

VOYAGE
to the
HEART
of the
KORAN

THE HOLY BOOK OF ISLÁM
FOR THINKING MINDS

(BY A NON-MUSLIM)

**WITH SPECIAL FOCUS:
HOLY WAR AND FIGHTING**

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PREFACE

The Search for *Salsabíl*

Salsabíl, according to the *Qur'án* (*Koran*), is the name of a fountain in Paradise that gives forth a delicious ginger-flavored drink. (*Qur'án*, Man, 76:17f) To this writer, who has a passion for ginger-flavored soft drinks, such a divine drink symbolizes the satisfying of the deep yearning to know what the *Qur'án* and other Holy Books are really saying deep down. Of course there are the outward stories and illustrations that might appeal to many. Those have some importance. But being satisfied only with that outward meaning is, perhaps, like being satisfied with an unpeeled orange, or an uncracked nut. The treasure is really in the nourishing fruit hidden within that protective outer rind or shell. How few struggle to get beyond outer coverings and into the heart and core!

There are those who pride themselves on being, so to speak, the owners of tall mounds of unpeeled oranges and large bins of uncracked nuts, yet who never taste the fruit inside. To discover some deeper hidden meaning is like eating the fruit of that orange or that nut. This is what nourishes and sustains the inner being of a human. There are experts in religion, even religious leaders, who have "all the facts", "all the answers", and little real comprehension of a deeper and more satisfying kind. They might even have memorized much of the *Qur'án*, or the *Bible*, or whatever their Holy Book is. And yet their grasp might still be literal, material, superficial. They are strangers to the deeper meanings that God hides away behind those outward meanings. Some even recite the Holy Books like parrots, understanding almost nothing of what they say – as though they uttered magical incantations. As the *Qur'án*

suggests, one should not be like a donkey carrying a load of books on its back.

It's not enough to sail across the Ocean of a powerful revelation such as the *Qur'án*, like a sailor, never getting wet in that Ocean. One must dive into that Ocean, thoroughly immersing oneself and plunge far enough down to pull up the pearls of inner meaning. It's not enough to know all the ports of call and all facets of the nature of the ocean's surface. The real diver sees a world of awe-inspiring beauty that the superficial sailor doesn't know about. A person desperate with thirst in a hot desert finally comes across a fountain of cool, sweet and refreshing water. *Salsabil* symbolizes to this seeker the ultimate quencher of the thirst for that deeper knowledge and true understanding. A fisherman or a painter might taste this *Salsabil*, eat the fruit of real deeper meaning and dive to the depths of the Ocean of Revelation, before a priest, a theologian or religious leader will. This is a *Search for Salsabil*.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to take a journey with the author through the *Qur'án*, the Holy Book of Islám, to get some understanding of that religion. We will try to be both sailor and diver, looking at both literal outward and veiled inner meanings. Jews and Christians do themselves a great service by trying to understand a Faith that claims to be next in the line of the revelations of God after their two revelations. Muslims are required to accept Moses and Jesus as being sent to Earth by God and know something about these two prior Faiths. So why shouldn't Christians and Jews learn about Islám? Bahá'ís are urged to study the *Qur'án* and Islám as part of their deepening. Islám and the *Qur'án* are the context in which their Holy Scriptures are written. And followers of the Buddhist, Hindu, Zoroastrian and other religions can surely benefit by learning something of a religion that they might have misunderstood. Even the non-religious can benefit by learning about a religion. At this moment in history, while there is so much confusion, strife and misunderstanding between Muslims and others, a knowledge of the spirit and teachings of the Holy *Qur'án* can only be beneficial.

Another motive behind preparing this book is to take a look at some of the reasons behind Islám's reputation among many in the world as a fierce and warlike religion. Some modern-day Muslim fighters terrorize the world and leave quite a number of people puzzled at how a religion claiming to be from God could possibly be so violent. The extreme devotion with which Muslim warriors fight, even willingly sacrificing themselves *kamikaze* style, seems to call for some kind of explanation. The national flags of many Islámic nations display a large sword, leaving little doubt about the central

position of battle in the religion – at least in the minds of many of its followers. Some have even called Islám, the *Religion of the Sword*. To those raised in cultures with earlier strong Christian traditions, all this violence seems utterly ungodly and alien to religion – notwithstanding that Christianity, in spite of its exhortations to peace and gentleness, has also had a vicious history of warfare, oppression and violence.

In order to get a better understanding of what is motivating most Muslims, including those that the non-Muslim world calls "fanatical" and "fundamentalist", and even arriving at a larger perspective of Islám as one in a line of many religions, it's necessary first to try to gain a rough understanding of the spirit and intent of the *Qur'án* and see, as well, how it ties in quite neatly with a number of other religions. From this it can be seen that the more warlike Muslims might not be grasping the meaning of their own Holy Book in a reasonable way. Like so many members of other Faiths who wish to promote some particular version of their religion, it seems some adherents focus intently on certain passages in their Holy Book while utterly ignoring other quite contrasting complementary commands and admonitions that moderate or even forbid the behavior they wish to adopt.

There are other writings in Islám, such as the *Hadíth*, a collection of statements attributed to Muhammad and some important figures in Islám. But these lack the full authenticity and authority of the *Qur'án*. So the focus here will be on the *Qur'án* itself. This does not cover the history, laws and tenets of Islám as actually practiced by Muslims, nor is it concerned with the social and political concerns of modern Islámic peoples. There are many other books that cover such topics. This is a concentrated look at the very heart of Islám – the Holy *Qur'án* – since all else in Islám revolves around this central core.

Since many of the concepts in this Holy Book are very foreign and strange to modern non-Muslims, especially those of the West, an attempt is made by the author to provide some kind of explanation for many of these by drawing on notions from modern science, philosophy and several other religions. It's possible that the readership of this book will be wide-ranging, including perhaps some Muslims. It's impossible to appeal to a wide range of readers – agnostic or atheist thinkers who place confidence in science, New Age enthusiasts, Christians and Jews of all shades of faith, Bahá'ís, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims of fundamentalist or liberal strains, social activists, those who study modern-day Muslim terrorism, or maybe those who are not sure what they think and believe and are curious to find out what the *Qur'án* is about – so a roughly middle course has been chosen that ventures out here and there to approach various temperaments and backgrounds.

It's not possible for a brief investigation like this to cover everything in the *Qur'án*. To do justice to a great Book even in a very lengthy tome is surely impossible. Some will note that there are points and principles missing that they consider important. This is simply a description of the things that seemed vital and very interesting to this student and which he felt might be valuable for introducing modern non-Muslims to its ideas and spirit. Muslims also might benefit from considering the points brought up that might shed a new light on their Holy Book. But this is for thinking and reasoning people; not for those who are satisfied with reciting texts without understanding, like parrots, as though the words were some kind of magical incantation, and mindlessly following whatever their religious leaders tell them.

There is a clear distinction between the revelation of God and the cultural ways in which it is expressed. One

problem frequently seen in the history of religion is that the cultural expressions of the people to which a religion comes are often taken to be just as important as the religion itself which of course must transcend all cultural expression. For example one finds many Indian religions where one cannot become a follower without adopting Indian cultural ways. European Christian missionaries unconsciously promoted their own cultural ways in addition to the Christian Faith that they wished to spread – all quite unaware that Christianity is not bound by any particular culture.

Similarly, Muslims tend to believe that Arab culture, language and ways are essential to Muslim belief and practice. So great has been the reverence for the Arabic language among Arabs, even long before the time of Muhammad, facility in the use of this language being a sign of true ability and Arabness to an Arab, that the custom has prevailed that the Qur'án must be recited only in Arabic, the language of its revelation, and that translations are not really translations but are rather 'interpretations'.

In addition to this, the classical Arabic in which the Qur'án was revealed is not the modern varieties of Arabic spoken and written around the world today. It's an old classical language, like Old English to modern English, like Latin to modern Italian. So, even when modern Arabic speakers read their Qur'án, they often don't understand what they recite very well. And, of course, for those who don't speak Arabic well, there's no understanding whatsoever. This results in the same problem that existed when the Bible of European Christians existed only in its Latin translation – which only scholarly priests could understand (though it appears that they didn't understand it too well either).

This condition makes it possible for Muslim clergy to determine just what the Muslim flock believes and acts on. And it is here that we find much of the cause for these interpretations of the Qur'án and the Hadíth that result in such unbalanced fanatical views that take verses out of the context of the whole Qur'án.

The following analogy conveys an extremely important point concerning the understanding of the spirit and letter of any religion. Consider a painting on which a very intelligent ant is walking. From such a very close perspective this ant cannot see any of the meaning and purpose of that large picture. It sees first a spot of green paint, then a stroke of white, next a splotch of red paint. He can make no sense of the way these brushstrokes are connected because he is unable to see the picture from a larger scale and perspective. But if that ant is a flying ant and flies up and away from that picture, the meaning of these brushstrokes becomes apparent as larger parts of the picture are seen. But it is only when that little ant flies far away enough from the picture to see it in its entirety that all those little brushstrokes gain their true meaning.

The Qur'án or any other Holy Book is like such a picture. It is a consistent whole whose real meaning becomes apparent only when looking at the whole. But this requires great detachment from that picture. Each verse of the Qur'án is like a brushstroke of the Master Painter, Alláh or God. Taken by itself it has a certain meaning. But the true meaning is revealed only when this brushstroke is seen in the context of the entire Holy Book, just as a green bit of paint in a painting has a meaning only when it's seen as a part of a leaf, say, on a tree in a garden. By itself it has no essential meaning.

The spiritually blind among religionists are noted for their inability to gain some objective detachment from the Holy

Book they study and so often see a verse only by itself. So they try to make deductions from this verse alone, without seeing its relation to other statements in that Holy Book. And this is how they come to such bizarre and irrational conclusions that so often do so much harm to that religion and to our world. And what is to be said of a person who cannot even see a brushstroke clearly let alone see how it fits into the picture as a whole – such as a person who is unable to comprehend the meaning of what they recite? Well, that's a recipe for trouble in our world.

Violent Muslims have been excellent in their ability to consider verses urging Muslims to violence out of context while ignoring other balancing verses that say such violence must only be carried out in defense, and then only in certain conditions of extreme danger to Islám and the community.

There are a number of English translations of the *Qur'án*. The modern English translation by N.J. Dawood (dah-wood = *David* in Arabic) of Baghdad and England will be the one used if the particular translation is not specifically stated.

It's possible for the more impatient reader who wants to know why some Muslims war and fight to simply jump ahead to the third chapter "War and Fighting" to gain a better understanding of this warring attitude – if that is all the reader wants to know. But without reading the quotes and comments of that chapter in the larger context of the central messages of the *Qur'án*, as covered in the first chapters, and even seeing these within the framework of a series of revelations, it's very possible that understanding could go astray. One of the points to be made is that a proper grasp of the teachings of Islám on fighting and war requires seeing them in the context of the

whole *Qur'án*, and as part of a series of revelations, not just as isolated statements.

The author is not himself a Muslim (nor a Christian or Jew), though he is quite convinced that this *Qur'án* is not just a product of some human mind, that it does indeed have a superhuman origin, and that Muhammad truly did become the instrument by which this transcendent revelation was conveyed to humankind. Furthermore, the author is no expert in Islámic, Arabic or Middle Eastern studies. (His background is focused on mathematics, science, philosophy and computer programming.) So it should be made clear that this is not a scholarly study of the *Qur'án* designed for a small audience of intellectuals or devotees. Rather, it's one person's attempt, as an outsider to the Islámic world, to share with the average reader, in simple everyday language, the results of his own quest to learn about the *Qur'án*, after going through that Holy Book from beginning to end a few times, writing notes and collating passages according to similar content, while comparing these with the teachings of other Holy Books, and with notions in modern philosophy and science.

It's hoped that the reader doesn't mind quotations being both paragraph-indented and having double-quotes. The usual custom is to use just one or the other. For certain reasons, it was decided to use both here.

DISCLAIMER

Aside from using many quotes from the Holy Book of Islám, the writer had made a number of comments drawn from his own studies of the Holy Books of other Faiths as well as of philosophy and some sciences. If it appears at times as though he is preaching, telling the

reader how he or she should think, feel or behave, it should be pointed out that the aim is actually to express his views of what the *Qur'án* could be saying. It would be gross hypocrisy for the writer to be preaching to readers while he is himself so far below the high standard set by this *Qur'án* and other Holy Books. Let it be stated clearly at the beginning that the writer is a seeker, an explorer, an investigator, struggling to find the deeper meaning of the religions of God. He is merely inviting the reader to join him on his voyage of discovery – because it has proven to be a most thrilling and beautiful discovery for him. Let the reader decide for himself or herself how he or she is to respond to the *Qur'án* or any other Holy Writ or even the author's ideas as expressed here; that's the reader's own business. It is the fervent belief of the author, anyway, that there is really no place in the religious realm, no real authority, for those who claim to be priests and religious leaders, who insert themselves between God and His creatures as though they were an intermediate class of being above the rest of humankind.

Secondly, all the ideas stated by the author are his own personal views and not to be directly associated with any religion or philosophy. They are necessarily imperfect and in the process of development. In a few years time it's hoped that these ideas will change and evolve – otherwise it could be said that his mind and heart have stopped growing and stagnated. Having views that do not change in some aspect

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is an evidence of a lack of serious thought. Expressing these views to others might be of some aid in fostering their own ideas.

So, welcome aboard! Let's start this voyage of discovery! Before going to the words of the *Qur'án* itself, some preparatory comments seem indispensable.

CHAPTER 1

ISLÁM AND CHRISTIANITY - TWO DIFFERENT SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

Most Muslims have a rough idea of what Christianity is about since the *Qur'án* speaks much of Christ and Mary and of Christianity as bringing a genuine religion of God to the world. But Christians, and those from cultures with an earlier Christian tradition, sometimes find it difficult to grasp how Islám could be a religion of God at all. This misunderstanding has been aggravated by unkind and unfair statements by Christians concerning Islám and Muhammad that have no basis in reality and are simply the product of religious prejudice and unjust opposition. Muhammad was meek and mild like Jesus, even shy, quite illiterate, and at first very terrified at what he was being asked to do. He actually ran home and wrapped himself in a cloak when the voice of the angel Gabriel first ordered him with: "Recite!"

Moreover, many Christians do not give much thought to the occasions when Jesus Christ became quite fierce and full of divine wrath, as when he drove the money-changers and salespeople out of the Temple in Jerusalem with a whip, turning over their tables and speaking with great power and authority. That is anything but meek and mild. He also called the people he was among a "generation of vipers", which is hardly polite and gentle. So, Christians sometimes neglect the reality that Jesus displayed God's justice just as Muhammad

often displayed God's mercy and kindness. One central point here, however, is that Christianity focused very strongly on teachings of love, mercy, kindness and compassion – "We gave him ['Jesus, the son of Mary'] the Gospel, and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of his followers." (*Qur'án*, Iron, 57:26) – while Islám balanced it with an emphasis on justice, discipline, fear of God, and submission – "Had God not defended some men by the might of others, the monasteries and churches, the synagogues and mosques in which His praise is daily celebrated, would have been utterly destroyed." (*Qur'án*, Pilgrimage, 22:40)

JUSTICE OPPOSITE MERCY

Christianity originated in a society dominated by the Roman Empire. There was already an established social system of justice in that empire – however astray of justice it sometimes went. Christ's teachings focused on the individual and said almost nothing about the social order. Jesus told his followers to "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (*Bible*, Mark, 12:17). In contrast, Islám, like Judaism, involved itself very much with the social order. The primitive and brutal Arab tribes who were to receive this revelation through Muhammad lived in a far less orderly social system than the Roman Order where Christianity found its birth. These Arabs were fierce, warlike and most difficult to control. It's one of the miracles of the Islámic revelation that these tribes were subdued and converted so quickly, and that Islám spread so very fast.

Whereas we find repeated exhortations to love one another in Christ's teachings, this is almost completely absent in the *Qur'án*. In contrast, this Holy Book focuses on justice, on righteous behavior, on giving to the needy, on fighting for God's cause. There are many admonitions that can be

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followed only if there is love and compassion in the heart of the believer, but only rarely does it come right out and say this in the *Qur'án*. Most chapters in it begin with the words, "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful", just as there are traces of firm justice in Christianity. (Modern Christian parents are starting to realize that the justice of "tough love" is the only way to help some of their more unruly children.) But in general, it's not difficult to see that Christianity had a focus on love, kindness, mercy and forgiveness while Islám focused more on justice, social order and submission. This is to be expected since justice is more to be applied in social circumstances while love and kindness are more appropriate in dealings between individuals.

In the West, there has been a vague notion among many that if we could only learn to love one another, then all the world's problems would be solved. A popular song of the 1960's, "All You Need Is Love", expressed the attitude well. But this could be wrong. Justice might be just as important, or even more fundamental, if we give it a little thought.

Justice can be likened to the firm unbending bones hidden within the human body. Love, kindness and mercy can be thought of as the soft, pliable and warm flesh that clothes those hard bones. Without this soft flesh, a set of rigid bones is just a dead skeleton. And without a firm foundation of those rigid bones, the soft flesh is as formless, weak and helpless as a jellyfish on land. Muscles exert their great pull from one unbending bone to another. Though the bones are hidden within the flesh, they are the actual foundation and basis. Justice is the real foundation of order in our societies. Loving kindness, which expresses itself between individuals, brings life, beauty, harmony and productivity over this foundation.

Consider the fish in water in a glass fishbowl. The glass fishbowl is too brittle and inflexible to show the productivity of life. This glass fishbowl is like rigid unbending justice; it cannot change and adapt for growth. Pressure to change only makes it break. And the water in that fishbowl is too fluid, changeable and formless to maintain enough structure and shape to manifest the qualities of life. The water is like gentle, flowing love and mercy. But the graceful fish swimming in that water beautifully blends the rigidity with fluidity so that it has enough rigidity to hold some kind of shape and yet enough flexibility to swim about and grow. It is only this balance between rigidity of structure on the one hand, and flexibility for change, growth and adaptability on the other hand, that allows the fish to express the amazing attributes of life. Similarly, it is only the beautiful balance of merciful love with firm justice that enables a person or a society to benefit and grow with all the qualities of life.

Love is the fire that fills the home with light and warmth; justice is the fireplace that controls, restrains and moderates that fire so that it doesn't burn that house to ashes or leave it cold and dark. Love is the bountiful flow of water that enables the farms and orchards to thrive while justice is the regulated irrigation that controls that flow -- because too little water is a killing drought and too much water is a devastating flood that washes away everything. Justice is the regulator and moderator of bountiful love. Without the controlling justice of law, rules, regulation, reward and punishment, the fire of love burns all to ashes and the flood of mercy washes away all efforts. Without justice, there is no order in an individual or a society. Without justice there's no way to moderate love and mercy so that they are productive and fruitful.

So, all we need is love *and* justice! The two complement and balance each other. Most in the West,

because of the Christian tradition behind their societies, do not yet appreciate the value of justice, particularly where religion is concerned, and easily mistake it for cruelty and revenge. Many who espouse the modern liberal philosophies of the West, and who hardly think of themselves as Christians, are unaware of how very profoundly their views are influenced by Christian notions that once laid deep foundations in their culture. They are unable to distinguish between the society's right to exercise force with constructive justice and the individual's misuse of such force in destructive criminal ways.

Many from Christian-based cultures have felt quite certain that if we could only apply Jesus' admonition to "turn the other cheek" in all circumstances, that peace would envelop the world. But this is very unrealistic. In fact, many Christian missionaries living among fierce warlike people quickly learned that "turning the other cheek" results in too many Christian deaths and few conversions. Historian R.A. Derrick, in his Volume I of *A History of Fiji* (published by the Fiji Government Press, 1950) writes:

In Bua [a province of the Fiji Islands at the western end of Vanua Levu, the second largest island of that nation], the tension between Christians and heathen flared up in open hostilities in September, 1850, when Christians sheltering in the hill fortress at Nakorobase were attacked. On 1st December a party of Christian chiefs – unarmed, and advancing to parley with their opponents at Nawaca – were fired on, Ratu George of Dama and some others being killed. Too late the missionary [Williams] and his people realized that a savage foe could not be placated by 'turning the other cheek'; and, on 2nd January,

1851, Williams armed his people. This was an extreme step for one who taught peace; but that it was necessary few will doubt. (p 104)

Despite their principles, even Christian missionaries learned to defend themselves and their communities. Hard reality quickly set in. Turning the other cheek is appropriate for dealings between individuals, which is where Christian teachings excel and are appropriate, but the social group also has the right to protect itself. A community cannot be safe and survive without the social requirements of justice in "that which is Caesar's", so to speak, playing its vital role. Jesus left this justice to the institutions of the Roman Empire; but where such a system is absent, or not able to come quickly to one's aid, then the community must carry out this defensive justice themselves. This principle of justice here involves the greatest good and the least amount of destruction.

This is why we allow police to act with a certain degree of violence, with controlled force. It's for the protection of the community. Without this firm justice, the overall amount of harm, suffering and injustice done is far greater.

Gandhi in India and Martin Luther King in the USA used passive, non-violent resistance and succeeded only because it was directed at the powers of cultures, British and American, that had already been influenced by Christian values so that the standards they held at a deeper level were cultural rather than only religious. This applied even where individuals in that society had no intention of acting in accord with Christian values. They could eventually be shamed into doing the right thing by appearing too much the oppressor, by seeming too brutal and uncivilized, by stark contrast with the passive, non-violent behavior. But would such a tactic as Gandhi and Martin Luther King used work among those for

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whom right means total victory, domination and oppression over others? Certainly not. Turn the other cheek to a wild cannibal and you'll soon be dinner for a man who thinks you're a fool.

This idea is so little grasped by some of the more naive who advocate peace, love, brotherhood and goodwill without justice that it needs some thought and explanation.

"Thus when Christ said: 'Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the left one also,' (*Bible*, Matthew, 5:39). it was for the purpose of teaching men not to take personal revenge. He did not mean that, if a wolf should fall upon a flock of sheep and wish to destroy it, the wolf should be encouraged to do so. No, if Christ had known that a wolf had entered the fold and was about to destroy the sheep, most certainly He would have prevented it.

"As forgiveness is one of the attributes of the Merciful One, so also justice is one of the attributes of the Lord. The tent of existence is upheld upon the pillar of justice and not upon forgiveness. The continuance of mankind depends upon justice and not upon forgiveness. So if, at present, the law of pardon were practiced in all countries, in a short time the world would be disordered, and the foundations of human life would crumble. For example, if the governments of Europe had not withstood the notorious Attila [the Hun], he would not have left a single living man.

"Some people are like bloodthirsty wolves: if they see no punishment forthcoming, they will kill men merely for pleasure and diversion. One

of the tyrants of Persia killed his tutor merely for the sake of making merry, for mere fun and sport. The famous Mutavakkil, the Abbasid, having summoned his ministers, councillors and functionaries to his presence, let loose a box full of scorpions in the assembly and forbade anyone to move. When the scorpions stung those present, he burst forth into boisterous laughter.

"To recapitulate: the constitution of the communities depends upon justice, not upon forgiveness. Then what Christ meant by forgiveness and pardon is not that, when nations attack you, burn your homes, plunder your goods, assault your wives, children and relatives, and violate your honor, you should be submissive in the presence of these tyrannical foes and allow them to perform all their cruelties and oppressions. No, the words of Christ refer to the conduct of two individuals toward each other: if one person assaults another, the injured one should forgive him. But the communities must protect the rights of man. So if someone assaults, injures, oppresses and wounds me, I will offer no resistance, and I will forgive him. But if a person wishes to assault Siyyid Manshadi [a person present during this recorded talk] certainly I will prevent him. Although for the malefactor noninterference is apparently a kindness, it would be an oppression to Manshadi. If at this moment a wild Arab were to enter this place with a drawn sword, wishing to assault, wound and kill you, most assuredly I would prevent him. If I abandoned you to the Arab, that would

not be justice but injustice. But if he injure me personally, I would forgive him." ('Abdu'l-Bahá'; *Some Answered Questions*, pp 170-71)

The principle is this: kindness and mercy to the wolf is cruelty to the sheep. By restraining the wolf, the sheep are protected. The act of justice involved in preventing the wolf from attacking the sheep reduces the overall amount of harm. This defensive justice results in the least amount of harm. Within justice there is a hidden mercy. And within some seeming mercy, there is injustice.

This means that the "liberal" tradition of being easy on criminals, of showing them "unconditional love", mercy and kindness, may end up being more cruel than kind and doing more harm than good. There are many who cannot respond to love and kindness, who see it only as weakness to be ridiculed and taken advantage of. The least amount of harm is arrived at by punishing a dangerous criminal so that this not only protects others who might have been his victims but also dissuades other criminals from thinking that they can "get away with it". Again, a little justice with the wolf protects a lot of sheep and minimizes the harm done, whereas kindness and mercy to the wolf brings about a greater measure of harm and is, from a larger view, more cruel.

Regardless of what "Christian nations" have talked about, this principle of justice in defense is the one they have often claimed they are applying because without it, the wolves among humankind would destroy everything.

This is precisely what the *Qur'án* teaches: that the early Muslims not only had the right but the duty to defend themselves against the fierce Arabs who were intent on attacking them and utterly annihilating them. In the third

chapter, "War and Fighting," it will be shown that the *Qur'án* supports very vigorous war and battle, but **only in certain circumstances of defense**. Offensive aggression and initial attack are forbidden, and coercion in religion is prohibited by God's command. Muslims who do this – and they are many – are flagrantly disobeying God's command to them in the *Qur'án*. This will be discussed more thoroughly in that section with many clear proofs from that Holy Book itself.

Once Christians, and those from cultures that once had a strong Christian foundation, realize the extreme importance of justice, discipline, firmness and submission, then it becomes easier to see that this justice is not cruelty and brutality, that it can indeed form a part of a divine religion. Motivation and control make the difference between a destructive act and a constructive act -- even though the two appear the same outwardly. A gift is not a bribe even though the two acts look outwardly the same. The difference is the motivation and purpose involved. So a genuine gift of love and generosity given without thought of return has an entirely different result than a bribe – which is actually a form of purchase, not a gift. Similarly, a forceful act of violent justice carried out by the community, such as by the police, is quite different from the violence carried out by criminals – even though outwardly they appear similar. One has the motivation and purpose of bringing order, protection and safety to the community while the other aims to subvert these. Using explosives in a controlled way to build a dam has constructive results while using those same explosives in a criminal way to destroy people and buildings has negative results. The response of justice is controlled, moderated and done without rage and hatred. It's aim is not to hurt the offender and get revenge against him but rather to protect the entire society. So the two actions have entirely different results: one is constructive, the other is destructive.

Of course, when a government, police, or system of justice become corrupt and oppress others, this is no longer justice; it is injustice. It is the acts of justice, not just of wearing the uniform of justice and being in institutions purporting to bring justice, that brings the beneficial results. Many tyrannical and oppressive regimes have used the excuse of maintaining "law and order" to justify their injustice.

Most teachers know that the temperaments and personalities of their students can be very different, that a method that works on one student will fail miserably with another. One student might be very sensitive and able to respond to the most gentle prodding. Just the slightest look of displeasure by the teacher may result in an immediate response. They are like violins that must be lightly stroked to make music. Others are tough and barely responsive so that only the firmest treatment has any helpful effect. These latter are more like drums that make music when pounded. Gently stroke a drum and nothing happens. Pound on a violin and you break it! The gentle person needs a gentle touch while the rougher and less sensitive one needs a firmer hand and real justice in order to bring about improvement in behavior and learning. It's a serious mistake to believe that one method should apply to all. Modern Christians who now speak of "tough love" in bringing up their children are beginning to get into reality and realize the extreme importance of firm justice, particularly when dealing with the less sensitive and responsive. The coach who is soft and gives in to the whining of his athletes does not produce winners and ends up being disliked by his athletes. The coach that does what is good for them and pushes them to their limits produces winners who love their coach for making them winners.

This same principle applies to entire societies. A gentle and loving approach with a society of very fierce, rough and brutal people will probably result in greater harm than if a stronger hand is applied. The revelation that brought us the *Qur'án* appeared among such a rough people. (This describes how they were one thousand four hundred years ago, not necessarily how Arabs are today. All humans were quite wild, fierce and savage if we go back far enough in time. And it wasn't so long ago that Europeans were known to other more civilized peoples of the time as crude and brutal barbarians who never washed.) The very strong language, stern warnings and tough talk were precisely what was required to bring about that magic transformation that happened throughout the Arabian Peninsula and beyond. The more gentle touch of Christianity was more appropriate for other societies in a different condition who were more amenable to awakening to the importance of gentleness, love, kindness and mercy.

Secondly, it appears that entire societies go through stages of infancy, childhood, youth, maturity and decline just as individuals do. As we go back in time we find a greater occurrence of the traits of childhood, even of infancy, displayed by most individuals and social groups. Perhaps at the present time many of us are like unruly adolescents on the verge of the first stage of maturity. Clearly, the way a parent or guardian must speak to a child depends on that child's level of maturation. One must speak and act differently with a small child than with a more mature youth. The powers of reason and strength of will in a small child are not yet sufficiently developed to let one use just logic and rationality to persuade the child to do what is right. The rule of reward and punishment, pleasure and pain, operate at this level of development while the higher rules of reason and conscience must wait for the intelligent ego and the conscientious highest self to become adequately strong. The *Qur'án* often speaks

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very sternly. But the discerning heart realizes that, in spite of this stern talk, a great deal of mercy and kindness is what is actually carried out.

This, however, is only one way of looking at the matter. From another perspective we could say that Muhammad's revelation revealed a stern and just God because six hundred and fifty years after the time of Christ humans had acquired the strength to be able to take justice whereas maybe during Christ's time that development was not there yet. (Though the Jews were sternly warned, they paid no heed at all, as the Old Testament clearly tells.) A tiny child cannot take justice. It needs that "unconditional love" that people in southern California are always talking about (but less frequently demonstrating). As that child grows older and stronger, it reaches a point where it can learn from the application of justice, from reward and punishment. So, perhaps this view can temper the first one presented.

If the blended balance of justice and mercy produces the best results, then it would seem that Islám balanced by Christianity would make an excellent religion. But it seems unlikely that anyone would be open to this – unless it is God Himself sending down a new revelation that brings such a balance.

The *Qur'án* is not unique in encouraging certain kinds of violence, even war, if it's a just and fair war. The *Bhagavad Gita* of Hinduism begins with Arjuna lamenting that he must kill friends and relatives in a war of the forces of good against evil. Arjuna sinks into despair saying he'd rather be killed himself. Krishna counsels him to fight vigorously and not worry about mere physical death. He says there is no real death anyway. There was a warrior caste, the *Kshatriya*, and their duty was to fight. Krishna urges Arjuna to fight in a war

of good against evil and that neglecting this is a sin. This is reminiscent of the *Qur'án*. Sections from that Bhagavad Gita will be quoted in the chapter "War and Fighting".

So, as we take a brief look at the *Qur'án*, please remember that those powerful words coming through Muhammad are not being addressed primarily to an educated and moderately civilized people as we might see today. Universal education is a thing of the present age; it simply did not exist a thousand years ago. Many of the words of the *Qur'án* are strong medicine designed to shake and change a people who knew little other than fighting, deceit and treachery, who even buried their baby daughters alive on being disappointed that the child was not a son. It's not the gentle stroke of the violin seen in much of Christ's teachings; it's the firm pounding of the drum of justice and discipline. We find some of the same in the Old Testament of the Bible, perhaps for much the same reasons. But on looking closer the reader will also find, along with this strong justice, the gentle touch so familiar to Christians that is often given as a second and preferable option. For example,

"Let evil be rewarded with like evil. But he that forgives and seeks reconciliation shall be rewarded by God. He does not love the wrongdoers....

"To endure with fortitude and to forgive is a duty incumbent on all. He whom God confounds has none to protect him." (*Qur'án*, Counsel, 42:41f)

The *Qur'án* has many statements like this permitting one situation but encouraging a yet higher standard if the believer has the inner strength of will to accomplish it. For example, men are permitted to have up to four wives on the condition

that they are fair and impartial with all of them, that all are treated equally, otherwise it states that a man should have just one wife. A while later in the same chapter of the *Qur'án* is the statement that it is impossible for men to be impartial with several wives, no matter how hard they try. The logical implication is clear: only one wife is allowed. But this is not outwardly stated. By giving the law in this way it allows the taking of several wives, up to four, for those with a loose interpretation of the Holy Book, and who don't bother making logical inferences, or who follow religious leaders who like to find ways to get around God's Will and do their own will. Stating the law in this way is a mercy to the weak and protects them from the consequences of disobeying the actual intention of the law which is to have just one wife. But it implies, for the believer with the more strict and logical interpretation, that taking only one wife at a time is really more in accord with the revelation of God through Muhammad. In a warlike society where many men were killed off and there was a surplus of women over men, survival for some unmarried women meant that some had to share a husband with one or more other women. There's often a first choice followed by a stricter more challenging choice for those of a deeper understanding and greater spiritual development.

The *Qur'án*, however, is not only for the unsophisticated and uneducated. It also speaks to the spiritual seeker, the wise philosopher and the virtuous saint. It's not all fierce gales, thunder and lightning. Gentle breezes and soft showers are there too. The perceptive reader must look for these beautiful, fragrant and delicate flowers growing in the cracks of the ponderous rocks of divine command and fierce threat.

THE FEAR OF GOD VS. THE LOVE OF GOD

Most from cultures whose basic philosophies of life have been influenced by Christian values and principles find the somewhat harsh and stern tone of the Jewish Old Testament of the *Bible* as well as the *Qur'án* to be too strong for their taste. It might seem cruel and unkind to them. Some will say, "How can a loving God speak like that to His creatures?" This firm attitude and stern justice is the other side of the coin of gentle love. Christians should not forget that Christ spoke with this stern justice on a few occasions.

As already explained, there are many among the immature who cannot respond to a loving approach. They take it for weakness, laugh at it and take advantage of it. Without the love of God they will never do what is right for themselves and their society unless they are cautioned by the fear of God. The fear of God is really the fear of consequences. If a father tells his son not to jump off the roof, explaining how this will lead to him getting hurt, that son, if of a rebellious nature, might go up to the roof and jump off in sheer defiance. After the fun on the way down he hits the ground hard and injures himself. The stern warning of that father to his son is really informing him about consequences of actions. It's not just a way for the father to be cruel and imperious over his son. After the son experiences the consequences of his unwise action, he will probably be more heedful of what his father says after that – even if he has no real love for his father. He will trust that his father gives him good advice for his own protection. He obeys out of fear of consequences.

As that young boy matures, however, he can start to obey his father out of love for him rather than just fear of consequences. This is a more noble motive. But there are very many people in our world today who cannot do the right thing out of love for their Creator. Only the fear of a strong and fierce God giving threats of horrible punishments and promises

of glorious rewards will restrain and train them. And in past ages there were surely many more who were immature and unable to rise up to the heights of those few who obeyed God out of love for Him.

Maybe it's best when we have both the fear of God, fear of consequences, and the love of God – one from the attitude of justice, the other from the spirit of love and mercy.

GOD'S WILL VS. HUMAN WILL

The people of the Western world tend to be individualistic. Perhaps it's no accident that the Christian Faith, whose teachings are directed to the individual rather than to the social order, dominated Europe for quite some time. After the European Renaissance, a great feeling of confidence in individual power and its success resulted from the consequences flowing in from Western initiative and inventiveness. Europeans moved out from their shores to explore and colonize the world. The stunning success they found in science and its technological applications enabled them to become dominant in battle, transportation, business and more. Such a heady experience easily leads to feelings of tremendous power of human will and initiative to such an extent that one can soon forget the hidden powers operating behind this that enable any of it to happen at all.

Europeans told themselves, "I'm the captain of the ship of my destiny, the master of my fate." and "Where there's a will there's a way." Only occasionally, when earthquakes and hurricanes strike, when social strife explodes that government cannot handle, when devastating wars set us back in our development, and when the Hindenberg dirigible burns, the "unsinkable" Titanic sinks, and the space shuttle Challenger

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explodes – only briefly during such tragedies is this feeling of individual omnipotence and invincibility shaken. Then does the human will begin to suspect that perhaps another Higher Will also has a part to play in all of this.

In much of the East and elsewhere, however, the tradition has been much different. Overawed by the powers of nature, and unable to adequately explain how misfortunes and crises occur in their lives, these humans come to believe that their fate is not held in their own hands but rather depends on more powerful forces outside them. They turn to gods and spirits for help, trying to appeal to them through offerings and sacrifices to be easy on us humans. And those who learned that there is just one God, a notion championed powerfully by Abraham, Moses and Muhammad, learned that their fate was held in this one God's hands. This was taken to such an extreme that it was often believed that God's Will and human will were both operating on the same level and in competition with each other, and that human will could not compete with the divine Will. They developed a sense of hopeless resignation, believing that it doesn't matter what they try to do because God's Will is going to triumph over puny human will. This comes about by thinking of God as little more than a superman who isn't so much different from us, who is just smarter and more powerful. Such a superman would be conceived of as having a will like us humans but just stronger. Such a fantasy leads to mistaken notions about will – as will be argued later.

In parts of southern Asia during the 1980s one could find people walking out in the middle of the road and refusing to move aside though they heard cars approaching from behind them because, to their way of thinking, any attempt to save themselves from onrushing traffic is quite useless, that it is God or the gods who will determine their fate. (Others among

these were simply suicidal.) If God or the gods had not decided that it's their time yet, then nothing could kill or harm them. And if God or the gods had decided that their time had arrived, then no efforts of human will could stop that from happening. So they didn't bother trying to exercise their free will.

There is much in the *Qur'án* that emphasizes the dominance of God's Will, stating that nothing can happen without it. And many Muslims have adopted the fatalistic approach to life. But there are other statements in the *Qur'án* making it very clear that human free will must be exercised. How else can one obey the commands and laws of God without using one's own human will? What's the point of sending good advice to the human world, advice to shun evil and do what is right, if human will has no part to play and is useless? In fact, the *Qur'án* tells us quite clearly that both the divine Will and human will are essential for the success of human endeavors:

"This is an admonition to all men: to those among you that have the will to be upright. Yet you cannot will, except by the will of God, Lord of the Universe." (The Cessation, 81:28)

This clearly points out the importance of the human will to be upright while emphasizing that this, however important, depends on the will of God to drive it. This is a difficult notion for both viewpoints. The East had difficulty seeing the importance of human free will to the success of any enterprise while the West had difficulty seeing the importance of the divine Will that is hidden behind it. Both have assumed that both kinds of will operate on the same level and are in competition with each other, that either one or the other must rule. This needs some explanation and will be given later towards the end of the next chapter where quotes from the

Qur'án stating the importance of the divine Will are made. The aim here in this chapter is to show that Christianity and Islám complement and balance each other in that Christianity, in its emphasis on the individual, seems to have focused on the importance of the exercise of individual human will while Islám has emphasized the importance of the divine Will. The reader will hopefully see, when we discuss this further towards the end of the next chapter, how these two kinds of will operate on different levels, and that one, the human will, is derived as a partial expression of the power of the divine Will. That is, human will is created by the divine Will and operates from it. As a very brief and inadequate explanation of this, let's just offer a couple of illustrations.

If a person in an imprisoned situation survives by eating the food cooked by a cook, and the cook brings the prepared food to the dining table for this diner to eat, then it is up to this diner to exert his own will to come to the table and to eat that food which sustains him. The very energy by which he is able to eat comes from the food that he eats. But this food would not be available to him at all if the cook's will to cook the food and bring it to the table were not involved. If the cook were to stop cooking and bringing the food to the table, then the person dining would have nothing to eat and would eventually find no strength even to be able to come to the table. He wouldn't be able to exercise his will to eat unless the cook exercises his will to cook and serve. And if the cook cooked and served the food but the diner refused to exercise his will to come to the table to eat – which is in his power – then he will soon starve and become unable after a time to come to the table even if he wanted to. The points here are that

- 1) the will of the dining person to eat depends on the will of the cook to cook and serve what he eats, and

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- 2) this eating depends on the exercise of both kinds of will; both cook and diner must exercise their wills in order for the eating to happen.

The will of the cook and the will of the diner are not in competition; it's not one or the other. Rather, they must both be put into action; and one will is dependent on the other.

Our own human free will must be exerted in order to "eat the food" of developing spiritually by obeying the commands and advice of God through the Holy Books. But this human free will cannot be exercised at all without the divine Will being behind it and driving it. "Yet you cannot will, except by the will of God, Lord of the Universe."

Here's a second example to convey the point that both levels of will, divine and human, are required for human will to operate. The physical heavens, that is, the sky, is often used as a symbol in the major religions for the spiritual heavens. Consider the relationship between the sun up in the heavens and an apple tree down on earth. If someone were to ask what causes the apples to appear on the tree, we might expect one person to explain how the tree causes this fruit to appear. Another person, however, might claim that the sun up in the heavens is the cause of the appearance of the fruit. Then the two might argue over this.

