones, is charity.

The fifth pillar of Islam is Hajj (pilgrimage), which a person who can afford it must perform at least once in his life. At the Ka'ba in Mecca, Muslims from all parts of the world, belonging to different races and speaking different languages, gather as equals before God. All distinctions of high and low, rich and poor, disappear as all pilgrims dressed alike in similar clothes (two white pieces of cloth wrapped round the body) together perform the prescribed rites and answer the call of God, declaring their determination to devote themselves completely and wholeheartedly to His cause and to make any sacrifice in His way. The inspiring atmosphere of the place, where the first house for the worship of the One true God was built; where Abraham (the father of the Semitic people among whom Judaism, Christianity and Islam took birth) again laid the foundation of a moral monotheistic religion; and where last of all the Prophet Muhammad appeared to complete the edifice of the true religion, fills the hearts of the pilgrims with the love of God. "The pilgrim shows by the external act of making circuits round the Ka'ba that the fire of Divine love has been kindled within his heart, and like the true lover he makes circuits round the House of his Beloved One. He shows, in fact that he has given up his own will and completely surrendered it to that of his Master, and that he has sacrificed all his interests for His sake." To quote Sir Thomas Arnold. "But above all—and herein lies its supreme importance in the missionary history of Islam—it ordains a yearly gathering of believers, of all nations and languages, brought together from all parts of the world, to pray in the sacred place towards which their faces are set in every hour of private worship in their distant homes. No stretch of religious genius could have conceived a better expedient for impressing on the minds of the faithful a sense of their common life and of their brotherhood in the bonds of faith. Here, in a supreme act of common worship, the Negro of the West coast of Africa meets the Chinaman from the distant East; the courtly and polished Ottoman recognises his brother Muslim in the wild islander from the farthest end of the Malayan Sea. At the same time throughout the whole Mohammedan world the hearts of believers are lifted up in sympathy with their more fortunate brethren gathered together in the sacred city, as in their own

homes they celebrate the festival of 'Id al-Adha or (as it is called in Turkey and Egypt) the feast of Bayram."<sup>13</sup>

### THE ETHICS OF ISLAM

The moral ideal and goal which Islam places before every man is described in the Qur'an as "the baptism of God" (2:138). The Prophet explained this by saying, "Imbue yourself with Divine morals." Every man has within him the seed of divinity which he must, so to say, water and develop into a full-grown fruit-bearing tree. This is *Falah* or true success in Islam.

The moral progress of man has been divided by the Qur'an into three stages: *Nafs al-ammara* (the uncontrollable spirit), *Nafs al-lawwama* (the self-accusing spirit), and *nafs al-mutmainna* (the soul at rest).<sup>14</sup>

Islam finds man at the stages of savagery or moral irresponsibility, where he makes no distinction between mine and thine, good and bad, and does whatever he feels like doing. This is the stage of *Nafs al-ammara* (the uncontrollable spirit). For a man at this stage Islam gives elementary or basic moral teaching, which comes under the heading of manners, rather than of morals strictly so called. It teaches him to fear God and restrain his desires. It prohibits everything which enflames the passions and weakens the moral sense, such as wine and gambling. The Qur'an says:

"O you who believe, intoxicants and games of chance and sacrificing to stones set up and the divining arrows are only an uncleanness, the devil's work; shun it therefore that you may be successful. The devil only desires to cause enmity and hatred to spring in your midst by means of intoxicants and games of chance, and to keep you off from the remembrance of God and from prayer; will you then desist?" (5: 90-91).

And again:

"O you who believe! Be careful of your duty to God and speak the right word; He will put your deeds into the right state for you; and forgive you your sins; and whoever obeys God and His Messenger, he indeed achieves a mighty success" (33:70-71)

"Come, I will recite to you what your Lord has forbidden to you; remember that you do not associate anything with Him and show

13. T.W. Arnold, *The Teachings of Islam*, p. 415 (Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Lahore, reprinted, 1961.)

14. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *The Teachings of Islam*, (Ahmadiyya Anjuman-i-Islam, Lahore, 1968.)



kindness to your parents, and do not slay your children for fear of poverty - We provide for you and for them -- and do not draw nigh to indecencies, those of them which are apparent and those which are concealed, and do not kill the soul which God has forbidden except for the requirement of justice; this He has enjoined you with that you may understand. And do not approach the property of the orphan except in the best manner until he attains his maturity; and give full measure and weigh with justice. We do not impose on any soul a duty except to the extent of its ability; and when you speak, be just, though it be against a relative, and fulfil God's covenant; this he has enjoined you with that you may be mindful" (6: 152-153).

"Whoever slays anyone,... it is as though he slew all men: and whoever saves a life, it is as though he saved the lives of all men" (5 : 32).

"This day all the good things are allowed to you, and the food of those who have been given the Scripture is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them; and the chaste from among the believing women and the chaste from among those who have been given the Scripture before you are lawful for you, when you have given them their dowries, taking them in marriage, not fornicating nor taking them for paramours in secret" (5:5).

"So eat and drink but be not extravagant, for God loves not the extravagants" (7:31).

"And do not turn your face away from people in contempt or anger, nor go about in the land exultingly; for God does not love any self-conceited boaster: and pursue the right course in your going about and lower your voice, for the most hateful of voices is braying of asses" (31:18-19).

"And when you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a better greeting or return it; for God takes account of all things" (4:86).

When a man develops in him the urge to restrain himself and follows these teachings, he enters into the second stage - - - *nafs al-lawwama* (the self-accusing spirit). At this stage a struggle is constantly going on within man between good and evil. He is still weak and many a time he gives in to the evil inclinations; but every time he falls his conscience pricks him and he feels unhappy, and so he renews his effort to fight against evil and resist temptation. The high moral teachings that Islam gives for a man at this stage may be divided into two categories: those that prevent a man from injuring the life, property, honour and freedom of others (such as chastity, honesty, politeness, peace, and freedom

of thought and expression), and those that prompt a man to do good to others (such as mercy, forgiveness, truth, courage, patience, kindness, sympathy and love).

*Chastity:* "And go not nigh to fornication (totally abstain from its preliminaries and everything that is likely to lead to it) for it is an indecency and evil is the way" (17:32). "And do not draw nigh to indecencies those of them which are apparent and those which are concealed" (6:152). "The adultery of the eye is to look with an eye of desire on the wife of another; and the adultery of the tongue is to utter what is forbidden" (A Saying of Muhammad).

*Honesty:* "God commands you to make over the trusts to those worthy of them" (4:58). "And do not covet that by which God has made some of you excel others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn; and ask God of His grace, for God knows all things" (4:32). "And do not swallow up your property among yourselves by false means, neither seek to gain access thereby to the judges, so that you may swallow up a part of the property of men wrongfully while you know" (2: 188). "Give full measure and be not of those who diminish: and weigh things with a right balance, and do not wrong men of their things, and do not act corruptly in the earth, making mischief" (26:181-183). "On the day of resurrection I shall be the adversary in dispute of a person - - - who employs a servant and receives fully the labour due from him, and does not pay his full remuneration". (A Saying of Muhammad).

*Politeness:* "No father has given his child anything better than good manners". "Whoever has been given gentleness has been given a good portion in this world and the next." "Verily the most beloved of you by me, and the nearest to me in the next world, are those of good disposition". "The proud will not enter paradise, nor a violent speaker" (Sayings of Muhammad). "O you who believe! Let not one people laugh at another people, perchance they may be better than they; nor let women laugh at other women, perchance they may be better than they; and do not find fault with your people nor call one another by nicknames; evil is a bad name after faith, and whoever does not turn, these it is that are the unjust. O you who believe! Avoid most of suspicion, for suspicion in some cases is a sin, and do not spy nor let some of you backbite others" (49:11-12). "A man cannot be a Muslim till his heart and tongue are so" (A Saying of Muhammad).

*Peace:* "And not alike are good and evil. Repel evil with what is best, when lo! he between whom and thee was enmity would be as

if he were a warm friend"(41:34). "And the servants of the beneficent God are they who walk on the earth in humility and when the ignorant address them, they say, Peace" (25:63). 'A Muslim is he from whose tongue and hands people are safe, and a *Muhajir* is he who forsakes what God has forbidden." "Shall I inform you of a better act than fasting, alms and prayers? Making peace between one another; enmity and malice tear up heavenly rewards by the roots" (Sayings of Muhammad).

*Freedom of Thought and Expression*: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256). "Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion" (109:6). "Lo! those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans -- whoever believes in God and the Last day and does good --- surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve" (2:62). "difference of opinion among my followers is a blessing of God." "The most excellent *jihad* is the uttering of truth in the presence of an unjust ruler" (Sayings of Muhammad)

*Truth and Justice* : "No man is true in the true sense of the word but he who is true in word, in deed and in thought" (A saying of Muhammad). "O you who believe! Be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for God's sake, though; it be against your own selves or your parents or near relatives; if he be poor or rich, God is most Competent to deal with both; therefore do not follow your desires, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn aside, God is surely aware of what you do" (4: 135). "O you who believe! Be upright for God, bearers of witness with truth and justice, and let not the hatred of a people for you incite you not to act equitably, act equitably, that is nearer to piety; and be careful of your duty to God; for God is aware of what you do" (5:8).

*Courage and Patience*: "O you who believe! Seek assistance through patience and prayer; for God is with the patient" (2:153). "And We will certainly try you with somewhat of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits; and give good news to the patient, who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: We are God's and to Him we shall return. Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord, and those are the followers of the right course" (2:155-157). "Those to whom the people said: Men have gathered against you, therefore fear them; but this increased their faith, and they said: God is sufficient for us and most excellent is the protector" (3:172).

*Forgiveness:* "And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a garden, the extensiveness of which is as the heavens and the earth; it is prepared for the righteous: those who spend for the well-being of others in ease as well as in straitness, and those who restrain their anger and pardon all men; and God loves the doers of good to others" (3:132-133). "Many of the followers of the Scripture (i.e., followers of the other revealed religions) wish that they could turn you back into unbelievers after your faith, out of envy on their part, after the truth has become manifest to them; but pardon and forgive, so that God should bring about His command; for God has power over all things" (2:109). "Pardon them therefore and ask God's forgiveness for them and take counsel with them in the conduct of affairs" (3:158).

*Doing Good to Others :* "All God's creatures are His family and he is the most beloved of God who tries to do the greatest good to His creatures." "What actions are the most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured" (Sayings of Muhammad). "And what will make thee comprehend what the uphill road is? It is the setting free of slaves, or the giving of food in the day of hunger to an orphan, having relationship, or to the poor man lying in the dust. Moreover he is of those who believe and exhort one another to show patience, and exhort one another to show compassion" (90:12-17).