In reality, both are correct. The tree grows and all parts of it, such as the fruit, appear through *photosynthesis*. *Photosynthesis* means that the energy in the sun's light is used to combine water and the carbon dioxide animals and humans breathe out to form the sugars and starches which are used to build the materials of the tree. Without sunlight the tree cannot grow and bear its fruit. In addition, it is the sun that evaporates the water of the ocean to form clouds that have the rain that

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waters the tree. And it is the sun that creates the differences of temperature between the air over the ocean and the air over the land so that winds blow those clouds over to the land where they can pour their water down on the land. (It is even the suns or stars that create all the elements that trees get from the soil, water and air to grow. These are created from simplest hydrogen in thermonuclear reactions at the cores of stars and are then showered out to the neighborhood when the star dies in an explosive nova or supernova.) So, it's quite true to say that the sun, far away up in the "heavens", is the cause of the apples appearing on the tree (as well as all the rest of the tree too). And it's also true to say that it is the tree that brings forth the apples. The tree is the immediate cause, and the sun is the more original cause.

The plant "will" to grow and bring forth its fruit cannot operate unless the original "will" of the sun also operates. It's not a competition between the two "wills"; it's a matter of cooperation between them. Without the original "will" or "cause" operating through the sun's light shining down from the faraway "heavens", the more immediate "will" or "cause" working at the level of the tree down on earth cannot function. The latter immediate cause and will is dependent on the former original cause and will.

Perhaps the reader sees now that this illustration can be an analogy where the apple tree represents a human down in this material world and the sun stands for the Original Will which we say derives from God. We human trees must exert our will to bring forth fruit in this life, and this will is able to function only through the operation of the divine Will that shines down like the sun on all humans and all things.

This idea still needs much more explanation, and this will be offered later when we more carefully go over

statements in the *Qur'án* concerning God's Will and human will. For now, the point has been made that Christianity and Islám complement each other in this respect, Christianity emphasizing the importance of individual initiative and the exercise of human free will, and Islám emphasizing the importance of the all-powerful divine Will being behind and driving this human free will.

Again, a religion that balanced the Christian emphasis on individual will with the Muslim focus on God's Will would be most realistic and bring about the most productive results.

BRACING FOR STERN WORDS FROM GOD

The first reading of the *Qur'án* is often a shock and produces a strong reaction of some kind or other in many readers – at least for those from the West or from other non-Muslim backgrounds. There could be a temptation for the modern educated person to make too quick a judgement, to judge it by modern liberal (Western) standards, to dismiss it, and to put it down and not read further. But for some the soul somehow adjusts and begins to grasp what it didn't before. One begins to get behind the outward manner of speech used to stir and awaken a rebellious, immature and uneducated people to see *what* is being said rather than *how* it is being said. A second reading often makes the reader realize the coherent integrity and the majesty, grandeur, beauty and glory of this peerless work. Those who read it only in a translation will, some say, be unable to appreciate it as in the original Arabic where its true beauty and power lie. But the grandeur, majesty and wisdom are still there in any translation. Some readers will realize that it is not a human literary effort at all, that it is exceedingly unlikely that an illiterate and uneducated man, the

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Unlettered Prophet, produced this remarkable Book of such incomparable power, beauty and majesty.

CHAPTER 2

THE CENTRAL MESSAGES OF THE *QUR'ÁN*

There are many items that could be included here. These are just some that seemed to the writer to be of value to modern readers to give a feel for what the *Qur'án* is about. The messages concerning fighting and war are reserved for the chapter after this entitled "War and Fighting".

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations in this chapter are from N.J. Dawood's translation of the *Qur'án* into modern English.

The Holy *Qur'án* is From God (Alláh) Through the Angel Gabriel To Muhammad

The *Qur'án* is a record of the words that the angel Gabriel commanded Muhammad to speak. These words claim their source as God Himself, Who is called *Alláh* in Arabic. "Al-láh" means "**the** (one) God". "God" is the English translation of "Alláh".

Some, confused by words, imagine that giving a different name to something renders it different. Whether the sun is called "sol", "ilanga", "soleil", "shams", "Sonn" or "sun", it is still the sun. Putting a different label on it doesn't change what it is. Similarly, calling the Supreme Being by various names in different languages doesn't change that one Supreme Being in any way. Some maintain that having the name

"Alláh" makes this Creator different from the God known to Christians and others. This, of course, is absurd. So, N.J. Dawood simply translates "al-láh", **the** God, as "God".

"This Koran could not have been devised by any but God. It confirms what was revealed before it and fully explains the Scriptures. It is beyond doubt from the Lord of the Universe."
(Jonah, 10:37)

That is, it confirms that what was revealed to Abraham, Moses, Jesus and many other Prophets of God, and it explains certain matters that had confused the followers of the religions of these Prophets.

The quote above is from the Chapter entitled "Jonah" (the one swallowed by the whale). Each Chapter is one session of revelation through Muhammad. These Chapters are usually ordered with the longest first and the shortest at the end. So this quote from the Chapter Jonah is the tenth chapter of this usual ordering. Each Chapter is divided into verses. These verses are usually numbered. So that quote above is in the 37th verse of the 10th Chapter named "Jonah" of the *Qur’án*. By looking along the side of the pages of most translations of the *Qur’án* one can find the numbering of the Chapters and verses, making a verse easy to locate. Some of the verse numbers shown here may be off by one or two since the publication used mostly here (Dawood's) does not show where verses begin. The numbers here are just a guide to help a reader find a quote.

"This Book is revealed by God, the Mighty, the Wise One. We have revealed to you the Book with the Truth: therefore serve God and worship none but Him." (The Hordes, 39:1)

If the *Qur'án* Was Not from God, Men Could Have Found Many Contradictions in It

"Will they not ponder on the Koran? If it had not come from God, they could have surely found in it many contradictions." (Women, 4:82)

There Is Only One God

Throughout the *Qur'án* there is a persistent emphasis on there being one God. The story of Abraham, born into a Mesopotamian Chaldean society that worshipped many gods by means of idols, taught that these idols and gods were merely human creations, that there is only one God Who is the Creator and Lord of the Universe. Aside from some people in India, Africa and a few other parts of the world, few people still worship idols and think in terms of many gods – though we see some remnants of this in the Catholic Church in the adoration of Mary and saints, and appeals to them through statues of them – so for most modern people it would seem puzzling why there should be such emphasis on there being only one God. But the people of the Arabian Peninsula of Muhammad's time were quite thoroughly idolatrous and worshipped many gods. Some of the goddesses early Arabs turned to were believed by them to be the daughters of God.

Abraham went into the temple where the idols were in his town (Ur) and smashed them all except for the one representing the main God, **the** God, Al-láh. This justice reminds one of Jesus driving out the money-lenders and salespeople from the Temple of Jerusalem. For his adamant insistence on there being only one God to worship, he was driven out of his land in Mesopotamia and went through what

are today Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. In the Arabian Peninsula, at Mecca, he built the first Temple for the worship of the one God. This is the *Ka'bah* (cube), the Holy House, which is the central object of Pilgrimage for Muslims.

"The first temple ever to be built for men was that at Bakkah (Mecca), a blessed site, a beacon for the nations. In it there are veritable signs and the spot where Abraham stood. Whoever enters it is safe. Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to God for all who can make the journey...." (The 'Imráns, 3:96)

Those who make a Prophet equivalent to God, or who add other gods or idols to God are said to be "joining partners with God".

Muhammad Is Only An Apostle

If you turn on a radio and hear an announcer giving the news, you probably understand that this news is not coming from the radio itself, that it is just relaying what that announcer is saying in the radio studio far away. Many different radios can "reveal" the words of the one announcer who is unseen by the radio's listeners. Similarly, Muhammad is a Prophet of God, a Messenger of God, the Apostle of God, who conveys the Voice of God but who is not God Himself. The words of the *Qur'án* do not come from Muhammad, even though he is speaking those words – just as the words of the announcer one hears on the radio do not come from the radio itself. In the case of divine revelation, there is only one "radio" with this perfect reception present at a time, and it appears with its announcement only rarely in history.

There is much emphasis in the *Qur'án* on Muhammad being only an apostle, a messenger. This is possibly in response to the tendency of believers in earlier religions such as Christianity to make the Prophet of God almost equivalent to God Himself, or even identical to Him. The fervently defensive efforts of many Christians to fend off Islám and possibly other Faiths may have resulted in emphasizing one Christian philosophy's insistence that Jesus was in fact God Himself (with most bizarre logic and a puzzling refusal to acknowledge clear statements by Jesus that he was not, that he could do only what His Father in heaven instructed him to do). In Islám this equating of the Prophets with God is blasphemy. We will see later how the *Qur'án* very strongly repudiates this notion.

"Muhammad is no more than an apostle: other apostles have passed away before him." (The 'Imráns, 3:144)

Oneness of God's Messengers/Prophets

If there is only **one** God, then it is reasonable that there is only **one** true Religion of God. Why would one God create many different conflicting religions? Why would He be in competition with Himself? And this means that the many different Prophets of God who appear at different times in different parts of the world are all part of one great divine Process designed to educate and train humankind. This one Religion of God has many different revelations, each with its own name, occurring one after the other, just as a school has a number of different teachers with different names teaching different grades, yet all teaching part of one curriculum. A teacher teaches only what is appropriate for the grade of the students. To teach spherical trigonometry and calculus to first grade students, who must learn addition and subtraction, would

not work any more than would teaching addition and subtraction to those working towards advanced degrees in mathematics. Each new revelation adds more of this great Curriculum of God to the students of Earth. Learning calculus does not mean that what one learned in arithmetic is no longer true. It just adds to the truth. And the inability of first graders to grasp the truth of calculus doesn't mean that only the arithmetic they understand is true. There is only one Truth, one great Religion of God – because there is only one God – but most of the Truth is far beyond us. So each revelation adds some more, as much as we can take at any time. This is reminiscent of Jesus Christ's statement:

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, {that} shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show {it} unto you." (*Bible*, John 16:12-14)

Many differences we find among the religions are due to misunderstanding, to human corruptions of the meaning of the revelations of God, and to human additions to what the Creator has revealed. In the Holy Books we don't find any competition or essential differences between the religions and their Founders or Prophets. Jesus promoted the Old Testament of the Bible, which includes the Holy Book of the Jews, the Pentateuch or Torah. He confirmed the divine missions of such Prophets as Abraham and Moses as well as the reality of lesser prophets such as Daniel and Isaiah. Similarly, in the *Qur'án* there is repeated reference to the divine station of Jesus

and the old Prophets of Judaism. The *Qur’án* glorifies both Jesus and Mary (though Mary was not a Prophet).

The disputes are between the **followers** of these religions, not between their Founders or Prophets. Though some Muslims and Hindus of the same Indian racial background be at each others' throats and glorify in murdering each other, Muhammad and Krishna are in the utmost harmony and agreement. Again, there is one God, and therefore one Religion of God. And this one Religion of God is taught to us by different Teachers of God, the Prophets or Messengers or Apostles of God, each of whom teaches us more about this one Religion of God. There is a great wisdom in changing the name of each revelation so that there is a new name for it each time – otherwise we humans couldn't be tested to see who really recognize God and who just follow names, labels and human leaders. Each revelation brings a Day of Judgement too!

Here is a story that expresses the basic idea of this progressive revelation of God's one Religion. Once there was a dark cave in which a group of people had been trapped for a long time. Feeling pity for these people stumbling about in the darkness, the Master of the Cave brought a Lamp and put it in the center of the large cavern room in which these people were. He called the lamp *Moses*. Light shone out to every corner of that room. Those who were near to this lamp opened their eyes. They were so thrilled by it that they excitedly told those around them, "Open your eyes! We can see now! We don't have to stumble around blindly in this cave any longer." Soon many opened their eyes and began to live a better life due to this Light. So great was their adoration that some of them began to hammer out small gold trinkets to hang on the Lamp. Others made silver trinkets. Yet others draped the Lamp in a beautiful green silk adornment. And some covered it with red

silk cover. After a time, all these additions by the people of the cave had covered up the Lamp to such a degree that its Light no longer shone out. And the oil in the Lamp ran out too. Because it was dark again, the people of the cave closed their eyes. Those who loved the gold ornaments felt these with their fingers and insisted that this was the true Lamp. Those who added the silver trinkets maintained that these silver trinkets they worshipped were the true Lamp of God. The same applied to those with the green silks and red silks. Each worshipping different items that they had placed their with their own hands, they began to fight and argue again. These additions and adornments are like the philosophies, doctrines, theologies and additions that humans add to God's Religion.

The Master of the Cave returned to see his people back in their original condition again. So He took the Lamp, picked it up, and gave it a great shaking. All the manmade trinkets, silks and other adornments fell off. Then He added new oil that burns even more brightly, relit it, and the original Light shone out once again. Though it was the same Light as had shone before, He decided to give the Lamp a new name, *Christ*, this time because if He gave it the same name it had before, the blind ones who loved the gold trinkets would think that the new Lamp was about those gold trinkets, and the ones who loved the green silks would think that the Lamp was about their green silks. Again, those who were near the Lamp began to open their eyes and see the Light. They realized there was no need to be arguing and fighting over the Lamp. It was just one Lamp. Again, they urged those around them to open their eyes and see the Light. Some would reply: "Light? What does it feel like? How heavy is it? Is it like those wonderful gold trinkets I used to know?" "No, no!", the others would answer, "It's not material like that. It's Light. You need to open your eyes to know about it!" And soon many opened their eyes to

realize that they no longer had to fight over the Lamp and stumble about in the darkness of the cave.

On and on it goes. The Master of the Cave comes down now and again to shake the Lamp free of human additions, add new oil and relight that Lamp. It's one Lamp, one Religion of God. This story isn't a perfect analogy for what actually happens. Each new revelation abrogates old social laws and teachings and brings new ones. But it does convey the idea that there is just one Religion of God that is periodically renewed.

The *Qur'án* verifies the prophethood of a very large number of men of God – Prophets such as Húd, Sálíh, Shu'aib, Idrís (Enoch or Hermes Trismegistus, the Father of Philosophy), Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. It also confirms the divine bestowals on David and Solomon.

"Say: 'We believe in God and that which is revealed to us; in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the other prophets by their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them, and to God we have surrendered ourselves.' " (The Cow, 2:137)

Many statements in the *Qur'án* begin with the command, "Say". This is the angel Gabriel telling Muhammad what to say. It reminds the reader that Muhammad is not making this up, that he is saying what he is told to say, that it is from God – otherwise Muhammad could have left out this instruction to him.

"We have revealed Our will to you as We revealed it to Noah and to the prophets who came after him; as We revealed it to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon and David, to whom We gave the Psalms. Of some apostles We have already told you, but **there are others of whom We have not yet spoken** (God spoke directly to Moses): apostles who brought good news to mankind and admonished them, so that they might have no pleas against God after their coming. God is mighty and wise." (Women, 4:163) [emphasis mine]

"And tell of Our servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: men of might and vision whom We made pure with the thought of the hereafter. They shall dwell with us among the righteous whom We have chosen.

"And of Ishmael, Elisha, and Dhul-Kifl [Dawood: probably Ezekiel], who were all just men." (Sád, 38:45)

"And [tell] of Idrís: he, too, was a saint and a prophet, whom We hounoured and exalted.

Idrís = Enoch = Hermes Trismegistus was probably the Founder of the Sabaeen religion to which reference is made in the *Qur’án*. (This is the Enoch in the seventh generation after Adam, not Adam’s son.) He is also believed by some to be the founder of philosophy as we know it and is called "The Father of Philosophy". The secrets of His knowledge are said to have been deciphered by Apollonius, or Balínús, and from there many other philosophers gained much of their knowledge.

In view of this remarkable harmony between the major revelations of that part of the world, one wonders at the incredible hostility that exists between their followers today. Here is an abridged sample of the stories told in the *Qur'án* about the Prophets of old:

"Long ago, We sent forth Noah to his people. He said: 'Serve God, my people, for you have no god but Him. Beware the torment of a fateful day.'

"But the elders of his people said: 'We can see that you are in palpable error.'

" 'I am not in error, my people,' he replied. 'I am sent forth by the Lord of the Universe to make known to you my Lord's will and to give you friendly counsel, for I know that an admonition should come to you from your Lord through a mortal like yourselves, and that He should warn you, so that you may keep from evil and be shown mercy.'

"They did not believe him. So We saved him and all who were with him in the Ark, and drowned those that denied Our revelations. Surely they were blind men.

"And to the tribe of 'Ad We sent their compatriot Húd. He said: 'Serve God, my people, for you have no god but Him. Will you not guard yourselves against evil?'

"The unbelievers among the elders of his tribe said: 'We can see you are a foolish man, and, what is more, we think that you are lying.'

"Foolish, I am not, my people,' he replied. 'I am sent forth by the Lord of the Universe to make known to you His will and to give you

honest counsel. Do you think it strange that an admonition should come to you from your Lord through a mortal like yourselves and that he should warn you? Remember that He has made you the heirs of Noah's people and endowed you with greater power than He has given to other men. Remember the favours of God, so that you may proper.'

"They said: 'Would you have us serve God only and renounce the gods which our fathers worshipped? Bring down the scourge you threaten us with, if what you say be true.'

"He answered: 'Your Lord's punishment and wrath have already visited you. Would you dispute with me about mere names which you and your fathers have invented, and for which God has revealed no sanction? Wait if you will; I too am waiting.'

"We delivered him and those who were with him through Our mercy, and annihilated those that disbelieved Our revelations. They were unbelievers all.

...

"And Lot, who said to his people: 'Will you persist in these indecent acts which no other nation has committed before you? You lust after men instead of women. Truly, you are a degenerate people.'

"His people's only answer was: 'Banish them from your city. They are men who would keep chaste.'

"We delivered him and all his kinsfolk, except his wife, who stayed behind, and let loose a shower upon them. Consider the fate of

the evil-doers. [surely a reference to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.]

...

"Whenever We sent a prophet to a city We afflicted its people with calamities and misfortunes so that they might abase themselves. Then We changed adversity to good fortune, so that in the hour of prosperity they said: 'Our fathers also had their sorrows and their joys.' And in their heedlessness We suddenly smote them.

"Had the people of those cities believed and kept from evil, We would have showered upon them riches from heaven and earth. But they disbelieved, and We punished them for their misdeeds.

...

"After those We sent forth Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his chieftains, but they too disbelieved them. Consider the fate of the evil-doers. [Then follows a long story concerning Moses and Pharaoh's sorcerers, the escape of Moses' people, and the destruction of Pharaoh and his people.] (The Heights, 7:59f)

Aside from the corruptions and additions humans make to God's Faiths, there are differences in the social teachings in each religion. These are due to the varying requirements of the people and times. As stated, what a first grader needs to learn is different from what a tenth grader should learn. But it's all one School of God with one Curriculum, one Truth, that is gradually unfolded and progressively revealed. Moses and Muhammad needed to lay down strict laws required for the

establishment of order in primitive tribal conditions in the desert. There is certainly good sense in forbidding the eating of pork in the sweltering desert where no refrigeration or other means of preservation is available in order to avoid problems such as trichinosis. And there could be other reasons too, of which we are now unaware, for why an all-knowing God would forbid pork. Moses and Muhammad could hardly explain the technical details of all this to an ignorant and immature people; these Prophets of old simply commanded their followers not to eat pork. And there are many other social teachings that are required at the time that are appropriate to the people to whom they come. These will be different in each situation.

In contrast to these changing social situations and needs, there are the more stable and unchanging spiritual laws brought by all the Prophets – the commands to be fair and righteous, to be truthful and honest, to pray to God with all one's heart and so on.

The Divine Mission of Jesus

There is a Chapter, the 19th chapter, of the *Qur'án*, entitled "Mary", that tells the story of Mary in some detail and glorifies both Jesus and Mary. One interesting part is that it recounts how Jesus taught even as a baby in his cradle. Here are some other quotes concerning Jesus that correct some mistaken notions of certain Christians concerning monkhood and monasticism, the Trinity, the Sonship of Jesus, and the identity of Jesus with God. Mention is also made of some the miracles that occurred through Jesus.

"We gave him ['Jesus, the son of Mary'] the Gospel, and put compassion and mercy in the hearts of his followers. As for monasticism,

they instituted it themselves (for We had not enjoined it on them), seeking thereby to please God; but they did not observe it faithfully. We rewarded only those who were true believers; for many of them were evil-doers." (Iron, 57:26)

"One day God will gather all the apostles and ask them: 'How were you received?' They will reply: 'We have no knowledge. You alone know what is hidden.' God will say: 'Jesus, son of Mary, remember the favour I have bestowed on you and on your mother: how I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so that you preached to men in your cradle and in the prime of manhood; how I instructed you in the Book and in wisdom, in the Torah and in the Gospel; how by My leave you fashioned from clay the likeness of a bird and breathed into it so that, by My leave, it became a living bird; how, by My leave, you healed the blind man and the leper, and by My leave restored the dead to life, how I protected you from the Israelites when you had come to them with clear signs: when those of them who disbelieved declared: 'This is but plain sorcery'; how when I enjoined the disciples to believe in Me and in My apostle they replied: 'We believe; bear witness that we submit.'

" 'Jesus, son of Mary,' said the disciples, 'can your Lord send down to us from heaven a table spread with food?'

"He replied: 'Have fear of God, if you are true believers.'

" 'We wish to eat of it,' they said, 'so that we may reassure our hearts and know that what you

said to us is true, and that we may be witnesses of it.'

" 'Lord,' said Jesus, the son of Mary, 'send down to us from heaven a table spread with food, that it may mark a feast for us and for those that will come after us: a sign from You. Give us our sustenance; You are the best provider.'

"God replied: 'I am sending one to you. But whoever of you disbelieves hereafter shall be punished.'

"Then God will say: 'Jesus, son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: "Worship me and my mother as gods besides God?" ' '

" 'Glory to You,' he will answer, 'how could I ever say that to which I have no right? If I had ever said so You would have surely known it. You know what is in my mind, but I know not what is in Yours. You alone know what is hidden. I told them only what You bade me. I said: "Serve God, my Lord and your Lord." ' ...
" (The Table, 5:111f)

"People of the Book [Christians and Jews], do not transgress the bounds of your religion. Speak nothing but the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was no more than God's apostle and His Word which He cast to Mary: a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His apostles and do not say: 'Three.' Forbear, and it shall be better for you. God is but one God. God forbid that He should have a son! ..." (Women, 4:171)

This shows how the *Qur’án* strongly refutes the notions of the Trinity [three gods in one: Father, Son and Holy Ghost], of Jesus literally being God's son and equivalent to God Himself. The Bible by itself is sufficient to show this quite clearly. Notions about the Trinity form no part at all of Christ's teachings and seem to have been introduced from the religions and philosophies extant at the time such as Mithraism, Manichaeism, versions of Sabaeism, Diana/Artemis worship, and Alexandrian Greek philosophy. (Many of the ceremonials, sacraments, dress, priestly hierarchy, customs and trappings of the Catholic and Orthodox Christian Churches entered from these and other earlier popular Roman religions of the time.)

This is most unfortunate since it was such extraneous ideas that were the issues of dispute that divided Christianity thus irreparably injuring it. How interesting that non-Christian teachings in Christianity were the cause of the divisions within Christianity that damaged the spirit and power of that Faith so horribly, rendering it incapable of truly making our world a peaceful place. What fruit can come from a once-living Tree of God that has been hacked into many pieces at the hands of foolish followers? That blessed Tree once planted in our world through Jesus Christ has now been cut up into thousands of pieces. How many sects and denominations there are, each claiming to be the correct one!

As they say today, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure these things out. One simply needs to read and digest what one reads in the Bible free of prejudice and the influence of those who wish to do your thinking for you – though this often doesn't qualify as thinking. Indoctrination and prejudice blind the heart and mind so that they can no longer reason and see the whole picture. Such blindness of heart and mind enable even the most scholarly of people to be able to completely

ignore statements that are blatantly obvious to others while focusing on just those that support what they wish to believe.

"Jesus cried and said, 'He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.' " (*Bible*, John 12:44)

" 'For 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.' " (John 12:49)

"And he [Jesus] said unto him, 'Why callest thou me good? {there is} none good but one, {that is}, God ... ' " (Matthew 9:17)

How can one reconcile such statements and so many others like these by Jesus Christ Himself with the unsupported claims of religious leaders that Jesus is God, and that Mary is "the mother of God"? Nowhere does He equate Himself with God! Or claim that His mother is God's mother. What patent irrationality and willful blindness! What arrogant insolence before God to add such unreasonable things to God's pure revelation! Imagine thinking that the infinite Creator is no more than a mere superman who came from a mother he did not create! Is Mary the Creator? God gave us these minds as precious gifts. This mind is what distinguishes us from the animals. Surely the Creator meant us to use the minds he gave us and not just shut them down in the name of faith. True faith is not ignorant and blind. And yet we find so many carrying on with such insulting and belittling references to their Creator, claiming the infinite, self-subsisting and unknowable Supreme Being has a mother, an equal, a son. This, from those who claim to believe in Jesus' words as recorded in the Gospels as the Word of God! That anyone can accept such ungodly

statements as true is proof positive that many minds have been shut down and ceased to think.

Such unreasonableness should form no part of religion; there is nothing whatsoever in Christ's teachings, or the Bible in general, to support it. A faith built on sound reason, clear vision and deep understanding is grossly preferable to the ignorant blind faith that misleaders have claimed is a sign of true belief and devotion. As Jesus prophesied, the blind lead the blind into the ditch.

"But he [Jesus] answered and said, 'Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them [Jewish Pharisees or priests] alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.' " (*Bible*, Matthew, 15:13-14)

The authority of the *Qur’án* emphasizes what should be obvious to anyone who can read the Bible with an open, thinking and unprejudiced mind and heart.

According to the *Qur’án*, Jesus foretold the coming of Muhammad.

"And [tell] of Jesus the son of Mary, who said to the Israelites: 'I am sent forth to you from God to confirm the Torah already revealed, and to give news of an apostle that will come after me whose name is Ahmad [another name of Muhammad, meaning 'The Praised One'].'" (Battle Array, 61:5)

Some interpret the Biblical prophecies of the coming of the "Comforter" or "Paraclete" to be a reference to Muhammad.

Concerning the miracles that Jesus did: many doubt them and say that such things are not in accord with science. In fact, it is science that has brought about many technological advances that would certainly be regarded as miracles by the people of older times. We even call them "miracles of science" now. Flying in an airplane would seem miraculous to the people of just a couple of centuries ago. Planes fly not because they break the laws of physics to overcome gravity but because they take advantage of these laws in new and unexpected ways. And what about "miracle drugs" that so quickly remove certain ailments or symptoms? If we could use a time machine to bring a group of Isrealites of Jesus' time to our current time and show them our airports, our factories, our hospitals full of fancy devices, our nearly instant worldwide communication, our televisions and telephones, and our astronauts flying to the moon in spacecraft, they would think it miraculous.

We don't know that the miracles performed by Jesus were contrary to the laws of science that we understand now; we know only that we are not now able to do such things. If the Creator is the source of the rules by which our world works, then He can probably do what we cannot through His Prophets. If one can create galaxies with suns and planets, one of which has produced life that has culminated in us humans, then materializing a table full of food and breathing life into a clay bird and making a baby speak wisdom might be easy tasks. But for those who imagine that the laws of physics and logic, and a realm of space, time and matter exist independently of a Creator, that they "just are", that they are prior to a Creator and that such a Creator is limited by the conditions of both what He did not create as well as by what He did create (what confusion! what a belittling of the Creator!), then of course there will be problems coming to grips with the notion that what we don't expect and are not

accustomed to might happen through a superior power implemented only rarely during the appearance of the Prophets of God. Unexpected, amazing and beyond our current comprehension of science and the laws of nature? Yes! Against the laws of science by which the Creator creates and maintains His universe? No!

"He [Jesus, Mary's son] is a portent of the Hour of Doom." (Ornaments of Gold, 43:61)

This was added in preparation for the quotes concerning the Hour of Doom, the Catastrophe, the Last Day, the Day of Judgement, the Resurrection.

Glorification and Praise of Mary

Though Mary is not a Prophet or Messenger of God (and hardly the mother and source of the Creator), it is very remarkable how many pages of the *Qur'án* are devoted to her, how much praise is lavished on her. Jesus is usually referred to as "son of Mary". We quote only a small part of this.

"And remember the angels' words to Mary. They said: 'God has chosen you. He has made you pure and exalted you above womankind. Mary, be obedient to your Lord; bow down and worship with the worshippers.'

"This is an account of a divine secret. We reveal it to you [Muhammad]. You were not present when they cast lots to see which of them should have charge of Mary; nor were you present when they argued about her.

"The angels said to Mary: 'God bids you rejoice in a word from Him. His name is the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary. He shall be noble in this world and in the hereafter, and shall be favoured by God. He shall preach to men in his cradle and in the prime of manhood, and shall lead a righteous life.'

" 'Lord,' she said, 'how can I bear a child when no man has touched me?'

"He replied: 'Such is the will of God. He creates whom He will. When He decrees a thing He need only say: "Be," and it is.' ... "
(The 'Imráns, 3:43f)

Islám - Submission, Surrender

The name of the religion brought through Muhammad is " 'Islám". This means "submission" or "surrender". The aim of the *Qur’án* is that we humans should submit to God's Will – not for God's benefit but for our own benefit.

When the Spanish first arrived on horseback in the Southwest of the USA, the indigenous original Americans ("Indians") believed man and animal to be one large creature, like a camel with a human hump, and ran away terrified. They were unable to distinguish between the human rider and the animal on which he rode. We humans often have a similar difficulty in distinguishing between the animal nature of our bodies and the human spirit that "rides" on it through this life.

If we move through time from those early days to the past couple of centuries, we find the cowboys of that same region of the American Southwest attending competitions called *rodeos*. One of the major parts of a rodeo is where cowboys try to ride wild, bucking unbroken horses as long as

they can. It's a very dangerous sport and can result in serious injuries to the cowboy. In this case there is little trouble distinguishing the cowboy from the animal he rides; the two are soon separated.

The pain and trouble involved in trying to ride a bucking *bronco* is because the lower animal is in control of the higher human trying to ride it. When the lower is in charge of the higher, chaos and trouble result. When the lower part of our being, the animal nature of our bodies with all its instincts, urges and drives, dominates the higher part of us, then confusion, disturbance, disorder and pain rule our lives. This is also what we see in our world in general – because the lower nature of so many, particularly the leaders, is in charge of the higher truly human nature. (Please remember: this isn't preaching to you; it's an attempt to try to offer a rationale for the concept of submission so central to Islám.)

When a wise parent or teacher tries to train and discipline a young child, the result is not rarely a defiant and rebellious resistance to being subdued – just like a wild horse resisting being controlled by a cowboy mounted on it. The same is true when God sends a revelation to the immature in our world – and we've been immature for thousands of years. The child and adolescent both rebel and resist being subdued. As noted above in the *Qur'án's* stories of the reception we humans have given to God's Messengers and Prophets, we didn't want to submit, to be subdued, tamed and trained. We resisted fiercely, like a bucking bronco. And the results were disastrous.

When the intelligent cowboy finally "breaks" the horse, when the horse finally submits to the will of that human trying to tame and train it, then the relationship between the cowboy and the horse, the human and the animal, changes radically.

The horse is fed, cared for and loved by the cowboy. The horse submits to the cowboy's will and goes wherever the cowboy directs it. In return it is treated with the greatest care and tenderness. A new relationship develops between the intelligent human and the submissive animal he rides. When the higher is in charge of the lower, then order, peace and productive results follow. The chaos, confusion, pain and trouble that exist when the lower dominated the higher gives way to a far more beautiful and fruitful development.

When humans learn to distinguish between the animal nature of the body and the divine nature of the human spirit that rides this animal in us, then we can begin to exercise the powers of the higher part of us so that it can eventually dominate the lower part of us. We become more "civilized" and fruitful. This doesn't mean that the lower part is killed or injured; rather, it's "broken", tamed and trained.

The spirit of the *Qur’án* is to tame and train the lower nature of humans so that we can grow and develop as we were designed to do. The aim is to get us, like the wild horse, to submit to a Higher Will, so that the higher will in us will dominate the lower animal will in us in order that the best in us will come forth. Sometimes the cowboy has to be very firm, stern and persistent in breaking and taming the wild horse. Similarly, the Voice of God, speaking through the *Qur’án* 1400 years ago to rebellious and immature humans, had to be forceful, stern and persistent – just like a father disciplining and training his wayward child. The idea is that an all-knowing and all-wise Creator Who designed every aspect of us and this world we live in surely knows better than we do what is best for our development.

God is really speaking in such strong language to the wild animal and selfish ego in us, the rebellious part of us that

isn't the real us at all. To our true higher human nature, He can speak more gently and wisely. But so long as our consciousness is focused in that animal in us rather than in our highest nature that is still asleep, then that is what must be spoken to in terms that lower part can understand. It is only the higher human spirit that continues life into the "next world" that the *Qur'án* speaks of. We get off the horse and continue free of it after death. So God speaks sternly to a rebellious animal part that isn't the real human. When we finally come to realize that we are not these bodies, that we are not animals, that we are actually human spirits riding on these animal bodies through this life, then we realize that God is not speaking harshly and fiercely to us; He's saying those stern things to the animal on which we ride, hoping to get us to tame and train it to submit, so that our real self, the human spirit, will prosper and develop well. But most don't realize that they are not their bodies, that they are not the animal in them. The illusions of materialism fool them into thinking that they are their bodies, that the rider and the horse are one being, just as the early indigenous Americans believed.

When the body dies, the intangible human soul no longer rides it. It continues to live without such a body. We are not these bodies. They are the vehicles we drive through life – while we're awake and alive. During sleep and after death we get out of these vehicles and function without them. So death is not the death of our human spiritual reality, the true and real human identity; death is the dying off of the vehicle we drive through life.

"Nay, but as when one layeth
His worn-out robes away,
And, taking new ones, sayeth,
"These will I wear to-day!"
So putteth by the spirit

Lightly its garb of flesh,
And passeth to inherit
A residence afresh."

(Hindu Holy Book, *Bhagavad-Gita*, Chapter 2)

Our growth and development in this life occur through our struggle to break, tame and train this animal mount, this vehicle. The soul grows in strength through this struggle. The weightlifter gets strong because he struggles against the resistance of gravity that pulls the weights downwards. The spiritual exerciser gets strong by struggling against the downward pull of the animal he rides through life. The human spirit pulls upwards while the animal spirit pulls downwards. Just as the fruitful tree grows up against the opposing force of gravity, so also does the real human grow upwards against the opposing force of the animal kingdom it rides. The religions of God have a major purpose in helping the soul develop with strength by giving instructions as to how to break, tame and train this animal so that when we leave it at the time of death, we will continue with strength and freedom.

Whoever doesn't gain this strength and power, who remains the helpless victim of the animal he rides through the mistaken illusion that he is the animal, will certainly experience tremendous remorse at having let the animal he rides dominate him, leaving him weak and helpless.

The spirit of the *Qur'án*, and of the other Holy Books that are somewhat in harmony with God's revelations, is to tame the wild and immature animal and ego within us so that our souls, our true realities, will rise with strength, power and freedom at the conclusion of this earthly training session. The wise coach pushes his athletes hard, even putting weights and other handicaps on them so that when they enter the competition without these handicaps, they win easily. The

athlete that does best is the one that **submits** to the instructions of his coach and trainer. The athlete that doesn't submit ends up losing when the final competition arrives. Islám is submission – for our own lasting benefit.

"Nay, — whoever submits His whole self to Alláh and is a doer of good, — He will get his reward with his Lord; on such shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (Yusuf 'Ali translation, The Cow, 2:112)

"Indeed, those that surrender themselves to God and do good works shall be rewarded by their Lord: they shall have nothing to fear or to regret. (Dawood translation, The Cow, 2:112)

Submission is also a major theme of much of the various parts of Hinduism. The word "Yoga" means "yoke". Westerners think of Yoga primarily as the part that deals with physical health, but there is much more. The true follower of Yoga is "yoked", like oxen, so as to submit to a higher will.

There is a very subtle difference between one Western view of submitting to God's Will and one Eastern Muslim view of this. Perhaps it can be hinted at in the following. The Western follower of religion, accustomed to individualism and personal initiative, prays: "O God! Please help me with *my* plan to help Your Cause!". The Eastern follower of religion says: "O God! Please help me with *Your* Plan to help Your Cause! (Make me an instrument of Your will.)" The first maintains a full sense of self and ego in God's service while the second submits and tries to become a selfless tool, an instrument, of the Higher Will. But it would be unfair to say that many Christians do not also ask that God *use* them as He wishes and direct them as He pleases.

The remainder of this section is for those who are interested in carrying some of the ideas here a little further. What has been said up to this point is perhaps adequate. In order to make this idea simple and not bring confusion through complication, just two kinds of human self have been described here: a higher divine self that is our true reality, and a lower animal self that is our temporary vehicle in this life. In reality it's probably a little more complex than that. The highest self meets the lowest self and where the two different realms of consciousness meet and mix forms a third intermediate kind of consciousness. Like two beams of different colors of light shining on a surface so that there is an area of intersection where they overlap, three regions with three colors result. Similarly, the meeting of our true divine nature with the lower animal nature of the body creates three distinct forms of consciousness or self. The lowest animal self might be likened to the *id* that Freud described and which dominates in infancy and childhood. The intermediate self is the clever and self-centred *ego* which, when dominant over the other two forms of self, results in the appearance of the qualities, attitudes and behavior of adolescence. The highest self is something like the *superego* Freud referred to which is moved by conscience and the highest altruistic ideals. (He was clearly seeing this superego from the viewpoint of the intelligent ego, otherwise he wouldn't have called it the *superego*. This writer prefers the term *io* for this highest self.) The attributes of calm wisdom, insight and stability that are characteristic of maturity appear the moment this highest form of self or consciousness becomes dominant over the other two.

From this it's clear that both the animal *id* and intermediate *ego* are the lower nature that must eventually be overcome by the highest nature. Both of these lower forms of conscious self are dependent on the animal nature for their

existence. These are the two that must submit to the true highest human nature. Since the ego depends for its existence on our animal body and nature (even though it also derives its powers from the highest nature), its consciousness disappears along with the purely animal id consciousness when the body dies and the true human reality is freed to go its way unencumbered by it. An argument will be made later that Satan or "the Devil" is an easily-grasped symbol to represent the powers of these lower natures, animalism and egoism, as they work to hold back the development of a human towards maturity where the highest true self becomes dominant. This needs much more explanation which will be provided later (particularly in the section dealing with Jinn, Satan, the Angels, Adam and the Garden of Eden in a later chapter covering "Other Interesting Matters in the *Qur'án*").

There seem to be forms of social organization appropriate to each stage of this psychological development. The tribal order that enforces unquestioning conformity suits collective childhood. The "civilization" we've known for the last 6000 years with its diversity of occupations and room for individualism is appropriate to a society in which the characteristic traits of adolescence dominate. And a form of social order that we have not yet seen, that will be as different from the civilization we know now as it is different from the tribal order, will be best suited to human collective maturity in the days ahead of us. Of course these stages of psychological development described here as "childhood," "adolescence" and "maturity" are not the same as the cultural, chronological and physical definitions using these same words. That is, one's age, stage of physical development and social classification as a child, youth or adult as recognized by one's culture are not the same as these psychological stages defined by characteristic attitudes and behavior. There are 90-year old men who display the attributes of children and 12-year olds who seem almost

mature and adult. Different cultures experience the psychological stages at different ages and have different criteria by which they define one's stage. (African Zulus and Swazis with whom this writer lived for many years insisted that he was still *umfana*, a youth or boy, not *indoda*, a grown man, even though he was in his 30s, because he had not yet married. One is not a man whose opinions and views are worth listening to in those cultures until one has a family.)

This point that a particular kind of social structure is suited to each collective stage of psychological development has a bearing on the laws and social standards brought with each revelation of God. Some revelations were clearly appropriate to the child and the tribal order. Others, such as Christianity and Islám seem suited to life in a civilization. A major world religion that has appeared since Islám, in the mid 19th century, that has over six million followers and which, after Christianity, is the world's most widespread religion, the Bahá’í Faith, makes a claim to be suited to a stage of human maturity that will appear in the not too faraway future. In fact, it claims to a means of bringing about the "coming of age" of humankind, that first phase of maturity. The very remarkable Writings of such a potent Faith can hardly be ignored here – they arose within the context of Islámic culture and make frequent reference to the *Qur’án*, very aptly explaining so many of its statements. So, along with the Holy Books of Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism, the Writings of the Bahá’í Faith will also be quoted.