*Love and Sympathy:* "Do you love your Creator? Love your fellow-creatures first". "No man is a true believer unless he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself". "Thou wilt see the faithful in their having mercy for one another and their kindness towards one another like the body; when one member of it ails, the entire body ails, one part calling out the other with sleeplessness and fever" (Sayings of Prophet Muhammad).

When a man tries his best to follow these teachings and fights against evil within him with determination and fortitude, the help of God comes to him and his evil desires and inclinations at last become extinct: "If you shun the great things which you are forbidden, We shall do away with your evil inclinations" (4:31). Thus he reaches the third stage of moral development -- i.e., *Nafs al-mutmainna* (the soul at rest). The Qur'an says :

"O soul at rest, return to thy Lord, well-pleased with him, well-pleasing Him, so enter among My servants, and enter My garden" (89:27-30).

The man who has reached this stage lives a heavenly life of perfect peace, contentment and purity in this very life. He is filled with the love of God and finds pleasure in doing His will :

"Say : My prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are all for God, the Lord of the worlds" (6:163).

About such a man God says : "The person I hold as a beloved, I am his hearing by which he hears, and I am his sight by which he sees, and I am his hands by which he holds, and I am his feet by which he walks".

### THE SOCIAL LAWS OF ISLAM

True religion cannot confine itself to the private life of individuals and shirk its responsibility of guiding people in their public life and reorganising it according to the will and purpose of God. Islam is not merely a faith but also a social system, an all-embracing way of life. "While Christianity," writes Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "in recent years has moved towards a social gospel, Islam has been a social gospel from the start."<sup>15</sup>

### The Political System of Islam

Islam ensures social justice and peace by bringing political, economic and international affairs under the control of religion and morality and by defining the basic duties of the individual towards the state and of the state towards the individual and of one state towards another state. It lays down some basic principles which every community is enjoined to adopt and then gives each the liberty to develop its structure according to the needs of the time and the genius of its people, provided that the super-structure observes the basic principles and remains within their scope.<sup>16</sup>

The first basic principle of the Islamic political system is that the sovereignty of the state rests with God and no legislature or parliament has the right to pass an act or law which is contrary to the letter and spirit of the commands of God as contained in the Qur'an and the precepts of the Prophet. Thus Islam ensures uniform justice and saves the state and the destinies of the people from being swayed by the whims and short-sighted decision of the legislators, and the minority groups from the brute will of the majority, and the interests of the people as a whole from the designs of the dominating economic class in the parliament.

15. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in the Modern World*, pp. 22-23.

16. Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The New World Order* (Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i-Islam, Lahore, 1944.)

The second basic principle is that all public offices, including that of the chief executive, are trusts from God and the trustees must exercise the authority given to them as per the commands of God and for the benefit of the people. As the head of the state is appointed by the people, he can also be removed by the people, if they find that he is not carrying on the administration according to the commands of God and in the best interests of the people.

The third basic principle is that all men (and that of course includes women) are equal before law and in the sight of God. They have equal political rights. The same law applies to all. In an Islamic state, no one, not even the head of the state, is above law. For the breach of any law, even the Caliph can be summoned in the court and punished, if found guilty.

The fourth basic principle is that all public matters are to be decided by consultation and after ascertaining the views of the citizens of the Islamic state, either directly or through their representatives :

"Pardon them therefore and ask God's protection for them, and take counsel with them in the conduct of affairs; and when thou hast thus determined, place thy trust in God; for God loves those who trust in Him" (3:158).

"And those who respond to their Lord and keep up prayer, and whose government is by consent among themselves, and who spend on others of what We have given them" (42:38).

Islam brought into existence the first true democracy in which there was no distinction of free-born and slave, citizen and alien, and no discrimination on the basis of race or colour or sex or creed.

### **The Economics of Islam**

Islam considers God to be the Absolute Owner of all wealth and the people who actually have it are only trustees; they can keep and make use of the wealth only if by their doing so the interests of other individuals and of the society as a whole are not unjustly affected and if their economic activities are carried on within the limits prescribed by God.

Islam regards all unearned income as unlawful. According to the Qur'an, "Man shall have only that for which he labours" (53:39). It upholds the dignity of labour. The Prophet said:

"No one eats better food than that which he eats out of the work of his own hands."

There is nothing more reprehensible in the sight of God than the exploitation of man by man. Islam severely condemns hoard-

ing, profiteering blackmarketing and all such practices by which a man takes undue advantage of the needs of others. It is opposed to cartels and monopoly and takes necessary measures to prevent the concentration of wealth in few hands, "so that it may not circulate only among the rich of you" (59:7).

Most important of all, Islam interdicts *Riba* -- that is, the system in which a man lends or invests money with a view to increasing it by exploiting others, without employing his own physical and mental powers to productive or creative use. Says the Qur'an:

"O you who believe! Do not devour *Riba* (surplus-value, interest, usury, etc.), doubling and redoubling, and be careful of your duty to God that you may be successful" (3:129).

"Those who swallow down *Riba* (the fruits of the labour of others) cannot arise except as one whom the devil has prostrated by his touch does rise" (2:275).

"And whatever you lay out at *Riba* (i.e., lend or invest money with the intention of appropriating the fruits of the labour of others), so that it may increase in the property of men, it shall not increase with God; and whatever you give in charity, desiring God's pleasure -- these it is that shall get manifold" (30:39).

While on the one hand, Islam is against hoarding and amassing of wealth, on the other it also censures squandering and all forms of wasteful expenditure. It wants every man to be personally responsible for the well-being of the society. The Prophet said, "He is not a Muslim who eats his fill and leaves his neighbour hungry."

In order to reduce inequality and make sure that every one gets the basic necessities and has equal opportunities in life, Islam imposes a tax on the capital of the rich for the benefit of the poor. This tax, called *Zakat*, is different from and in addition to *Khairat* or voluntary charity. And finally by its judicious laws of inheritance, Islam makes the concentration of wealth in few hands impossible.

While not ignoring the importance of economic activities in human life, Islam condemns the tendency to give importance to people on the basis of their financial and social status. The mark of a man's worth is not his wealth but higher character and moral integrity. Wealth is not an end, but "a means of support" to the people. The wealth that a man earns is not absolutely his. It is a trust with him from God. He has acquired it by employing God-given faculties and by the aid and facilities provided by the society.

He must repay his debt to the society and spend as much as possible, out of what he has honestly earned in the way of God. Above all, in the pursuit of wealth a man must never lose sight of the higher values of life.

### **Women in Islam**

Before Islam woman was generally regarded as a slave. She was not considered a person in the sense in which man was a person. Several pre-Islamic religions looked down upon her as the temptress and held her responsible for the fall of man and genesis of sin. The Holy Qur'an cleared woman of the responsibility for the fall of Adam and vindicated her honour and dignity. It raised the status of woman to make her man's equal, declaring that both the sexes have been created of the "same essence and kind." The Prophet said: "Women are the twin halves of men". Islam makes no distinction between them as regards their intellectual, moral and spiritual capabilities and rewards:

"Whoever does good, whether male or female, and he (or she) is a believer. We will make them live a happy life, and We will give them their reward for the best of what they did" (16:97).

"The men who submit to God, and the women who submit, and the men who believe and the women who believe, and the men who obey and the women who obey, and the men who are truthful and the women who are truthful, and the men who persevere and the women who persevere, and the men who are humble and the women who are humble and the men who are charitable and the women who are charitable, and the men who fast and the women who fast, and the men who are chaste and the women who are chaste, and the men who remember God much and the women who remember -- God has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward" (33:35).

For the first time in history Islam gave women the same rights as those of men :

"And they (women) have rights similar to those of men over them in a just manner (2:228).

The modern man recognises that there can be no true freedom and dignity without economic rights. Fourteen hundred years ago, Islam gave woman the right to inherit the property of her father and husband and to acquire, own and dispose of wealth as she liked. The Qur'an says:

"Men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn" (4:32).



"Men shall have a portion of what the parents and the near relatives leave and women shall have a portion of what the parents and the near relatives leave, whether there is little or much of it : a stated portion" (4:7).

In marriage woman is considered to be an equal and free partner. Marriage in Islam is a sacred contract between a man and a woman, and the consent of both the parties has to be taken before marriage can take place. The Qur'an describes woman as a companion of her husband -- an object of love and a source of peace and solace to him, as he to her :

"And one of His signs is that He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find quiet of mind in them, and He put between you love and compassion; surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect" (30:21).

To impress upon his followers the exalted position and sacredness of womanhood, the Holy Prophet said: "Paradise lies at the feet of the mother."

The Qur'an is the first revealed book to put restrictions on polygamy. It allowed a man to marry more than one wife in very rare circumstances only -- as after a war, in which many young men have died, leaving behind widows and orphans. The Islamic permission of a limited and conditional polygamy is only to provide homes to homeless women, to protect them from being exploited by men, and to save the society from moral corruption. Moreover, Islam imposes conditions which make polygamy a well-nigh impossibility. "If," says the Qur'an, "you fear that you will not do justice between them, then marry only one" (4:3). And a little later it goes on to say : "And you have it not in your power to do justice between wives and to love them equally, however much you may wish to do so" (4:129). From this it is clear that as a rule Islam recognises only the union of one man and one woman as a valid form of marriage.<sup>17</sup>

### ISLAM'S CONTRIBUTION TO CIVILIZATION

Within incredibly short time Islam spread over more than half the earth. "The closer we examine this development," writes Dr. A.M.L. Stoddard, "the more extraordinary does it appear. The other great religions won their way slowly, by painful struggle, and finally triumphed with the aid of powerful monarchs converted to the new faith. Christianity had its Constantine, Buddhism its Ashoka, and Zoroastrianism its Cyrus, each lending to his chosen

17. Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Islamic Law of Marriage and Divorce* (Ah-madiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i-Islam, Lahore).

cult the mighty force of secular authority. Not so Islam. Arising in a desert land sparsely inhabited by a nomad race previously undistinguished in human annals, Islam sallied forth on its great adventure with the slenderest human backing and against the heaviest material odds. Yet Islam triumphed with seemingly miraculous ease, and a couple of generations saw the fiery crescent-borne victorious from the Pyranees to the Himalayas and from the deserts of the Central Asia to the deserts of Central Africa."<sup>18</sup>