The Principle of Purity

A little thought reveals that the attribute of purity is intimately related to justice. The *Qur’án* is much concerned with justice and purity. This needs explanation. Without such explanation, it's difficult for the average Western person to

grasp the strict demands of the *Qur’án* to Muslims concerning who they are to befriend and marry, and the degree to which purity and holiness are expected of them. For example, the following sentence from the *Qur’án* might seem very unfriendly and unkind to many from the West.

"Therefore shun those who turn away from Our Message and desire nothing but the life of this world." (Yusuf 'Ali translation, *The Star*, 53:29)

Purity refers to separation of the components of things so that the one which is to become pure is free of mixture, association or connection with all other components – particularly of lower components. For example, purified gold ideally has all parts that are not gold removed until only gold remains. When we wash our bodies, we are separating the non-living things such as dirt from the body so that mostly the living components that are genuinely part of the body remain.

The principle of mercy mixes components together while the principle of justice separates them. Mercy lets the lower rise to a higher position. Mercy lets the wolf mix with the sheep while justice separates the two and protects the sheep. An illustration of this is appropriate here. Consider how rocks and soil tend to fall to the bottom of a body of water while air and other gases go to the top. The sun evaporates the water of the ocean so that its moisture rises up into the air – which is not a liquid's natural home. This forms clouds that block out the light of the very sun that lifted them up through its "mercy". These clouds threaten the land with fierce storms full of lightning and thunder, and finally return "home" through "justice" by falling as rain and running off in rivers back to the ocean. Justice returns the water to its ocean home and

establishes purity by separating the water from the air and the land.

Similarly, consider how the same sun, by creating differences in the heating of the atmosphere, produces winds that blow across the land to create dust and sand storms that darken the sky and make it difficult to see. Strong currents in the water also stir up the mud at the bottom of seas, lakes and rivers to cloud the water and make it difficult to see through it as well. Mercy can bring temporary confusion, lack of clarity and disorder because the lower rises and gains control over the higher – just like the wild bucking horse dominating the higher intelligent cowboy.

Justice brings about purity that separates the different components of earth, water and air. When this purity and separation exists, the sun shines unimpeded, the air is crystal clear, the water is also quite clear and pure, and all the dirt and stones are at the bottom. Order results. Justice brings purity, order, clarity.

We spoke earlier of how some humans are like wolves that tear innocent sheep to pieces and devour them. God's attribute of mercy stirs up the world so that those whose natural home is the lowest condition, rise to higher positions where they don't really belong – just like the clouds being raised from the ocean into the air where they block out the sun that raised them. The lower who are raised by Mercy to a higher position in this world aren't grateful for this. Like the clouds, they block out the very thing that lifted them up. These lower kinds oppose the very Source of Mercy that lifted them up.

We look at our world and see that tyrants, bullies, troublemakers, mischievous souls, corrupt politicians, unscrupulous businessmen, wealthy bribers and manipulators,

selfish brutal chiefs, warlords, corrupt priests and other ungodly religious leaders, and many others who are "evil" have in general ruled the human world. They are like clouds lifted up through mercy so that they rule over the land and block out the sun. The history of divine revelation has been one of religious leaders, raised up in the world by God's mercy, attacking, rejecting and crucifying His Prophets and Messengers. Wherever we look today, and over the past six thousand years of human history, we see the lowest, the most unworthy, ruling over the meek, the worthy, the wise, the honest, the altruistic, the fair, the just. This is really the product of God's mercy to the wolves that they rule and control the sheep to a large degree. In our stages of immaturity, we cannot take justice, so mercy rules; and this is the result. Mercy is milk to the weak and immature; justice is meat to the strong and mature.

In the previous section there was mention of what happens when the lower is in control of the higher, when nothing but chaos, destruction and ruin results. Is it any wonder that human history has been the story of one war followed by another. Many history books are mostly the recounting of one war or battle after the next – when not telling of the folly of the powerful and famous. To many, history is war stories. The longest period of peace recorded in any society on Earth was that amazing reign of three centuries of warless constructive cooperation that took place in a large part of India after King Ashoka accepted Buddha and his teachings of peace and compassion. King Ashoka said that he had conquered thousands of others for so many years, that now he would accomplish the far more difficult job of conquering himself through Buddha's help. What an immense outpouring of benefit followed from that one beautiful act of submission to what was highest and noblest in him! What king or other ruler since him has acted with such wisdom, courage, nobility and

humanity? Aside from this excellent example, this shining light in a dark world of foolish leaders, we've been at each other's throats like ravenous wolves most of this time. The wolves have been in charge. Injustice has reigned supreme. Consequently, chaos, trouble, suffering, ruin, misery and confusion have filled our world. This is all the consequence of our having ignored or rebelled against the excellent advice given to us by our Creator through His revelations. The wild unbroken horse has dominated the intelligent human rider and made it a very rough ride for us over the past 6000 years!

Perhaps much of this is due to our immaturity, to our still being in the stages of rebellious adolescence and foolish childhood. The lower has been in charge of the higher. So chaos, confusion, war, tyranny, trouble and endless ruin have continually plagued us. Not long after we go to immense trouble to build up our cities others, or even we ourselves, work to tear them down.

The principle of justice, however, separates the different groups and returns each to its "home", to the place where it really belongs. Justice puts the wolf where it cannot harm the sheep. It returns the fierce stormclouds full of water vapor that block out the sun to the ocean. It lets the mud that clouds and dirties the water settle through peace and tranquility so that it becomes clear and pure. What is highest remains pure and undefiled by what is lower.

This is why, when the principle of justice reigns in our future maturity "the meek shall inherit the earth". The most worthy will rise to the top. The righteous will rule. The wise and intelligent will reign over those who are only clever and crafty. Then, order, peace and immense productivity will appear. The intelligent cowboy will have broken, tamed and

trained the wild horse of a lower nature and caused it to **submit** to what is Higher.

The *Qur'án* insists that true Muslims must not marry nonbelievers or associate with and befriend them. The idea is separation and purity. Nonbelievers are not allowed in the mosques. To Western ideas conditioned by Christian notions of love for all, this sounds very unfriendly and unloving. But if we look more closely, we find that there are similar exhortations in Christianity and other Faiths to avoid the companionship of the ungodly. This justice brings order and purity to the world.

"Women impure are for men impure, and men impure for women impure and women of purity are for men of purity, and men of purity are for women of purity: these are not affected by what people say: for them there is forgiveness, and a provision honourable. (Yusuf 'Ali, Light, 24:26)

"Give warning to the hypocrites of a stern chastisement: those who choose the unbelievers rather than the faithful for their friends. Are they seeking glory at their hands? Surely all glory belongs to God." (Women, 4:137)

"Believers, do not choose the infidels rather than the faithful for your friends. Would you give God a clear proof against yourselves?" (Women, 4:135)

By itself such justice can become fanatical and harmful. But when balanced by the more Christian ideals of love for all, then the optimum good is attained. Is there a religion somewhere that balances and harmonizes these two opposed

principles? – that opens the door of friendship and fellowship to all the peoples and religions of the world and yet moderates this with a wise restraint in befriending the ungodly and others in a low condition whose continued association would work to pull us down?

These points are stated so that the modern Western reader will not be too quick to judge the *Qur’án* by the standards of his or her culture and background. There's a great wisdom in balancing separation and purity with friendly association and love for all. Consider how the atoms do not come apart to dissolve into an amorphous mass in order to form molecules. Rather, they maintain their integrity and purity while they combine together to form molecules. Similarly, molecules maintain their integrity when they form into the cells, tissues and organs of the human body. The smaller parts join together to form larger systems, but without losing their own integrity, order and purity. We don't have to take apart the family to put humans into communities. Cities and towns are not dissolved to form nation states. The countries of the world do not have to be dismantled to become members of a world community. The smaller unit maintains its integrity and purity while becoming part of the next larger unit.

Purity, sanctity and holiness of spirit mean that what is lower in a person, the selfish and animal nature, is separated from what is higher, which is the highest self which is the expression of the divine in a human. When this true human nature is refined and purified from what is lower, then, like the cowboy and the horse, great results are forthcoming. The laws and commands of God as expressed in the *Qur’án* and in other Holy Writings of other religions are means of purifying a person from what is lower. When the person attains to purity and holiness, it means she or he has purified himself or herself from the lower nature so that this purified higher nature can act

with great power and effectiveness. Knowledge and wisdom increase greatly, and a person's influence in this world becomes great – even though it might not be seen and acknowledged by most. The Holy Books are a key to becoming truly human, truly the master of this animal body on which we ride through life. We will speak later of how such purity and holiness also have their greatest effect in the next life – which the *Qur’án* explains is the real life, this life being just a brief preparation and prelude to that next one.

Those who strive for spirituality know that much of what they work for can be lost by associating with a person of low habits and life. It's as though this ungodly person robs them of what they've worked for, and they degenerate. Association with those in a significantly lower condition of spirit may affect the lower one to some degree, but the likelihood is much greater that the lower person will adversely affect the higher one and bring him down. Poison works faster than nourishing food. There's a story about a very good and virtuous man who, sympathizing with a man who was the slave of alcohol, drugs and a loose life, appealed to him: "Come and stay with me for a month. Perhaps association with me will change you and make you like me." The other replied: "Come and stay with me for just a few days, and I will make you like me!"

The *Qur’án* contains many statements concerning the desire of the unbelievers, the ungodly, to bring down the godly and pure. And envy is not rare. As stated, the power of poison in destroying the human body works far more quickly and powerfully than the power of good food to nourish that body. Fire burns down a house far more quickly and easily than it is built. The contagious spirit of rebellion and waywardness works far more quickly than the influence of a good life – but the latter is stronger in the long run because the

former also works quickly to destroy itself. Cancerous cells multiply and spread quickly through the body; but they also end up killing themselves by killing the host on which such parasitical cells live.

Hopefully, this will give the reader some feeling for why Muslims are encouraged to protect themselves against becoming impure and getting pulled down spiritually by others. The actual details of the *Qur'án's* admonitions to purity and separation from non-Muslims (infidels) will be dealt with later. These words are said first, before quoting more from the *Qur'án*, so that it will be easier to take them in and not resist them so much because of seeming strange or too strong. You'll notice that there haven't been so many quotes from the *Qur'án* yet. It's been mostly preparation. Later in this book the quotes will appear in abundance. A rain storm starts with a few scattered drops, and then after that it really pours.

God Controls, Sees, Hears and Knows Everything

The Holy Book of Islám repeatedly conveys the idea that God is all-powerful, all-seeing, all-hearing and all-knowing, that nothing whatsoever escapes His knowledge. He made the entire creation and He knows every tiny thing in it.

"God created you from dust, then from a little germ. Into two sexes He divided you. No female conceives or is delivered without His knowledge. No man grows old or has his life cut short but in accordance with His decree. All this is easy enough for God. (The Creator, 35:11)

"Say: 'Would you tell God of your religion, when God knows what the heavens and the

earth contain? God has knowledge of all things.' " (The Chambers, 49:16)

"Whether you speak in secret or aloud, He knows your inmost thoughts." (Sovereignty, 67:13)

The Real Life is the Next One - This Life is Just a Test and Preparation

"Know that the life of this world is but a sport and a pastime, a show and an empty vaunt among you, a quest for greater riches and more children. It is like the plants that flourish after rain: the husbandman rejoices to see them grow; but then they wither and turn yellow, soon becoming worthless stubble. In the life to come a woeful scourge awaits you – or the forgiveness of God and His pleasure. The life of this world is but a vain provision." (Iron, 57:20)

"The life of this world is but a sport and a pastime. It is the life to come that is the true life: if they but knew it." (The Spider, 29:64)

"We have decked the earth with all manner of ornaments to test mankind and see who would acquit himself best. But We will surely reduce all that is on it to barren dust." (The Cave, 18:7)

It's all just a show, a test, a trial, a preparation for the next real life. But most are deceived, fooled. It makes sense that if this life and world were really important and of great value, the Creator would not have allowed the unworthy, the

lower kinds of humans, the wolves, to dominate the world. That His mercy during our immaturity allows the lowest to rise to the highest positions makes it clear that this world is not of great worth. This is the realm of the animal, the beast, on which we ride through this life.

"Woe to those who love this life more than the life to come; who debar others from the path of God and seek to make it crooked. They have strayed far into error." (Abraham, 14:2)

"When evil befalls man he calls out to Us; but when We vouchsafe him a favour from Ourselves, he says, 'It is my due.' By no means! It is but a test: yet most men do not know it." (The Hordes, 39:49)

"Whoever seeks the harvest of the world to come, to him We will give in great abundance; and whoever desires the harvest of this world, a share of it shall be his: but in the hereafter he shall have no share at all." (Counsel, 42:20)

"... We created man to try him with afflictions." (The City, 90:4)

But ...

"Every hardship is followed by ease. Every hardship is followed by ease." (Comfort, 94:6f)

The "next life" cannot occur in this physical world otherwise the *Qur'án* would not speak of "the world to come" (in the quote just before the last one above) and it would not speak of "the abode of the hereafter" (The Confederate Tribes,

33:28). Clearly, the next life occurs in a "next world" that is very different from this physical world we know now. References to being able to bring these bones and flesh back to life must surely refer to the spiritual "body", the spiritual reality of a human, not to the physical reflection in matter – as we will speak about shortly. So, with this notion that the next life is an entirely different and more real state than this life, and that it occurs in another non-physical realm of which we are now very little aware, let's look at the rewards and punishments of that next life in a next world as described in the Holy *Qur'án*.

The Next Life: Exquisite Rewards for the Good, and Horrific Punishments for the Bad

One of the most dramatic, and to modern educated readers, the most challenging aspects of the *Qur'án* are the very vivid pictures of the heavenly Paradise that awaits the true believer, and the ghastly punishments that are in store for the wicked. Before sharing some quotes on these, it's helpful to remember that God is speaking to a wild and untamed people with no education as we know it today. They were like simple and very unruly children. Complex explanations of the differences between spiritual reality and physical reality, of how heaven and hell are spiritual rather than physical conditions, would not be understood. Vivid and powerful physical representations of these spiritual conditions are therefore required to make a deep and lasting impression.

It would be wrong to say that by depicting heavenly gardens as physical places with running waters, beautiful young ladies, couches lined up in rows, and delicious fruit within one's reach, that God is telling lies and trying to deceive Muslims with false pictures that cannot really be true. It would be blasphemy to say that the Lord of the Universe is deceiving and lying – even when it is acknowledged that the Creator can

do anything He wants, that the laws and rules He requires of His creatures do not have to apply to Him. (Do the rules that a human applies to his pet dog or cat, such as having to leave the house at night, apply to the master too? Of course not; and the Creator is not required to abide by the rules for the development of His creatures. The Creator is not the created.) But there is a way of looking at these amazing promises so that they are not actually speaking of physical realities – even though the words outwardly seem to indicate this. This needs some explanation.

If the reader will permit, let's take a look at some ideas of Plato, an ancient philosopher living in Greece about 500 years before Christ's time, and then take a brief journey into the world of modern physics, in order to gather some clues as to how we can interpret these physical descriptions of a future life in a reasonable, scientific and realistic way.

First, let's speak briefly of Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* since some quotes we will make from a great physicist and a well-known biologist refer to this. Plato describes a dark cave in which a number of humans are chained along a row so that they can see only their shadows as cast on the cave wall in front of them. The shadows are cast by a fire that burns behind them. Since the enchained prisoners are unable to turn their vision anywhere except towards the wall, they see only shadows, not what casts those shadows. When a person wills to move his right arm, it is the shadow arm he sees move. So, knowing nothing of his own reality, he comes to the conclusion that he is the shadow, that the shadow right arm is his real right arm. There are other objects casting shadows as well. Plato states that this is an analogy for our entire world, that all physical objects are really shadows in matter cast by more enduring and permanent spiritual realities or essences.

When one of the prisoners in the cave breaks his chains and frees himself, he suddenly becomes aware of his own true nature and realizes that the shadows he took for reality are not very real at all. He gains a true knowledge of himself, of the reality of others, and of the realities of all physical things. Having freed himself from his chains, he turns around to see the Fire that casts the shadows and even goes outside the cave, where great adjustments to his vision are required to get used to the bright light. When he returns to the prisoners chained along the row and tells them about his discovery, they laugh at him and ridicule the idea that the shadows are not reality – just as so many modern worldly-wise materialists laugh at those who insist that what is material is not the ultimate reality.

The *Qur’án* tells us something similar about this world in its attempt to explain that it is the next life that is the real one. Modern quantum physics also urges us to this notion. Popular science writer and biologist Lyall Watson quotes the great physicist Sir James Jeans in the following:

"Physics deals with shadows. It always did, but the new physics has become aware of the fact, while the old physics operated under the illusion that it dealt with the world itself. The change is best expressed by another knight of the new realm, Sir James Jeans:

"The outstanding achievement of twentieth-century physics is not the theory of relativity with its welding together of space and time, or the theory of quanta with its present apparent negation of the laws of causation, or the dissection of the

atom with the resultant discovery that things are not what they seem; **it is the general recognition that we are not yet in contact with the ultimate reality.** We are still imprisoned in our cave, with our backs to the light, and we can only watch the shadows on the wall.' (Jeans, J. *The Mysterious Universe*. University Press, Cambridge, 1931) [emphasis mine]

"To most of us still, the shadows seem real enough. They appear to be the whole world, unless something happens to make you doubt your perceptions. Jeans and other sensitive physicists party to the complex mathematics became aware of the shadowy nature of the whole enterprise, and turned round to look at the light. They found, to their surprise, that even their new physics could tell them nothing whatsoever about the world outside the cave. To go beyond the shadows, they discovered, was to go beyond physics altogether and into metaphysics. With the result that every one of them—Einstein, Schroedinger, Heisenberg, De Broglie, Planck and Pauli included—became a mystic." (Lyall Watson, *Beyond Supernature*, Bantam Books, USA, 1988)

Well, much of what these founders of quantum physics thought is expressed in a book entitled *Quantum Questions* (ed. Ken Wilber, Shambhala Press). Though many of these pioneers of physics were very quick to deny that their mystical

interests had anything to do with their physics, the simple reality that they all immediately went to study "eastern religions" and mysticism on discovering the implications of what they had discovered in this new quantum physics says more than their words do. Today we find no small number of lesser physicists clinging to the old materialist superstitions – in spite of the clear implications of their own work. But the founders and originators of modern physics, the ones at the very forefront, who discovered these things, who are not just followers, are anything but materialist in their views. The giants of physics, Kepler, Newton, Einstein, Eddington for example, have all been quite spiritually-minded, even religious (but not in a narrow social sense), while those who have followed in their footsteps have all too often displayed a narrow materialist view quite incompatible with both the implications of modern theoretical physics and the expansive teachings of the major religions.

The point is that this physical world is indeed the material shadows of essential realities in a realm of "ultimate reality" that our physical senses are not yet in contact with. This means that the human body is a material shadow or image of a corresponding spiritual reality – just as in Plato's cave allegory. Perhaps we could identify this reality with the human soul. This means that we are not actually our bodies, that when these bodies die and decompose, the original essence or spiritual human reality still exists – just as an object exists even when a mirror reflecting an image of it is broken.

As mentioned earlier, the rider on the animal horse is not the horse. The driver of the vehicle is not the vehicle. The bodies exist in this material world while the souls that ride them have their roots in a different world with different properties – a world outside of space and time and matter. We are intelligent spirits whose consciousness operates within and

through these animal bodies while we are awake and alive. When not awake and not alive, we function without the animal body.

If each existing thing in the material world is a reflection of a spiritual reality, then the entire physical realm is an image of an intangible spiritual realm that is not available to our senses. Jesus sometimes spoke of the higher parts of this world of "ultimate reality" as "the Kingdom". So, if the *Qur’án* and the Bible speak of spiritual realities and principles using physical models so that we can understand them, it does not necessarily mean that it is actually these physical entities that are being referred to. The Garden of Eden, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Tree of Life, the gardens of Paradise, the flames of Hell, the Catastrophe, the destruction of mountains to dust, the cleaving of the sky, the return of Jesus in the clouds – these may all be physical representations of spiritual realities. Since we can grasp the physical things but find it difficult if not impossible to speak of the spiritual realities that these represent, the Holy Books speak of physical objects that we know. But this may not be the intent. An insensitive and unaware person who is utterly oblivious of anything spiritual at all will respond only to what he can understand. Hence the stories of a physical Paradise and Hell in the Bible and the *Qur’án*. It is very likely that they represent spiritual realities appropriate to the spiritual "ultimate reality" of that far more real world. There is a spiritual equivalent to gardens, to eating rich fruit, to drinking the delicious, thirst-quenching ginger-flavored waters of the fountain of *Salsabíl*, and to the fires and torments of Hell.

The teachings of the Bahá’í Faith, a religion born in the midst of Islám in the middle of the 19th century but which is an entirely independent and separate religion from Islám, has some very beautiful and interesting ideas on this that confirm

and expand on what we've just explained from modern physics and the ancient philosophers. To be fair it is right to state that some of the ideas put down here have some of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith as their inspiration – though it would be unfair to claim with certainty that they precisely convey those Bahá'í teachings.

As already stated, the "next life" in the "next world" is not a variation of physical life in this world. It's a different condition free from the limitations and restrictions of space, time and matter. The rewards and punishments of that "next life" must be understood with this understanding – though it's quite likely that God did not expect the early Muslims to grasp this and simply wanted to encourage them, or rather strongly urge them by threat and promise, to do what is right and good to gain the rewards of the next life.

So, with this in mind, let's now look at the words of the *Qur'án* concerning Paradise and Hell.

"They shall enter the gardens of Eden, where they shall be decked with bracelets of gold and pearls, and arrayed in robes of silk. They will say: 'Praise be to God who has taken away all sorrow from us. Our Lord is forgiving and bountiful in His rewards. Through His grace He has admitted us to the Eternal Mansion, where we shall endure no toil, no weariness.

"As for the unbelievers, the fire of Hell awaits them. Death shall not deliver them, nor shall its torment be ever lightened for them. Thus shall We reward the thankless.

"There they will cry out: 'Lord, remove us hence! We will live a good life and will not do as we have done.' But He will answer: "Did We

not make your lives long enough for anyone who would be warned to take warning? Besides, someone did come to warn you: have a taste of it then. None shall help the wrongdoers.

"God knows the mysteries of heaven and earth. He knows the hidden thoughts of men."
(The Creator, 35:35)

The intelligent thinking reader needs to look behind these words to see what they might really represent. Clearly, a physical body is eventually burnt up by physical fire. So the statements cannot refer to physical fire burning physical bodies; rather they must refer to a spiritual counterpart of this physical fire. As we will learn later, the *jinn* of which the *Qur'án* speaks so frequently are made of "smokeless fire" (in contrast to humans who are made of "dry clay"), and yet they are to be consigned in large numbers to The Fire. How shall physical fire burn physical fire? Some careful thought helps us out of these puzzles. Please see the chapter on "Other Interesting Matters in the *Qur'án*" for more on the *jinn*.

Space and time are attributes of this physical realm. The spiritual worlds that cast material shadows must be free of the limitations of space and time. There cannot be before and after, that place and this place, in such an "ultimate reality". How else to refer to such a freedom from time than as "eternal", "everlasting" and so on. Not having any experience of such spiritual worlds, we cannot even really talk about them – other than by using physical analogies. For example, we say a person has a "broken heart". But everyone would laugh if you suggested that this person should see a *cardiologist*, a heart doctor, to heal his broken heart. The physical heart is used as a physical description to represent the spiritual heart. It's the spiritual heart that gets broken in unrequited love, not the physical heart – though there is surely a close connection

between the two, perhaps one being some kind of image of the other, just as the physical brain and intangible mind are closely connected. We know our heart can "go through hell" during heartbreak, grief, strife with those close to us, depression or some kinds of mental illness.

"Here are two antagonists who contend about their Lord. Garments of fire have been prepared for the unbelievers. Scalding water shall be poured upon their heads, melting their skins and that which is in their bellies. They shall be lashed with rods of iron.

"Whenever, in their anguish, they try to escape from Hell, back they shall be dragged, and will be told: 'Taste the torment of the Conflagration.'" (Pilgrimage, 22:19)

This is very strong language. But if a simple person takes it seriously and does all he can to avoid this Hell, and then experiences great joy after death, he will be grateful even if he had misunderstood this to refer to actual physical torments rather than their spiritual equivalents which he could not understand in his lifetime. We cannot expect the simple and uneducated to always grasp spiritual subtleties. It's the final result that counts. The all-knowing Father knows how best to train his child to bring about the best results possible. Those with feeble powers of comprehension and extremely limited knowledge must have things explained to them as clearly as possible within the bounds of what they can grasp.

"The righteous shall dwell amidst gardens and fountains, and shall receive what their Lord will give them. For they have done good works, sleeping but little in the night-time, praying at dawn for God's pardon, and sharing their goods

with the beggars and the deprived." (The Winds, 51:17)

"Give no heed to the disbelievers: they desire you to overlook their doings that they may overlook yours. Nor yield to the wretch of many oaths, the mischief-making slanderer, the opponent of good, the wicked transgressor, the bully who is of doubtful birth to boot. Though such a man be blessed with wealth and children, when our revelations are recited to him, he says: 'they are but fables of the ancients.' On the nose We will brand him!" (The Pen, 68:10)

Aside from being "attended by boys graced with eternal youth, who to the beholder's eyes will seem like sprinkled pearls" (Man, 76:14), the inhabitants of Paradise will also have "high-bosomed maidens for companions." (The Tidings, 78:31)

Eventual Destruction of Nations Who Reject God's Revelation

Meanwhile, back on Earth in this life:

"How many cities, teeming with sin, have We utterly destroyed! they lie in desolate ruin, their wells abandoned and their proud palaces empty.

"Have they never journeyed through the land? Have they no hearts to reason with, or ears to hear with? It is their hearts, not their eyes, that are blind.

"They bid you hasten the threatened scourge. God will not fail His promise. Each day of your Lord's is like a thousand years in your reckoning.

"I bore long with many nations, teeming though they were with sin, and in the end I smote them. To Me shall all things return." (Pilgrimage, 22:43f)

Humans Give No Heed to God's Revelations

"Yet every time a revelation comes to them from their Lord, they give no heed to it. Thus they deny the truth when it is declared to them: but they shall learn the consequences of their scorn." (Cattle, 6:4)

This means that, in general, the wild horse our souls ride hasn't been broken and tamed yet. It hasn't yet surrendered and submitted. We've still been defiant children and rebellious adolescents. But could it be that our collective maturity is near, that the "Kingdom of God on Earth" foretold by Jesus Christ could be a reality before too long?

Fate and Destiny: God's Will Is Behind All Things -- Even Human Will

An introduction to some of the principles here was given in the previous chapter describing how the spirit and teachings of Islám and Christianity complement and balance each other. This will look at those ideas more closely.

Human Will Is Derived From God's Will

"This is an admonition to all men: to those among you that have the will to be upright. Yet

you cannot will, except by the will of God, Lord of the Universe." (The Cessation, 81:28)

This quote (which was offered and considered in the previous chapter) is very revealing and contains an ocean of philosophy and wisdom in it. Human free will is dependent for its operation on a Higher Will. Let's look at a system of explanation that might make this clearer.

Here's another allegory that might be an aid in helping the mind and heart get a deeper understanding of and feeling for this. Henry Ford was the first manufacturer of cars. He designed and built the earliest Ford cars by building a factory that made car parts and assembled them. If a person asks, "Who built that car?", there are several possible answers, each of them true. One can reply: "The factory workers who made and assembled the car parts did." They would be offering the immediate cause. And if another says: "Henry Ford built it.", this would also be correct. He was the one who conceived of the idea and brought together all the means for turning his plan into reality. Automotive designers and engineers, those who designed and built the factory, those who bring in the raw materials and other items to make the car parts, those who assemble the cars, and those who test and return cars for final touches, are all part of this large system that implements or carries out Henry Ford's intention and will. Henry Ford was not the immediate cause behind those vehicles – he wasn't on the assembly line putting those car parts together; he was the original cause for those cars. All these other workers are instruments of his will and plan. Any of these workers can do a good job or a poor job, or even go on strike and not do the job at all – all that lies within their own free will. But they wouldn't be able to do any of this at all if the source of the original cause, Henry Ford, had not hired and employed them to carry out his will. That is, their will to work well or work

poorly is all derived from Henry Ford’s will to make Ford cars using their labor. Without Henry Ford’s will to make this factory and use them, they couldn’t do either.

In a similar way, we are empowered to use our free will in this life in this world only because we are part of this great "factory" of God which is this universe. All of it is empowered through the Creator's Will. Our power to use our free will in order to rise up to do what is right and good, or to refuse to use it and collapse weakly into our animal and ego will, depends on the power of the One Who conceived, designed, built and maintains this creation. Without that Power behind us we can do nothing at all. "Yet you cannot will, except by the will of God, Lord of the Universe."

Now some might be offended here thinking that we might be saying that Henry Ford is like God. That would mean that this analogy was not understood properly. An analogy does not say that two things being compared are equal or identical; it merely uses something easily known in this world to help the mind understand something quite different that is not easily understood. This analogy does not say that Henry Ford is like God. It is only using a parable, just as Jesus used the parable of the vineyard and the return of the owner of the vineyard to convey a great idea. He was not saying that the owner of the vineyard is God, or the Father, or anything like Him. It just an analogy to convey in terms that people easily understand what is much harder to understand.

Let's probe even deeper now for the benefit of thinkers. All force and action in the universe can be viewed as the product of a manifestation of the Complete Will, the Total Will, the Absolute Will, what we could also call the All-Powerful Will. The nonliving mineral kingdom manifests or reflects this will only to a small degree in the forces of gravity,

magnetism, electricity and other forces such as those within the atom. Plants show a yet greater expression of this Complete Will: plants grow up against the mineral kingdom force of gravity, and their roots break through the cohesive bonds of that non-living realm that hold rocks and soil together. Above this, animals show a remarkable degree of this Will in their ability to will to move about in search of food, mates, play and so on. Unlike the plants which are rooted in one spot, the animals race across the ground, swim through the seas and rivers and fly at great speed through the air. Human beings show yet a greater measure of reflection of this Complete Will. We can override our animal level of will when we obey the commands of God and of the social order, when we diet and fast, when we restrain ourselves from doing what is wrong, when we decide to study instead of play, when we resolve to accomplish some great project. We can make amazing technological devices such as jumbo jets that speed hundreds of us at a time through the air. We can even make spacecraft to take some of us to the moon!

It's clear that this will of ours is not complete and all-powerful. The quote above applies the condition that it's for "those among you that have the will to be upright". Clearly some lack that degree of strength of will. The child cannot discipline and control himself the way a mature adult can.

Some, such as Bahá'ís, say that the Prophets of God have a higher level of will than ordinary humans, even though the *Qur'án* tries to emphasize their human nature so as to downplay the tendency to deify them. This might be the means by which they accomplish what look to us like miracles. Remember that the *Qur'án* repeatedly refers to the miracles of Jesus (which have their ultimate origin in God's Will like all other forms of will).

The point here, however, is that all these manifestations of Will are partial reflections or expressions to various degrees of that one great Complete Will. Without that original Source Will, none of these manifestations of will would work at all. "Yet you cannot will, except by the will of God, Lord of the Universe."

We might also consider God's attribute of Complete Knowledge. Each kingdom manifests a partial measure of this Total Knowledge, the mineral kingdom expressing it the least, and each kingdom above showing yet more of it. (Non-local interaction in modern quantum physics with the consequent effect that the intention of an experimenter influences the outcome of experiments suggests a low level of knowledge in the non-living mineral kingdom.) Plants also have a remarkable ability to respond – even to human attitudes, as experiments such as those by Backster have shown. Electrodes attached to plant leaves show them responding very dramatically to a human who has been killing plants and significantly more gently to those who have been helping them grow. Plant roots seem to be able to move towards water at some distance even when there are no differentials in water concentration nearer to the plant. These are indications of a low level of knowledge in the plant kingdom. Animal knowledge is seen in the physical senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch feeling. Humans have a knowledge that can comprehend and understand to a certain degree. The Prophets of God appear to have a much greater measure of this Complete Knowledge. The point is that all knowledge that exists – all the way down to the non-living mineral kingdom – is a partial expression of the Complete Knowledge. None of it can exist without the presence of this Total Knowledge.

We know that such a Complete Knowledge and a Complete Will must exist because we humans have only a

partial measure of knowledge and will – yet we can think of the idea of there being a complete measure of these. The existence of a fraction or part of something implies the existence of the entire thing. For example, there can be no such thing as one-half of a pie without there being a whole pie – otherwise the idea of one-half of a pie could not exist. So our recognition that we have a partial degree of will and knowledge means that the Complete Will and Complete Knowledge must exist. This is from the Creator. This in itself establishes the existence of the Supreme Being, the one God and Lord of the Universe. And if all expressions of knowledge and will seen in our world are manifestations of a great Knowledge and Will, then these latter can be thought of by us as being complete and total. The reflection or manifestation cannot exist without a source any more than a mirror image can exist without an object causing that image.

The light of the sun is white light. It's composed of all the colors combined together. Putting this white light through a prism breaks up this light into its component colors of the rainbow. In fact, such a rainbow is the result of this light being broken up by rain drops. Each color can be likened to one of these great universal attributes of God such as Knowledge, Will, Beauty, Glory, Oneness, Justice and Love. All together they form the one "white light" of what shines forth from the Creator to bring out His creation. This one white light of all the complete attributes, what can be called "universal attributes", shines down like a light on the entire creation, each level reflecting what it can of that light. Some things barely reflect anything at all, like a black rock – like the mineral kingdom that barely manifests the qualities of life. Other parts are like a green leaf that reflects only the green part of the white light, soaking up all the other colors. Yet another thing is like a white lily or piece of paper that reflects all the white light in a scattered way. But a mirror reflects all that light in a

perfectly faithful way so that we see the image of everything in it – even the image of the sun that is the source of all that light. Some, such as the Bahá’ís, believe that the Prophets of God, though human in appearance, actually express the full measure of these universal attributes such as Knowledge and Will just as a mirror reflects the one white sunlight. So the Prophets are called "Manifestations of God", meaning that they are like mirrors that perfectly manifest or reflect the light of all the Divine attributes. These Manifestations of God, of course, are not God.

This means that all things express these universal attributes to various degrees. Just as the green color of a leaf, the red of a rose, and the white of a lily cannot exist at all without the white sunlight which contains all those colors, the various levels of will and knowledge cannot exist and operate without the complete Knowledge and Will from which they derive. In a dark cave, the green of leaves, the red of roses and the white of lilies is not seen. Similarly, without the complete universal attributes, those attributes of God, no partial expressions or manifestations of them could exist and function. The universe cannot exist without this shining radiance of the "white light" of the Primal Will radiating from the Creator.

Here's a principle for thought. It could be that each level of will is free in accord with the understanding of its corresponding level of knowledge. But a higher level of knowledge understands that level of will to be destined, constrained and predetermined. These last two sentences express a deep principle that needs some thoughtful contemplation, perhaps even meditation, in order to fully register and make sense. For example, a person who is completely the victim of his animal nature and utterly ruled by the promptings and urges of his body, will believe and understand himself to be completely free when he does as he

pleases, breaking laws and rules, doing whatever he wants, stealing, fighting, raping and so on. But to a person who lives in a higher level of himself, who has conquered his animal nature to some degree, this supposed freedom of the criminal is seen as enslavement to a lower part in him that is not his true self. The higher kind of person sees the lower kind as being the complete slave of his animal nature and will be able to predict exactly what that criminal will do in any situation. The higher level of knowledge sees the lower level of will as being constrained, destined, determined and not free at all, even though the person on that lower level sees and understands it with his lower kind of knowledge to be completely free.

Similarly, from the point of view of that higher kind of human, his own kind of free will is seen to be completely free. Yet, from the point of view of the Complete Knowledge, that of God, this apparent freedom is constrained and completely predetermined and predestined – just as the *Qur’án* says. Our minds cannot understand what that higher kind of knowledge really is. We can know that it exists, but we cannot know what it is. This is not the kind of predestination we can think of – this kind doesn't exist for us – it's a higher kind of destiny that is beyond our understanding.

This doesn't mean that it is useless to exercise our human will. Unless we do so we cannot develop and grow inwardly strong. Human will is real and very necessary. The confusion some minds find comes about only by seeing the Divine Will and human will as separate and on the same level rather than one deriving from the other. To assume that the divine Will is on the same level as human will, and thus separate and in competition with it, is somewhat blasphemous and disrespectful to God. It fails to acknowledge that God's Will is far above anything that human knowledge can

understand. The human will expresses a partial reflection of that Complete Will.

These ideas are those of the author and are not from the *Qur’án* or the teachings of Islám (so far as this writer knows). The aim is to try to make some sense of what the *Qur’án* says. Some of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, however, appear to imply (at least to the author) the validity of such an interpretation. These views are offered here in case a reader might be struggling to reconcile the seeming conflict between the exercise of free human will and the Complete Will in which all things are predetermined and predestined (from the point of view of the Complete Knowledge, not from the perspective of human knowledge).

The all-knowing Creator knows what we will do even when we have all the free will that our limited kind of human knowledge can comprehend. To Him it is all fixed and predestined. He knows who will go wrong and who will end up right. But that's His Complete Knowledge. To our limited human knowledge, we don't know what we will do ten years from now.

It is the answer to "But why do some people obey God and other's rebel?" that is perhaps in a realm of knowledge above what we can grasp that leads to a Higher Knowledge understanding what we will do with our unpredestined free will.

We Are Not Our Own Masters

"Indeed, man transgresses in thinking himself his own master: for to your Lord all things return." (Clots of Blood, 96:3)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this runs counter much of what the average person of the West believes: "I'm the captain of the ship of my fate". "Where there's a will, there's a way." "I'm the one who worked hard for my money. My success depends only on my own will." Well, according to the *Qur'án*, human will cannot function at all without the Complete Divine Will behind it empowering it. It's like a delegate sent by a king or president to represent that leader at a meeting. The delegate is permitted to express himself as the representative of that leader. Whether he does so in an excellent or a poor way, or if he even refuses to do his job at all, is up to his own will. But he can do none of this without the king or president authorizing this delegate to represent him. The illustration of the cook preparing and serving food for a diner who must do the work of coming to the table and eating himself was given in the previous chapter. Whether the diner eats or not, and how he decides to eat, is all dependent on the cook preparing and serving him the food.

Another somewhat imperfect but simple analogy is provided by a sailboat. The person sailing the sailboat controls the rudder to determine in which direction he will go. But none of this would be possible at all without the power of the wind blowing into the sails pushing that boat forward. When the wind isn't pushing the boat forward, moving the rudder or wheel has no effect. This wind is like the Complete Will behind all other forms of will. This analogy is not perfect because it doesn't show how the movement of the person directing the rudder is determined by the same wind that pushes the boat forward – but it might offer a vague help to understanding for some.

Here's another imperfect analogy that might explain the matter a little more thoroughly. Let's modify the Henry Ford allegory a little. Here, we will now liken the manufactured car

to a human body "manufactured" by a process whose immediate causes are studied by modern biology and whose more original causes are currently beyond the reach of our understanding. The Holy Books assure us that God is the ultimate original cause. Our human spiritual reality or soul will be likened to the driver of that vehicle. (One must have grasped the ideas presented in Chapter 2 for this to make sense.) The driver's will determines where the car and driver together go. But unless the car has fuel, operating foot pedals, working steering and other essentials, the driver can go nowhere. Going someplace depends both on the car and on the driver's will to drive somewhere. And, most importantly, it depends on whoever designed and built this vehicle. In the case of the vehicle of the human body, it's clear Who its original Designer and Builder is. Human free will, operating through the vehicle of the human body, cannot function without the Will that designed and built this vehicle in the first place.

We can think of the car factory and all the resources it requires as being like the world we live in.. The Owner of the factory of creation is also the Designer and is in charge of all those building the cars. This is the Creator Who designed and built us and all living things by using various intermediaries – just as the factory workers fulfill the will of the factory owner and car designer. We can operate and drive these vehicles of our bodies with free will. We can choose to drive off a cliff, or crash into the city dump, or go someplace useful and constructive. It all depends on our free will. But none of it could happen if the Designer and Maker of this vehicle hadn't built it perfectly and arranged for a supply of fuel so that we can exercise our free will. We can choose to drive these bodies about and do either what is good or what is bad only through the power of the great Will that designed, built and fueled these bodies and this world. Without that vehicle being designed and

built with such perfection by its Designer and Maker, we don't go anywhere at all. Just as all power and energy on our Earth come from the sun, so also does all power and energy to do anything come from God.