Islam gave birth to a civilization which is still the wonder of the historians. "Never has a people," writes H. Hirshfeld, "been led more rapidly to civilization, such as it was, than were the Arabs through Islam."<sup>19</sup> History bears testimony to the fact that Islam gave unprecedented impetus to the intellectual development of the human race and the early Muslims held high the torch of light and learning at a time when the world was immersed in ignorance and barbarity. "During the darkest period of European history," writes Bosworth Smith, "the Arabs for five hundred years held up the torch of learning to humanity."<sup>20</sup>

The Prophet of Islam laid the greatest stress on the acquisition of knowledge. He said: "The acquisition of knowledge is a duty incumbent on every Muslim, male and female." "Acquire knowledge from the cradle to the grave." "God in quest of knowledge even unto China." "One hour's meditation on the work of the Creator is better than seventy years of prayer." "The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr."<sup>21</sup>

Before Islam religion was synonymous with blind faith and dogmas, sacrifices and rituals; and bigotry had placed an embargo on freedom of thought and enquiry. Whenever anyone conceived any new idea or propounded a new theory, he was condemned and even tortured to death by his coreligionists as a heretic. It was Islam that for the first time discountenanced all dogmatic teachings and made reason the test of faith. "The first thing created," said the Prophet, "was reason." On another occasion he said: "Verily a man has performed prayers, fasts, charity, pilgrimage, and all other good deeds, but he will not be rewarded save in

18. A.M. Lothrop Stoddard, *The New World of Islam*, pp. 1-2. (Chapman and Hall, London.)

19. H. Hirshfeld, *New Researches*, p. 5.

20. Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism* (reprinted by Sind Sagar Academy, Lahore).

21. *The Sayings of Muhammed*, translated by Sir Abdullah Al-Mamun al-Suhrawardy (Wisdom of the East series, London, 1945.)

proportion to the sense he employs." In the words of Guizot, "Islam stands almost alone among the religions in discountenancing the reliance on tradition without argument. It demands that its votaries should undertake the investigation of the great work of their faith."<sup>22</sup>

The result of these teachings was that wherever the banner of Islam was carried outstanding centres of learning sprang up in no time and produced illustrious men in the fields of literature, arts, philosophy, science and industry. Thus Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, Cordova and Granada became from time to time reputed centres of Muslim culture and held aloft the torch of light and learning in Asia, Europe and Africa, at a time when the West was sunk in ignorance and superstition.

The Muslims, to begin with, brought together the learning of the Greeks, the Byzantines, the Persians, the Chinese and the Indians at one place. They had all the works of science hitherto produced translated into Arabic. After having learnt and absorbed all that had been written on various subjects in different languages by different peoples, they went on to make fresh researches and original contributions. They spread this knowledge wherever they went through the schools, universities, libraries, observatories and laboratories that they established. The gates of Muslim institutions of learning were open to all, to men as well as women, the rich as well as the poor, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. Thus Professor Frank Blackmore of the University of Kansas writes:

"In every country that was conquered, the first duty of Islam was to build a mosque in which Allah would be worshipped and His Prophet honoured. Attached to the mosque was a school where people were taught to read and study the Koran. From this initial point they enlarged the study of science, literature and art, and, through the appreciation of these sublime things, they collected the treasures of art and learning wherever these could be found. From imitation they passed on to the great field of creation and great advances were made to the sum of human knowledge. Schools were founded, great universities established, and libraries were built, which laid the permanent foundations of knowledge."<sup>23</sup>

There is no branch of learning to which Muslims did not make valuable contribution. They created modern chemistry, made most important discoveries in Astronomy, added much to the knowledge

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22. Guizot, *History of European Civilization*.

23. Frank Blackmore, *History of Human Society*.

of Mathematics and Medicine, laid the foundations of modern historiography and sociology, and made very valuable researches in Botany, Geology, Geography, Zoology, and other branches of Science.<sup>24</sup> The works of Al-Razi, Ibn Sina and Abu al-Qasim Zahrawi in the field of medicine; al-Khwarizmi, al-Battani, al-Zarqali and Omar Khayyam in Mathematics and Astronomy; Ibn al-Baytar and Abu Zakariya Yahya in Botany; al-Damiri in Zoology; Ibn al-Haytham in Physics; Jabir and al-Jahiz in Chemistry; Yaqut in Geography; and Ibn Khaldun in historiography and sociology (to name only the most prominent among the many Muslim scientists) laid the firm foundation on which the impressive structure of modern European science has been raised. More important than their contributions to particular branches of science, according to Robert Briffault, is the Muslim invention of the scientific method itself. In *The Making of Humanity*, he writes "Although there is not a single aspect of European growth in which the decisive influence of Islamic culture is not traceable, nowhere is it so clear and momentous as in - - - natural science and the scientific spirit".

"Science owes its very existence to Arabic culture. The ancient world was pre-scientific. The Greeks systematised, generalised and theorised, but the patient ways of investigation, the accumulation of positive knowledge, the minute methods of science, detailed and prolonged observation and experimental inquiry were altogether alien to the Greek temperament. What we call science arose in Europe as a result of new spirit of inquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks. That spirit and those methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs."<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, Muslims made important contributions to the theory and practice of music and have many glorious works of art and architecture to their credit. Muslim advances in knowledge gave stimulus to industry, agriculture, commerce and navigation. Although Muslims did not originate philosophical thought as they originated scientific enquiry, some of their achievements in this field were most remarkable. Muslim thought split up into a number of schools, principal among which were Mu'tazilism (Rational Scholasticism), Asharism (Orthodox Scholasticism), Sufism (Mysti-

24. For details see R.L. Gulick Jr., *Muhammad the Educator* (Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1969.); A.M.A. Shushtery, *Outlines of Islamic Culture* (Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1966.)