The West has excelled in the exercise of human free will and initiative. It hasn't been bound and crippled by the misunderstanding of much of the East of an earlier time that the exercise of human will is pointless since it will be overridden by the Supreme Will.

The *Qur'án* speaks of the technology in which the West so excels in the following:

"We have sent down iron, with its mighty strength and diverse uses for mankind, so that God may know those who aid Him, though unseen, and help His apostles." (Iron, 57:25)

We humans are tested to see how we use the gifts of the Creator. Sometimes we use these gifts in such a foolish way as to devise means to destroy our fellow humans, our cities and much of the planet. We can use iron for weapons of justice or injustice, or even for farming implements. We can use explosives to build dams or to destroy what we've built. Even atomic energy has constructive uses. But foolish minds and hearts fail God's test and use these gifts unwisely. And we punish ourselves by failing God's test to see how we use these gifts. The man who imagines himself to be the master of his fate seems to end up destroying himself and his fellows, seemingly helpless to act with true human maturity and wisdom.

God Gives and Takes Wealth

"God gives abundantly to whom He will and sparingly to whom He pleases. ..." (The Greeks, 30:37)

"Say: 'My Lord gives abundantly to whom He will and sparingly to whom He pleases. But most men do not know it.'" (Sheba, 34:36)

The rugged individualist of the West who is certain that he is wealthy only because of his own hard work and efforts has an entirely different view of this matter. When misfortune hits him and he loses everything, in spite of all his efforts and struggle, he wonders what is wrong. Many Americans of the Depression Years of the 1930s felt certain, because of this philosophy by which they had been raised, that they were somehow wrong in being poor and desperate, that if they were to struggle hard enough, they would be rewarded. Human will and struggle is essential; but so is the divine Will that is behind it. God gives and God takes. His Will is what determines whether our efforts succeed or not. And as will be shown later, it often turns out that the one who becomes wealthy does so only because God has abandoned him to this fate.

"But for the fear that all mankind might have become one race of unbelievers, We would have given those who denied the Lord of Mercy dwellings with silver roofs, and gates and stairs of silver; silver couches to recline upon and ornaments of gold. For all these are but the fleeting comforts of this life. It is the life to come that your Lord reserves for those who fear Him." (Ornaments of Gold, 43:33)

"When We give man a taste of Our mercy, he rejoices in it; but when through his own fault

evil befalls him, man is ungrateful." (Counsel, 42:48)

"... If God afflicts you with a misfortune none can remove it but He and if He bestows on you a favour, none can withhold His bounty. He is bountiful to whom He will. He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful." (Jonah, 10:107)

Faith Is From God's Will

"None can have faith except by the will of God. He will visit His scourge upon the senseless." (Jonah, 10:100)

All That Happens to Us, Good or Bad, is Pre-ordained by God.

"Say: 'Nothing will befall us except what God has ordained. He is our Guardian. In God let the faithful put their trust.' " (Repentance, 9:51)

"The fate of each man we have hung about his neck." (The Night Journey, 17:12)

"No one dies unless God permit. The term of every life is fixed. He that desires the reward of this world shall have it; and he that desires the reward of the life to come shall have it also. We will surely reward the thankful." (The 'Imrans, 3:145)

"Every misfortune that befalls the earth, or your own persons, is ordained before We bring

it into being. That is easy enough for God; so that you may not grieve for the good things you miss, or be overjoyed at what you gain." (Iron, 57:22)

"No misfortune falls except by God's will. He guides the hearts of those who believe in Him. God has knowledge of all things." (Cheating, 64:11)

As already stated, even when our own free will is completely involved, as it must be if we are to progress, whatever we do is already pre-ordained by God. But this is in accord with **His** Complete Knowledge, not through our limited human knowledge that is unable to see any such predestination and fate. In accord with all that we can know, there is **no** predestination and the way **is** open for us to exercise our free will. But we would still have to acknowledge that the All-Knowing and All-Seeing One knows exactly what we will choose through our free will. And He does this through a Knowledge that is utterly beyond our comprehension.

God Leads Believers and Misleads Unbelievers

This is a very frequent statement of the *Qur’án*.

"Had God pleased, He would have united you into one nation. But He confounds whom He will and gives guidance to whom He pleases. You shall be questioned about all your actions." (The Bee, 16:93)

"... None can guide those whom God has led astray." (Thunder, 13:34)

"None can guide those whom God confounds. He leaves them blundering about in their wickedness." (The Heights, 7:186)

"You cannot make the dead hear you, nor can you make the deaf hear your call if they turn their backs and give no heed; nor can you guide the blind out of their error. None shall give ear to you save those who believe in Our revelations, and are submissive to Our will." (The Greeks, 30:52)

"We have predestined for Hell many jinn and many men." (The Heights, 7:179) [The topic of *jinn* will be covered in a later chapter. For the present, they are intelligent beings created of "smokeless fire" who interact with us humans who are created of "dry clay". Some jinn are good and others, such as Satan, are bad.]

This makes it clear that there are mysteries beyond our understanding and grasp. The infinite and All-Powerful God's ways are necessarily far above what our minds and hearts can comprehend. Why would God create some people destined for Hell, whom He misleads and confounds, and others fated to enter Paradise, whom He guides and assists? Why would some parts of the tree be precious fruit and other parts bark that peels away and leaves that dry up and fall? Why would some parts of the human body be as valued and precious as the eye while other parts such as the finger nails and hair are clipped away and discarded with little thought or concern. Why are diamonds rare while dull stones are abundant? Why would some among humankind be precious and valued and treasured while so many others are heedless of their highest self and of God? Why has God created us differently? There are wisdoms

behind everything. But sometimes some things are difficult to understand. We don't have all knowledge. Perhaps we will see some of these things more clearly in the next life. If we could understand everything, then we would be all-knowing. Indeed, we are not! There are things beyond our comprehension.

***God Gives Wealth And Comfort to His Enemies
and Then Punishes Them Later***

"We suffer them [that disbelieve] to take their ease for a while, and will then subject them to a grievous scourge." (Luqmán, 31:24)

"Do they think that in giving them wealth and children, We are solicitous for their welfare? By no means! They cannot see." (The Believers, 23:55)

Each Nation Has Its Appointed Time

"A space of time is fixed for every nation; when their hour is come, not for one moment shall they hold it back, nor can they go before it." (The Heights, 7:34)

***We Get What We Want (Deep Down in Our
Hearts) In This Life –
God Gives It to Us***

"Those that desire the life of this world with all its finery shall be rewarded for their deeds in their own lifetime: nothing shall be denied them. These are the men who in the world to come shall have nothing but Hell-fire. Fruitless are

their deeds, and vain are all their works." (Húd, 11:15)

"There are some who say: 'Lord, give us abundance in this world.' These shall have no share in the world to come. But there are others who say: 'Lord, give us what is good both in this world and in the hereafter and keep us from the torment of the Fire.' These shall have a share, according to what they did. Swift is God's reckoning." (The Cow, 2:201)

"When We resolve to destroy a city, We first give warning to those of its people who live in comfort. If they persist in sin, judgement is irrevocably passed, and We raze that city to the ground.

"How many generations have We destroyed since Noah's time! Suffice it that your Lord is well aware of His servants' sins: And observes all!

"He that desires this fleeting life shall soon receive in it whatever We will: We bestow Our gifts on whom We please. But then We have prepared Hell for him, where he will burn despised and helpless.

"As for him that desires the life to come and strives for it as he ought to, being a true believer, his endeavours shall be rewarded by God.

"On all - on these and those - We bestow the bounty of your Lord: none shall be denied the bounty of your Lord." (The Night Journey, 17:16f)

Sometimes it's better to desire what the All-Knowing and All-Wise Creator desires for us, instead of what we alone desire for ourselves. He knows better than we do what is good for us. After all, He designed and created us! Shouldn't He know best?

Perhaps this is an appropriate place to distinguish two different meanings of "the will of God". God's all-powerful will, what we called the Complete Will, is one thing. What He wants us to do, also called "His will" for us, is a different thing. The first is an actual will. The second refers to His desire for us to act well. It refers to a set of commands and admonitions for good behavior. When we "do God's will", it does not mean that we are in any way involved with the all-powerful Complete Will. It means that we're rising up to a higher level of will within our own selves to carry out the wise advice of the Creator for our development -- figuratively, to do what He *wants* us to do. English words can be used with different meanings in different contexts. To fail to look at meanings and simply focus on the words easily leads one to confusion. There is no way out but to think carefully and deeply here.

CHAPTER 3

WAR AND FIGHTING

The Introduction stated that a proper understanding of what is in this chapter is best found after reading the earlier chapters. Without this grasp of what justice really is, and how fundamental it is to the establishment of order, safety and security in the community, the following will possibly not be understood well, or rejected outright as unacceptable. The reader is most strongly urged to first read the previous two chapters, especially the parts dealing with justice, the different emphases of Christianity and Islám, the afterlife, and the manner in which the Creator speaks to His immature and unruly children.

VERSES OF THE QUR'ÁN CONCERNING WAR AND FIGHTING

As is implied in what was said earlier, there are two different kinds of defense: one in which an individual defends himself, and another where a community defends itself. Since there were no clear-cut social institutions of justice among the Arabs of Muhammad's time, statements in the *Qur'án* concerning individual defense and the collective defensive warring of Muslims in groups are not carefully separated.

Personal Defense

Here are some statements that seem directed primarily to individuals:

"Believers, retaliation is decreed for you in bloodshed: a free man for a free man, a slave for a slave, and a female for a female." (The Cow, 2:178)

"If anyone attacks you, attack him as he attacked you. Have fear of God, and know that God is with the righteous." (The Cow, 2:194)

God lays down a method of defense here that restrains the person on the defense from being excessive in his retaliation. It insists that he match the violence of the attacker. When there is no well-founded institution to police the community, then a person must defend himself against attackers. Please note that this is about **defense**, not offense.

"Men of understanding! In retaliation you have a safeguard for your lives; perchance you will guard yourselves against evil." (The Cow, 2:179)

Next, however, is a statement permitting personal revenge and yet encouraging a higher standard of being patient, forgiving and long-suffering:

"Let evil be rewarded with like evil. But he that forgives and seeks reconciliation shall be rewarded by God. He does not love the wrongdoers.

"Those who avenge themselves when wronged incur no guilt. But great is the guilt of those who oppress their fellow men and conduct themselves with wickedness and injustice in the land. These shall be sternly punished.

"To endure with fortitude and to forgive is a duty incumbent on all. He whom God confounds has none to protect him." (Counsel, 42:41f)

So there are three levels of action described here:

- 1) Offense, oppression, injustice – that incur great guilt and a stern punishment,
- 2) Defensive retaliation commensurate with the offense – that incurs neither guilt and punishment nor reward, and
- 3) Long-suffering patience, forgiveness and attempts at reconciliation – that brings reward.

Consider how easy it would be for a Muslim to focus his mind only on the previous guidance that permits him to take revenge and ignore the advice just above that it is better to forgive, to seek peace, to reconcile, to "endure with fortitude" in long-suffering patience. God, in His mercy, permits the former, knowing the weakness of so many men, and yet encourages the latter higher standard of conduct that is forgiving, kind, and inclined to peace.

Collective Defense

During the first 12 or 13 years of Muhammad's Mission in Mecca, the Muslims did not defend themselves. They were at the mercy of the extremely hostile Quraysh tribe all around them. There was no instruction through Revelation to defend themselves.

Then, when the Quraysh of Mecca were plotting to kill Muhammad in His home, He fled Mecca with His followers to Medina, a town then known as Yathrib. This date in 622 AD marks the beginning of the Muslim lunar calendar. It's called

the Hijrih Calendar, “hijrih” referring to this “flight” from Mecca to Medina.

So fierce was the opposition to Muhammad and His Cause at this time that He, His followers, and the new religion would have been completely extinguished if they didn't defend themselves. So the commands came to do just that:

"Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked, because they have been wronged. God has power to grant them victory: those who have been unjustly driven from their homes, only because they said: 'Our Lord is God.' Had God not defended some men by the might of others, the monasteries and churches, the synagogues and mosques in which His praise is daily celebrated, would have been utterly destroyed...." (Pilgrimage, 22:39)

Some of the followers of Islam were reluctant to fight. The revelation told them that this defense was not optional:

"Fighting is obligatory for you, much as you dislike it." (The Cow, 2:216)

"Believers, why is it that when it is said to you: 'March in the cause of God,' you linger slothfully in the land? Are you content with this life in preference to the life to come? Few indeed are the blessings of this life, compared to those of the life to come.

"If you do not fight, He will punish you sternly., and replace you by other men..." (Repentance, 9:38f)

"When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly. Then grant them their freedom or take ransom from them, until War shall lay down her burdens.

"Thus shall you do. Had God willed, He could Himself have punished them; but He has ordained it thus that He might test you, the one by the other.

"As for those who are slain in the cause of God, He will not allow their works to perish. He will vouchsafe them guidance and ennoble their state; He will admit them to the Paradise He has made known to them." (Muhammad, 47:4f)

These are the verses of the Holy *Qur'án* that Muslim fighters are taught. They are told that they will be blessed in the next life, that the war they are fighting is in defense of God's cause. It is a specific intention here to avoid any statements that are even remotely political, that stray beyond what is in the Holy Book itself. But those who are informed and perceptive might consider whether many of the causes in which Muslims have fought and willingly given their lives are at least as much political and cultural as religious. Some modern-day Muslim warriors of course insist that Islám is being attacked in various ways and that their war is a holy war and is justified. Some will see these claims as being quite ludicrous while others might believe that they have value.

This religious call to war in defense of what is right is not unique to Islám. Hinduism is a vast collection of religions and traditions. Within this vast body of Indian belief and folklore is the central gem of the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is surely

one of the most powerful religious writings in human history. In it the messenger of God, or *avatar*, Krishna, urges Arjuna, the warrior, to fight valiantly in a war of good against evil. Though many understand this as only symbolic of a personal spiritual battle that each of us must fight, it's also clear that Krishna is speaking of real war inasmuch as he argues that the warrior (of the *Kshatriya* caste) is not actually killing a person, that he is only being the instrument of God in transferring a human from the worldly condition to another condition of the next life. Krishna compares the body to a house, and to clothes. The human being in the house, and in the clothes, is not the house or the clothes; and the destruction of the house or clothes leaves the human spirit untouched. Let this Holy Book of the Hindus speak for itself -

"... Birthless and deathless and changeless
remaineth the spirit for ever;

Death hath not touched it at all, dead though the
house of it seems!
Who knoweth it exhaustless, self-sustained,
Immortal, indestructible,- shall such
Say, 'I have killed a man, or caused to kill?'

Nay, but as when one layeth
His worn-out robes away,
And, taking new ones, sayeth,
'These will I wear to-day!'
So putteth by the spirit
Lightly its garb of flesh,
And passeth to inherit
A residence afresh.

I say to thee weapons reach not the Life;
Flame burns it not, waters cannot o'erwhelm,

Nor dry winds wither it. Impenetrable,
Unentered, unassailed, unharmed, untouched,
Immortal, all-arriving, stable, sure,
Invisible, ineffable, by word
And thought uncompassed, ever all itself,
Thus is the Soul declared! How wilt thou, then,-
Knowing it so,- grieve when thou shouldst not
grieve?

How, if thou hearest that the man new-dead
Is, like the man new-born, still living man-
One same, existent Spirit- wilt thou weep?
The end of birth is death; the end of death
Is birth: this is ordained! and mournest thou,
Chief of the stalwart arm! for what befalls
Which could not otherwise befall? The birth
Of living things comes unperceived; the death
Comes unperceived; between them, beings
perceive:
What is there sorrowful herein, dear Prince?

This Life within all living things, my Prince!
Hides beyond harm; scorn thou to suffer, then,
For that which cannot suffer. Do thy part!
Be mindful of thy name, and tremble not!
Nought better can betide a martial soul
Than lawful war; happy the warrior
To whom comes joy of battle- comes, as now,
Glorious and fair, unsought; opening for him
A gateway unto Heav'n. But, if thou shunn'st
This honourable field- a Kshattriya-
If, knowing thy duty and thy task, thou bidd'st
Duty and task go by- that shall be sin!
And those to come shall speak thee infamy
From age to age; but infamy is worse
For men of noble blood to bear than death!

The chiefs upon their battle-chariots
Will deem 'twas fear that drove thee from the
fray.
Of those who held thee mighty-souled the scorn
Thou must abide, while all thine enemies
Will scatter bitter speech of thee, to mock
The valour which thou hadst; what fate could
fall
More grievously than this? Either- being killed-
Thou wilt win Swarga's safety, or- alive
And victor- thou wilt reign an earthly king.
Therefore, arise, thou Son of Kunti! brace
Thine arm for conflict, nerve thy heart to meet-
As things alike to thee- pleasure or pain,
Profit or ruin, victory or defeat:
So minded, gird thee to the fight, for so
Thou shalt not sin!"
(*Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 2, transl: Sir Edward
Arnold) [find a better translation; this one is
hard to read; it's trying too hard to sound like
difficult-to-read English poetry]

'Lawful war' gives an entrance to heaven, and failure of
the warrior to fight is a sin! How reminiscent of the *Qur'án*!

Here is a very important point for the reader to ponder:
if all that is of importance and value exists just in this material
life, if we are nothing more than just these bodies, then all this
violence and destruction, this killing and fighting, are pointless
and silly. But if this life is just a show, just a test, just an
illusory realm that trains and schools us in preparation for a
next life in a next world that is far more real, then when God
kills humans in large numbers, even through his servants who
believe that they are obeying Him, it's not really bringing
death; it's just bringing about a transition from a less important

preparatory world to a more important and more real realm. Transplanting of the seedlings of trees may look like death to the seedlings that are not yet transplanted (supposing that such trees could think like humans), but to those growing in a new, more spacious and fertile soil, it's not death at all. There is a tendency to think of the death of humans as a real death, as the end of it all – because of a materialist and unreligious orientation to life. But if what all the Prophets tell us is true – and modern physics certainly confirms it more than many people of science realize – then what appears to be mass killing is really a hidden mercy. Destroying a city of those who are injuring their souls by foolish behavior simply puts an end to the destructive behavior and permits the process of education and training to continue in a different environment. From a wider perspective than the materialist one, this death is a mercy and a kindness. But, of course, this killing is legitimate only if in obedience to God's command and not merely the result of personal motives.

Here, in the next item, those Muslims who are afraid of defending the Muslim community against its attackers are urged to obey and not seek an easy way out:

"The faithful say: 'If only a Chapter were revealed!' But when a forthright Chapter is revealed and war is mentioned in it, you see the infirm of heart looking towards you as though they are fainting away for fear of death. Yet obedience and courteous speech would become them more. Indeed, should war be decided upon, it would be better for them to be true to God." (Muhammad, 47:20)

"The believers who stay at home - apart from those that suffer from a grave impediment - are

not equal to those who fight for the cause of God with their goods and their persons. God has given those that fight with their goods and their persons a higher rank than those who stay at home. God has promised all a good reward; but far richer is the recompense of those who fight for Him: ranks of His own bestowal, forgiveness and mercy. God is forgiving and merciful." (Women, 4:95f)

The Muslim who fights defensively in the cause of God is regarded as superior to those who, being able to, do not. It's very clear from these quotes that God is commanding the Muslims – at least those of Muhammad's time – to fight in defense of the Faith of Islám and to fight vigorously. If one is to fight, then one must fight fully and completely, not half-heartedly. And if one is not to fight, then one should also do that fully and completely.

If we are to take these quotes above by themselves, in isolation from the many other statements concerning war and fighting, it would be easy to justify the most oppressive and evil acts against others who don't share one's beliefs, and think that one is very right in doing this: "But Satan made their foul deeds seem fair to them" (The Bee, 16:63). No one is more sure that he is right than the wrongdoer doing evil on a major scale, while he who is more right worries about it and in his concern turns to God pleading to be put on the right path. The first sign that one is astray and doing wrong is the complete conviction and assurance that one can do no wrong. Hitler, Stalin and others like them seem to have had no doubts, no cause for deep reflection and concern about what they were doing. But let's look now at other statements that very clearly tell a Muslim what kind of war and fighting in the defense of Islám is acceptable:

Only Fighting in Defense Is Permitted

"Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but **do not attack them first**. God does not love the aggressors." (The Cow, 2:190) [emphasis mine]

That's clear enough. Fighting for the cause of God is in **defense only**. A Muslim is not permitted to "attack first". "God does not love the aggressors." The next quote makes it clear that the Arabs of that ancient time a millennium and a third ago might like to use the excuse of insisting that others are unbelievers to justify taking their belongings. This is clearly discouraged:

"Believers, show discernment when you go to fight for the cause of God, and do not say to those that offer you peace: 'You are not believers,' - seeking the chance booty of this world; for with God there are abundant gains. Such was your custom in days gone by, but now God has bestowed on you His grace. Therefore show discernment; God is cognizant of all your actions." (Women, 4:94)

In the following, the one God makes it clear that the motive of defense is not hateful revenge and angry retaliation but rather firm justice.

"Do not allow your hatred for those who would debar you from the Holy Mosque to lead you into sin. Help one another in what is good and pious, not in what is wicked and sinful.

Have fear of God; God is stern in retribution."
(The Table, 5:2)

The next quote emphasizes the vigor with which a Muslim should defend his cause and his community and then follows it with the condition of being peaceful with them if they make peace with him.

Make Peace If Others Want Peace

"Let not the unbelievers think that they will ever get away. They have not the power so to do. Muster against them all the men and cavalry at your command, so that you may strike terror into the enemy of God and your enemy, and others besides them who are unknown to you but known to God. All that you give for the cause of God shall be repaid you. You shall not be wronged.

"If they incline to peace, make peace with them, and put your trust in God. He hears all and knows all." (The Spoils, 8:59f) [emphasis mine]

In addition to the restriction of not being permitted to war offensively, but only defensively, there are also restrictions on when one can fight. War is not allowed during the sacred month, Ramadan, except in the circumstances explained below:

When Fighting Is Not Permitted – With An Exception

"They ask you about the sacred month. Say: 'To fight in this month is a grave offense; but to debar others from the path of God, to deny Him, and to expel His worshippers from the Holy Mosque, is far more grave in His sight. Idolatry is worse than carnage.'

"They will not cease to fight against you until they force you to renounce your faith - if they are able...." (The Cow, 2:217f)

"Idolatry is worse than carnage." This is most interesting.

Do Not Attack Those Who Repent, Who Honor Their Treaties, Who Seek Asylum

"Proclaim a woeful punishment to the unbelievers, except to those idolaters who have honoured their treaties with you in every detail and aided none against you. With these keep faith, until their treaties have run their term. God loves the righteous.

"When the sacred months [Shawwal, Dhul-Qu'adah, Dhul-Hajjah and Muharram] are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. If they repent and take to prayer and render the alms levy, allow them to go their way. God is forgiving and merciful.

"If an idolater seeks asylum with you, give him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and then convey him to safety. For the idolaters are ignorant men.

"God and His apostle repose no trust in idolaters, save those with whom you have made treaties at the Sacred Mosque. So long as they

keep faith with you, keep faith with them. God loves the righteous."

...

Make War On Those Who Break Their Oaths and Revile Islám

But if those who appear to make peace later reveal that this was false, then war is again enjoined:

"But if, after coming to terms with you, they break their oaths, and revile your faith, make war on the leaders of unbelief - for no oaths are binding with them - so that they may desist.

"Will you not fight against those who have broken their oaths and conspired to banish the Apostle? They were the first to attack you. Do you fear them? Surely God is more deserving of your fear, if you are true believers.

"Make war on them: God will chastise them at your hands and humble. He will grant you victory over them and heal the spirit of the faithful. He will take away all rancour from their hearts: God shows mercy to whom He pleases. God is all-knowing and wise."
(Repentance, 9:4f)

Here is another in the same spirit:

"Others you will find who seek security from you as well as from their own people. Whenever they are called back to sedition they plunge into it headlong. If these do not keep their distance from you, if they neither offer you peace nor cease their hostilities against you, lay

hold of them and kill them wherever you find them. Over such men We give you absolute authority." (Women, 4:91)

Dangerous Verses When Taken Alone and Out of Context

Some, however, will point to the following quotes and insist that these justify attacking any unbelievers or infidels, perhaps even justifying force in spreading the Faith of Islám.

"Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and deal sternly with them. Hell shall be their home, evil their fate." (Prohibition, 66:9)

"Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them. Know that God is with the righteous." (Repentance, 9:123)

Balancing Verses

These strong verses above must be understood in the context of the whole of the Holy Book, not just by themselves. The following quotes modify them very strongly:

"There shall be no compulsion in religion." (The Cow, 2:256)

"We well know what they say. You shall not use coercion with them. Admonish with the Koran whoever fears My warning." (Qáf, 50:45)

"Call men to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kindly exhortation. Reason with them in the most courteous manner. Your Lord best knows those who stray from His path and those who are rightly guided.

"If you punish, let your punishment be commensurate with the wrong that has been done you. **But it shall be best for you to endure your wrongs with patience.**" (The Bee, 16:124f) [emphasis mine]

"Be courteous when you argue with the People of the Book [Jews and Christians], except with those among them who do evil." (The Spider, 29:46)

One can only conclude that some Muslims have been as negligent of the commands of their own Faith as Christians have been of their own teachings. Both warred and oppressed in direct disobedience to the teachings of their Holy Books. What could be clearer than this next instruction from the Creator to every true Muslim?

Muslims Can Be Kind and Fair To Those Who Are Not Against Islám and Who Have Not Driven Them From Their Homes

"God does not forbid you to be kind and equitable to those who have neither made war on your religion nor driven you from your homes. God loves the equitable. But He forbids you to make friends with those who have fought against you on account of your religion and driven you from your homes or abetted others so to do. Those that make friends

with them are wrongdoers. (She Who Is Tested, 60:8f)

Taking Verses Out of Context

In the Introduction to this book, the analogy was given of these verses of the Qur'an being like brushstrokes of a painting. The brushstroke is meaningful only in the context of the whole painting. One verse must be understood within the meaning of the entire Holy Book.

Here's another analogy to convey what religious fundamentalists do when they draw conclusions from a verse without considering its meaning in the light of the entire revelation. I call it the error of Rodney King Videotape Lawgic. Any small child can watch this famous videotape and tell you clearly what is happening there. A number of policemen are standing over an African-American man on the ground and beating him with their clubs. No fair-minded person can watch that and imagine that Rodney King was attacking the policemen and that they were defending themselves against him.

There is one way, however, to escape this obvious conclusion. And that is the method the lawyers for the defense of the policemen used. What they did was try to avoid seeing the whole running videotape as much as possible and instead focus the attention of the jury on individual frames from that videotape. Then, by pointing to certain positions taken by Rodney King, they tried to suggest that he was attacking the officers and that they were defending themselves. This is done by trying to influence the minds of the jurors to imagine what would be the following sequence of actions – extrapolating actions from just one frozen frame. Of course, the proper way to know what was actually happening would be to watch the

full running videotape and make one's judgement from that. But by using this tricky technique of letting the minds of the jurors imagine were one position would lead, they were able to override the obvious conclusion that the full running videotape conveys and come to a quite different and unrealistic conclusion.

Religious fundamentalists use the same trick. They take one verse from their Holy Book and look at it in isolation from the rest of the verses. Then they suggest meanings of it that go in a direction that conflicts with other verses in that same Holy Book. This is what modern-day Muslim terrorists do. There's no doubt that there are verses in the Qur'an commanding Muslims to fight. Again:

"Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and deal sternly with them. Hell shall be their home, evil their fate."
(Prohibition, 66:9)

"Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them. Know that God is with the righteous."
(Repentance, 9:123)

But these verses have meaning in the context of other verses making it clear that this war is only in defense of Islam and Muslims. It applies to conditions where the Muslim community's existence and freedom to worship are threatened. Again:

"Permission to take up arms is hereby given to those who are attacked, because they have been wronged. God has power to grant them victory: those who have been unjustly driven

from their homes, only because they said: 'Our Lord is God.' Had God not defended some men by the might of others, the monasteries and churches, the synagogues and mosques in which His praise is daily celebrated, would have been utterly destroyed...." (Pilgrimage, 22:39)

This makes it clear that fighting in defense of Islám, as the *Qur'án* commands, is an act of justice, not an act of revenge, oppression and tyranny. It's as different from aggression as the giving of a gift is different from the giving of a bribe. Outwardly they look similar, but in reality they are quite different and have entirely opposite results. Oppression and aggression increase the amount of harm while justice minimizes it. As God says in this quote, if some men had not risen up in justice to defend their community against vicious aggressive attacks, the places of worship of all the religions where God is worshipped would have been "utterly destroyed". The use of force in the service of justice is constructive while its use in injustice is destructive. Those from cultural backgrounds where Christian ideals were once promoted and who feel that this is wrong must please read or re-read the first chapter and think carefully over the arguments made there in order to understand this point of the legitimate and constructive use of forceful justice by a society.

So, when God says, "Seek out your enemies relentlessly." (Women, 4:104), it is clear that what the All-Powerful and All-Knowing One means by "enemies" is those who attack first, who drive Muslims from their homes, who prevent them from worship, who do not incline to peace, who do not have peace treaties which they keep faithfully.

Some Muslims war and fight these days with the most horrible acts of oppression and evil imaginable. And they

justify this by focusing only on the commands to fight, to war against the infidels, and ignoring the other commands that make it very clear that these apply only as acts of defense where others are clearly opposing Islám, directly attacking Muslims, and driving them from their homes. If this is pointed out to them, perhaps some will find ways to make it look as though they are defending themselves. And, of course, once those they attack defend themselves, this can be viewed as offensive and then justify a defense. We humans are masters of rationalization and can fool ourselves into justifying just about anything.

It would be easy to get drawn into the politics of current Muslim warring against others. But it's the express intention of the writer to avoid that and stick strictly to the guidance of the *Qur'án*, free from the interpretations of Muslim leaders/clergy, politics, nationalism and other less central matters.

***Muslims Are Forbidden to Intentionally Kill
Other Muslims***

"It is unlawful for a believer to kill another believer except by accident." (Women, 4:92)

"He that kills a believer by design shall burn in Hell for ever. He shall incur the wrath of God, who will lay His curse on him and prepare for him a woeful scourge." (Women, 4:93)

When one sees the spectacle of horrible wars between Muslims, such as that which occurred between Iran and 'Iraq, one wonders how they justified it. God clearly desires that His submissive servants survive, as the following quote shows.

"It was He who ended hostilities between you in the Valley of Mecca after He had given you victory over them. God was watching all your actions.

"Those were the unbelievers who debarred you from the Sacred Mosque and prevented your offerings from reaching their destination. But for the fear that you might have trampled underfoot believing men and women unknown to you and thus incurred unwitting guilt on their account, God would have commanded you to fight it out with them; but He ordained it thus that He might bring whom He will into His mercy. Had the faithful stood apart from them, We would have sternly punished the unbelievers." (Victory, 48:24f)

If two groups of Muslims do happen to fight, then Muslims are commanded to try to make peace between them. If one of them is the aggressor, then they must first fight the aggressors until they submit and then try to make peace:

"If two parties of believers take up arms the one against the other, make peace between them. If either of them commits aggression against the other, fight against the aggressors till they submit to God's judgement. When they submit, make peace between them in equity and justice. God loves those who exercise justice." (The Chambers, 49:9)

Though God encourages Muslim men to fight in defense of Islám, it's clear that our Creator's deeper aim is to bring about peace among humans. The defensive fighting is

justice, which is only a means of minimizing the harm that is done by those who violently attack and oppose Islám.

"That which is revealed to you from your Lord will surely increase the wickedness and unbelief of many of them. We have stirred among them enmity and hatred, which will endure till the Day of Resurrection. Whenever they kindle the fire of war, God puts it out. They spread evil in the land, but God does not love the evil-doer." (The Table, 5:65)

Jihad

There is much talk these days about *jihad*. It has been equated with holy war. In reality, this Arabic word means "struggle" or "effort" and is usually applied to struggle in and for the Cause of Islám. It can refer to the struggle to overcome one's lower nature and obey the commands and laws of God. But most often it refers to the struggle to defend and advance Islám. That is, *jihad* can be holy war in some circumstances but can also have a wider meaning.

The quotes from the *Qur'án* here concerning war and fighting are about all of them this writer could find in that Holy Book. There are a few others that repeat the points made in these quotes. This makes it clear that what is here is complete, or nearly complete, and is not a biased covering of just some of them.

PROBLEMS WITH MUSLIM WARRING IN THIS MODERN AGE

Aside from the obvious point that some Muslims are ignoring the parts of the *Qur'án* that insist that Muslim war is

to be defensive only, there are at least two problems with taking these commands to war seriously in this modern age some one thousand and four hundred years since the earliest days of Islám. One of these is that there are many instructions in the *Qur'án* that seem to apply only to the situation of Muslims in that very early environment of the Arabian Peninsula and possibly nearby. Muslim holy war could be one of these. The other is that if a new revelation from God has occurred, then it is the commands of the new revelation that must be put into practice. The old laws and commands no longer apply unless they are sanctioned by the new revelation. Some of the commands and laws of Islám might have been designed for more primitive social conditions where there were no formal institutions for carrying out justice such as courts and a police force. Let's consider this more closely.

Which Commands Apply Only to the Early Days of Islám?

It is very clear that many instructions and statements conveying information in the *Qur'án* apply only to the days when Muhammad was alive, and only to the specific situations found in the Arabian Peninsula. Let's look at some of these.

Desert Arabs Surpass Others in Unbelief and Hypocrisy

"The desert Arabs surpass others in unbelief and hypocrisy, and have more cause to be ignorant of the laws which God has revealed to His apostle. But God is all-knowing and wise.

...

"Yet there are others among the desert Arabs who believe in God and the last Day ..."
(Repentance, 9:97f)

"The Arabs of the desert declare: 'We are true believers.' Say: 'Believers you are not. Rather say: 'We profess Islám,' for faith has not yet found its way into your hearts. ..." (The Chambers, 49:14f)

Can one truly say that this must be true now? Or at least a thousand years after the time of Muhammad? Surely conditions change over time and the desert Arabs (many of whom have left the desert to work in modern cities) have less cause "to be ignorant of the laws which God has revealed to His apostle." Can one really say that now, about 1400 years later, the desert Arabs are mostly still without faith, that they only profess Islám?

Don't Kill Your Children For Fear of Want

"You shall not kill your children for fear of want. [Dawood: An allusion to the pre-Islamic custom of burying alive unwanted newborn girls.] We will provide for them and for you. To kill them is a great sin." (The Night Journey, 17:31)

Is this really applicable to any time after Islám was firmly established in the Arab world?

Jews and Pagans Were "the most implacable of men", Christians best

"You will find that the most implacable of men in their enmity to the faithful are the Jews and the pagans, and that the nearest in affection to them are those who say: 'We are Christians.' That is because there are priests and monks among them; and because they are free from pride.

"When they listen to that which was revealed to the Apostle, you see their eyes fill with tears as they recognize its truth...." (The Table, 5:82)

This may have been true of the Jews, pagans and Christians of the Arabian Peninsula in those days so long ago. But in a later age, in Europe, Christians were generally not responsive at all to the revelation of Muhammad. Sending thousands of Christian men to the Holy Land during the Crusades to fight against Muslims is a far cry from having "their eyes fill with tears as they recognize its truth". Islám did conquer Spain and Sicily (with most civilizing, enlightened and impressive results) but the rest of Europe fought vigorously against the Muslims, particularly at the Pyrenees Mountains that separate Spain from the remainder of Europe. In Renaissance times, Europe partook liberally of the intellectual and material fruit of the Tree of Islám (all our knowledge of Greek philosophy, mathematics and science came through the Arabic translations), but it firmly rejected the Tree itself and the Seed, Muhammad, from which it grew. Clearly, this statement applies to the times in which Muhammad lived.

Miscellaneous Advice Involving Muhammad, His Wives and His Followers

"Prophet, say to your wives: 'If you seek this life and all its finery, come, I will make

provision for you and release you honourably. But if you seek God and His apostle and the abode of the hereafter, know that God has prepared a rich reward for those of you who do good works.' (The Confederate Tribes, 33:28)

"Prophet, We have made lawful to you the wives to whom you have granted dowries and the slave-girls whom God has given you as booty; the daughters of your paternal and maternal uncles and of your paternal and maternal aunts who fled with you; and any believing woman who gives herself to the Prophet and whom the prophet wishes to take in marriage. [At that time Muhammad had nine wives, apart from slave-girls.] This privilege is yours alone, being granted to no other believer." (The Confederate Tribes, 33:50).

Again, a dog's or cat's master is not subject to the rules imposed on his or her pets. That all cats must go out of the house at night does not mean that the master must also do this. The Prophet of God doesn't take wives on consequent to lust and greed. Often, it was for the purpose of sheltering and uplifting them. Those who feel outraged that the Prophet of God is not subject to the rules God imposes on the generality of humankind have failed to realize the immense gulf that exists between a Prophet of God and an ordinary person. That the Prophet shares a human station with us does not mean that that is all there is to him. There's something more -- something high above what any human can comprehend. Otherwise they would never be able to endure the intense and persistent persecution with such courage and unwavering principle. We humans look something like apes such as gorillas and orang utans, but there is a difference in spirit that enables us humans

to build civilizations and go to the moon, something apes have not even started to do because the human spirit simply does not exist in those animal bodies so similar to our bodies. We have something unseen, a comprehending human mind and heart that the apes don't have, and the Prophets of God have a spiritual Nature high above their human nature that the human mind and heart cannot comprehend or sense in any way. Mere similarity of physical appearance is not a proof of an identical nature. It merely means that the Prophets and humans share a human nature, just as humans and apes share the animal nature. Bahá'u'lláh has a most wonderful explanation of this in the book referred to earlier, the *Kitab-i-Iqan* or *Book of Certitude*. But it would distract from our point here to divert too much by quoting from it. None of this means that the Prophets are equal to God. As they all confess, they are far, far below the Creator. That the Prophets of God are far above us and yet far below God testifies to how far God is above us. The *Qur'án* emphasizes their human station, perhaps as a counterbalance to a previous tendency of the religious to equate their Prophet with God. Here's another passage focused on the time of Muhammad.

"Believers, do not enter the houses of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for the proper time, unless you are given leave. But if you are invited, enter; and when you have eaten, disperse. Do not engage in familiar talk, for this would annoy the Prophet and he would be ashamed to bid you go; but of the truth God is not ashamed. If you ask his wives for anything, speak to them from behind a curtain. This is more chaste for your hearts and their hearts.

"You must not speak ill of God's apostle, nor shall you ever wed his wives after him; this would be a grave offence in the sight of God.

Whether you hide or reveal them, God has knowledge of all things.

"It shall be no offence for the Prophet's wives to be seen unveiled by their fathers, their sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, or their slave-girls." (The Confederate Tribes, 33:53)

Instructions Concerning Dealing with Idolaters

"If an idolater seeks asylum with you, give him protection so that he may hear the Word of God, and then convey him to safety. For the idolaters are ignorant men.

"God and His apostle repose no trust in idolaters, save those with whom you have made treaties at the Sacred Mosque. So long as they keep faith with you, keep faith with them. God loves the righteous."

The Arabian Peninsula, and much of the world around it, was filled with *idolaters* in those ancient times. But few still worship idols. Surely this instruction is applicable primarily to those early days of Islám. Perhaps there is some stretch of meaning by which we can call modern Westerners "idolaters", as they "idolize" money and their pop-music and movie "idols". Or we could refer figuratively to various modern materialist ideologies such as communism, nationalism and racism as idols of secular "faith" and devotion that have replaced genuine religious faith. But this is surely carrying the word "idolater" far beyond the obvious meaning of the *Qur'án* here.

Slavery

Consider the laws and commands of the *Qur'án* concerning slavery:

"It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces to the East and the West; but righteous is he who believeth in Alláh and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and **to set slaves free**; and observeth proper worship and payeth the poor-due. And those who keep their treaty when they make one, and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the Alláh-fearing. (Pickthal, *The Cow*, 2:177) [emphasis mine]

"... He that accidentally kills a believer must **free one Muslim slave** and pay blood-money to the family of the victim, unless they choose to give it away in alms..." (*Women*, 4:92) [emphasis mine]

"God will not punish you for that which is inadvertent in your oaths. But He will take you to task for the oaths which you solemnly swear. The penalty for a broken oath is the feeding of ten needy men with such food as you normally offer to your own people; or the clothing of ten needy men; or **the freeing of one slave**. ..." (*The Table*, 5:89) [emphasis mine]

"... As for those of your slaves who wish to buy their liberty, free them if you find in them

any promise and bestow on them a part of the riches which God has given you.