25. Robert Briffault, *The Making of Humanity*, p. 191. (London, 1928.)

cism), and Hikmat (Scientific Philosophy). The first three schools were not only born of Islam, but also fostered and developed in the cradle of that faith. The last was, doubtless, influenced in its inception by Hellenic culture, but here also Muslim philosophers - e.g., Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Maskawayh, Ibn Sina, Ibn Tufail and Ibn Rushd -- impressed their individual stamp and exercised considerable influence on the origin and development of European philosophy.<sup>26</sup>

### SUFISM

The first four Caliphs, who were elected as the heads of the Islamic state after the passing away of the Prophet, were pious and God-fearing men. They led a simple and pure life, as the Prophet had done. They were completely devoted to the service of Islam and the welfare and happiness of the people. But with the rise of the Umayyads to power, luxury and corruption crept into the court circles. The Umayyad rulers, with but few honourable exceptions, led their lives and managed the affairs of the state in a manner which was far from Islamic. Disgusted with the materialism and corruption of the men in power, a large number of God-fearing and righteous men withdrew from public life and devoted themselves to self-perfection and cultivation of inner purity and sincerity. They have been described by the Western writers as the 'ascetics' of Islam. The common people turned to them for religious guidance and inspiration for godly life. One of the earliest and most prominent among them was Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), an eminent theologian and saint. Another was Rābia, perhaps the greatest woman mystic and saint of the world. In her teaching she laid the greatest stress on the love for God. Her prayer to the Divine Beloved was: "O God! if I worship Thee in fear of Hell, burn me in Hell; and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, withhold not Thine Everlasting Beauty."<sup>27</sup>

It was among the 'ascetics' that mystical doctrines in Islam made their appearance. But the Sufis (or Muslim mystics) declare that Sufism is as old as Islam and that the Prophet himself was the first Sufi. His religious experience, both in its form and content, can be rightly understood only in the light of Sufism. The Sufi writers quote verses of the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet in

26. M. Saeed Sheikh, *Studies in Muslim Philosophy* (Pakistan Philosophical Congress, Lahore, 1962.)

27. Quoted by A.J. Arberry in *Sufism* (George Allen and Unwin Ltd. London, 1950).

support of their doctrines and practices. Among the greatest of the early Sufis were al-Muhasibi (781-837), Dhu'l-Noon the Egyptian (d. 861), Abu Yazid (Bayazid) of Bistam (d. 875), al-Kharraz (d. 899), al-Junaid of Baghdad (d. 910) and al-Hallaj. Some of these early Sufis (the so-called "intoxicated mystics") were regarded with some suspicion by the formal theologians (some of whom were, unfortunately, too literalistic and legalistic in their interpretation of religion), and it was not until the eleventh century of the Christian era that a complete understanding was reached between the theologians and the Sufis under the influence of the great theologian, Ghazzali (d. 1111). His great reputation as a theologian and authority on canon law (*fiqh*) had caused him to be appointed a teacher in the famous Nizamiyyah college in Baghdad, but his study of philosophy led him into scepticism, and disgusted with the arid pedantry of the formal theologians, among whom his life was spent, at the age of fifty he fled from Baghdad, and became a wandering dervish and lived a life of contemplation, practising the forms of devotion of the Sufis. He thus regained his faith by the way of personal religious experience. Rejecting philosophy as a means of the attainment of truth, he accepts the fundamental principle and practices of the Islamic faith on the ground of the personal experience of their efficacy in bringing the believer into union with God; he lays special stress on the ethical aspect of mysticism and on the spiritual side of worship.<sup>28</sup>

Among the many general accounts of Sufism that appeared during the tenth and eleventh centuries, mention may be made of *Kitab al-Luma* of Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d. 988), *Qut al-Qulub* of Abu Talib al-Makki (d. 996), *Al-Ta'arruf fi-madhab al-Tasawwuf* of Abu Bakr al-Kalabadhi (d. 1000), the *Risala* of al-Qushairi (d. 1074), and *Kashf al-Mahjub* of Hujwiri. With the 12th century comes the foundation of the great Sufi Orders, the most important among them being the Qadiriyyah, founded by the great Mujaddid and saint, Abdul Qadir Jilani (1078-1166); the Suhrawardiya, founded by Shihab-ud-Din Umar bin Abdullah al-Suhrawardy (1144-1234); the Chishtiya, founded by Khwaja Moin-ud-Din Chishti; and the Maulawiya, founded by Jalal-ud-Din Rumi (d. 1237), perhaps the greatest mystic poet of the world.

The Sufis speak of themselves as travellers or wayfarers, faring upon a way (*tariqa*), which leads the traveller away from self -- to begin with, from the carnal, self-indulgent self, and then, more and

28. W. Montgomery Watt (translator), *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazzali* (George Allen and Unwin); and *Muslim Intellectual -- A Study of Al-Ghazzali*, also by Dr. Montgomery Watt (Edinburgh University Press).

more from any assertion of self or conscious regard of self. The goal or destination is defined in various ways: as gnosis (*ma'rifat*), or as union with God (*visal, ittihad*), as vision of Him, in His unveiled beauty and glory, or again, as utter consumption in the fire of love, or, simply, as perfection. The gist of the matter seems to be deliverance from self by the alchemy of divine love, which takes man out of himself and prompts him to consider himself as the servant of all. In order to reach the goal a long process of training is required: the Sufi literature describes several stages (*maqamat*) through which the wayfarer has to pass. The earliest of these constitute the ethical discipline of the Sufi - namely, conversion or repentance, renunciation, voluntary poverty, patience, abnegation of the personal will in the will of God, trust in Him, and contentment, or the state of one who pleases God and is always pleased with Him and His ways. Their purpose is to set the disciple free from the trammels of the self, to dispose the soul to self-denial, self-transcendence, self-surrender. From another angle they may be said to aim at a progressive purification of the soul, a testing and training in purity of intention. The Sufi then experiences certain spiritual states (*ahwal*), according as it may please God to bestow them upon him. While the ethical stages (*maqamat*) are reached by the Sufi by his own personal endeavour (*koshish*), the spiritual states (*ahwal*) are due to supernatural attraction (*kashish*). They are the gifts of the divine grace and generosity to a soul stripped of all self-seeking and self-regard. So guided and favoured by divine grace, the Sufi may hope even in this mortal life to win a glimpse of immortality, by passing away from self (*fana*) into the consciousness of survival in God (*baqa*). Thus Junaid of Baghdad says that Sufism consists in this, that "the Lord causes you to die to yourself and to live in Him." In another place he writes: "The *arif* (gnostic) is one from the depth of whose consciousness God speaks, while he himself is silent."<sup>29</sup>

One of the most beautiful fruits of Sufism was the mystical poetry of Persia, the great representatives of which were Sanai, Attar, Rumi, Jami and Hafiz. Their poetry breathes the spirit of toleration and love for all and is the expression of the soul's intense longing for union with God. The following quatrains of Jalal-ud-Din Rumi (translated by A. J. Arberry) give expression to the various experiences of the Sufi and are the outpouring of the enraptured soul:

29. Margaret Smith (editor), *The Sufi Path of Love* (Luzac and Co., Ltd., London, 1954.)

## 1

As salt resolved in the ocean  
 I was swallowed in God's sea,  
 Past faith, past unbelieving,  
 Past doubt, past certainty.

Suddenly in my bosom  
 A star shone clear and bright;  
 All the suns of heaven  
 Vanished in that star's light.

## 2

Happy was I  
 In the pearl's heart to lie;  
 Till, lashed by life's hurricane,  
 Like a tossed wave I ran.

The secret of the sea  
 I uttered thunderously;  
 Like a spent cloud on the shore  
 I slept, and stirred no more.

## 3

I sought a soul in the sea  
 And found a coral there;  
 Beneath the foam for me  
 An ocean was all laid bare.

Into my heart's night  
 Along a narrow way  
 I groped; and lo! the light,  
 An infinite land of day.<sup>30</sup>

The greatest work of Jalal-ud-Din Rumi is his vast poem (translated by Professor R.A. Nicholson in three large volumes), the *Mathnawi*, which ranges over the entire field of Sufi speculation. It is often described as the "Qur'an in Persian". In the words of Professor A.J. Arberry, "As Ibn Arabi summed up and gathered into a single system all that had been said on mysticism in Arabic before him, so Rumi in his immortal *mathnawi* performed a like service in Persian". The grand climax of the *mathnawi*, according to Professor Nicholson, are those lines in the third book where Rumi appears to anticipate the Darwinian theory, and envisages a consummation of

30. A.J. Arberry (translator), *The Rubaiyat of Rumi* (Emery Walker Ltd., London, 1949.)



all things in which the God-descended soul of Man returns at last to its original and eternal Home.

I died as mineral and became a plant,  
 I died as plant and rose to animal,  
 I died as animal and I was Man.  
 Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?  
 Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar  
 With angels blest; but even from angelhood  
 I must pass on: *all except God doth perish.*  
 When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,  
 I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.  
 Oh, let me not exist ! for Non-existence  
 Proclaims in organ tones, "To Him we shall return."<sup>31</sup>

### ISLAM AND OTHER RELIGIONS

The Qur'an describes God as "the Creator and Sustainer of the worlds." He provides for the satisfaction, not only of the physical needs, but also of the spiritual needs of humanity. Man needs revelation from God to satisfy his religious hunger and to guide him on the straight path in the journey of life. This need is obviously felt by people all over the world. And so, the Qur'an says that God has revealed Himself and sent His Messengers to men of every country and every nation.

"There is not a nation but a warner has gone among them" (35:24).

"And every nation had an apostle" (10:47).

The Qur'an asks the Muslims to believe in the prophets and inspired religious teachers of all the nations:

"Say: We believe in God and in that which has been revealed to us, and in that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and in that which was given to all prophets from their Lord: we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit" (2:136).

It is obvious that many of the Biblical prophets have been named and acknowledged here; others have been acknowledged by the general affirmation that no people have been without a Divinely-inspired apostle, and there is a clear indication in the

31. R.A. Nicholson (translator), *Rumi: Poet and Mystic* (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. London, 1950.)

Qur'an that many of the prophets have not been named in the Book. Thus:

"And certainly We sent prophets before thee: there are some of them that We have mentioned to thee and there are others whom We have not mentioned to thee" (40:78).