"You shall not force your slave-girls into prostitution in order that you may make money, if they wish to preserve their chastity. If anyone compels them, God will be forgiving and merciful to them." (Light, 24:33f)

"Those that divorce their wives by so saying, and afterwards retract their words, shall **free a slave** [Dawood: as a penalty] before they touch each other again...." (She Who Pleaded, 58:3) [emphasis mine]

"Ah, what will convey unto thee what the Ascent is! - (It is) **to free a slave**, And to feed in the day of hunger, And orphan near of kin, Or some poor wretch in misery, And to be of those who believe and exhort one another to perseverance and exhort one another to pity." (Peckham, The City, 90:12f) [emphasis mine]

Does the command to free a believing slave as a penalty for certain offenses really apply to conditions today? How many Muslims have slaves today? Can we still insist that slavery is a valid institution? Jesus and Muhammad never spoke against the institution of slavery itself. Rather, they urged us to be kind to slaves, to treat them fairly and equitably. But today there is a feeling around the world, even among some Muslims, that slavery is a thing of the past and is no longer appropriate to our world now. This should suggest to us that God might have a new set of instructions now for the world.

The Inferiority of Women

Can we still insist that men have authority over women and are inherently superior to females as the Christian and Islámic revelations maintain?

"Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them. As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. Then if they obey you, take no further action against them. God is high, supreme." (Women, 4:34f)

What has happened to our world that so many in even the most remote corners of the planet feel strongly that in this day society will be uplifted to a far greater degree when women attain equality with men? A thoughtful person would begin to wonder if God had not sent a new revelation with new teachings concerning the equality of the sexes, the abolition of the institution of slavery, universal education, and so many other high-minded ideals that have now encompassed all but the most primitive, conservative and resistant regions of our world. Has not the glaring reality that a number of nations have had female leaders of great ability stirred the minds to wonder what is really happening in our world? One of these female leaders even led a Muslim nation!

An Ancient View of the Universe

The *Qur'án* speaks to humans in accord with the understanding of the time. If God spoke to peoples of ancient times in accord with our modern more scientific view of what

the heavens and earth are, suggesting that the stars are giant suns over a million times the size of the earth – which is a round ball speeding through space around our sun – and that these stars are scattered through a vast emptiness of outer space that stretches far beyond our ability to imagine, those people would have laughed and insisted that such an understanding was ridiculous. How obvious it was to them that the earth is flat, that the sun and moon are bigger than the stars, which are tiny little dots of light, and that it is the sun which goes around the earth, not vice versa! Perhaps the people of a time thousands of years from now will laugh at our present view – which most of us see as unerringly correct – and wonder that we could be so ignorant, just as we see the views of the ancients. So God must speak in accord with the understanding of the time:

"We spread the heavens like a canopy and provided it with support; yet of its signs they are heedless." (The Prophets, 21:32)

"...If We will, We can cave in the earth under their feet or let fragments of the sky fall upon them...." (Sheba, 34:9)

Surely, if God were to send a new revelation closer to our time now, He would speak in terms of ideas we now find realistic and use a language suitable to this age. Are these old views of reality still to be held up as appropriate?

So, if it's clearly true that certain sections of the *Qur'án* speak mostly to conditions prevailing in the days of Muhammad, particularly in the Arabian Peninsula, can we not suspect that there are other instructions given in that Holy Book which, however fitting they were to life in the Middle Eastern desert nations of that time, are not so apt and suitable

to modern life? It's very difficult to read these quotations from the *Qur'án* just above concerning war and battle without feeling that they are dealing with situations concerning defiant idolatrous tribes intent on erasing the Faith of Muhammad from their world, and that they are not as well suited to our modern world 1400 years later. If one reads them with an unprejudiced and unindoctrinated mind, surely this is the conclusion that one comes to.

It's quite difficult to imagine that the command, "Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and deal sternly with them." (Prohibition, 66:9) applies to anything other than those early days. "Hypocrites" were a particular group of so-called Muslims who professed belief at that time but who were inwardly opposed to it and had no faith or real belief in the truth of Islám. Every religion has its hypocrites. Can it also be that other statements concerning violent war against unbelievers and hypocrites are also most appropriate to those earliest days of Islám and far less suited to our modern world now that we have institutions of justice working through our governments that can defend the religiously oppressed?

Has a New Revelation with New Commands Superseded the Revelation of Muhammad?

The mere suggestion of this is very dangerous talk in many Muslim countries and areas. To even acknowledge the possibility that God has sent a new revelation to the world would mean that Islám bears the same relation to this new Faith as Christianity and Judaism do to Islám: true for an older age but outdated and no longer appropriate to the needs of a

more modern age. There is nothing absurd or foolish about investigating the possibility that the Creator of the Universe has sent another Prophet to our world. In fact, being on the lookout for such an immensely important event seems to be a key teaching of most of the religions.

As Jesus pointed out, when you see the signs of springtime – the trees blossoming with flowers, the cold winter giving way to warmer weather, the rivers filling with melted water from the mountain snows – one knows that a new spring is arriving. When one sees the sky lightening after a dark night, when the birds start singing and the roosters are crowing loudly, one knows that a new day is about to begin. Similarly, as we look around our world we see so many signs of a new spirit pulsing through the arteries of human life. Slavery is no longer accepted as a legitimate institution. So many are now recognizing that our societies benefit when women are permitted to serve along with men and to use all the talents and skills that have previously not been allowed to develop. Science and technology are blossoming to an amazing degree providing new means of transportation and communication that have brought the world together into one home, however little we've learned to live well with our new neighbors around the planet. Everywhere we look we see the signs of a new spirit that is tearing down old notions and institutions and raising up new ones. Where is it all coming from? Such things don't "just happen". They have causes. A thinking person would certainly be on the lookout for a new revelation from God. There is not one major religion that doesn't foretell the next revelation as well as a great revelation that will bring about the Kingdom of God on Earth. As will be shown later in a chapter on the End Times Metaphors, the *Qur'án* quite powerfully tells of that next revelation – but in veiled and symbolic language.

As one surveys the new religions popping up all over these days, there's certainly no shortage of claimants to being the new revelation of God. But it was the same in the days of the appearance of Jesus and just afterwards: so many mystery religions and cults abounded. Both Mithraism and Manichaeism, very popular religions of the Roman Empire, had their founders who were supposed to have had virgin births and even resurrections after death. Only a very discerning heart and mind would have been able to recognize that one small, obscure and unobtrusive religion would have conquered Europe while all far more popular faiths of the time just disappeared (even though many of their ceremonies, sacraments, priestly hierarchies, garments, customs, habits and traditions still appear live and well in the Catholic and Orthodox Christian Churches). One seed among many has the potential for immense growth – because it is from the Creator – while all the others wither away because they are the product of human imagination and gall, or are old religions that have outwardly died yet are still propped up to give the appearance of life, having lost all ability to change the world. The world now is filled with claimants to this high station.

The animal goes straight to the kind of plant that it needs at the moment, its sense of smell directing it there. It sniffs at everything along the way but goes on until it detects the one it really wants and needs. There's an inner spiritual sense in some humans that leads them to the object of their quest. They can sniff out what is from God and what is not. Humans who are, as the *Qur'án* describes, "believers", are that way potentially even before they ever hear of what their hearts are thirsting for. They sniff here and there among all the candidates and go on disappointed until one day they hit Gold. "This is what I was looking for all the time! I've always believed this!" they say. The potential believer becomes the

realized believer. As the *Qur'án* says repeatedly, God has guided them all the way, just as He misguides the unbelievers.

And others are only looking for a convenient social program of friends, comforting belief, and the feeling that one is saved, special, chosen and selected so as to feel superior to others. There are countless religions and denominations of religions around to satisfy their "religious needs" and let them feel "chosen" and "saved". Some of these religionists even accidentally get into God's actual religion for the day because it happened to come along and satisfy those "religious needs and wants". But they were never thirsting for the Truth, for reality, for God; they were craving the fulfilment of their "needs and wants". They wanted something to make them feel good, to fulfill their desires and assuage loneliness, to have a nice social club with lots of nice friends to join for potluck dinners, social outings, token service to the poor and needy, and so on. They want a "feel good" religion. Some go for the denomination with the best singing. After sermons on Sunday or Saturday or whenever, they feel good, holy and uplifted. Then they go back to their usual ungodly and worldly life. Their religion isn't their life; it's just one part of it that they make sure doesn't go too far and dominate them. They get what they want. They make good tests for the real believers.

"Avoid those that treat their faith as a sport and a pastime and are seduced by the life of the world. Admonish them with this lest their souls be damned by their own sins...." (Cattle, 6:70)

There are a thousand religions and cults, some of them almost custom-tailored to special personal needs and desires, just waiting for them. But a person looking for God, for Truth, for reality, is ready to go through Hell to get to this Heaven. Nothing else will satisfy him! His spiritual nose leads him or

her gradually, painfully, with struggle and search, to the Object of his quest. Such a person finds the one Faith that has come down from God through a Revelation. This writer has known people who drove all over town for an hour looking for the exact food they want, but can't quite find it. Then they find it after some search. It's the same with finding the Truth that the heart of a true seeker longs for.

These two general categories of seeker, however, still comprise only a small minority of members of religious groups. Many people are not seekers at all. They just blindly follow whatever religion they happened to be born into. They get indoctrinated at an early age and learn that the religion of the people of their culture is the only correct one. They don't question this. Which means that they don't think. Very few people actually think. They just learn **what** to think, meaning what to believe. So, if the person happens to have been born in Saudi Arabia or Syria, then he's a Muslim and cannot imagine being anything else. If she's born in Thailand, then she's a Buddhist and is certain that this is the only valid and possible religious truth. If he's raised in a Christian family or environment, then he feels assured, after all those years of indoctrination as to what is true, that the particular version of Christianity he has learned is the absolute and final truth, that he is going to heaven as a saved favorite of God and everyone else is destined to fry most painfully in the fire.

This is where most of the world is now, and where it has been for thousands of years. It's been a major cause of war and bloodshed. This is why Hindus and Muslims of India kill each other in complete defiance of the spirit of their religions. If they had actually searched for the truth and not just blindly believed in whatever religion they happened to be born into, they wouldn't disgrace their religions so horribly. Krishna and Muhammad are in complete harmony and love, while some of

their followers are like ferocious wolves. Muhammad and Krishna are surely ashamed of these followers of theirs.

Such humans are like computers or robots; all they need is to be programmed, and off they go – without any doubts, without any search for Truth, without any questions, without even the slightest thoughts of their own! (What did God give us these minds for?) And then, when they meet another person just like themselves, but who has been indoctrinated to believe that another religion is true, they argue and fight. This is blind, ignorant faith, and unworthy of anyone who claims to be concerned about God and Truth. In fact, it is unworthy of anyone who can be described as human because the unique characteristic by which a human is distinguished from all the animals is his capacity to think, to reason, to search for Reality. If we cannot think for ourselves and search on our own for what is true, right and real, then what quality is it in us that differentiates us from the animals?

In contrast, when a group of true seekers meet, they are in agreement and unity because they don't claim to have the full truth; they are looking for it. And since there is only one Reality high above us all, whoever seeks the Truth will be moving closer to everyone else seeking it. It's just one Goal. It's like hundreds of people struggling to reach the top of a high mountain, each following his own path. The closer they get to their goal, the closer they get to each other. And when they finally do reach the summit, they find themselves all together. There's only one God, only one Truth, only one Religion, only one Reality. But it's far above us. Ignorant indoctrinated fanaticism breeds disunity, strife and trouble while enlightened search for Truth engenders harmony, love and unity.

This is why most Christians aren't really Christians, most Hindus aren't really followers of Krishna and the other

avatars, most Buddhists don't really believe in Buddha, most Jews don't really know Who Moses is, most Muslims aren't really Muslims, and perhaps why many who call themselves Bahá'ís aren't really Bahá'ís. It's why so many of these religionists don't really follow the teachings and commands of their religion, why they fight and argue instead of following the teachings of Krishna, Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and Bahá'u'lláh to cooperate, be humble and make peace. It's not the same as joining a club that your friends, relatives or neighbors belong to. Precious diamonds are rare and hidden; dull stones of little value are common and everywhere to be seen.

How interesting that most in Thailand are Buddhist, most in Iraq are Muslim, most in India are Hindu. Does such a distribution suggest that humans are searching for what God's Will is now? How many of these have given any real thought to the matter of religion – enough to wonder, to search, to ask questions such as "What if I were born in Vietnam or China or Tibet? What would I believe in then?" But such questions don't occur to those who aren't seeking Truth, who never learned to think or wonder or ask important questions. They just want to feel comfortable, fulfilled, satisfied. They want a God who will be submissive and obedient to their wishes and prayers. They pray and ask for a child, or scads of money, or to win at gambling, or to be on their side to win a war or some battle, or to capture a boyfriend, or whatever. They expect an obedient God to know who is boss. They want a God that will humbly surrender and give them whatever they ask for.

And if the All-Powerful and Majestic Lord of the Universe decides not to answer their selfish and petty prayers, if He decides that it is they who should obey and submit to His Command, then they get angry and even threaten the God they cajole, plead with, bargain with, and prod, with not doing His

Will. Have you seen the angry man screaming and raging at the statue of Mary near the cathedral for not letting him win at gambling? – for not "coming through" on the "deal" he made with the statue earlier? Have you seen the lady making offerings to some small shrine and speaking so sweetly hoping to coax and cajole the Lord of the Universe into bringing her that nice boy she likes? – or maybe a baby? This is the selfish child who wants to be satisfied, not the mature adult who longs for reality and truth.

No human can lead another to Truth, or change any person in a fundamental way. Real religious efforts are a matter of bringing out whatever potential exists in a person. The orange seed is not going to bring forth grapes or bananas. The watermelon seed will not produce apples – even through the most ardent efforts. Again:

"The fate of each man we have hung about his neck." (The Night Journey, 17:12)

"... None can guide those whom God has led astray." (Thunder, 13:34)

"You cannot make the dead hear you, nor can you make the deaf hear your call if they turn their backs and give no heed; nor can you guide the blind out of their error. None shall give ear to you save those who believe in Our revelations, and are submissive to Our will." (The Greeks, 30:52)

So the true seeker, the potential believer, already has it in him to search for God's Faith, while others have what they want in religions others like them create themselves, or in religions they've changed to suit themselves, or in religions that

are God's old revelation of ages past in which they've been indoctrinated. We get what we want deep down in our hearts. Those who want this world and its life and wealth get it. And those who want Truth, Reality and God and the next life get that! It's God or gold. Again:

"Those that desire the life of this world with all its finery shall be rewarded for their deeds in their own lifetime: nothing shall be denied them. These are the men who in the world to come shall have nothing but Hell-fire. Fruitless are their deeds, and vain are all their works." (Húd, 11:15)

So, a person who truly desires God might hopefully find this a stepping stone in that direction. And another who has been programmed to believe in the "correct" Faith of their family, culture or group, and indoctrinated towards a fanatical and unreasoning approach to religion, will reject the Truth, whatever it is for this day and age, because it will conflict with his prejudices, desires and indoctrination. The potential believer will develop into an actual realized believer because that is what is hidden away within him. And the one who is not a potential believer can never be changed into one any more than an appleseed can grow into a coconut tree.

This in no way changes or interferes with the principle that the Prophet has an immense power working through him that enables him to transform a person in the most radical way so that satanic strength is converted to heavenly power. The transformation of the ugly caterpillar into the beautiful butterfly after a period of time of utter formlessness in a cocoon is remarkable. (There is a stage in the cocoon where all the substance of the caterpillar dissolves into a homogenous fluid and then completely reorganizes and solidifies into the

new butterfly.) But no matter how great this transformation, the truth still remains that the butterfly can develop only from its previous condition as a caterpillar. Other wormlike creatures will not and cannot be changed into butterflies. There isn't the potential.

A Prime Candidate

As hinted at earlier, this writer feels that the religions of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths, which appeared in Islámic Persia (modern-day Iran) of the 19th century, don't have any real competition as candidates for being the next revelation of God. In fact, to him it's like the sun rising after a dark night; the old stars are still there, but one just doesn't notice them any longer because the light of this sun is so bright. But no one can impose his faith on another. As quoted, it's a gift from God, the Creator. Without this glorious gift, the mind and heart will not see. So it's for each seeker to investigate carefully for himself.

These are not the days of childhood any longer, where one's powers of thought and comprehension are weak, where one must be told what to do, what to think, what to believe, where blind imitation and conformity are the rule. We are approaching maturity now, and maturity requires that faith be built on rationality and the scientific approach. A person must genuinely seek out what is true, carefully going over proofs and arguments until utterly convinced. In fact, there's no harm in even trying to prove a religion wrong – so long as one is being fair and unprejudiced, and genuinely seeking what is true. It's the bad attitude of ignoring possible truth, or of opposing it without investigating it, or of recognizing the truth, not liking it, and then opposing it, that are unreasonable and harmful. No one can search for another. Each person has his or her own path of search to find the Goal of the heart's quest.

If it is true that a new revelation has come to our world since the revealing of the *Qur'án* through the Prophet of God, Muhammad, then this new Prophet will reveal new laws, new commands, new exhortations and advice suited to this new age. Bahá'u'lláh has certainly done that. In fact, many of the principles our world now takes for granted as the signs of progressive society were first stated by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh: the abolition of slavery, the equality of men and women, universal education for all (with a special preference for girls), the full agreement and harmony of science and religion, the elimination of all forms of prejudice that separate one section of humanity from another, the institution of a world government (whose first stages we see in the League of Nations and the United Nations) to protect us from international anarchy and aggression by nations and peoples, the removal of the priesthood and excessive ritual in religion, the establishment of a global auxiliary language for the world by which all can communicate. And, so important to our discussion here, the removal of the institution of holy war and battle.

"O people of the earth! The first Glad-Tidings which the Mother Book hath, in this Most Great Revelation, imparted unto all the peoples of the world is that **the law of holy war hath been blotted out from the Book**. Glorified be the All-Merciful, the Lord of grace abounding, through Whom the door of heavenly bounty hath been flung open in the face of all that are in heaven and on earth." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 21) [emphasis mine]

"O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint

and oppression, are one and all condemned."
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ quoted, *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, p. 239)

"Sanctify your ears from the idle talk of them that are the symbols of denial and the exponents of violence and anger. The hour is approaching when ye will witness the power of the one true God triumphing over all created things and the signs of His sovereignty encompassing all creation." (Bahá’u’lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 73)

This is good news! In addition, Bahá’u’lláh has removed the requirement of not associating with those of other religions. There is no more shunning of "infidels". He says,

"It is permitted that the peoples and kindreds of the world associate with one another with joy and radiance. O people! Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. Thus hath the day-star [sun] of His sanction and authority shone forth above the horizon of the decree of God, the Lord of the worlds." (*Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 22)

If this is true (and the writer finds it difficult saying this conditionally since he is convinced that it is true), then the current Muslim violence we see being perpetrated in the world is against the command of God now. If this is the next revelation from God, then even Muhammad would now disagree with the law of holy war and violence against others. Those who reject the new revelation and continue to abide by the old religion are now no different from the people of Ur who opposed Abraham, no different from Thamud who rejected

Salih, no different from 'Ad who turned away from Hud, no different from Pharaoh who opposed Moses, no different from the Jewish Sadducees and Pharisees who were behind the crucifixion of Jesus, and no different from the Christians, Jews and pagans who opposed and tormented Muhammad. All the horrific statements in the *Qur'án* that apply to unbelievers, how their evil deeds seem "fair" to them, how they will end up in Hell, now all apply to those that reject the new revelation because now **they** are the disbelievers; now **they** reject God in this Last Day, this Resurrection, this great Hour of Doom, this Catastrophe, this first and second blast on the Trumpet, this cleaving of the heavens and destruction of the mountains, this Day of Judgement.

Can we see the *Qur'án's* promise coming true that the deniers will be given what they want in this life? What great material wealth, often through oil, has been showered on some! But sooner or later, as that *Qur'án* says, the Day of Doom arrives.

Consider the horrible fate of those who opposed the Messengers of God in the past. Consider what has happened to India since the days in which this birthplace of Buddhism rejected The Buddha and returned to old ways. From the glory of the days of King Ashoka, a truly wise king who accepted the wisdom of Buddha and lifted up his land to well-being and peace, India sank back to the misery, degradation and suffering that we still see now. Think of how severely the Jewish people suffered for two thousand years so very shortly after the crucifixion of the one who was their promised Messiah. It wasn't 40 years after Christ's crucifixion before the Roman general Titus reduced Jerusalem to ruins and the Jews were cast out of their own country to live persecuted in other nations around the world for almost two millennia. That was the result of tormenting Jesus for three years. If Bahá'u'lláh is indeed

"The Father", the "owner of the vineyard come to bring justice in the vineyard", the Prince of Peace, the Lord of hosts, the Glory of God foretold in the holy Scriptures of all the major religions, then those who tormented and opposed Him and His Forerunner, the Bab, for almost half a century, will indeed have a painful price to pay. Is it any wonder that the *Qur'án* refers to the Last Days as the "Hour of Doom", the "Catastrophe", the "Earthquake" and so on? (A later chapter will cover these Last Day matters.) The mercy of God extends for a long time; and then the hour of justice arrives. One can see the stage being set for this already.

Muslim terrorists now plague the world believing that they are being obedient to God through various rationalizations and justifications. Could it be that they are being used as tools to discipline and train the true believers. They think they are doing right. Their foul deeds seem "fair" to them. They are so often wilfully blind to a new revelation and feel dutybound to attack it and its followers. They've tortured and martyred over 20,000 followers of the new revelations so far and work diligently to make the lives of Bahá'ís a nearly unbearable torment by denying them the rights that other citizens have. When the tool has served its purpose, it will be over. None can fight against God – even those who vainly imagine that they defend Him. If God has indeed sent down a new revelation, then there is now no justification whatsoever for those who claim to be Muslims and yet do what is the shame and disgrace of Islám and Muhammad.

How would Krishna receive those who oppose the tenth Avatar who is His return (or reincarnation as they would say)? How would The Buddha receive those who work against the Fifth Buddha, the Amitabha Maitreya Buddha of Universal Peace? How would Moses receive the Jewish priests who arranged the crucifixion of the Messiah? How would Jesus

receive Christians who opposed Muhammad? How does Muhammad receive Muslims who tortured and killed over 20,000 followers of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, who strung up that Holy Báb and murdered him before the eyes of thousands, who imprisoned and tormented Bahá'u'lláh, exiling him from Persia, to Iraq, to Constantinople, to Palestine in the Holy Land (now Israel) – how will these be received by Muhammad?

" 'O heedless one!' He [Bahá'u'lláh] thus addresses, in the Lawh-i-Burhán, a notorious Persian mujtahid [priest], whose hands were stained with the blood of Bahá'í martyrs, 'rely not on thy glory and thy power. Thou art even as the last trace of sunlight upon the mountaintop. Soon will it fade away, as decreed by God, the All-Possessing, the Most High. Thy glory, and the glory of such as are like thee, have been taken away, and this, verily, is what hath been ordained by the One with Whom is the Mother Tablet.

"...Because of you the Apostle [Muhammad] lamented, and the Chaste One [Fatimih] cried out, and the countries were laid waste, and darkness fell upon all regions. O concourse of divines! Because of you the people were abased, and the banner of Islám was hauled down, and its mighty throne subverted. Every time a man of discernment hath sought to hold fast unto that which would exalt Islám, you raised a clamor, and thereby was he deterred from achieving his purpose, while the land remained fallen in clear ruin.'

" 'Say: O concourse of Persian divines!' Bahá'u'lláh again prophesies, 'In My name ye have seized the reins of men, and occupy the

seats of honor, by reason of your relation to Me. When I revealed Myself, however, ye turned aside, and committed what hath caused the tears of such as have recognized Me to flow. Erelong will all that ye possess perish, and your glory be turned into the most wretched abasement, and ye shall behold the punishment for what ye have wrought, as decreed by God, the Ordainer, the All-Wise.' " (Bahá'u'lláh quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Promised Day is Come*, pp 88-89)

However, when one reads the powerful letters that Bahá'u'lláh wrote to the Pope, and to kings and rulers of Europe and the Middle East – Pope Pius IX, Napoleon III of France, Alexander II of Russia, Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary, Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany-Prussia, Queen Victoria of England, Násiri'd-Dín Sháh of Persia and 'Abdu'l-'Azíz, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire – written, mostly while a prisoner in Palestine, with such stupendous power and authority, "it is as if the king of kings were issuing his behest to his humblest vassal king, and regulating his conduct!" (to use the words of the Grand Vizir of Sultan 'Abdu'l-'Azíz). Most sobering is the realization that all the warnings and prophecies made by Bahá'u'lláh to these kings, rulers and religious leaders have come true. There are no longer kings or queens in any of those nations whose rulers arrogantly rejected Him.

Queen Victoria was the sole sovereign who did not respond in a dismissive manner. Bahá'u'lláh praised her that England had abolished the slave trade and established representative government. The man who delivered Bahá'u'lláh's stern condemnation of that cocky little emperor, Napoleon III, while he was in his glory, later became a follower of Bahá'u'lláh after seeing how His warning that a sudden and most unexpected fall was imminent came true. The

Sultanate and Caliphate of Islám have disappeared along with the Turkish Ottoman Empire, and there is no Sháh of Iran on the throne. Pope Pius IX was even taken prisoner and the temporal rule of the Catholic Church over Europe was reduced to the Vatican. "From two ranks amongst men power hath been seized: kings and ecclesiastics." said Bahá'u'lláh. One needn't be an accomplished historian to see that that has happened. (There will, however, He says, be a return to the institution of kingship in a later age. But the priesthood is finished and no longer suited to a more mature humankind.)

No thinking, informed and intelligent person can study this and not realize that something immense, something truly stupendous, glorious and majestic is going on here. This is no mere human lusting for leadership starting up his little religion filled with desperately insecure people who devour the first fruit that suits their taste, however poisonous. This new revelation is prophesied in the Holy Books of all the major religions. After Christianity, it is the world's most widespread religion. It now has upwards of five million adherents, probably six million, across the globe. How strange that so many who hear of it suddenly become silent, almost dumbfounded, instead of making it the major news item of our day. There's nothing to compare with it.

Professor Edward G. Browne, a renowned scholar of Middle Eastern studies from Cambridge University of England, met Bahá'u'lláh in 1890 and had this to say:

"... my conductor paused for a moment while I removed my shoes. Then, with a quick movement of the hand, he withdrew, and, as I passed, replaced the curtain; and I found myself in a large apartment, along the upper end of which ran a low divan, while on the side

opposite to the door were placed two or three chairs. Though I dimly suspected whither I was going and whom I was to behold (for no distinct intimation had been given to me), a second or two elapsed ere, with a throb of wonder and awe, I became definitely conscious that the room was not untenanted. In the corner where the divan met the wall sat a wondrous and venerable figure, crowned with a felt head-dress of the kind called *taj* by dervishes (but of unusual height and make), round the base of which was wound a small white turban. The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it.

"Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow; while the deep lines on the forehead and face implied an age which the jet-black hair and beard flowing down in indistinguishable luxuriance almost to the waist seemed to belie.

"No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!

"A mild dignified voice bade me be seated, and then continued: — 'Praise be to God that thou has attained!

" '... Thou has come to see a prisoner and an exile. ... We desire but the good of the world and happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment. ... That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be

strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled – what harm is there in this? ... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the "Most Great Peace" shall come. ... Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold?

" '... Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind. ... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. ... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind [i.e., humankind] ...'

"Such, so far as I can recall them, were the words which, besides many others, I heard from Beha. Let those who read them consider well with themselves whether such doctrines merit death and bonds, and whether the world is more likely gain or lose by their diffusion." (Introduction to *A Traveller's Narrative (Episode of the Báb)*, pp. xxxix-xl; quoted in Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, pp 39-40)

Peace! The long-awaited Kingdom of God on Earth foretold by Jesus Christ! The Golden Age of humankind! "Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come." No more holy war, or war of any kind! The day when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when men will learn war no more! Is this good news or what?

Imagine a world where the staggeringly huge amounts budgeted in preparation for war and the threat of war (called "defense") are instead applied to relieving problems of poverty, hunger, lack of clean water and social justice, and towards the development of science and other constructive uses. War is a process of wasting money, effort, time and resources with no constructive end results; just the ruin of the character and spirit of our children, the spread of disease and suffering, and the destruction of what we've taken such pains to build. It's the cancelling out of each other's efforts. How utterly foolish and self-defeating it is! No one wins any wars. The one they call the "winner" is in fact the loser that lost the least. Only cooperation brings a real winner. This way all sides win. And there is no real winner unless all win! For 6000 years or more we've been like the man who tries to sink his fellow who is in the same boat, like the fool who tries to burn down his brother's room in the same house in which he lives. What a glorious world this will be when we wake up to see the gross stupidity and self-defeating childish folly of the mutual destruction called war and fighting! Perhaps we can be excused for acting like foolish children while we are children. But as our collective maturity approaches, there's no longer any excuse for attacking our own human family so brutally. It's not sane or sensible for the human family to attack and injure itself.

This doesn't mean, however, that there is no place for the just use of force in our nearer future. So long as there are immature humans who have no thought for the welfare of others, there will be troublemakers and trouble. While the vicious wolf is still free to assault the sheep, a means of protection is needed. As stated, the optimum good and minimal harm is done through the application of force with controlled and disciplined justice. So police forces at the civic,

national and global levels will surely be needed for a time. Bahá'u'lláh states:

"O kings of the earth! We see you increasing every year your expenditures, and laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is wholly and grossly unjust. Fear the sighs and tears of this wronged One, and lay not excessive burdens on your peoples. Do not rob them to rear palaces for yourselves; nay rather choose for them that which ye choose for yourselves. Thus We unfold to your eyes that which profiteth you, if ye but perceive. Your people are your treasures. Beware lest your rule violate the commandments of God, and ye deliver your wards to the hands of the robber. By them ye rule, by their means ye subsist, by their aid ye conquer. Yet, how disdainfully ye look upon them! How strange, how very strange!

"Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.

"O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions. Beware lest ye disregard the counsel of the All-Knowing, the Faithful.

"Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. **Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest**

justice." (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp 253-54) [emphasis mine]

In explanation of this, 'Abdu'l-Bahá', his son and appointed successor, said:

"True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns – the shining exemplars of devotion and determination – shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world.

"They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race.

"This supreme and noble undertaking – the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world – should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should

be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure. (*The Secret of Divine Civilization*, pp. 64-65)

The League of Nations and the present-day United Nations are the first two faltering steps towards this great goal of what Bahá'u'lláh has called The Lesser Peace. In the Most Great Peace, to come at a time when the generality of humankind have at last attained our first stage of maturity (we're in the adolescent stage now), there will be little need to worry about leaders of nations being so mentally and spiritually retarded as to imagine that there would be any benefit in attacking and invading other nations and peoples. We will have grown up by then and left the things of our immaturity behind. The light of justice and peace will fill the world then. But until that blessed and beautiful day, the wise and just application of defensive force will be required for the protection of all.

The point is to convey the notion that if there is a new revelation of God in our world, then these commands in the *Qur'án* to fight and war are no longer appropriate to this day and age.

Please forgive the writer if his enthusiasm has overflowed a bit here. How does one pretend that it's all just a neat intellectual exercise? Is such excited ardor really the same as preaching? No pressure is exerted here; the reader is free to investigate for herself or himself and come to his or her own conclusions.

At least you understand now why the writer said he is not a Muslim and yet believes in the revelation of Muhammad.

CHAPTER 4

LAWS, COMMANDS AND ADMONITIONS

Though there is a great deal to be covered here, each item will be given only a short space for consideration unless it seems it might be of interest to non-Muslims. (Otherwise this book will become bigger than desirable.) In some items quotes will be used sparingly since some Muslim laws are derived from numerous different passages in the *Qur'án*, as well as other sources, with considerable interpretation made by religious leaders. Many would distinguish between Laws of God, commands, admonitions and advice. Here, they've been lumped all together. This book has the purpose of showing some things of interest to the non-Muslim reader. It's not a guide for Muslims. For more accurate details please consult one of the many books giving information on Islám.

Any who have lived in a Muslim country or with practicing Muslims will realize quickly that Muslims generally abide by an understanding of Islámic law and command that goes considerably beyond the obvious statements of the *Qur'án*. This is due to various Muslim 'traditions' and beliefs about what Muhammad said as well as a great deal of interpretation by Muslim leaders. Since the point of this book is to get to the heart of what the *Qur'án* is about, not to describe Islámic practice, only those laws spoken of clearly in the *Qur'án* will be included here.

Prayer

Muslims pray regular obligatory prayers a number of times each day, often five times daily. As many know, these involve various body positions signifying humility and submission to accompany the recital of the prayer. Those praying the obligatory prayers are supposed to face the *Ka'bah* in Mecca, called the *Qiblah* or *Qiblih*. Before obligatory prayer, ablutions, washing of the arms from hand to elbow and the head, are done. Certain situations of ceremonial uncleanness require the complete washing of the body before obligatory prayer. In addition to this regular prayer believers are urged to make sincere personal prayer in private to God.

"Attend to your prayers morning and evening, and in the night-time too. Good deeds shall make amends for sins. That is an admonition for thoughtful men."

That is, pray, but don't forget that prayer is no substitute for action. There's a story about two devout young girls who are afraid of being late for school. As they hurry along, one of them says, "Let's stop and pray that we won't be late." The other more practical and sensible one replies: "Let's pray while we're running."

Privacy Required Three Times a Day

"Believers, let your slaves and those who are under age ask your leave on three occasions when they come in to see you: before the morning prayer, when you have put off your garments in the heat of noon, and after the evening prayer. These are the three occasions when none may intrude upon your privacy. At

other times, it shall be no offence for you, or them, to go around visiting one another. Thus God makes plain to you His revelations: God is all-knowing and wise." (Light, 24:58)

Fast During Month of Ramadan

"In the month of Ramadán the Koran was revealed, a book of guidance with proofs of guidance distinguishing right from wrong. Therefore whoever of you is present in that month let him fast. But he who is ill or on a journey shall fast a similar number of days later on.

"God desires your well-being, not your discomfort. He desires you to fast the whole month so that you may magnify Him and render thanks to Him for giving you His guidance.

...

"It is now lawful for you to lie with your wives on the night of the fast; they are a comfort to you as you are to them. God knew that you were deceiving yourselves. He has relented towards you and pardoned you. Therefore you may now lie with them and seek what God has ordained for you. Eat and drink until you can tell a white thread from a black one in the light of the coming dawn. Then resume the fast till nightfall and do not approach them, but stay at your prayers in the mosques." (The Cow, 2:184f)

Muslims are not permitted to eat, drink or smoke while the sun is up during the 30 days of the holy month of Ramadan.

Eating, drinking and smoking are done before sunrise and after sunset. It's a time of devotion and prayer to God.

Pilgrimage to Mecca

"The first temple ever to be built for men was that at Bakkah [Mecca], a blessed site, a beacon for the nations. In it there are veritable signs and the spot where Abraham stood. Whoever enters it is safe. Pilgrimage to the House is a duty to God for all who can make the journey. As for the unbelievers, God can surely do without them." (The 'Imrans, 3:96) [This first temple, the *Ka'bih*, was built by Abraham.]

Chastity and Restraint

"Enjoin believing men to turn their eyes away from temptation and to restrain their carnal desires. This will make their lives purer. God has knowledge of all their actions.

"Enjoin believing women to turn their eyes away from temptation and to preserve their chastity; to cover their adornment (except such as are normally displayed); to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their finery except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their step-sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women-servants, and their slave-girls; male attendants lacking in natural vigour, and children who have no carnal knowledge of women. And let them not stamp their feet when walking so as to reveal their hidden trinkets." (Light, 24:30f)

Stay Away From Menstruating Women

"They ask you about menstruation. Say: 'It is an indisposition. Keep aloof from women during their menstrual periods and do not touch them until they are clean again. Then have intercourse with them in the way God enjoined you. God loves those that turn to Him in repentance and strive to keep themselves clean.'
" (The Cow, 2:222)

Fornication/Adultery

"You shall not commit adultery [fornication], for it is foul and indecent." (The Night Journey, 17:32)

"The adulterer [fornicator] and the adulteress shall each be given a hundred lashes. Let no pity for them cause you to disobey God, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let their punishment be witnessed by a number of believers.

"The adulterer may marry only an adulteress or an idolatress; and the adulteress may marry only an adulterer or an idolater. True believers are forbidden such marriages." (Light, 24:2f)

Condemnation of Homosexuality

" ... Lot's people, too, disbelieved their apostles. Their compatriot Lot said to them: 'Will you not fear God? I am indeed your true apostle. Fear

God and follow me. For this I demand of you no recompense; none can reward me except the Lord of the Universe. Will you fornicate with males and abandon your wives, whom God has created for you? Surely you are great transgressors.'

" 'Lot,' they replied, 'desist or you shall be banished.'

"He said: 'I abhor your ways. Lord, preserve me and my kinsfolk from their evil doings.'

"We delivered Lot and all his kinsfolk, save for one old woman who stayed behind, and the rest We utterly destroyed...." (The Poets, 26:160) [Sodom and Gomorrah]

"His [Lot's] people, long addicted to evil practices, came running towards him. 'My people,' he said, 'here are my daughters: surely they are more wholesome to you. Fear God, and do not humiliate me by insulting my guests [messengers from God]. Is there not one good man among you?'

"They replied: 'You know we have no need of your daughters. You know full well what we are seeking.' [the two messengers/angels]

"He cried: 'Would that I had strength enough to overcome you, or could find refuge in some mighty man!'

"They said: 'Lot, we are the messengers of your Lord: they shall not touch you. Depart with your kinsfolk in the dead of night and let none of you turn back, except your wife. She shall suffer the fate of the others. In the morning their hour will come. Is not the morning near?'

"And when Our judgement came to pass, We turned their city upside down and let loose upon it a shower of clay stones bearing the tokens of your Lord. The punishment of the unjust was not far off." (Húd, 11:78f)

Fornication, that is, the fulfilment of the sexual urge outside of a legitimate marriage between a man and a woman or women, is forbidden. Clearly, homosexuality falls in this category. All the major religions uphold the sacred nature of the family. It's not only the nest in which children are to be raised; it's also the building block of society. When the building blocks fall apart, then the rearing of children goes astray; and the social structure built up from these component families soon falls apart too. Fornication of all kinds undermines the stability of the family. So there's a great wisdom in prohibiting whatever works to upset or erode the stability of the family. Individual spiritual, mental and physical health also depend on the careful and disciplined use of the powerful drive by which new human beings are created. AIDS, syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes and other sexually-transmitted diseases are the consequences of promiscuity. If every person remained with just one partner, then these diseases would disappear in a couple of generations. Though it's not now popular to say so, promiscuity and perversion of sexuality also have serious psychological consequences. This is quite obvious to those who are free of these distortions and defects. That it ruins spiritual development goes without saying. It's like submerging oneself in a sea of mud; one becomes blind to the things of the spirit. The Creator appears to have designed all levels of the world – material, mental and spiritual – so that immense benefit results from obeying His laws, while harm and suffering, both individually and socially, result from ignoring these laws. Marriage between a genuine female and a true male is the fireplace in which the fire of

sexual feelings is controlled and moderated. Without this controlling fireplace, the entire house of a human life and family can be burnt to ashes. The point is not the complete quenching of this natural human fire but rather its careful control and moderation within the institution of marriage.

Up to Four Wives Permitted - But Conditioned on Fairness – And No Man Can Be Fair

"Give orphans the property which belongs to them. Do not exchange their valuables for worthless things or cheat them of their possessions; for this would surely be a great sin. If you fear that you cannot treat orphans [orphan girls] with fairness, then you may marry other women who seem good to you: two, three, or four of them. But **if you fear that you cannot maintain equality among them, marry one only** or any slave-girls you may own. This will make it easier for you to avoid injustice.

"Give women their dowry as a free gift; but if they choose to make over to you a part of it, you may regard it as lawfully yours." (Women, 4:3f) [emphasis mine]

"Try as you may, **you cannot treat all your wives impartially.**" (Women, 4:130) [emphasis mine]

So, in reality, the *Qur'án* is actually saying that only one wife is allowed. But it gives some leeway for those who wish not to make this obvious logical deduction. They can have up to four wives without breaking God's law if this is what they understand of it.

Believers Must Not Marry or Befriend Unbelievers or Strangers

"Give warning to the hypocrites of a stern chastisement: those who choose the unbelievers rather than the faithful for their friends. Are they seeking glory at their hands? Surely all glory belongs to God." (Women, 4:137)

"Believers, do not choose the infidels rather than the faithful for your friends. Would you give God a clear proof against yourselves?" (Women, 4:135)

Wine, Games of Chance, Divining Forbidden

"Believers, wine and games of chance, idols and divining arrows, are abominations devised by Satan. Avoid them, so that you may prosper." (The Table, 5:90)

"They ask you about drinking and gambling. Say: 'There is great harm in both, although they have some benefit for men; but their harm is far greater than their benefit.'" (The Cow, 2:219)

The Sabbath

Jews regard the Sabbath, or day of rest, as being on Saturday. Many of the Latin-based or Romance languages use some variation of the word for Sabbath for "Saturday". In

Spanish and Portuguese, "Saturday" is "Sábado". In Judaism the Sabbath begins on Friday at sunset and continues until sunset on Saturday since the day is regarded as beginning and ending at sunset in the Hebrew Calendar (and in the Muslim and Bahá'í Calendars as well). Apparently Jesus changed the Sabbath to Sunday. This is not found in the Bible but is clear from the simple reality that almost all Christians regard Sunday as the Sabbath. The Seventh-Day Adventists use only the authority of the Bible in this respect and insist that it should be returned to Saturday since this is what is given in the Old Testament to the Jews. Muslims regard Friday as the Sabbath. The *Qur'án* states that the only reason for establishing this is to stop the bickering over which day of the week it is.

"The Sabbath was ordained only for those who differed about it. On the Day of Resurrection your Lord will judge their disputes." (The Bee, 16:24)

To those who can reason, it doesn't matter which day of the week the Sabbath falls on. What is important is only that one day of the seven is set aside for this day of rest so that all in the religion have the same day of rest. These names, "Monday", "Tuesday" and so on have arbitrarily been applied to the days. There is no necessary connection between the name of a particular day of the week and that day. We could have started naming the days of the week a day earlier or a day later. It's merely a human convention on which we agree.

In October of 1582, it was decided by the Pope to drop 10 days from the calendar because the mathematicians and astronomers informed him that the Julian Calendar they were using had gotten out of step with the actual year (the one defined by one revolution of the earth around the sun with respect to the stars) by these ten days. To make the Calendar

match this actual solar year more closely, three leap years in a 400 year period were dropped (those in century years not divisible by 400). This is the Gregorian Calendar that we now use. Some of the uneducated people did not understand that changing the numbers that apply to a day is arbitrary, only a human convention, and doesn't change the days themselves. They rioted in the belief that ten days had been stolen from them.

Those who believe that the names of the days of the week belong inherently to certain days and are not just conventions that we use make the same mistake. Seventh-Day Adventists need perhaps to focus more on the Advent and less on the Seventh-Day in order to be reasonable and faithful. (Like Bahá'ís and the Millerites such as the early Jehovah's Witnesses and other Adventists, they also believe that Jesus was to return in 1844 in accord with Jesus' reference to Daniel's prophecy about the Return but felt that it didn't happen physically – as Bahá'ís do.) It doesn't matter which day of the week is proclaimed to be the Sabbath. What matters is that all in one religion agree on selecting the same day of each week. The Prophets have the authority to do this. Jesus changed the day of the Sabbath perhaps to distinguish Christians from Jews. The *Qur'án* did it to resolve the disputes about which day it fell on, and, apparently, to distinguish the Muslim Sabbath from the Jewish and Christian ones. Bahá'ís do not have a particular day of the week as a Sabbath perhaps because work done in the spirit of service is regarded as a form of worship, meaning every day is holy in this sense; and a far more advanced technology and pattern of social justice in the future will greatly reduce necessary human work hours.

Carrion, Blood and Flesh of Swine Prohibited

"He has forbidden you carrion [meat of an animal found already dead], blood and the flesh of swine [pork]; also any flesh consecrated other than in the name of God. But whoever is compelled through necessity, intending neither to sin nor to transgress, will find that God is forgiving and merciful." (The Bee, 16:115)

Stealing, Cutting Off of Thief's Hand

"As for the man or woman who is guilty of theft, cut off their hands to punish them for their crimes. That is the punishment enjoined by God. God is mighty and wise. But whoever repents after committing evil, and mends his ways, shall be pardoned by God. God is forgiving and merciful." (The Table, 5:39)

"No prophet would rob his followers; for anyone that steals shall on the Day of Resurrection bring with him that which he has stolen. Then shall every soul be paid what it has earned: none shall be wronged." (The 'Imrans, 3:161)

Alms

"Alms (charitable donations) shall be only for the poor and the helpless, for those that are engaged in the management of alms and those whose hearts are sympathetic to the Faith, for the freeing of slaves and debtors, for the advancement of God's cause, and for the traveller in need. That is a duty enjoined by

God. God is all-knowing and wise."
(Repentance, 9:60)

"Those that give alms, be they men or women, and those that give a generous loan to God, shall be repaid twofold. They shall receive a noble compensation." (Iron, 17:18)

"They will ask you about almsgiving. Say: 'Whatever you bestow in charity must go to parents and to kinsfolk, to the orphans and to the helpless and to the traveller in need. God is aware of whatever good you do.'" (The Cow, 2:215f)

"You shall never be truly righteous until you give in alms what you dearly cherish." (The 'Imrans, 3:92)

Tithing

"Know that one-fifth of your spoils (war booty) shall belong to God, the Apostle, the Apostle's kinfolk, the orphans, the needy, and those that travel the road: if you truly believe in God and what We revealed to our servant on the day of victory, the day when the two armies met. God has power over all things." (The Spoils, 8:41)

Condemnation of Hoarded Riches

"Let those who hoard the wealth which God has bestowed on them out of His bounty never think it good for them: it is nothing but evil.

The riches they have hoarded shall become their fetters on the Day of Resurrection. It is God who will inherit the heavens and the earth. God is cognizant of all your actions." (The 'Imrans, 3:181)

Charging Interest on Loans (Usury) Forbidden

"God has laid His curse on usury [charging interest on loans] and blessed almsgiving with increase. God bears no love for the impious and the sinful." (The Cow, 2:276)

"That which you seek to increase by usury will not be blessed by God; but the alms you give for His sake shall be repaid to you many times over." (The Greeks, 30:39)

Bribery Prohibited

"Bestow no favours expecting gain. Be patient for your Lord's sake." (The Cloaked One, 74:4)

"Do not devour one another's property by unjust means, nor bribe with it the judges in order that you may wrongfully and knowingly usurp the possessions of other men." (The Cow, 2:188)

Greed Censured

"... Those that preserve themselves from their own greed shall surely prosper." (Exile, 59:9)

Kindness to Parents

"... Your Lord has enjoined you to worship none but Him, and to show kindness to your parents. If either or both of them attain to old age in your dwelling, show them no sign of impatience, nor rebuke them; but speak to them kind words. Treat them with humility and tenderness and say: 'Lord, be merciful to them. They nursed me when I was an infant.' " (The Night Journey, 17:23f)

"We have enjoined man to show kindness to his parents. But if they bid you serve besides Me deities you know nothing of, do not obey them. To Me you will all return, and I shall declare to you all that you have done. ..." (The Spider, 29:7)

Don't Divide Religion

"Do not split up your religion into sects, each exulting in its own beliefs." (The Greeks, 30:31)

On Muhammad's deathbed the first division occurred in Islám. Shi'ih Muslims (mostly in Iran and to a lesser extent in Iraq now) accept Muhammad's appointment of his son-in-law and nephew 'Alí as his successor and first Imam. The larger division of Sunni Muslims derive from the rejection of this and the choosing of a leader by the democratic principle to justify their aims.

Only Believers May Enter Mosque

"None should visit the mosques of God except those who believe in God and the Last Day, attend to their prayers and render the alms levy and fear none but God. These shall be rightly guided." (Repentance, 9:18)

This suggests a very significant number of those who are called Muslims may be entering the mosques in disobedience to the command of God in the *Qur'án*.

Dress Well When Attending Mosques

"Children of Adam, dress well when you attend your mosques." (The Heights, 7:31)

Stay Away From Those Who Act as Though Their Religion is a "Sport and Pastime".

"Avoid those that treat their faith as a sport and a pastime and are seduced by the life of the world. Admonish them with this lest their souls be damned by their own sins...." (Cattle, 6:70)

Keep Promises

"Keep your promises; you are accountable for all that you promise." (The Night Journey, 17:36)

Be Courteous In Speech

"Tell My servants to be courteous in the speech. Satan would sow discord among them; Satan is the sworn enemy of man." (The Night Journey, 17:53)

Justice, Kindness and Charity Enjoined

"God enjoins justice, kindness and charity to one's kindred, and forbids indecency, wickedness and oppression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed." (The Bee, 16:90)

Moderation and Balance.

"... Do not squander your substance wastefully, for the wasteful are Satan's brothers; and Satan is every ungrateful to his Lord." (The Night Journey, 17:27)

"Eat and drink, but avoid excess. He does not love the intemperate." (The Heights, 7:31)

"Be neither miserly nor prodigal, for then you should either be reproached or be reduced to penury. (The Night Journey, 17:29)

Endure With Fortitude

"Say: ' ... Those that endure with fortitude shall be requited without measure.' " (The Hordes, 19:10)

"To endure with fortitude and to forgive is a duty incumbent on all. He whom God

confounds has none to protect him." (Counsel, 42:43)

"We bestowed wisdom on Luqmán, saying: 'Give thanks to God. He that gives thanks has much to gain ...

" 'My son, be steadfast in prayer, enjoin justice, and forbid evil. Endure with fortitude whatever befalls you. That is a duty incumbent on all. ... ' " (Luqmán, 31:12, 17)[Dawood footnote: Luqmán was 'A sage who, we are told, was a grandson of a sister or an aunt of Job.']

Inquire Into Matters to Ascertain Truth

"Believers, if an evil-doer brings you a piece of news inquire first into its truth, lest you should wrong others unwittingly and then regret your action." (The Chambers, 49:6)

Defamation of Character

"Those that defame honourable women and cannot produce four witnesses shall be given eighty lashes. Do not accept their testimony ever after, for they are great transgressors -- except those among them that afterwards repent and mend their ways. God is forgiving and merciful." (Light, 24:4)

Calling by Nickname, Defaming and Mocking Prohibited

"Believers, let no man mock another man, who may perhaps be better than himself. Let no woman mock another woman, who may perhaps be better than herself. Do not defame one another, nor call one another by nicknames. It is an evil thing to be called by a bad name after embracing the true faith. They that do not repent are wrongdoers." (The Chambers, 49:11)

Avoid Suspicion, Spying and Backbiting

"Believers, avoid immoderate suspicion, for in some cases suspicion is a crime. Do not spy on one another, nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Surely you would loathe it. Have fear of God. God is forgiving and merciful." (The Chambers, 49:12)

Sorcery and Witchcraft Condemned, and a Prayer for Protection

"Moses was much alarmed [by the sorcery of Pharaoh's sorcerers] . But We said to him: 'Have no fear; you shall surely win. ... Sorcerers shall not prosper, whatever they do.'" (Tá' Há', 20:67)

"[Moses:] 'The sorcery that you have wrought God will surely bring to nothing. He does not bless the work of those who do evil. By His words He vindicates the truth, much as the guilty may dislike it.'" (Jonah, 10:81)

"Say: 'I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak from the mischief of His creation; from the mischief of the night when she spreads her darkness; from the mischief of conjuring witches; from the mischief of the envier, when he envies.' " (Daybreak, 113:1f)

A List of Virtues

"Indeed, man was created impatient. When evil befalls him he is despondent; but, blessed with good fortune, he grows niggardly.

"Not so the worshippers, who are steadfast in prayer; who set aside a due portion of their goods for the needy and the deprived; who truly believe in the Day of Reckoning, and the punishment of their Lord (for none is secure from the punishment of their Lord); who restrain their carnal desire (save with their wives and slave-girls, for these are lawful to them: he that lusts after other than these is a transgressor); who keep their trusts and promises and bear true witness; and who attend to their prayers with promptitude. These shall be laden with honours, and shall dwell in fair gardens." (The Ladders, 70:21)

"Have you thought of him that denies the Last Judgement? It is he who turns away the orphan and has no urge to feed the poor.

"Woe to those who pray but are heedless in their prayer; who make a show of piety and give no alms to the destitute." (Alms, 107:1-7)

Return Good for Evil

"Good and evil deeds are not alike. Requite evil with good, and he who is your enemy will become your dearest friend. But none will attain this attribute save those who patiently endure; none will attain it save those who are truly fortunate." (Revelations Well Expounded, 41:34)

Hypocrisy Condemned

"Believers, why do you profess what you never do? It is most odious in God's sight that you should say one thing and do another." (Battle Array, 61:2)

"... Do not pretend to purity. He knows best those who guard themselves against evil." (The Star, 53:34)

CHAPTER 5

SOME SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

In order to elucidate some of the principles quoted here, the author offers some of his own thoughts. The reader should feel free to use them if they are of any value in gaining a better understanding. Otherwise, they can be discarded since they are not necessarily directly derived from any statements in the *Qur'án* or any other Holy Books.

Men Have Authority Over Women

"Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them. As for those from you fear disobedience, admonish them and send them to beds apart and beat them. then if they obey you, take no further action against them. God is high, supreme." (Women, 4:34f)

Here is the same surih in a different translation. Notice how very different the interpretation is.

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Alláh has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they

support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Alláh would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Alláh is Most High, great (above you all). (Yusuf 'Ali, Women, 4:34f)

It would be wonderful to understand classical Arabic and find for oneself what the *Qur'án* is saying independently of the views and inclinations of the translators. In either translation (and in the other translations the author has read) this writer very much fears that this principle will not be a big hit with modern Western women – particularly those favorable to feminist ideology. But the Bible isn't that much different on this point either. There, the man is still dominant.

Perhaps it's wisest to understand that the social laws of our Creator change in accord with the stage of development of us humans. In the stages of immaturity, equality cannot be implemented; someone has to be the boss or there is too much selfish wrangling and dispute. To actually carry out real equality requires real maturity. Even most of those today who claim to advocate equality of women and men seldom manage to do this in their own private lives. If it's not the husband dominating and ruling over his wife, then it's the wife imperiously reigning over her husband (something not rarely seen in the West). But a few of the more enlightened do manage to struggle towards the ideal of equality between men and women.

This brings us to ask the question, If both Christ and Muhammad reveal that God's Will is that the man is over the woman, that wives must obey their husbands, then how is it that the idea of the equality of the sexes is so powerfully moving through our social orders? Even the long-subdued women of Africa, who are often little more than slaves of their husbands, are now starting to realize that the days of male dominance over women has come to a close, that it's now time for women to rise up, to take leading roles in society, to act as equals with their husbands. In Swaziland the wives of traditional Swazi men bow down to the ground in front of their husband in order to ask him permission to speak to him. And in that same nation educated women fearlessly move forward to take on the responsibilities and challenges they know are their right, working in organizations for the advancement of women, and scolding the men in letters to the editor in newspapers for not getting with the times. Where has this new notion of the equality of woman and men come from? It didn't exist in our world two centuries ago.

This certainly seems to suggest that a new revelation of God has come which promotes the equality of the sexes. As readers will by now have realized, this author believes that this is very much the case. The dominance of one sex over the other is no longer appropriate to our world; it's a feature of past ages and revelations. It was for our weak immaturity. And this new ideal of equality is the result of the diffusion of an idea originating in a recent revelation of God.

Slavery

Like the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, the *Qur'án* does not speak against the institution of slavery. These Holy Books do, however, encourage all to be kind and fair to their slaves. There are a number of punishments for various

offenses that involve the freeing of a believing slave. It's clearly regarded as a good thing for a slave, at least a believing one, to be free. It is clear that in God's eyes, from a spiritual standpoint, a free person is not inherently better than a slave:

"... A believing slave is better than an idolater, although he may please you." (The Cow, 2:221)

The attitude that slavery is inherently wrong as an institution is a fairly recent one – one not much older than the idea of the equality of the sexes. Where has it come from? Has there been a revelation of God since the revelation of Muhammad that teaches that slavery is wrong?

No One Is Tested More Than He Can Bear

"God does not charge a soul with more than it can bear." (The Cow, 2:286)

God Forgives Those Who Repent

"If any one among you commits evil through ignorance and then repents and mends his ways, he will find God forgiving and merciful." (Cattle, 6:54)

God sounds very stern and strict in the *Qur'án*, perhaps with the aim of prodding rebellious and immature humans to do what is best for themselves. And yet, He is very quick to forgive and be merciful with those who sincerely want to do what is right but find themselves weak at times.

There Is No Compulsion in Religion

We've already gone over this one in the previous chapter on war and fighting. But it also applies to circumstances where there's no physical battle. There is also *proselytizing*, which implies an attempt to push a person by various inducements and pressures into a religion, perhaps with the idea of indoctrinating the person into abandoning any independent thought of his own and submitting entirely to some group's set of doctrines, standards and social organization. So let's look at the quotations we selected previously in the light of this new consideration.

"There shall be no compulsion in religion."
(The Cow, 2:256)

"We well know what they say. You shall not use coercion with them. Admonish with the Koran whoever fears My warning." (Qáf, 50:45)

"Call men to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kindly exhortation. Reason with them in the most courteous manner. Your Lord best knows those who stray from His path and those who are rightly guided.

"If you punish, let your punishment be commensurate with the wrong that has been done you. But it shall be best for you to endure your wrongs with patience." (The Bee, 16:124f)

"Be courteous when you argue with the People of the Book [Jews and Christians], except with those among them who do evil."
(The Spider, 29:46)

Each Has His Own Spiritual Responsibility - No One Bears Another's Burden

"No soul shall bear another's burden. If a laden soul cries out for help, not even a near relation shall share its burden." (The Creator, 33:16)

"... Has he [who turns his back upon the Faith] not heard of what is preached in the scriptures of Moses and Abraham, who fulfilled his duty: that no soul shall bear another's burden, and that each man shall be judged by his own labours ..." (The Star, 53:37)

"When they are asked: 'What has your Lord revealed?' they say: 'Old fictitious tales!' They shall bear the full brunt of their burdens on the Day of Resurrection, together with the burdens of those who in their ignorance were misled by them. Evil is that which they shall bear." (The Bee, 16:25)

This admonition is helpful in any society where some who are infantile or childlike (at any age – even in old age) will wish to depend on others and childishly avoid any sense of responsibility for their own acts. Here are some of the writer's ideas on this. The reader is encouraged to judge them in accord with his own reason, understand and experience and come to his own conclusions.

This principle that, spiritually, we are each responsible only for our own development and cannot rely on some connection with another, doesn't necessarily mean that we humans cannot help one another, particularly if a very immature person needs help. Perhaps this is referring to a deeper principle that the actual spiritual benefit accruing to a person depends only on his own efforts. For example, a parent will carry a child before it learns to walk. And while it is learning to walk, the parents might hold the small child's hand or prop him up so that the child can feel a sense of help and victory, and know how it should feel to be able to walk upright. But the only real benefit the child gets is from its own efforts and struggle. The parent cannot walk for the child. When the day of testing comes, the child must be able to walk on its own and it is only that child's own efforts that enable it to achieve that aim. All the carrying and support in the world cannot be a substitute for the child's own struggle to walk.

Similarly, as so many Christians believe, there is succor and help when one turns to Jesus in one's heart. (Do Muslims do the same with Muhammad?) Or, since Bahá'ís will also be reading this, they so often feel a deeply emotional relationship with Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá' for which they wouldn't trade the whole earth. They are much aware of being helped and sustained through this connection of heart. But this is like a gnat getting a free ride on the back of a powerful eagle. One learns with the most exhilarating joy what it feels like to fly through the realm of the spirit. But no matter how uplifting and helpful all this is, the only thing that is of lasting benefit to the believer is his or her own efforts to learn to fly for himself through his own will. The experience on the back of the Eagle is like the experience of the toddler being supported by his parents in his efforts to walk: it lets him know what it feels like and what he should be aiming towards. But sooner or later, the Eagle knows that it's best if the person learns to start

flying with the wings of his or her own will power. So the free rider gets bumped off when it's time for weaning. After a period of feeling great distress and loss and perhaps much whining about "Bahá'u'lláh doesn't love me any more!" or "Jesus has abandoned me!", the young human bird finally realizes that if it isn't to crash to the ground, it had better start flapping those spiritual wings of one's own free will and stay up. And so strength is gained.

We can help each other. In fact, it's a law of life that the weak turn to the strong for help, that the immature lean on the more mature for help, that the child turns to the parent in a sense of clinging dependence. But this help doesn't actually strengthen the weak and immature one. It only gives encouragement and an example so that the weak one will know what the goal is and how to reach it. In the final analysis, it's only our own efforts that make the real difference.

The teacher does not pour the cup of his knowledge into the cup of a student's mind. A good teacher can only work to awaken the student's own mind so that this student will exert his own powers of thought and comprehension. As one ancient philosopher said: real education is not the pouring of the cup of knowledge from one mind into another; it's the lighting of the fire of a student's own mind from the fire of the teacher's love of knowledge. It's like the illustration of the diner and the cook mentioned earlier. The cook can prepare and serve the food, but it is up to the diner to exert his own will to come to the table and eat for himself. The cook cannot eat for the diner. In the final analysis, it is only an individual's own efforts that really count. During examination time, the teacher does not help the student. The student is tested to see how well she or he does alone. The same applies spiritually.

Those who are weak throughout much of their lives and give in to what the Holy Books refer to as *evil*, are like weak birds that ride on the backs of others through life. They are always looking for someone to ride on. They feel unhappy unless there is someone to cling to and get a free ride from. Such dependent children are of all ages, from one to ninety-one. They don't learn to fly on their own. When this life is over, it is an individual's own *Day of Judgement*, his day of testing. All are tested to see how well they have learned to fly on their own. It's like a school examination; no one is permitted to help another. Each is tested individually. No one is allowed to ride on anyone else's back. So, the strong birds that have been carrying others on their backs and gained much exercise and strength through this, suddenly feel greatly lightened, and like athletes whose heavy training weights and handicaps are taken off, fly with power and ease up to the heights of joy and freedom. It's pure heaven! And the weak ones who knew only how to ride on the backs of others, never really growing up, find themselves unable to fly and fall down into the lowest pits and swamps. That is hell!

Exerting great effort to obey the commands and advice of our Creator brings strength – even though we might not feel any exhilaration while we're carrying the burdens and loads of troubles through life. And simply riding on the backs of others like babies, always looking for the free ride, might give the immature and foolish person a sense of fun, of being gay and full of energy and spirit in this life. But when the Day of Examination and Testing arrives at the end of this earthly lesson, the freeloaders will fall and experience the greatest misery and gloom. There is no longer any one to ride on and support them.

Some will wonder how this works. All humans are connected by spiritual bonds that tie us together to some

degree. These bonds might be thought of as being like elastic cords. The connection is strongest with those closest to us but the bonds reach out to some degree to all humans.

" ... Each man who is higher in the ascent of life is the means of helping those who are lower, and those who are the highest of all are the helpers of all mankind. It is as if all men were connected together by elastic cords. If a man rises a little above the general level of his fellows, the cords tighten. His former companions tend to draw him back, but with an equal force he draws them upwards. The higher he gets, the more he feels the weight of the whole world pulling him back, and the more dependent he is on the divine support, which reaches him through the few who are still above him. Highest of all are the great Prophets and Saviors, the Divine 'Manifestations' – those perfect men Who were each, in Their day, without peer or companion, and bore the burden of the whole world, supported by God alone. 'The burden of our sins was upon Him' was true of each of Them. Each was the 'Way, the Truth and the Life' to His followers. Each was the channel of God's bounty to every heart that would receive it. Each had His part to play in the great divine plan for the upliftment of humanity." (Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, pp 203-4)

This analogy from Dr. Esslemont is quite illustrative. It explains the envy and jealousy that motivate those who are lower for those who rise above them with excellence. It explains the tribal drive towards conformity, that attempt to

keep everyone down at the same low level, that attempt to cut down any "tall poppies" (Australia), to hammer down any nail that still sticks up (Japan), that watches out for anyone who "steps out of line" and needs to be "cut down to size" and "put in his place" (USA). Every person who turns to God through a divine revelation is lifted up to superior behavior and qualities that by themselves challenge the status quo of those around them. The tribal spirit of conformity, still working quite powerfully even in so-called civilized societies, then works to try to pull down that *outstanding* person who "stands out", that excellent soul who excels those around him. And this stronger person, if she stands firm, exerts an equal and opposite force on those weaker ones around. A Being like Jesus fulfilled this principle so fully that He was finally crucified, and yet, by staying firm and steadfast, exerted an equal force back that worked to lift up so many others for many centuries. The same applies to Muhammad and all the Prophets of God.

But this aid and assistance is instruction and encouragement. Only when a person being helped actually starts the struggle to rise himself, even carrying the helpless babies, so to speak, does any real strength develop. Let's alter this analogy of the elastic cords somewhat to convey the point in a new light.

We humans are like mountain climbers going up the steep side of a mountain. The bonds that tie us together are like the ropes that hold that team of mountain climbers together. Holding firmly onto the rock of the mountain face is like holding firmly onto God's laws, commands and admonitions. Some hold on tight, and others are more careless about this. And some don't care at all and simply jump off. Because of the bonds that connect them to their fellows they don't yet fall into the deep abyss below. They are held up because those who still cling firmly to the rock of the divine

advice have to hold them up. While the foolish swing free and easy, experiencing great freedom, energy and gaiety, those who hang on for dear life are in great distress, drained, exhausted, praying, struggling, turning to God with all their hearts. While the wrongdoers feel great exhilaration and freedom swinging so freely, the ones who hold them up struggle and are in the greatest distress. The Mercy of God comes to the weak and foolish ones through their stronger fellow humans.

The reality of this situation is that those struggling to hold on are gaining great strength through this trial; and those who swing free and easy, become spiritually weak and flabby. At the end of this life, everyone climbs separately and is judged solely by what he or she can do. The one who struggled desperately to hold on, will find that the strength gained enabled him or her to climb up with ease to the very summit of the mountain. And those who played in life and swung free and easy while others held them up will find themselves unable to climb. They'll be too weak in spirit to climb on their own. And with no one to hold them up, they will fall down into the dark abyss far below and meet the destiny they prefer to imagine is not real. All this is about spiritual things, not physical things.

The higher a person is up the mountain, the greater is the load of those below him he has to carry. Those who are highest carry the greatest loads. And this makes them strongest. This is why the Prophets of God suffer more and carry heavier burdens than all.

All of this becomes blatantly obvious once one's spiritual vision is opened. One sees and experiences all this as a daily reality. But so long as only the physical and mental vision work, these things will not be clear and obvious. The comforting rationalization of the weak ones would be that

anyone claiming this principle as true is the victim of imagination and delusion, perhaps "crazy". They turn the world upside-down in their self-deluding minds in their effort to make bad look good and good look bad. How else can they make themselves right in their own eyes? "As for those that deny the life to come, We make their foul deeds seem fair to them, so that they blunder about in their folly." (The Ant, 27:4)

In summary, though there are burdens in life, and the strong can help show the weak how to gain strength, it is only each individual who can actually exercise to gain that strength. No one else can exercise for us. We're tested at the end of this life, and even periodically through it, to see how well we've learned to climb, or fly, on our own. "No soul shall bear another's burden."

Good Deeds Amend for Sins

"Attend to your prayers morning and evening, and in the night-time too. Good deeds shall make amends for sins. That is an admonition for thoughtful men. Therefore have patience; God will not deny the righteous their reward." (Húd, 11:114)

Prayer and meditation are preparation for action. By themselves they are like a blueprint for a house that is not yet built. Action without prayer is misguided and often harmful. Prayer without action goes nowhere and is fruitless. It is the combination of the two, along with great faith, that produces excellent results. So, it is as though the Creator is urging humans to pray and then making sure that this prayer finds consequences in good deeds and actions by saying that it is good deeds that make amends for sins, without saying that

prayer will do this too. It's "an admonition for thoughtful men."

We Are Tests to One Another

"We test you by means of one another. Will you not have patience?" (Al Furqán, 25:20)

"Believers, you have an enemy in your wives and children: beware of them. But if you overlook their offences and forgive and pardon them, then know that God is forgiving and merciful." (Cheating, 64:14)

Evil Deeds Cast a Veil Over the Heart

"No! Their [the disbelievers] own deeds have cast a veil over their hearts." (The Unjust, 83:6)

If a human wishes to see the Truth clearly, and to understand Reality, free of all illusion and distortions, then the heart must be purified and freed from all attachments, from all loves and hates, all preconceived notions and ideas. The cup of the mind and heart must be completely emptied before the crystal Water can be poured in. In addition to the cleansing of the mirror of the mind and heart so that they will be able to reflect the Truth clearly, that mirror must be flat and free of all warps and distortions created through injustice, prejudices, biases and indoctrinated conceptions. The warped mirror distorts all that it sees. When a person lies, cheats and acts with dishonesty, he works to warp this mirror. When he descends into the kingdom of the animal within him and lets it rule his life, then the dark, stinking mud of that swampy region cover up the mirror of the heart until little is reflected in that mirror of the mind and heart. The words of the Holy Books

can be put in front of him and they mean nothing to him. He will understand them only literally and materially at best. He becomes blind and deaf to the world of the higher spirit. As this quote says, those dark deeds "have cast a veil over their hearts." They don't see and they don't understand. They wander in a fog.

The eyes can be blinded by staring at the sun. The ears can go deaf by listening to extremely loud sounds. The nose can lose its ability to smell if ammonia overwhelms it. The sense of taste is deadened when too many hot chilli peppers kill the taste buds and leave only the nerves that feel heat and cold, pain and pressure, to send messages to the brain confusing this sensation with tasting. When very rough work callouses the hands, they can no longer feel delicate silks. Harsh emotions and bad deeds work to draw the veil over the heart and prevent it from seeing and understanding.

When a wind blows across the surface of a body of water such as a pond or lake, it disturbs that water with waves, turbulence and ripples. When these winds are completely calmed, then the surface of the body of water becomes like a polished mirror and reflects all that is above it and around it with perfect clarity. The heart is like this lake. When the winds of passions, of loves and hates, of prejudices and biases, of attachments to people and things, blow across the heart, nothing is reflected at all. The person who is attached to this world and its people has a heart that is tossed this way and that by this world. But the one who finally achieves freedom is the one who finally learns the pure joy of having a tranquil heart. And this makes inspiration easy. The pictures of the heavens above reflect on the tranquil mirror-like heart. Then a person reads the Holy Books and starts to understand the spiritual messages behind the words, and these words start to make good sense. The Prophets of God and the Holy Books contain

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the keys to opening the door of the mysteries hidden away, that tell us what this life is all about.

There are so many more principles and ideas revealed in the *Qur'án*, but this book mustn't grow too big.

CHAPTER 6

OTHER INTERESTING MATTERS OF THE *QUR’ÁN*

After Death This Life Will Seem as Though It Lasted Just a Very Short Time

"And He [God] will ask: 'How many years did you live on earth?'

"They will reply: 'A day, or possibly less. Ask those who have kept count.'

"He will say: 'Brief indeed was your sojourn, if you but knew it! Did you think that We had created you in vain and that you would never be recalled to Us?' " (The Believers, 23:112)

"On that day We shall assemble all the sinners. Their eyes will turn blue with terror and they shall murmur among themselves: 'You stayed on the earth but ten days.'

"We know full well what they will say. The most upright among them will declare: 'You stayed on the earth but one day.' " (Tá' Há', 20:104)

"... On that day He will summon you all, and you shall answer Him with praises. You shall think that you have stayed away but for a little while.' " (The Night Journey, 17:52)

"The day will come when He will gather them all together, as though they had sojourned in this world but for an hour. ... " (Jonah, 10:45)

"On the day when the Hour strikes, the wrongdoers will swear that they had stayed away but one hour. Thus are they ever deceived." (The Greeks, 30:55)

"Bear up then with patience, as did the steadfast apostles before you, and do not seek to hurry on their doom. On the day when they behold the scourge with which they are threatened, their life on earth will seem to them no longer than an hour." (The Sand Dunes, 46:35)

Einstein would have no problem with this. Time and space are the properties of the world of matter. If a realm is outside of what is material, and outside of space, then it will probably be outside of time too. Our bodies are material and exist in space and time. Our souls that ride on these bodies are not material; so they cannot be in space and time. So, when the body dies and our soul is freed like a bird being freed from a cage, we will live in a different condition that we cannot imagine now (because we've never experienced it before) and this condition is outside of space and time and not limited and confined by them. So, from the perspective of that other world, without a physical body, while adjusting to a new condition, it will seem as though time hardly existed. Consider the following:

"To God belong the secrets of the heavens and the earth. The business of the Final Hour shall be accomplished in the twinkling of an

eye, or in a shorter time. God has power over all things." (The Bee, 16:77)

People who have had near-death experiences report time seeming as if it had stopped. They often review their entire lives and go through a series of interactions with a Being of Light in what later appears to be an instant. An American friend of this writer told him about falling from the top of a high waterfall and feeling sure that he would die on hitting the bottom. He said he had a near-death experience at some point on the way down, reviewing his entire life, interacting with the Being of Light and having a number of other profoundly life-changing experiences. Then, on learning that he would be continuing his life and not dying, his bodily consciousness returned while he was still falling. He survived, changed his life completely, married a wonderful Japanese woman and went to live and serve in southern Africa. The worlds outside of this physical world are outside of time and space. In fact, time and space may be illusions foisted on life in a physical body. Remember the material shadows spoken of in an earlier chapter? Space and time may be like shadows, constructions based on far more real spiritual essences.

The Righteous Will Inherit the Earth

"The righteous among My servants shall inherit the earth.'" (The Prophets, 21:106)

It's like the Biblical prophecy of the meek inheriting the earth. The clouds will return to the ocean, the mud will settle in the waters, and the smoke will go back to the earth. Justice will reign and put in the highest place those whose home is in the highest place; and those whose natural home is in the lowest place will be returned to that home. When the higher is in control of the lower, then peace, order and immense

productivity result. It's the Kingdom of God on earth, the Golden Age prophesied in all the Holy Books.

The Jinn, Angels, Satan (Iblis), Adam and the Garden of Eden

This is a very interesting and wide topic, and it's one that the writer has not come to any firm conclusions on yet. He's still searching for the true meaning of these symbols and stories. The reader might care to join him in his look into what the *Qur'án's* very frequent reference to the *jinn* means. Since it seems very interesting, some space is devoted to this exploration. But please be advised that these are not final truths.

"He created man from potter's clay, and the jinn from smokeless fire." (The Merciful, 55:14f)

Other translators (Yusuf 'Ali, Pickthal and Shakir) have translated "smokeless fire" here as "fire free of smoke", "a flame of fire", "the fire of a scorching wind", "essential fire" and "intensely hot fire". Now we know what *jinn* are made of – or do we? The *Qur'án* also states that we humans are made of "dry clay, from black moulded loam" (Dawood, Al-Hijr, 15:26) or, in another translation, of "clay that gives forth sound, of black mud fashioned in shape" (Shakir, Al-Hijr, 15:26). In yet another place, the *Qur'án* states: "Are the disbelievers unaware ... that We made every living thing of water?" (The Prophets, 21:29)

The Bible also says we are made of clay, or dust. But should these be taken literally? Clay is used to represent in a poetic way our body's material nature. It contrasts with mind and spirit. We, like most living things are also mostly water;

so it's true that we are made of water. But it's also quite clear that we are not just water, nor are we literally made of clay. Similarly, the term "smokeless fire" that is used to describe how the jinn were made is surely also a poetic or veiled and indirect way of showing that the nature of the jinn is not fully material, that they are what some would call spirits. In fact, there is one translation of the *Qur'án* that simply translates "jinn" as "spirits". The word "jinn" itself is derived from an Arabic word meaning "hidden". This suggests a being that is not outwardly apparent, perhaps not fully material and visible.

The Arabs of Muhammad's time believed in the existence of these *jinn*, and many turned to them for help, even believing that they were associated with God. (The story of the *jinn* or *genie* in Alladin's lamp is an example.) They also believed in many gods and idols. It's very interesting that the *Qur'án* and other Holy Books speak out very strongly against all gods and idols and yet, in stark contrast, the *Qur'án* confirms the reality of the *jinn* and speaks very frequently of them throughout the *Qur'án* stating that they were created by God.

A few have occasionally translated "jinn" as "evil spirits" or even "Satan". But this seems to be an error, and this is confirmed by most translators simply using the word "jinn". Many statements in the *Qur'án* make it very clear that jinn, like humans, range from good to bad. The idea promoted by some that they are always evil, or a symbol of evil, is clearly not supported by the *Qur'án*. Here are a few quotations that make this clear and inform us a bit more of the nature of the *jinn*:

"Say: 'It is revealed to me that a band of jinn listened to God's revelations and said: "We have heard a wondrous Koran giving guidance to the right path. We believed in it and shall

henceforth serve none besides Our Lord. He (exalted be the glory of our Lord!) has taken no wife, nor has He begotten any children. The Blaspheming One [Iblis, Satan] among us has uttered a wanton falsehood against God, although we had supposed no man or jinnee could tell of Him what is untrue." ' "

"(Some men have sought the help of jinn, but they misled them into further error. Like you, they thought that God could never resurrect the dead.)

" ' "We made our way to high heaven, and found it filled with mighty wardens and fiery comets. We sat eavesdropping, but eavesdroppers find flaming darts in wait for them. We cannot tell if this bodes evil to the inhabitants of earth or whether their Lord intends to guide them.

" ' "**Some of us are righteous, while others are not; we follow different ways.** We know we cannot escape on earth from God, nor can we elude His grasp by flight. **When we heard His guidance we believed in Him:** he that believes in his Lord shall fear neither dishonesty nor injustice.

" ' "**Some of us are Muslims and some are wrongdoers.** Those that embrace Islám pursue the right path; but those that do wrong shall become the fuel of Hell." ' " (The Jinn, 72:1f) [emphasis mine]

"On the day He assembles them all together, He will say: 'Jinn, you have seduced mankind in great numbers.' And their votaries among mankind will say: 'Lord, we have enjoyed each

other's fellowship. But now we have reached the end of the appointed term which You decreed for us.'

"He will say: 'The Fire shall be your home, and there you shall remain for ever unless God ordain otherwise.' Your Lord is wise and all-knowing.

"Thus do We give the wicked sway over each other as a punishment for their misdeeds.

"Then will He say: 'Jinn and men! Did there not come to you apostles of your own who proclaimed to you My revelations and warned you of this day?'"

"They will reply: 'We bear witness against our own souls.' Indeed, the life of this world seduced them. They will testify against themselves that they were unbelievers." (Cattle, 6:128f)

"Thus have We assigned for every prophet an enemy; the devils among men and jinn, who inspire each other with vain and varnished falsehoods." (Cattle, 6:112)

"Tell how We sent to you a band of jinn who, when they came and listened to the Koran, said to each other: 'Hush! Hush!' As soon as it was ended they betook themselves to their people and gave them warning. 'Our people,' they said, 'we have just been listening to a scripture revealed since the time of Moses, confirming previous scriptures and directing to the truth and to a straight path. Our people, answer the call of God's summoner and believe in Him! He will forgive you your sins and deliver you from a

woeful scourge. Those that give no heed to God's summoner shall not go unpunished on the earth, nor shall there be any to protect them besides Him. Surely they are in evident error.' " (The Sand Dunes, 46:29)

"I created mankind and the jinn that they might worship Me." (The Winds, 51:59)

Let's save the discussion concerning whether jinn are actually existent or not, whether they are just a symbol to refer to a principle rather than to entities for a bit later. For the time being, let's just be like good scientists and not jump to conclusions until we have enough information on which to base those conclusions. Let's just look at what the Holy Books say first and try to suspend judgement rather than try to force everything into some preconceived system of explanation that our culture or subculture might have taught us is the only correct and true one.

Since the subject of the jinn is intimately bound up with those of Iblis (Satan), angels, Adam and the Garden of Eden, let's now look at these others:

"We created you and gave you form. Then We said to the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam.' They all prostrated themselves except Satan [Iblis], who refused to prostrate himself.

"Why did you [Satan] not prostrate yourself when I commanded you?' He [God] asked.

" 'I am nobler than he,' he replied. 'You created me of fire, but You created him of clay.' "

"He said: 'Off with you hence! This is no place for your contemptuous pride. Away with you ! Henceforth you shall be humble.'

"He replied: 'Reprieve me till the Day of Resurrection.'

" 'You are reprieved,' said He

" 'Because You have led me into sin,' he declared, 'I will waylay Your servants as they walk on Your straight path, and spring upon them from the front and from the rear, from their right and from their left. Then You will find the greater part of them ungrateful.'

" 'Begone!' He said, 'A despicable outcast you shall henceforth be. As for those that follow you, I shall fill Hell with you all.'

"To Adam He said: 'Dwell with your wife in Paradise, and eat of any fruit you please; but never approach this tree or you shall both become transgressors.'

"But Satan tempted them, so that he might reveal to them their nakedness, which they had never seen before. He said: 'Your Lord has forbidden you to approach this tree only to prevent you from becoming angels or immortals.' Then he swore to them that he would give them friendly counsel.