The Qur'an is not a book of history; it only mentions a few of the prophets - some Biblical (i.e., of the Israelite race) and some non-Biblical (i.e., of the races other than the Israelite) - as examples. But it enjoins faith in the prophets of all the nations, whether mentioned by name or not. The Holy Prophet Muhammad regarded Zarathushtra, though he is not mentioned in the Qur'an, as a Divinely-inspired prophet, and Zoroastrains as the "People of the Book" (i.e. followers of a revealed religion). Similarly, other religious teachers such as Krishna, Buddha, Confucius, Lao Tzu, Mo Tzu, Socrates, etc. - will command the allegiance and reverence of the Muslims, as they all fall within the scope of the list I have quoted.

The equal acknowledgment of religious teachers by Islam is also apparent from the fact that the Muslims do not call themselves Muhammadans. For, their attachment is rather to the purpose of God than to the person of Muhammad. One who submits to the Divine purpose is a Muslim. Prophet Muhammad himself has been called a Muslim. Similarly, other prophets and their true followers are Muslims and have been so called in the Qur'an.

As all the prophets received their guidance from the same God - - - the one and only God - - - so the essentials of the messages of all the prophets were the same. They taught the same religion to their respective nations.

"The same religion has He established for you (O Muslims) as that which He enjoined upon Noah - and that which We have revealed to thee (Muhammad) - and that which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus - so, you should remain steadfast in religion and make no divisions therein" (42:13).

The fundamental doctrines of the true religion as it was revealed through the prophets, whenever and wherever they might have been raised, were the following:

- (1) Belief in the unity and goodness of God.
- (2) Belief that God is a living God, and so reveals Himself to man and guides him to the right path. Hence -

- (3) Belief in the prophets as the Messengers of God, and in the Scriptures (in their original forms) as the Books of God.
- (4) Distinction between good and bad, and man's obligation to shun evil and do that which is right and good.
- (5) Man's personal responsibility for his actions.
- (6) The immortality of the soul and the life after death, when the good and bad deeds of every man will become manifest.

Every one of the prophets said that the aim of religion was to bring man closer to God; true religion being submission to the will and purpose of God and doing good to others. The moral teachings of the prophets were very similar. The core of that teaching was the golden rule: "No one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother that which he loves for himself". If today the religions associated with the names of the different prophets differ among themselves, and from the fundamental doctrines mentioned above, it is because of the following reasons:

(1) The messages of the prophets who came before Prophet Muhammad have not come down to us in their pristine purity - - - the revelations and inspired teachings of the prophets were not written down in their life-time; by the time they were written down they had been intentionally or unintentionally distorted and altered in many ways by their respective followers; the Scriptures were repeatedly revised and altered; greater reliance was placed on the expositions of the religions by the later followers than on the inspired sayings and teachings of the founder-prophets (as, on the Epistles of Paul rather than on the genuine sayings of Jesus in Christianity).

(2) The missions of the prophets who had come before the Prophet Muhammad were for their respective nations and times only - - - and not for the whole of mankind and for all ages - - - and so, together with the fundamental and universal religious doctrines, they also contained many things which were of only temporary significance. The essentials were the same but the details varied to suit the needs of each age and each nation.

The Prophet Muhammad revived the original message of the earlier prophets and corrected the errors that had crept into their religions due to the failure of their followers to hand them down in their original purity. Thus the prophets of all the religions are the prophets of Islam, and truths, whenever and wherever revealed, are included in the Qur'an and are Islamic truths. But, while the earlier prophets had come for their own nations only, the Prophet

Muhammad has come for all mankind : "We have not sent thee (O Muhammad) but as a mercy to all the nations" (24:107). The religions revealed to the earlier prophets were not complete and final, being suited only for the needs of the age and nation for which each was meant, but Islam is a complete and universal religious system, providing guidance for all aspects of life and meeting the religious and moral needs of all ages : "This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion" (5:3). Moreover, the Qur'an was written down in the lifetime of the Prophet and has come down to us exactly as it was revealed to him by God.

How, then, does Islam stand in relation to the other religions?

First, Islam presents the heart and core of the earlier revealed religions - - - the undying essentials - - - apart from later accretions and emphases. The Prophet Muhammad rediscovered the original purity and simplicity of the earlier revealed religions, the timeless essentials that the earlier prophets had attempted to establish.

Secondly, the Prophet Muhammad universalised the content of the teachings of the earlier prophets by **outting** out those that are particularistic - - - of value, meaning and significance for particular nations and times only - - - and by highlighting those of universal significance.

Thirdly, Islam made clear what was vague in the other religions and taught many truths which had not been revealed earlier, as the time was not then ripe and those prophets were not sent for all mankind and all ages - - - thus, Prophet Muhammad completed the edifice of revealed religion.

Fourthly, whereas the earlier prophets had performed miracles in support of the truth of their religions and to convince their respective peoples, Islam appeals to the faculty of reason in man and asks him to observe the signs in nature and the lessons of history. The Qur'an encourages man to search for wisdom and for truth, to use his intellect and to apply reason. Now miracles may convince the few who actually witness them, but are of no value to the succeeding generations of truth-seekers. Reason and the signs in nature, on the other hand, have universal validity. Muhammad is the Prophet of the modern age and Islam is the religion of humanity. By accepting the prophets of all faiths as true Messengers of God, Islam seeks to unite all religions in a single Universal Religion.

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