"Thus did he cunningly seduce them. And when they had eaten of the tree, their shame became visible to them, and they both covered themselves with the leaves of the garden.

"Their Lord called out to them, saying: 'Did I not forbid you to approach that tree, and did I not warn you that Satan was your inveterate foe?'

"They replied: 'Lord, we have wronged our souls. Pardon us and have mercy on us, or we shall surely be among the lost.'

"He said: 'Go hence, and may your descendants be enemies to each other. The earth will for a while provide your dwelling and your comforts. There you shall live and there you shall die, and thence you shall be raised to life.' " (The Heights, 7:10)

This is essentially the story told in Genesis of the Bible about Adam, Eve, the Garden of Eden and Satan, the snake. But it tells more about the origin of Satan.

"When we said to the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam,' all prostrated themselves except Satan, who was a *jinnee* disobedient to his Lord." (The Cave, 18:30f)

This makes it clear that Satan (Iblis) was a *jinnee* who was previously an angel. As we saw earlier, some *jinn* are good and others are bad. Satan is, of course, a fallen angel, the worst of the *jinn*. The *Qur’án* retells this story time and again, but each time with some different information. Let's look at a few more tellings of it:

"We made a covenant with Adam, but he forgot, and We found him lacking in steadfastness. And when We said to the angels: 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam,' they all prostrated themselves except Satan [Iblis], who refused.

" 'Adam,' We said, 'Satan is an enemy to you and to your wife. Let him not turn you both out of Paradise and plunge you into affliction. Here

you shall not hunger or be naked; you shall not thirst, or feel the scorching heat.'

"But Satan whispered to him, saying: 'Shall I show you the Tree of Immortality and an everlasting kingdom?'

"They both ate of its fruit, so that they saw their nakedness and began to cover themselves with the leaves of the Garden. Thus did Adam disobey his Lord and go astray." (Tá' Há', 20:115)

If this is a recounting of some actual happening, so that these words are to be taken literally, then it's strange indeed that God would want us to know such a story. But there are ways of understanding these characters and events as symbols that explain the very meaning of life to those who really care to know.

Since some might be interested in knowing of one of the interpretations of the symbolism of Adam, Eve and Satan (or the snake) in the Garden of Eden, the following explanation, based on the *Bible's* Genesis version, is offered. The English translation of this might have a few problems. There is some difficulty in translating words into a very limited English vocabulary where matters of soul and spirit are concerned. In the opinion of this writer, the words "spirit" should be "soul", the highest reality of a human, and "soul" should be "ego" or "self" – the middle human self between our highest divine soul and our lowest animal nature. Here it is:

"If we take this story in its apparent meaning, according to the interpretation of the masses, it is indeed extraordinary. The intelligence cannot accept it, affirm it, or imagine it; for such arrangements, such details, such speeches and

reproaches are far from being those of an intelligent man, how much less of the Divinity – that Divinity Who has organized this infinite universe in the most perfect form, and its innumerable inhabitants with absolute system, strength and perfection.

"We must reflect a little: if the literal meaning of this story were attributed to a wise man, certainly all would logically deny that this arrangement, this invention, could have emanated from an intelligent being. Therefore, this story of Adam and Eve who ate from the tree, and their expulsion from Paradise, must be thought of simply as a symbol. It contains divine mysteries and universal meanings, and it is capable of marvelous explanations. Only those who are initiated into mysteries, and those who are near the Court of the All-Powerful, are aware of these secrets. Hence these verses of the Bible have numerous meanings.

"We will explain one of them, and we will say: Adam signifies the heavenly spirit of Adam, and Eve His human soul. For in some passages in the Holy Books where women are mentioned, they represent the soul of man. The tree of good and evil signifies the human world; for the spiritual and divine world is purely good and absolutely luminous, but in the human world light and darkness, good and evil, exist as opposite conditions.

"The meaning of the serpent is attachment to the human world. This attachment of the spirit to the human world led the soul and spirit of Adam from the world of freedom to the world of bondage and caused Him to turn from the

Kingdom of Unity to the human world. When the soul and spirit of Adam entered the human world, He came out from the paradise of freedom and fell into the world of bondage. From the height of purity and absolute goodness, He entered into the world of good and evil.

"The tree of life is the highest degree of the world of existence: the position of the Word of God, and the supreme Manifestation [of God, the Prophet of God]. Therefore, that position has been preserved; and, at the appearance of the most noble supreme Manifestation, it became apparent and clear. For the position of Adam, with regard to the appearance and manifestation of the divine perfections, was in the embryonic condition; the position of Christ was the condition of maturity and the age of reason; and the rising of the Greatest Luminary was the condition of the perfection of the essence and of the qualities. This is why in the supreme Paradise the tree of life is the expression for the center of absolutely pure sanctity—that is to say, of the divine supreme Manifestation. From the days of Adam until the days of Christ, They spoke little of eternal life and the heavenly universal perfections. This tree of life was the position of the Reality of Christ; through His manifestation it was planted and adorned with everlasting fruits.

"Now consider how far this meaning conforms to the reality. For the spirit and the soul of Adam, when they were attached to the human world, passed from the world of freedom into the world of bondage, and His descendants

continued in bondage. This attachment of the soul and spirit to the human world, which is sin, was inherited by the descendants of Adam, and is the serpent which is always in the midst of, and at enmity with, the spirits and the descendants of Adam. That enmity continues and endures. For attachment to the world has become the cause of the bondage of spirits, and this bondage is identical with sin, which has been transmitted from Adam to His posterity. It is because of this attachment that men have been deprived of essential spirituality and exalted position.

"When the sanctified breezes of Christ and the holy light of the Greatest Luminary were spread abroad, the human realities—that is to say, those who turned toward the Word of God and received the profusion of His bounties—were saved from this attachment and sin, obtained everlasting life, were delivered from the chains of bondage, and attained to the world of liberty. They were freed from the vices of the human world, and were blessed by the virtues of the Kingdom. This is the meaning of the words of Christ, "I gave My blood for the life of the world" (John 6:51)—that is to say, I have chosen all these troubles, these sufferings, calamities, and even the greatest martyrdom, to attain this object, the remission of sins (that is, the detachment of spirits from the human world, and their attraction to the divine world) in order that souls may arise who will be the very essence of the guidance of mankind, and the manifestations of the perfections of the Supreme Kingdom.

"Observe that if, according to the suppositions of the People of the Book, [Jews and Christians] the meaning were taken in its exoteric [outward and literal] sense, it would be absolute injustice and complete predestination. If Adam sinned by going near the forbidden tree, what was the sin of the glorious Abraham, and what was the error of Moses the Interlocutor? What was the crime of Noah the Prophet? What was the transgression of Joseph the Truthful? What was the iniquity of the Prophets of God, and what was the trespass of John the Chaste? Would the justice of God have allowed these enlightened Manifestations, on account of the sin of Adam, to find torment in hell until Christ came and by the sacrifice of Himself saved them from excruciating tortures? Such an idea is beyond every law and rule and cannot be accepted by any intelligent person.

"No; it means what has already been said: Adam is the spirit of Adam, and Eve is His soul; the tree is the human world, and the serpent is that attachment to this world which constitutes sin, and which has infected the descendants of Adam. Christ by His holy breezes saved men from this attachment and freed them from this sin. The sin in Adam is relative to His position. Although from this attachment there proceed results, nevertheless, attachment to the earthly world, in relation to attachment to the spiritual world, is considered as a sin. The good deeds of the righteous are the sins of the Near Ones. This is established. So bodily power is not only defective in relation to spiritual power; it is weakness in comparison. In the same way,

physical life, in comparison with eternal life in the Kingdom, is considered as death. So Christ called the physical life death, and said: "Let the dead bury their dead." (Matt. 8:22) Though those souls possessed physical life, yet in His eyes that life was death.

"This is one of the meanings of the biblical story of Adam. Reflect until you discover the others.

"Salutations be upon you." ('Abdu'l-Bahá', *Some Answered Questions*, pp 122-26)

That is, Adam symbolizes the highest divine nature of a human, what other translators would call the soul, and Eve symbolizes the human nature or self that derives from the body and which we might call the “ego” and “id”.

This would suggest that the story of Satan [Iblis] being an angel who refused to bow down before Adam and who works to lead the descendants of Adam (us) astray, should be understood as symbolic as well. One can understand Satan as a general principle by which the lower works to pull down the higher. The spirit of plant growth causes the tree to rise up against the gravity of the mineral kingdom below it. This gravity of a lower kingdom works in opposition to the plant growth of a higher kingdom. The spirit of animal will enables the animal to roam, swim and fly free of the limiting influence of the plant world that would restrict it to one spot. The human spirit can struggle up against the opposed animal spirit of the body it rides and drives. The symbol of Satan provides a single collective way of referring to the forces that work at a lower level than the human one to pull us down and keep us from developing as humans. The seedling that doesn't grow up to bear fruit, that is starved out by the weeds, that doesn't get the sunlight and water it needs or is in a soil too rocky and lacking

in fertility; the animal that doesn't move about to find its food; the human that remains the helpless prisoner of his lower animal and ego nature and never grows with inner strength in his spiritual reality – these are those that become the manifestations of Satan, that symbol of the lower that resists the growth and development of the higher. People or intelligent beings who fail to develop in their true spiritual reality, feeding only their animal and ego nature, become "devils", "manifestations of Satan" through their effect of exerting an influence to pull others down to their own level.

Criminals, tyrants, scoundrels and others we call "evil" are actually just humans who are too immature and weak to bring their higher free will into play in order to rise above the drives, urges, instincts and promptings of the animal and ego realm. The highest expression of this human free will is awakened through the influence of the Revelation of God and the Prophet of God. Faith and the full power to follow the commands and advice of the Holy Books are a gift from God.

Is there some way in which the *jinn*, like Satan, are a symbol of some principle? Satan is clearly the symbol of evil. But since some *jinn* are good, and others are bad, it wouldn't make sense to apply anything similar here. Could the *jinn* be a reference, taken from old Arab beliefs, and applied in a new meaning to a part of human nature that is not so material? Or is God simply using a belief with which the Arabs were familiar and comfortable as an instrument for teaching some higher principle? If so, then what is this principle?

Some might point out that the Bible makes no reference to *jinn* or similar beings. This may be wrong. Here is a quote that the author got off the Internet Web and (for which he cannot now find who it is attributed to). It seems to point out

something very interesting and leads us to a fascinating discovery.

" 'And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat.' " [Leviticus 16:8]

[drg: God commanded Aaron, Moses' brother, to ceremonially put the sins of Israel on this second goat and then have a strong man take the goat out into the wilderness and leave it to roam there. The modern use of the word "scapegoat" – one who is made to take the blame for the wrongs of others – comes from this word.]

"This set of verses dealing with Aaron sacrificing a bullock as a sin offering and then choosing between two goats, has some very deep spiritual implications. What is important for this discussion is the Hebrew equivalent for the word 'scapegoat.' The word actually used is 'Azazel.' [drg: one of the goats is "for Jehovah" and the other is "for Azazel" according to Jewish tradition.] Most people have never heard of the word. However, if you read the Book of Enoch, you will discover that Azazel happens to be the name of one of the leaders of the two hundred angels which left their heavenly domain and rebelled against God by making love to Earthly women and teaching humankind other things as well.

"As can be seen, were it not for the Book of Enoch, this mention of Azazel in the modern Bible would be completely overlooked...and

what is interesting is that this is the only verse in our English Bible where there is even a shaded reference to the sins of Azazel and his followers. Could it be that this is just one that was overlooked by those who so kindly purged the Bible for us?

" For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.' " (Hebrews 5:12-14).

The reference to the two hundred fallen angels in the Book of Enoch is very interesting. We'll look more closely at it in a moment. With this in mind, let's now look at an interesting passage from Genesis in the Bible.

"And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them,

"That the **sons of God** saw the **daughters of men** that they {were} fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.

"And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also {is} flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

"There were giants [*Nephilim*] in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the **sons of**

God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare {children} to them, the same {became} mighty men which {were} of old, men of renown.

"And God saw that the wickedness of man {was} great in the earth, and {that} every imagination of the thoughts of his heart {was} only evil continually.

"And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." (Genesis, 6:1-6) [emphasis mine]

The term "sons of God" comes from the Hebrew *b'nai Elohim*. *Elohim* is a plural form for God and may be a respectful reference to Him. Its literal translation is "gods". There are some who, taking this latter meaning, believe that this is a reference to the technologically advanced occupants of UFO's who have been meddling with humans for ages and are currently occupied through abduction with another genetic mixing of these "sons of gods" with humans. But maybe a spiritual meaning is more in line with what the Holy Books speak of. The Hebrew language is closely related to Arabic. They are both Semitic languages. In both languages a group of people can be referred to as "sons of X" where X is the common male ancestor of all in the group. For example all humans are often referred to as *bani Adam*, the "sons of Adam". This *bani* is the plural of *bin* or *ibn*, meaning "son (of)", that we often see in the names of Arabs. In Hebrew *b'nai* is the plural of *ben* – as in "Ben Gurion" (son of Gurion). The Jewish organization *B'nai Brith* would mean "Sons of Brith" and refers to all descendants of Brith, not just the males.

Some will insist that *sons of God* here means nothing more than Earthly men. But why say "sons of **God**" but "daughters of **men**"? Who are the *sons of God* who saw the

"daughters of men", took them as wives, and bred a rebellious race of humans who were giants or *Nephilim*? Are these the "two hundred angels" under Azazel referred to in the Book of Enoch "which left their heavenly domain and rebelled against God by making love to Earthly women and teaching humankind other things as well"?

Well, as mentioned, some will maintain that *sons of God* is just another way of referring to human men and little more. But there is more evidence to suggest that this is not so. There are only three other references to *b'nai Elohim*, *sons of God*, in the entire Old Testament, and all of these are in the book of Job:

"Now there was a day when the **sons of God** came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.

"And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

"And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that {there is} none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?"
(Job, 1:6-8) [emphasis mine]

Satan suggests to God that Job is good only because his life is blessed and asks if He won't afflict him with woes and troubles, so long as his body is not troubled, to show that Job will fail to show his love for God and curse Him. But Job passes his tests. So, again these same *sons of God* accompanied by Satan return to God.

"In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.

"Again there was a day when the **sons of God** came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them to present himself before the Lord." (Job, 1:22-2:1) [emphasis mine]

This next time Satan suggests that by bringing troubles to Job's body, Job will finally turn against his Lord. Of course, for those who know the story, Job comes out again in shining colors. These *sons of God* and Satan twice come before God. Does this suggest that they are ordinary humans? Do ordinary men accompanied by Satan come to present themselves before the Lord? Why is Satan always in the company of the "sons of God" here? Is it that they are of the same nature, as Satan or Iblis was one of the jinn? The final reference to them in the book of Job occurs in God's reply to Job and makes it quite clear that these *sons of God* are not humans:

"Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said,

"Who {is} this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?

"Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

"Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

"Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

"Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

"When the morning stars sang together, and
all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job,
38:1-7) [emphasis mine]

God asks Job here if he was present when He created the earth. Clearly, being a human who was created later, he was not present. But the *sons of God* were present: they "shouted for joy" at this creation of the earth. It is very difficult to interpret this as saying anything other than that the *sons of God* are not humans. As the *Qur’án* points out, men were created **after** the *jinn*. Since the only other mention of these *sons of God* in the Old Testament is in the Genesis passage quoted above, our suspicion that *sons of God* are of a different nature than the "daughters of men" seems to be confirmed.

In the New Testament, the phrase "sons of God" is used rarely only to refer to the true believers in Christ – or its equivalent in Greek is translated as "demons". Since this terminology was used so much later, and is used so very differently, it has little bearing on the Old Testament usage

The Book of Enoch was rejected by the early Church fathers of Europe because of this reference to fallen angels taking on a physical form so as to take earthly women as wives. So they probably destroyed the copies they had. But another Christian Church, an Ethiopian one, retained it. And it was so commonly known to Jews in Jesus' time that Jude quotes from it and the Revelation of St. John seems to copy its style. Much of its prophecies apparently refer to a distant time in the future as the text itself says. That time could be the days of the appearance of the Messiah, Jesus, or Muhammad, or now. So, for a thousand years the vast majority of Christians knew little of it.

Then, since the middle of the 19th century we've starting recovering it. One Dr. Bruce came back from Ethiopia with three copies of it. More recently, fragments of it – including those dealing with these fallen angels taking earthly wives – were found among the Dead Sea scrolls. There's a Greek text as well. The *sons of God* are also referred to as *zophim*, meaning "the watchers", and *malakh*, meaning "messengers" but the term is usually translated as "angels" into English. Here are some relevant sections from that Book of Enoch translated from a Greek text by R.H. Charles. (My comments are enclosed within braces - { }.)

[Chapter 6]

"And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels {the Aramaic Qumran texts (Dead Sea scrolls) reads 'Watchers' here} , the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: 'Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men and beget us children.' And Semjaza, who was their leader, said unto them: 'I fear ye will not indeed agree to do this deed, and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin.' And they all answered him and said: 'Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations not to abandon this plan but to do this thing.' Then sware they all together and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And they were in all two hundred; who descended in the days of Jared {Enoch's father who was the sixth generation from Adam} on the summit of Mount Hermon, and they called it Mount Hermon [or Armon from Hebrew *herem*

meaning 'curse'], because they had sworn and bound themselves by mutual imprecations upon it. And these are the names of their leaders: Samlazaz, their leader, Araklba, Rameel, Kokabel, Tamlel, Ramlel, Danel, Ezeqeel, Baraqijal, Asael, Armaros, Batarel, Ananel, Zaqiel, Samsapeel, Satarel, Turel, Jomjael, Sariel. These are their chiefs of tens. {From the Ethiopic: Urakabameel, Akibeel, Tamiel, Ramuel, Danel, Azkeel, Saraknyal, Asael, Armers, Batraal, Anane, Zavebe, Samsaveel, Ertael, Turel, Yomyael, Arazyal; and from the Aramaic of the Qumran texts: Semihazah; Artqoph; Ramtel; Kokabel; Ramel; Danieal; Zeqiel; Baraqel; Asael; Hermoni; Matarel; Ananel; Stawel; Samsiel; Sahriel; Tummieel; Turieel; Yomieel; Yhaddieel}.

[Chapter 7]

"And all the others together with them took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments, and the cutting of roots, and made them acquainted with plants. And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, {One Greek manuscript adds, "And they bore to them [the Watchers] three races—first, the great giants. The giants brought forth the Naphelim, and the Naphelim brought forth the Elioud. Some translations give 'slew' instead of 'brought forth'. The apocryphal Book of Jubilees has more on this.} whose height was three thousand ells {1.25 km = 0.78 miles; another version: 300 cubits =137 m = 450 ft.}:

Who consumed all the acquisitions of men. And when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind. And they began to sin against birds, and beasts, and reptiles, and fish, and to devour one another's flesh, and drink the blood. Then the earth laid accusation against the lawless ones.

[Chapter 8]

"And Azazel taught men to make swords, and knives, and shields, and breastplates, and made known to them the metals of the earth and the art of working them, and bracelets, and ornaments, and the use of antimony, and the beautifying of the eyelids, and all kinds of costly stones, and all colouring tinctures. And there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication, and they were led astray, and became corrupt in all their ways. Semjaza taught enchantments, and root-cuttings, 'Armaros the resolving of enchantments, Baraqijal (taught) astrology, Kokabel the constellations, Ezeqeel the knowledge of the clouds {divining from the clouds} , Araziel the signs of the earth, Shamsiel the signs of the sun, and Sariel the course of the moon. And as men perished, they cried, and their cry went up to heaven . . .

[Chapter 9]

"And then Michael, Uriel, Raphael, and Gabriel looked down from heaven and saw much blood being shed upon the earth, and all lawlessness being wrought upon the earth. And

they said one to another: 'The earth made without inhabitant cries the voice of their cryingst up to the gates of heaven. And now to you, the holy ones of heaven, the souls of men make their suit, saying, "Bring our cause before the Most High.'" And they said to the Lord of the ages: 'Lord of lords, God of gods, King of kings, and God of the ages, the throne of Thy glory (standeth) unto all the generations of the ages, and Thy name holy and glorious and blessed unto all the ages! Thou hast made all things, and power over all things hast Thou: and all things are naked and open in Thy sight, and Thou seest all things, and nothing can hide itself from Thee. Thou seest what Azazel hath done, who hath taught all unrighteousness on earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were (preserved) in heaven, which men were striving to learn: And Semjaza, to whom Thou hast given authority to bear rule over his associates. And they have gone to the daughters of men upon the earth, and have slept with the women, and have defiled themselves, and revealed to them all kinds of sins. And the women have borne giants, and the whole earth has thereby been filled with blood and unrighteousness. And now, behold, the souls of those who have died are crying and making their suit to the gates of heaven, and their lamentations have ascended: and cannot cease because of the lawless deeds which are wrought on the earth. And Thou knowest all things before they come to pass, and Thou seest these things and Thou dost suffer them, and Thou dost not say to us what we are to do to them in regard to these.'

[Chapter 10]

"Then said the Most High, the Holy and Great One spake, and sent Uriel [Ethiopic: Arsayalalyur] to the son of Lamech, and said to him: 'Go to Noah and tell him in my name "Hide thyself!" and reveal to him the end that is approaching: that the whole earth will be destroyed, and a deluge is about to come upon the whole earth, and will destroy all that is on it. And now instruct him that he may escape and his seed may be preserved for all the generations of the world.' And again the Lord said to Raphael: 'Bind Azazel hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert, which is in Dudael, and cast him therein. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there for ever, and cover his face that he may not see light. And on the day of the great judgement he shall be cast into the fire. And heal the earth which the angels have corrupted, and proclaim the healing of the earth, that they may heal the plague, and that all the children of men may not perish through all the secret things that the Watchers have disclosed and have taught their sons. And the whole earth has been corrupted through the works that were taught by Azazel: to him ascribe all sin.' And to Gabriel said the Lord: 'Proceed against the bastards and the reprobates, and against the children of fornication: and destroy [the children of fornication and] the children of the Watchers from amongst men [and cause them to go forth]: send them one against the other that they may

destroy each other in battle: for length of days shall they not have. And no request that they (i.e. their fathers) make of thee shall be granted unto their fathers on their behalf; for they hope to live an eternal life, and that each one of them will live five hundred years.' And the Lord said unto Michael: 'Go, bind Semjaza and his associates who have united themselves with women so as to have defiled themselves with them in all their uncleanness. And when their sons have slain one another, and they have seen the destruction of their beloved ones, bind them fast for seventy generations in the valleys of the earth, till the day of their judgement and of their consummation, till the judgement that is for ever and ever is consummated. In those days they shall be led off to the abyss of fire: and to the torment and the prison in which they shall be confined for ever. And whosoever shall be condemned and destroyed will from thenceforth be bound together with them to the end of all generations. And destroy all the spirits of the reprobate and the children of the Watchers, because they have wronged mankind. Destroy all wrong from the face of the earth and let every evil work come to an end: and let the plant of righteousness and truth appear: and it shall prove a blessing; the works of righteousness and truth' shall be planted in truth and joy for evermore.

"And then shall all the righteous escape,
And shall live till they beget thousands of children,
And all the days of their youth and their old age
Shall they complete in peace.

"And then shall the whole earth be tilled in righteousness, and shall all be planted with trees and be full of blessing. And all desirable trees shall be planted on it, and they shall plant vines on it: and the vine which they plant thereon shall yield wine in abundance, and as for all the seed which is sown thereon each measure (of it) shall bear a thousand, and each measure of olives shall yield ten presses of oil. And cleanse thou the earth from all oppression, and from all unrighteousness, and from all sin, and from all godlessness: and all the uncleanness that is wrought upon the earth destroy from off the earth. And all the children of men shall become righteous, and all nations shall offer adoration and shall praise Me, and all shall worship Me. And the earth shall be cleansed from all defilement, and from all sin, and from all punishment, and from all torment, and I will never again send (them) upon it from generation to generation and for ever."

Here is a section from that same Book of Enoch that refers to these fallen angels as "sons of God", *b'nai Elohim*:

[Chapter 69]

"And after this judgement they shall terrify and make them to tremble because they have shown this to those who dwell on the earth. And behold the names of those angels [and these are their names: the first of them is Samjaza, the second Artaqifa, and the third Armen, the fourth Kokabel, the fifth Turael, the sixth Rumjal, the seventh Danjal, the eighth Neqael, the ninth Baraqel, the tenth Azazel, the eleventh Armaros,

the twelfth Batarjal, the thirteenth Busasejal, the fourteenth Hananel, the fifteenth Turel, and the sixteenth Simapesiel, the seventeenth Jetrel, the eighteenth Tumaël, the nineteenth Turel, the twentieth Rumaël, the twenty-first Azazel. And these are the chiefs of their angels and their names, and their chief ones over hundreds and over fifties and over tens]. The name of the first Jeqon: that is, the one who led astray [all] the **sons of God**, and brought them down to the earth, and led them astray through the daughters of men. And the second was named Asbeel: he imparted to the holy **sons of God** evil counsel, and led them astray so that they defiled their bodies with the daughters of men. And the third was named Gadreel: he it is who showed the children of men all the blows of death, and **he led astray Eve**, and showed [the weapons of death to the sons of men] the shield and the coat of mail, and the sword for battle, and all the weapons of death to the children of men. And from his hand they have proceeded against those who dwell on the earth from that day and for evermore. And the fourth was named Penemue: he taught the children of men the bitter and the sweet, and he taught them all the secrets of their wisdom. And he instructed mankind in writing with ink and paper, and thereby many sinned from eternity to eternity and until this day. For men were not created for such a purpose, to give confirmation to their good faith with pen and ink. For men were created exactly like the angels, to the intent that they should continue pure and righteous, and death, which destroys everything, could not have taken hold of them,

but through this their knowledge they are perishing, and through this power it is consuming me. And the fifth was named Kasdeja: this is he who showed the children of men all the wicked smitings of spirits and demons, and the smitings of the embryo in the womb, that it may pass away, and [the smitings of the soul] the bites of the serpent, and the smitings which befall through the noontide heat, the son of the serpent named Taba'et. And this is the task of Kasbeel, the chief of the oath which he showed to the holy ones when he dwelt high above in glory, and its name is Biqa. This (angel) requested Michael to show him the hidden name, that he might enunciate it in the oath, so that those might quake before that name and oath who revealed all that was in secret to the children of men. And this is the power of this oath, for it is powerful and strong, and he placed this oath Akae in the hand of Michael." {emphasis mine}

Could it be that, like the story of Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden, the reference to the "sons of God" mating with the "daughters of men" is symbolic and has some spiritual meaning? This is very possible, even likely. If Eve symbolizes the human self while Adam represents the higher human spirit that illumines that self, then perhaps this mating of the "sons of God" with the "daughters of men" is a similar reference to our dual nature in this life, to the condition of a divine human soul being entrapped in the mesh of desire in this world.

There are some parts of this that seem very unlikely, such as the heights of the giants. Different versions give very

different heights – all of them quite unbelievable if we are to take them literally. But that could be due to accumulation of exaggeration. Since these texts are probably very ancient, tracing back to what could have been our infancy or early childhood, the childlike tendency to exaggerate, each copier outdoing the previous one, might have played a part here. The feats of mythic heroes may be an immense magnification of the original deeds. The original text might simply have referred to giants and the myth makers might have felt a need to embellish. Notice how different versions of the same text have significantly different names for the fallen angels. This strongly suggests that some of the scribes might have been lacking in the discipline required of that work.

And there is this statement in Genesis: "And God saw that the wickedness of man {was} great in the earth, and {that} every imagination of the thoughts of his heart {was} only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." (Genesis, 6:1-6) If humans were the victims of these fallen angels, then why should humans be blamed completely here? Why should the Lord repent "that He had made man on the earth"? These might be giving hints to us that the story is like that of Adam and Eve and the snake in the Garden of Eden. There is surely a hidden meaning here.

Let's recall here the statements made previously concerning the true nature of a human being. We are a soul riding an animal vehicle through this life – like that cowboy on a horse. The soul lives in a spirit world, a world of mind and spirit, while the body lives in the world of matter. Matter is built up in ever greater degrees of organization through evolutionary processes – from the mineral to the plant to the animal – until it attains to a form adequate to become the throne and vehicle for a human soul. Our animal bodies are the

highest development of the world of matter. It's as though matter reaches up high enough towards the worlds of spirit to be able to reflect what is actually human. The soul's powers are reflected in this body just as the sun reflects its powers on the earth and brings forth life on it even though it be millions of miles away. That is, the soul isn't **in** the body but is associated with it. The death of the body is the dissociation of the soul in its world of spirit from the body in its world of matter. The soul lives in that realm of "ultimate reality" referred to by Sir James Jeans and reflects its power onto the body like an object reflecting its image in a mirror.

This means that our human mind and its consciousness is confined and restricted through the limitations of the brain and body. We have the illusion that our reality is here in this body because the brain and body focus this consciousness through their nature. We think through this brain, see through these eyes, hear through these ears, move through these legs, etc., and this brings us the definite feeling that we are these bodies – unless we have an out-of-body state of awareness such as a near-death experience. And when the death of the body arrives, the soul's power no longer operates through the body.

This means that our souls are, in one sense, in the heavens and that we are spirits or even angels in a very general sense of the word. And these angelic realities of ours are born into these animal bodies when conception occurs. A link is made between the angelic soul and the animal body. We could even say that the angel soul has **descended** into the physical realm of the body. And then the soul enters that realm of battle, the lower animal pulling down and the higher soul pulling up – unless a soul refuses to do this battle and gives in entirely to the lower animal.

Small children often express the beauty, glory, joy and spirit of the heavenly realm. One poet has written that they come into our world "trailing clouds of glory". They are wonderfully pure-hearted, sensitive and prone to saying wise things sometimes while hardly knowing what they are saying. This beauty and purity attracts our hearts strongly. What normal mother and father have not found their hearts thrilled beyond description on gazing on their new-born child? There's something in young children that greatly attracts the heart. But all this lovable nature of babies and small children (before many little boys turn into demons) is through weakness, not strength. Purity of heart does not mean spirituality.

The moment the physical world tests the weak child, it fails because of its weakness. This failure gradually informs the soul and mind of where it needs to work in order to get strong. But the mind doesn't accept this information immediately. It plays games with itself and projects all its weaknesses and shortcomings onto others so as to maintain a good self-image. So, such children need to think they have an external cause of their naughtiness or badness. "The devil made me do it." "Something possessed me." "See what you made me do!?" "It's you! Not me." Perhaps the revelation of God needs to use such an external symbol of error and evil to communicate with the child and adolescent.

According to one Jewish legend, before Azazel had fallen he asked God why He didn't just destroy all the Jews since they were disobedient to His command. God answers Azazel by asking him if he's sure he wouldn't fail as well if he were in the position of humans. Azazel overconfidently assures God that he would continue to praise Him and obey Him under all circumstances and then asks to be sent down to earth in order to prove it. No sooner is he on earth than he begins to fall. This is like those who are unaware of their own

weakness because they haven't yet been tested. Then the tests reveal a different condition. Humans in the days after Adam were surely immature and unaware of their weakness.

In order for the human soul to grow, it needs to struggle against some form of resistance – just as a weightlifter gets strong by struggling to lift heavy weights against the downward-pulling gravity. Without electrical resistance the filament in a light bulb would not shine brightly. The human soul needs something to struggle against to give it the spiritual exercise needed to develop spiritual "muscles". The animal condition of these bodies provides that opposed force. This resistance is collectively symbolized by Satan. When these spiritual muscles are strong enough, then the tests are passed easily. Infancy, childhood and adolescence are times of weakness, of having difficulty acknowledging weakness. Maturity is the condition of strength where the higher nature dominates the lower.

The story of the Watchers, the angels who enter the earthly world, is very much like the reality of the human soul entering the animal body and, during the earliest stages is very weak. There has to be some attractive principle that brings the soul to "descend" from its heaven and associate itself with these bodies in this material world. The simple story of the angels lusting after earthly women neatly conveys in terms most humans can grasp this notion of whatever it is that causes the soul to link up with an animal body and live for a while within its limitations. Then the mission of the Prophets of God is to bring us back up, the struggle to do so bringing us strength.

The animal id dominates in infancy and childhood. The statements about these fallen angels bringing so much knowledge to humans could illustrate the truth that the human

mind gains a knowledge that the animal condition can never know. Through the human mind, humans in these bodies become mental "giants", learning of things that animals could never know and using this to change the world – just as the union of the angels with humans produced giants. They ate of the tree of knowledge and gained the responsibility that comes with it. Those without knowledge are not held responsible for what they don't know – at least where spiritual matters are concerned. But being weak children, they don't know how to use their knowledge wisely and well. They do all the wrong things first.

Children usually learn by doing the wrong thing first, that is, by failing tests. Gradually strength is gained. The small child tries to stand up and falls down a hundred times – just as we humans have a 6000 year history of falling down so repeatedly. But the child never gives up trying and finally one day stays up. And eventually we humans will finally stand up and stay there, and even learn to walk, then run and dance. This story of the first days after Adam is the story of our early weakness.

The leader of the fallen angels, Semyaza, finally repented, realizing his weakness. This is like a person who comes to realize his weakness and wants to change and grow. But Azazel did not and persisted in his waywardness. There's no improvement when one sees nothing wrong.

Such stories in the Holy Books can have many meanings. This might be one of them: a story whose purpose was not understood by immature humans who imagined it to be a tall tale and embellished it. We may be like a tiny worm inside a seed in an apple on a branch on a tree in an orchard tended by a Gardener. We know a little about the seed and maybe just the tiniest amount about the apple. But we're

ignorant of the other apples on our branch, and utterly unaware of other branches. Then what do we know of the whole tree let alone the orchard or the Gardener that tends it?

There was a time when we didn't realize that strange peoples of other races in faraway lands are fellow members of our one human species. What do we know now of beings of the planets of other star and planet systems and their relationship to us? What do we know of the connections and relationships between galaxies? What do we know of the interconnections between vast realms of the spirit and this physical universe? We look at the small, narrow beliefs of the ancients who thought this world was the center of everything as amusing. But maybe the people of a future age will see our current views in the same light. The revelation of God comes down to us from realms far above us in a form we can understand and digest. The worm in the seed of an apple might imagine that God's revelation comes down from the branch to which that apple is attached and may not comprehend that it has descended from a far higher realm.

Consider how our dreams communicate to us deep truths needed for our growth in a very symbolic form. These symbolic dreams communicate with our deepest mind, which is usually below the level of our consciousness. Why cannot these Holy Books communicate with us in the same way? – speaking to our deepest subconscious mind in symbolic form, even while our waking consciousness may not grasp the meaning and understand how to react. As we mature, ever more of this that is planted deep within in a symbolic form becomes available to our conscious understanding. We bite off as much as we can chew and digest at any one time.

We are told what we need to know in accord with our stage of development, and this might occur in a symbolic form

so that the more developed ones can progress too. We tend to reject and oppose whatever is too far beyond our comprehension and can even damage ourselves through such opposition, so certain truths are conveyed in a cryptic form so that the simple will see them only as stories that literally happened – no matter how bizarre and unlikely – while those who truly want to develop are helped to see what some of the hidden meanings might be.

Though the story of the Garden of Eden is surely symbolic and has hidden meanings which are revealed only to those who are close to God, it is also true that the human in it, Adam, is quite real. Humans are not merely symbols. And it could be that, since the *Qur’án* and Bible make other references to *jinn* or spirits or *sons of God* where it seems they are not fully material (at least to begin with), that the possibility does exist of there being another type of being that is not fully physical as we are. But this writer has not come to any firm conclusions on this – the matter is still open for him. It simply seems to be a feasible possibility.

Symbolic events can also be actual and vice versa. For example, Bahá’u’lláh was cast into a deep, dark dungeon in Tehran, the capital of Persia (Iran) of that time. That rat-infested dungeon had a stench that was unbearable due to the lack of sanitation. An immensely heavy metal collar attached to huge heavy chains was placed on his neck. Not far away was the palace of the tyrannical king, Násiri'd-Dín Sháh, who was responsible for his being placed there. At times the king heard Bahá’u’lláh and those with him chanting prayers and was puzzled as to it.. In a sense this is an outward symbol of what is happening within the kingdom of each individual. In immaturity the tyrants of the id and ego, like the king and his evil prime minister, usurp the throne of that kingdom. The result is chaos, disturbance and confusion. The highest self is

hidden down in the dark dungeon of the subconscious and calls out in distress now and then. Finally, the tyrant is toppled from the throne in maturity when the highest self finally dominates, the true king then sits on the throne designed for him, and peace, order, productivity and well-being appear in the kingdom. When the inner kingdom of most people is ruled by the tyrannical and unjust lower self, then this is reflected in the larger kingdom or nation. And when maturity arrives to the individuals of a nation, then the entire society reflects this.

So, actual physical situations can symbolize spiritual conditions. So maybe there could also be some reality to this story of the fallen angels and the giants they produced.

Could it be that there are "angels", maybe some of them fallen, in the physical heavens too?—angels from other parts of our galaxy who have interacted with us humans for many millennia? The idea seems strange to many, but there has been an accumulation of evidence that this might be true. It seems very likely to this writer that there are intelligent beings on other planets, that such beings might even be the very purpose and fruit of a planet. If this is true, there surely there are some who have evolved beyond us and have the means to visit. And it seems likely that there is some kind of orderly development among these many different species where they are to help the immature in their development. Perhaps there are even rogue beings who fail their tests at some time and make trouble for others. But we, or at least this writer, are still greatly in ignorance of most of this now and can only speculate what our relationship is to these others in our galaxy. And this stretches a little too far beyond the intent of this book.

If such "angels", good or bad, do descend to our Earth to visit and interact with us in certain ways (most of them obviously subtle, evasive and hidden), this does not mean that

there are not other kinds of angels outside the material universe who also play a profound role in human development. "As above, so below." This story could have many meanings on many different levels, a similar pattern appearing at each level. It could be talking about our own human nature as souls functioning through bodies, or about relationships between us and those who are far in advance of us in this physical universe, or about the deep ties that bind human souls with angelic beings in other non-material realms. Whatever the level, they are *zophim*, Watchers, seeing how we're developing.

We see that there are similar angel-like beings in the Holy Books of Judaism-Christianity and that, like the *jinn* they can be either good or bad, that the *jinn* and angels were created first, and that there seems to be a lot of interaction between the two. [I've just learned that there is a book by Jung entitled something like *Fallen Angels in Judaism, Christianity and the Muhammadan Religion*. Must get a copy and read that.]

Some claim that the *jinn*, like Satan, are a symbol of the "principle of evil". It's difficult to understand the reasoning behind this after reading the *Qur'án's* many statements about *jinn* concerning some of them being good and others bad. Satan, who is one of the *jinn*, is certainly a symbol of evil. But when the *Qur'án* states that some of the *jinn* believed in the truth of Muhammad's revelation and were Muslims, it's quite difficult to accept that some of those who are Muslims and accept the revelation of God could be a symbol of evil. " ' "Some of us are righteous, while others are not; we follow different ways." ' ' " (Jinn 72, 1f)

There is another statement that the *jinn* represent a particular type of human in whom the element of 'fire', among the elements of fire, air, water and earth of which humans are made, predominates. Other humans made of 'clay' would have

the element of 'earth' dominant. These elements might not refer to what we normally think of as fire, air, water and earth but might use these as symbolic of deeper-lying elements not yet fully-understood from which material things are built up. Perhaps this is true. The question arises as to why the *Qur’án* would refer to the creation of *jinn* and men separately, also saying that men were created after the *jinn*, suggesting that *jinn* and men are two different kinds of creatures. Why refer to "jinn and men" if *jinn* are actually one kind of man? How does this accord with the translation of "jinn" as "spirits" in the same context? And how would such an understanding accord with the common Arab understanding of *jinn* as somewhat intangible creatures whose name derives from the word for "hidden"? How does the statement that *jinn* are one kind of human accord with - " " "We made our way to high heaven, and found it filled with mighty wardens and fiery comets. We sat eavesdropping, but eavesdroppers find flaming darts in wait for them. We cannot tell if this bodes evil to the inhabitants of earth or whether their Lord intends to guide them."...'..." All these diverse statements serve mostly to bring more questions than answers to this writer.

The author's current understanding is that the words "angel" and "devil" describe two opposite extremes on a scale from very good to very bad. This is a different distinction than that between *jinn* and humans. Some humans are good and some are bad; and some *jinn* are good and some are bad. Satan is a symbol of the principle of evil. But *jinn*, like humans, seem to be creatures. Both are created by God and can be either good or bad. Are *jinn* the same as the *sons of God*, the Watchers?

There are some other things written in the *Qur’án* as well that the writer cannot yet make any sense of. For example, why would God explain to us that "He sends forth the

angels as His messengers, with two, three or four pairs of wings."? What is the meaning of having different numbers of wings? (The Creator, 35:1) Is it to classify the angels or messengers in accord with their varying powers of spiritual "flight"?

For those who insist that no such things as ghosts or spirits exist, who subscribe to the materialist perspective of the modern Western or Western-educated worldview, it should be stated that this is simply a matter of cultural belief. It has little to do **with** science, even if it's **about** science. When science (i.e., scientists) has not investigated a matter, then it can say nothing about it other than "We don't know yet; we haven't investigated the matter adequately yet." When people, including scientists, insist that there are no such things as intangible beings, they are simply making statements derived from articles of faith and belief which their culture or subculture has taught them – even if these doctrines are inculcated in our educational institutions. There are secular items of belief just as there are religious articles of faith. Everyone has to believe in something – even if it's something as shallow and temporary as a political ideology.

It's quite amazing that medical researchers and other life scientists are moving to ever more anachronistic extremes of materialist philosophy in the fundamental assumptions of their work when the "hardest" and most rigorous of sciences, physics, has been compelled to abandon that materialist philosophy as an old superstition. Science writer Arthur Koestler states:

"Thus for the last fifty years [written in 1978], since the advent of quantum theory, it has become a commonplace among physicists of the dominant school (the so-called Copenhagen

School) that the strictly deterministic, mechanistic worldview can no longer be upheld; it has become a Victorian anachronism. The nineteenth century model of the universe as a mechanical clockwork is a shambles and since the concept of matter itself has been dematerialized, **materialism can no longer claim to be a scientific philosophy.**" (Arthur Koestler; *Janus*, pp 249-50. [emphasis his])

Here's another statement conveying the same general idea:

"What has happened is that biologists, who once postulated a privileged role for the human mind in nature's hierarchy, have been moving relentlessly toward the hard-core materialism that characterized nineteenth-century physics. At the same time, physicists, faced with compelling experimental evidence, have been moving away from strictly mechanical models of the universe to a view that sees the mind as playing an integral role in all physical events. It is as if the two disciplines were on fast-moving trains, going in opposite directions and not noticing what is happening across the tracks." (Harold Morowitz, "Rediscovering the Mind," *Psychology Today* 14 (August 1980): 12) (p 226)

This is a very bizarre situation, where so many scientists themselves have failed to respond to the best of science, as though different branches of science were different truths that needn't match up and be consistent. Even among so many physicists, there seems to be a stubborn reluctance to face the realities of what quantum physics implies. So many of

them simply do not see what the founders of quantum physics saw and resist the implications of the work of their fellows. The world didn't take too long to catch on to the notions of Einstein's relativity – even if it didn't easily grasp its ideas. But for some reason the extremely revolutionary ideas of the new shift in understanding brought by quantum physics never seemed to have registered with the public – nor even with the subculture of the educated in most of the world's universities. It's no wonder that so many of the educated still believe that for something to be "scientific" it must be in accord with a materialist perspective more appropriate to the 19th century, that lost its validity and usefulness in science three-quarters of a century ago. How very strange indeed! There's clearly something more than science going on here. It's a kind of wilfull blindness and ignorance.

As every student in a beginning course of university philosophy learns during his study of the philosophy of science, materialism is no longer a viable way of looking at reality. Notwithstanding this, many scientists and the bulk of the modern educated public still view reality in accord with the old and most unrealistic materialist paradigm and believe that it is in accord with good science. This is not only unscientific; it is irrational.

Consider how very difficult it would be to prove that something does **not** exist. How would one demonstrate conclusively that ghosts or discarnate spirits such as *jinn* do not exist? It's easy to prove that something **does** exist; one just shows an example. To prove that an animal exists with a neck longer than its back or a nose as long as its leg, one need only point to a giraffe or an elephant. But how does one prove that there are no large sea serpents, leviathans, dragons, Bigfoot ape-men, aliens from other parts of the galaxy, or unseen and intangible beings such as angels or *jinn*? The fact that most

people haven't seen one and that we have no specimens on hand is no proof; they might just be very rare and avoid humans well. New species of animals are being found all the time. The *coelacanth*, thought by scientists to have been extinct for millions of years, suddenly turned up one day in a fisherman's catch. To prove that a sea serpent or leviathan does not exist we would have to devise some outrageously difficult process such as going carefully over every location in the ocean and then not allowing any creatures back into the areas we've investigated – which is most unworkable and an incredible waste of time and resources. So how would one prove that there are no intangible spirits? No scientist would be silly enough to even think of trying such a thing. When some with a little education state that science doesn't believe in ghosts and spirits, they are simply stating an article of cultural belief and faith that they have been taught is true. It's a cultural belief **about** science, not a belief **of** science. Neither they nor any scientists have demonstrated the truth of it.

Of course, the progress of science has influenced some modern subcultures of the world whose members consider themselves educated. We abandoned a lot of spiritistic superstitions that were of no use to us during the Age of Enlightenment. And then we went to the opposite materialist extreme. Both extremes are superstitious; both are based on untenable assumptions about reality. Truth and reality are somewhere between these two extremes of spiritism and materialism – and high above them.

This writer is quite convinced that entire worlds exist that we are not aware of – even if it turns out that the *jinn* are a symbol of something rather than actual beings. Theoretical physicists are no strangers to such ideas. There's even one theory that there are infinitely many universes; that each time there's a choice to be made, one universe goes the way of one

of the choices and another universe goes the other way. And many physicists take it quite seriously (though this writer does not) because the mathematics of it appears to work out well. There is no reason to suppose that our physical senses should be able to respond to all that exists. That would be presumptuous. Our eyes pick up only a small band of wavelengths along the electromagnetic spectrum being quite blind to infra-red and ultra-violet light and what is beyond them. Our ears don't hear sounds that dogs and bats hear. Our noses are pitifully insensitive compared to what so many animals such as dogs can smell. We don't sense x-rays or microwaves or radio waves or any of a large number of things that do exist. What presumption is it that prompts a human to suppose that the realm of existence is limited just to what these puny senses can respond to? – or to what we can convert into what can be sensed?

What if there were other senses, such as those of the heart, mind and spirit, that could be awakened and refined so that we come to learn of new realities? Does our current lack of ability in such areas prove that they don't exist? The attitude that something doesn't exist if you don't see it is how a tiny child thinks!

Any who have read the many books on near-death experiences, or who have actually had them, know that we are spirits that can vacate these bodies and look at them from outside. Many have "out-of-body" experiences. What always fascinated this writer were the many who have had such experiences who told of how revolting the idea of returning to their clammy body was after experiencing the exhilaration, joy and freedom of being disconnected from it. Some were just furious at having to be trapped back inside a body again and took some time to overcome their anger and resentment at this. If we are spirits that can ride around in these bodies and

occasionally function independently of them, as when asleep or during an out-of-body experience, then how should it be impossible that there are beings that don't have material bodies at all?

This is not an argument that the *jinn* have an actual existence like ours; it's an argument for the **possibility** of such a thing, that there **could** be intangible beings.

The writer is convinced that the Holy Books inform us of realms of existence, and of other beings and realities, that exist – even if we cannot sense them now. And he is also convinced that many of the stories told in the Holy Books, if we can probe back through mythic exaggerations and distortions to the original, are really a coded form of conveying information to those who have the key to the code through purifying the mirror of the heart so that it will reflect the realities of the worlds of the spirit, and through deep contemplation and meditation.

To repeat, the writer has not come to any solid conclusions on the matter of the *jinn* of the *Qur’án* or the *sons of God* of the Bible, and their possible symbolism. He can only conclude that he is not (at least yet) among the pure of heart, the spiritual, the chosen few who have discovered the key to the deeper meanings of these stories in the Holy Books. This doesn't mean he doesn't believe that there are many existing beings of many different kinds who are not material. He's certain that each of us continues after the death of the body in some non-material form. It's just that he doesn't know where to place the *jinn* among these, if the *jinn* are in fact actual beings and not just symbolic of some principle.

It's usually at this point that someone with utterly no background of study, who has come to rock solid conclusions

based on some shallow indoctrinated cultural or religious system of belief, and without that slightest real thought or investigation, arises to declare precisely what the *jinn* are and dismisses all else as pure superstition. They then declare the case closed and try their best to prevent any further investigation of reality in the name of the absolute unquestioned and uninvestigated truth of which they are the supreme custodians. The thinking do well to circumvent such arrogant and presumptuous ignorance. Far better to say "I don't know" than to state that one has certain knowledge when one doesn't in order to prevent further consideration of the matter.

What has been stated so far is not a complete account of all that the writer thinks about beings and influences that don't seem to have a corresponding material body. His experiences in Africa and elsewhere have played a large role in his understanding. But it doesn't seem appropriate to discuss those aspects here other than to say that most, but not all, of what sensitive "people of the heart" experience may come from other living human beings who are not physically present, who might be dreaming, or who have not completed the process of dying and are in a condition and world intermediate between this one and the next. But that is a very large topic and it's best left for consideration elsewhere. It seems unlikely that these are the *jinn* referred to in the *Qur'án*.

But if no definite conclusions have been arrived at here, these efforts are not lost. A lot has been learned about other very interesting matters in the process of trying to open this locked box. These are the thoughts at the present moment surrounding his quest for a deeper understanding of this. Some of this might be used as tools for the reader's own search for meaning here. Readers can work out their own thoughts here or, like the writer, simply leave the matter undecided until more information or insight arrives. God willing, as Muslims

and Bahá’ís say, we will some day get a clearer understanding of this mystery.

Changing People into Detested Apes and Swine

Let's now move from the sublime to the ridiculous, from angels to apes, from saints to swine.

"... And when they scornfully persisted in their forbidden ways, We said to them: 'Turn into detested apes.' " (The Heights, 7:166)

"Say: 'Shall I tell you who will receive a worse reward from God? Those whom God has cursed and with whom He has been angry, transforming them into apes and swine, and those who serve the devil...." (The Table, 5:60)

"You have heard of those of you that broke the Sabbath. We said to them: 'You shall be changed into detested apes.' We made their fate an example to their own generation and to those who followed them, and a lesson to the righteous." (The Cow, 2:65)

Many of us secretly or openly admit that we've seen people who bear a resemblance to apes, swine and other animals. In China, where this writer once taught at university, some students referred to a particular type of person whose appearance bears some similarity to a caricature of a pig. But **looking** like an ape or a pig is quite different from actually **being** one. Maybe this has some spiritual meaning, that the person has acquired the qualities and attributes of apes or swine. Many of us have known people with simian, swinish

and bovine characteristics. It seems quite possible that it is this latter meaning that might be intended.

This writer has a particular understanding of how acquired traits can, over a period of a few generations, become locked into a group of people genetically so that the trait now becomes inherited and passed on automatically to the next generation. For example, people with light skin who stay out in the bright sun much of their life, generation after generation, might finally find that the trait becomes hereditary. Most people in the world cannot digest cow’s milk well. But generations of trying seems to bring the ability to do this and eventually it’s sealed into the genes.

A proper explanation of this requires an understanding of biologist Rupert Sheldrake’s *hypothesis of morphogenetic formation* that postulates the existence of intangible fields that interact with our bodies and their genes, changes first getting locked into something in the field before being reflected in the material structure of body and its genes. This isn’t the place for a careful discussion of this idea. Our suggestion here is that groups of people who abandon their highest human nature and let the animal nature rule them will, over a period of generations, gradually change to look like those apes to whom we are so closely related genetically. Remember that the only real difference between us and those apes is that our animal bodies have a human soul associated with them whereas the apes do not. Biologists have also pointed out that we bear some strong similarities genetically and otherwise to swine, to pigs. Research that is investigating the possibility of using animal organs to replace failing human organs currently looks to pigs for this.

This idea suggests that humans who manage to let the highest nature in them dominate the lower for a number of

generations will, by the same process, gradually come to look less like apes and swine. This is merely a hypothesis, a suggested explanation.

Creation

"Are the disbelievers unaware that the heavens and the earth were but one solid mass which We tore asunder, and that We made every living thing of water?" (The Prophets, 21:29)

"In six days He created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them, and then ascended His throne." (Al-Furqán, 25:58)

In the Holy Books the word "day" often represents a much longer period of time:

"He is the Lord of the Ladders, by which the angels and the Spirit will ascend to Him in one day: a day whose space is fifty-thousand years." (The Ladders, 70:2)

In other translations, this "day" is translated as "span" so that "In six spans He created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them". A span can refer to a long period of time. Our modern scientific understanding is that these "days" of creation each took an immensely long period of time by our time scale.

There are seven heavens and seven earths too:

"It is God who has created seven heavens and earths as many." (Divorce, 65:12)

It would be wonderful to know what the meaning behind this is. Remember that in the days of the revelation of the *Qur’án* the physical heavens included, aside from the relatively fixed stars, the seven moving bodies of the sun, the moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Earth was not understood to be a planet. What could the seven earths be? This writer's immediate and rather wild guess is that it refers symbolically to seven material realms or kingdoms, the mineral, plant and animal kingdoms being three of these. Or maybe there are actually seven different grades of worldly existence. Biologist Lyall Watson states in his book on the process of death, *The Romeo Error*, that death appears consecutively in the various layers of our physical being. First the grossly physical body dies, then less tangible bodies die until the process is complete. Ghosts, by this understanding, could be people who have not yet completed the process of dying and are somehow stuck for a while at some point in this transition. Some people of ancient and modern India speak of these different layers of the human body very matter-of-factly, giving each one names, "astral body" being one of them. Traditional and even modern Chinese insist on the existence of these quasi-physical, semi-tangible kinds of reality in the body. The highly-effective acupuncture is based on this idea of an invisible *chi* flow along well-defined lines in the body. Some Muslim philosophers and mystics speak of various grades of spirit. Shaykh Ahmad, head of the Shaykhi School of Muslim theology, and announcer of the coming of The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, refers to two physical bodies (the visible one being dependent on the invisible one) and two spiritual bodies in addition (with the same relationship of one being dependent on the other for its existence), all four being reflections of a soul or divine Spirit. But this writer must confess that all this raises more questions than answers for him.

Maybe this is a way of referring to various levels of the physical world as it exists in seven different layers. Modern materialist physics and the people of cultures that have learned to see the world as strictly material will, of course, acknowledge only the most tangible of these layers that they are able to sense or measure.

A role played by the lowest heaven, which appears to be a spiritual realm for which the night sky we see is a symbol, is to provide means of pelting devils and eavesdroppers who try to listen in on what is being said in the higher heavens (as we will discover soon).

"He created seven heavens, one above the other. You will not see a flaw in the Merciful's creation. Turn up your eyes: can you detect a single crack [flaw]?"

"Then look once more and yet again: your eyes will in the end grow dim and weary.

"We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps, missiles for pelting devils. We have prepared a scourge of flames for these, and the scourge of Hell those who deny their Lord: an evil fate!" (Sovereignty, 67:2f)

It seems reasonable to understand that the seven heavens use the notion of a physical "heavens" or sky as it was generally seen in the days of the revelation of the *Qur’án* as a symbol for spiritual heavens.

Some insist on interpreting creation as something occurring at some particular time, that is, they believe that there is a moment or time of creation. But God and the other worlds are surely outside of our world of space and time. How can the Creator be limited by the constraints and bounds of His

creation? So His creation surely originates outside of time and then, as it enters our physical realm appears as continuous. That is, it must be a continuous process, like the radiation of light from the sun. But there are also cycles of growth and development in all things: stages of conception, birth, growth, maturity, decline and death. The new seed grows in the fruit of the old tree and starts the new life of a tree as the old tree dies. The universe probably has such seed-stage "beginnings" too (as in the Big Bang). So creation might be thought of as a continuous process of renewal in one sense as well as the renewing of life when each new thing is born, when each cycle starts over again.

"He conceives Creation, then renews it: that is easier for Him." (The Greeks, 35:27)

And it didn't tire Him either. (He's all-powerful and almighty!)

"In six days We created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them; nor were We ever wearied." (Qáf, 50:38)

And the reason for building this huge structure of the creation is to train and test us:

"Throned above the waters, He made the heavens and the earth in six days, to find out which of you shall best acquit himself." (Húd, 11:7)

It took Him only two days to make the earth, and two days as well to make the heavens.

"Say: 'Do you indeed disbelieve in Him who created the earth in two days? And do you

make other gods His equals? The Lord of the Universe is He.'

"He set upon the earth mountains towering high above it. He pronounced His blessing upon it, and in four days provided it with sustenance for all alike. Then, turning to the sky, which was but a cloud of vapour, He said to it and to the earth: 'Come forward both, willingly or perforce.'

" 'We will come willingly,' they answered. In two days He formed the sky into seven heavens, and to each heaven He assigned its task. We decked the lowest heaven with brilliant stars and guardian comets. Such is the design of the Mighty One, the All-Knowing." (Revelations Well Expounded, 41:9)

"We have decked the lower heaven with constellations. They guard it against rebellious devils, so that they may not listen in to those on high. Meteors are hurled at them from every side; then, driven away, they are consigned to an eternal scourge. Eavesdroppers are pursued by fiery comets. (The Ranks, 37:8)

We explained earlier the possibility that the physical realm is a kind of image of the spiritual realm. So the physical heavens can be an image of the spiritual heavens. These statements might be referring primarily to spiritual realities that have counterparts in our physical world.

Whatever is Between the Heavens and the Earth

There is a typical phrase one often comes across in the *Qur’án*: "the heavens and the earth and all that lies between

them." (e.g., The Ranks, 37:1) This sometimes seems strange to Western ears that think of there being just the heavens and the earth. Bahá'ís might notice that the prayers of The Báb, particularly those for protection, often use this phrase. Perhaps this intermediate realm took two "days" or spans of time to create as well, thus making the time of creation add up to six days.

It helps in visualizing what lies between the heavens and the earth if one first thinks of this in strictly material terms – as the early Muslims might have understood this. The earth in such a view is a flat expanse of land and water, while the heavens are a system of seven solid but see-through surfaces of rotating spheres in which are embedded the sun, moon, planets and stars. It's the air and its rain-bringing clouds that lie between that earth and those heavens.

Now, with this physical picture in mind, let's try to conceive of what these three realm could symbolize so that the *Qur'án's* statements make sense, are logically consistent (i.e., have no contradictions), and are deeply meaningful. The earth can represent the material world; the heavens can stand for the spiritual worlds of reality; and the air and clouds can match up with an intermediate realm that shares the qualities of both. The reader might want to consider the analogy set up earlier concerning how the attribute of mercy lifts the water up through evaporation to become clouds and raises the earth through wind and fire to become airborne dust and smoke. Bahá'ís reading this might recall reading about the "common faculty" by which the five physical senses convey their data in the electrical patterns of the brain to the intangible mind's powers of imagination, thought, comprehension and memory. The references to the powers of the *sympathetic nerve* (autonomic nervous system) as being neither wholly material

nor wholly spiritual, as well as the comments concerning the ether, suggest the existence of such an intermediate realm.

This is merely speculation by the writer, but his current view is that the intangible form of the human body that appears to separate from the tangible body during out-of-body experiences such as "near-death experiences belongs to this intermediate realm since the attributes of space, time and shape or form of the physical realm are maintained while the material component is lacking. Those experiencing such near-death experiences often tell of a river or some kind of barrier separating them from the "next world". They say that they know that if they go across that barrier there's no coming back. Well, if they aren't actually in the "next world" and "next life" yet, but are clearly not in their physical bodies and bound by the laws of physics that rule those bodies, then where are they? Perhaps this is that intermediate realm of "and whatever lies between them".

If the physical human body is an image in matter of the human reality or soul, then perhaps there is also an image of that human essence in the intermediate realm. We've already stated that biologist Lyall Watson made a study of the process of death in a book entitled *The Romeo Error*. He concludes what many cultures have believed for centuries: that there are stages of death and that the process is not completed until all layers or levels of the body, from the visible body to the least tangible forms have all died. Again, some suggest that ghosts are nothing more than people who haven't finished the process of dying yet, that their less tangible form or forms in the intermediate realm have not yet died – perhaps through the intense attachment of heart such people have to particular people and places, or perhaps because they cannot handle the transition too quickly and need time to adjust. So, if this speculation is realistic, then maybe the best response for those

who sense the presence of ghosts or even see them is to pray that they release their strong attachments and complete the process of "graduation" to the "next world". For those who are afraid of ghosts or what they cannot see, they might consider that such people are possibly even more afraid and confused and are in need of help in getting through to "the other side" by completing the process of physical death and birth into awareness of a new realm.

In quite a number of cultures around the world, there is a fear that those who recently "died" will, in their confusion, cling desperately in a ghost form to loved ones. People in such cultures may have ways of driving away such people who, unlike ripe fruit, fail to be taken easily from the tree of material existence in this life. Firecrackers, clapping of hands and various other activities are said to help the process of separation. Many of these cultures have a ceremony 40 days or so after the death to pray for and help the deceased person complete the process of death. A mature spiritualized person would have no strong earthly attachments and would go through the death process easily and quickly – like a ripe fruit falling from life's tree.

Of course, to those who still see everything in accord with the modern superstition of materialism, all this will be nonsense and be dismissed as "unscientific". That this item of belief has little to do with science has already been explained. In fact, since this intermediate realm is so close to the physical realm that physical instruments can detect, it might be possible before long for scientists to begin discovering the realities of such a realm and learning of its laws and principles, perhaps at first indirectly through inferences from physical behavior – just as we have deduced the mathematical laws of intangible electric-magnetic and gravitational fields by analyzing the behavior of physical objects in such fields. In fact, maybe

these force fields of the non-living mineral kingdom as well as the hierarchy of biological fields that bring about form and differentiation in plants and animals – maybe these fields are really part of that intermediate realm too.

It would even be possible that the *jinn*, if they have a real existence as the *Qur’án* seems to emphasize and are not solely symbolic, might exist in this intermediate realm since they seem able to interact with humans and even do certain kinds of work. Is their nature as "smokeless fire" the nature of that realm between the heavens and the earth? What about all these people who do horrible deeds who claim that voices told them to do these evil things? Why do some others who are near them also claim to hear those same voices? Are these voices really just manifestations of inner mental disturbance? This writer has seen these supposedly ill people display an astounding knowledge of some things that is hard to explain by the usual materialist system of rationalization. Could they be reacting to what they are sensing in this intermediate realm that most of us do not sense? Could this be why so many supposedly mentally-ill people see what we don't see, hear what we don't hear, and feel what we don't hear?

Well, all this is just speculation, just brainstorming about possibilities. The closed-minded cannot even tolerate that; one isn't even permitted to muse and reflect on possibilities in the simplistic strait-jacketed world of certain answers. That's not the way good science progresses. One has to be open to new ideas and possibilities – but without trying to freeze them into immutable eternal truths. As stated several times, this is a book where the reader shares the writer's journey of exploration and discovery. There is nothing permanent about his ideas. If his mind is growing and developing, then surely these ideas must grow and evolve.

This is where they are now. Take what you like; dispose of what you don't.

Well, as long as we're venturing out onto a limb here and saying what could be very challenging, let's go even further. The writer lived for over 12 years in Africa and had intimate contact with the African people living in traditional cultures for much of that time. What he saw and experienced very frequently went so contrary to much of what he was taught in university about how the world works that he finally had no choice but to restructure the way he saw reality so that this new evidence would fit into the picture. The story of the amazing things he saw and experienced is a book in itself and should not fill up these pages. He just wants to say that his African friends taught him about a world of realities that he didn't know of before. And much of this seems to be related to this intermediate realm. He has no way to explain many of the utterly unbelievable things that happened other than to suppose that another unseen realm that is close to this material world influences it quite strongly in many different ways. I won't say a word about witchcraft lest some readers be tested too much. But for those who have lived with Africans and other peoples who know of these things (and we're not referring to those who live in the towns and cities of Africa as part of an expatriate community and who see African cultures from the outside), they will probably agree that there is no other way to explain them without recourse to such intangible realms.

In summary, the phrase that refers to the heavens and the earth and whatever lies between them, so frequent in the *Qur'án*, and in the writings of The Báb, is surely speaking symbolically of three distinct realms: the material world, the spiritual worlds, and an intermediate realm that shares some characteristics of both realms.

Frequent Reference to Signs

"Do you not see how the ships speed upon the ocean by God's grace, so that He may reveal to you His wonders? Surely there are signs in this for every steadfast, thankful man.

"When the waves, like giant shadows, envelop them, they pray to God with all devotion. But no sooner does He bring them safe to land than some of them falter between faith and unbelief." (Luqman, 31:31)

There are so many ways to interpret a physical thing or situation as a sign or symbol of some spiritual principle. For example, in this example of a ship on the ocean, one could think of the ocean as representing life in this material world where a person could easily drown in a sea of materialism. The ship could symbolize the Religion of God that keeps a person high and dry above that ocean. Noah's Ark could symbolize God's Refuge where He protects His more responsive servants and leaves all those outside this "Ark of Salvation" to drown in the world, to die spiritually. There are many other ways this could be interpreted as well.

"We will show them Our signs in all the regions of the earth and in their own souls, until they clearly see that this is the truth."
(Revelations Well Expounded, 41:53)

The entire world is filled with signs and hints to teach us about spiritual realities, the real meaning of life, and how to progress well through life. How many lessons there are in a simple tree, or a flower, or the fruit of that tree! What an ocean of the signs of wisdom there are in the human body! It's the ideal analogy.

Consider how a tree tells us about life: it starts its life at the boundary where earth meets air, symbols of material and spiritual. While it puts down its roots into the solid earth with practicality and realism, it also grows upwards with detachment from that earth into the atmosphere of the spirit which is the realm of the soul. The fruit appears in this realm of air, not down in the dark and heavy soil of the physical animal and body. How can a tree grow up with detachment from the earth unless it first puts its roots down into that soil to provide a firm base from which to grow up out of that soil? How can a human gain true detachment and freedom from bondage to this world of matter and bodies without first living in worldly situations such as families, work environments and so on? The ascetic who imagines that he will achieve detachment by leaving the arena of daily life to spend his life away from society fools himself and fails through weakness from lack of testing in that arena of daily life the moment he is tested. "We have made you to be tests for one another; will you not have patience?". How will one grow strong without struggling against some opposed force? How will the weightlifter exercise and strengthen his muscles if there is no force of gravity opposing his efforts? How will the electric light bulb shine with brilliance if there is no electrical resistance in the filament through which the electricity is forced? How will a human gain inner strength of spirit without being tested in the social arena? The beautiful flowers of knowledge blossom before the fruit of wise action appears. The fruit of the tree is not just for the tree itself but is given in service to a kingdom above it. The seeds of new life are in this fruit.

The wisdom and lessons of God are written all over every created thing. Our Creator speaks to us with a thousand voices in all the things around us – if we have eyes to see and

ears to hear, that is, if our hearts and minds are not veiled. How many, even among the great scientists, see and hear nothing and are like cows that recognize nothing in the world except what satisfies their hunger. Whether we see a glorious masterpiece of perfect wisdom in the universe or not, or hear a heart-stirring symphony of joyous beauty in the stars, the mountains, the oceans, the singing and soaring birds, and the fragrant flowers or not, depends on our own heart. The more the mirror of the heart is cleansed of all mud and freed from the distorting warps of prejudices and passions, the more exhilarating and delightful are the thousands of messages full of glorious music, perfumed fragrances and joyous color that an all-wise and all-powerful Creator has placed in all these things around us. The placid pond of the heart reflects the glorious images of the heavens above it.

Will we listen to the deaf for a careful analysis of a symphony based on his evaluation of the movements of the musicians arms? Shall we pay great heed to the blind man who tells us of his study of a painted masterpiece by going over the hardened paints with his hands? Shall the blind in heart and narrow of mind who claim to be scientists and thinkers be our only guides to a clear understanding of the world around us? Or should we also take into account those who see and understand what they do not?

It takes a certain condition of mind and heart to see these messages from the Creator that are written all over His creation. We humans are the highest form of life; our souls are created in the image of God, potentially possessing all those divine universal attributes we spoke of earlier.

Here's a quote from Bahá'u'lláh that quotes this same passage above (in a different translation). It refers to a revelation from God that is different from the revelations of

God that, from time to time, come through the Prophets to humans. This other kind of revelation refers to that "white sunlight", here called "that Most Great Light", of all the attributes of God combined that shines out ceaselessly from the Source of Creation. This revelation is the source of all existing created things. The following shows how the soul and reality of man is created in the image of God. (The translation is into older English to convey the majesty, power and poetic formality of the Arabic original.)

“Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist. How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him. Even as He hath said: 'Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery.' Manifold are the verses that have been repeatedly revealed in all the Heavenly Books and the Holy Scriptures, expressive of this most subtle and lofty theme. Even as He hath revealed: 'We will surely show them Our signs in the world and

within themselves.’ Again He saith: ‘And also in your own selves: will ye not, then, behold the signs of God?’ And yet again He revealeth: ‘And be ye not like those who forget God, and whom He hath therefore caused to forget their own selves.’ In this connection, He Who is the eternal King—may the souls of all that dwell within the mystic Tabernacle be a sacrifice unto Him—hath spoken: ‘He hath known God who hath known himself.’

“... From that which hath been said it becometh evident that all things, in their inmost reality, testify to the revelation of the names and attributes of God within them. Each according to its capacity, indicateth, and is expressive of, the knowledge of God. So potent and universal is this revelation, that it hath encompassed all things visible and invisible. Thus hath He revealed: ‘Hath aught else save Thee a power of revelation which is not possessed by Thee, that it could have manifested Thee? Blind is the eye which doth not perceive Thee.’ Likewise hath the eternal King spoken: ‘No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it.’ Also in the tradition of Kumayl it is written: ‘Behold, a light hath shone forth out of the morn of eternity, and lo, its waves have penetrated the inmost reality of all men.’ Man, the noblest and most perfect of all created things, excelleth them all in the intensity of this revelation, and is a fuller expression of its glory. And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished, and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth [Prophets of God]. Nay, all else

besides these Manifestations, live by the operation of Their Will, and move and have their being through the outpourings of Their grace." (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp 177-79)

This passage contains a sea of wisdom that reveals its hidden pearls only if one leaves all one knows behind and dives into its depths. Real total immersion is required. But we can also skim its surface like sailors instead of divers and still gain a superficial grasp of its main points.

"On earth, and in yourselves, there are signs for firm believers. Can you not see?" (The Winds, 51:19)

There are so many passages referring to signs. Only a few will be quoted here. The topic could fill a large book or more. It's left to the reader to ponder the meanings and lessons of these signs.

"In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the ocean with cargoes beneficial to man; in the water which God sends down from the sky and with which He revives the earth after its death, dispersing over it all manner of beasts; in the disposal of the winds, and in the clouds that are driven between earth and sky; surely in these there are signs for rational men." (The Cow, 2:164)

"He sends down water from the sky, and with it We bring forth the buds of every plant. From these We bring forth green foliage and close-

growing grain, palm-trees laden with clusters of dates, vineyards and olive groves, and pomegranates, alike and different. Behold their fruits when they ripen. Surely in these are signs for true believers." (Cattle, 6:99)

"Do they not know how many generations We have destroyed before them? They walk among their ruined dwellings. Surely in this there are veritable signs. Have they no ears to hear with?" (Adoration, 32:26)

"So We sent (plagues) on them [Pharaoh's people]:

"Wholesale death,

"Locusts,

"Lice,

"Frogs,

"And

"Blood:

"Signs openly self-explained: but they were steeped in arrogance,— a people given to sin." (Yusuf 'Ali, The Heights, 7:133)

"Surely in Joseph and his brothers there are signs for doubting men." (Joseph, 12:7)

Frequent Reference to Two Seas, Pairs

"It was He who sent the two seas rolling, the one sweet and fresh, the other salt and bitter, and set a rampart between them, an insurmountable barrier." (The Poets, 25:53)

"He has let loose the two oceans [Dawood: salt water and fresh water]: they meet one another. Yet between them stands a barrier which they cannot overrun. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?"

"Pearls and corals come from both. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?"

"His are the ships that sail like mountains upon the ocean. Which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?" (The Merciful, 55:19f)

"The two seas are not alike. The one is fresh, sweet, and pleasant to drink from, while the other is salt and bitter. From both you eat fresh fish and bring up ornaments to deck yourselves with. See how the ships plough their course through them as you sail away to seek His bounty. Perchance you will give thanks." (The Creator, 35:12)

"Surely worthier is He who has established the earth and watered it with running rivers; who has set mountains upon it and placed a barrier between the Two Seas." (The Ant, 27:61)

Some say that the Two Seas represent the two realms of the heavens and the earth, of the spiritual realm that is pure sweetness and joy, and the earthly material realm that is the source of suffering and pain, strife and grief. Humans are the point at which these two seas meet. There is a barrier between these two realms that prevents those in the lower realm from knowing of the higher realm. The human soul and reality is at the lowest point of the world of spirituality. The animal body of a human is the highest point of evolution of the kingdoms of

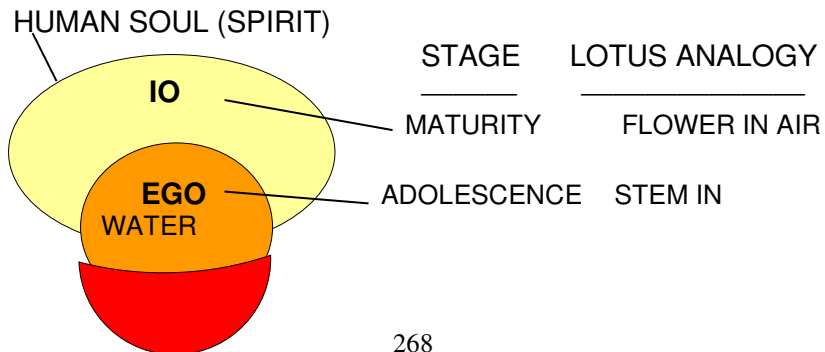
life on earth. The sweet ocean of spirit meets the salty ocean of the world of matter. The soul and reality of humans gets trained through this experience while imprisoned within this animal body. At the death of the vehicle of the animal body, its driver, the human soul, continues on completely free of any illusion it had during life that it was that animal body. The barrier might be in that intermediate realm referred to in "and whatever lieth between them [the heavens and the earth]".

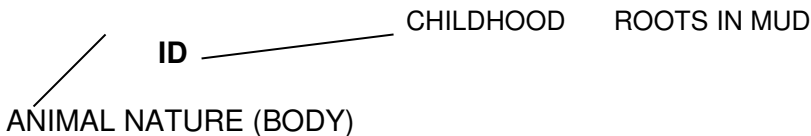
This meeting of the two worlds of spirit and matter produces three distinct levels or areas of consciousness and self. One derives from the animal body with all its instincts. This is somewhat like the *id* described by some psychologists. Another self, the highest self, perhaps something like the *superego* referred to by Freud (this writer prefers the word *io*), derives completely from the highest spiritual nature. It knows conscience and virtue. Where the two meet and intersect a blend occurs; this is the world of the clever *ego*. This is like two beams of different colored light shining on a surface so that there is an area of partial overlapping. Three areas of three different colors are formed. For example, if one beam is red and the other is yellow, the overlapping area where they meet will be orange. So three colors, yellow, orange and red will appear in three different regions.

In infancy and childhood the animal *id* dominates the growing *ego* and highest self. When the clever and self-centered *ego* suddenly gains dominance over the *id*, then we see the attributes of adolescence appear. When the highest self is dominant, then the qualities of wise, calm maturity make their appearance. Of course, most of the world is now in the stages of immaturity – otherwise there would be wisdom, peace and prosperity for all: the Kingdom of God on earth!

The human being starts with the animal self dominant, then breaks through into an intermediate condition where the two different natures, the divine and the worldly, are in great tension and conflict, being about equal in strength, and then finally achieves maturity with the highest nature dominant. This is like the cowboy breaking, taming and training the animal horse he rides that we spoke about earlier. First the animal is in charge. Then there's an intermediate stage where animal and human battle to gain the edge over the other. Finally, the human gains full control.

The Yogis express this human development through the analogy of the growth of a lotus plant in the lake. It begins as a tangle of roots in the dark mud of the lake bottom. This is the dark and ignorant world of the animal. It has a closeness that is primitive and blind. Then, from this tangle of roots in the mud, straight stems shoot up into the clear water. The water represents the world of the mind where the clever ego lives. Like egos, the stems are separate, each going its own way to the surface of the water. At that surface, the bud of the flower opens up and a beautiful lotus flower blossoms in the fresh sunlit air. This air represents the spiritual realm. So there are three realms: the material, the mental and the spiritual, which are represented by the solid, liquid and gas of the earth, water and air. The id knows the mud of the material animal, the ego knows the water of ordinary human intellect, and the highest io knows the air of the enlightened understanding.





The intermediate realm of the ego exists only through the interaction of the spiritual nature with the physical animal nature reflecting in the body. When the death of the body arrives, both the id and ego consciousness disappear because they depend on the world of the physical body, and only the highest nature associated with the soul itself continues. But the mind that is associated with the soul, which is its radiance, continues. This is different from the ego manifestation of mind.

Again, it should be pointed out that these are the writer's own ideas in his quest to find out the meanings of the words of the Holy Books. Others are not required to accept them. They are simply an attempt to make sense of what is there. It could be that there are many who won't find the writer's pathway acceptable to them. As they say in Australia, "No worries, mate!" Find a way that is suited best to yourself!

Another interpretation of the Two Seas suggests that they represent the pairs in which God has made all things: male and female.

"We built the heaven with Our might, giving it a vast expanse, and stretched the earth beneath it. Gracious is He who spread it out. And all things We have made in pairs, so that you may give thought." (The Winds, 51:47)

"He created you from a single being, then from that being He created its mate...." (The Hordes, 39:5)

Women tend to be sweeter, more loving and forgiving – though many of us can think of some major exceptions here. And men can tend to be more salty, aggressive and unpleasant – though very kind and pleasant males do exist. There must be some reason why someone invented the rhyme:

"Little boys are made of rats and snails
And puppy dogs' tails.
But little girls are made of sugar and spice
And everything nice."

This has been around long before those in-your-face “females” came thundering onto the scene to achieve equality with men by showing that they could be made of rats and snails and puppy dogs’ tails too. So there must be something to it. Isn't it men who are always starting wars in the world? Maybe it's an immature expression of justice. Well, i suppose we’ve all met salty women and sweet men, but, in general, maybe we could think of the sweet water as representing females and the salty water as standing for males.

There are Bahá’í prayers for marriage that use the quote from the *Qur’án* concerning the two seas meeting. The implication seems to be that the two seas represent husband and wife.

God Makes The Foul Deeds of the Deniers Seem Fair to Them

"As for those that deny the life to come, We make their foul deeds seem fair to them, so that they blunder about in their folly. Such are those who shall be sternly punished and in the hereafter lose most." (The Ant, 27:4)

"By the Lord, We have sent apostles before you to other nations. But Satan made their foul deeds seem fair to them, and to this day he is their patron. A woeful scourge awaits them." (The Bee, 16:63)

"Indeed, their foul devices seem fair to the unbelievers, for they are debarred from the right path. None can guide those whom God has led astray." (Thunder, 13:33)

"Do not revile the idols which they invoke besides God, lest in their ignorance they revile God with rancour. Thus have We made the actions of all men seem pleasing to themselves." (Cattle, 6:108)

"Is he whose foul deeds seem fair to him like the man who is rightly guided? God leaves in error whom He will and guides whom He pleases." (The Creator, 35:8)

It was already mentioned how we humans have an amazing power of rationalization by which to justify our unwise and harmful actions. This is characteristic of adolescence where the clever mind knows how to find reasons that will lead to desired conclusions but where the wisdom and conscience of the highest self is not yet strong enough to make it clear to the person that he is deceiving himself. The mature person lets logic work forwards, letting reason take him to conclusions. But the immature person in adolescence uses backwards logic, first starting at the conclusion he wishes to be true and then moving backwards to find reasons and excuses that will lead him to the conclusions he has decided he wants to

be true. Then he uses pressure on others to accept his "reasoning" to justify his unwise behavior. Rather than change himself to fit the reality of our world, he tries to change everything and everyone outside himself to justify and suit him.

What liar, scoundrel, cheat, thief, sexual deviant, corrupt politician or terrorist doesn't have a system of rationalization to justify his harmful actions? And if they are a somewhat organized group they work out standard doctrines based on false information to justify their position to the liberal public – who often swallow the nonsense. Following fashions in thought is not the same as thinking and being realistic. Some have even falsified scientific evidence to come to the conclusions they want. It appears in the newspapers and many accept it as true. When other scientists state that they cannot duplicate the results and there is suspicion of dishonesty, it appears in a small article at the back of the newspapers and hardly anyone notices. So the public accepts the false story as true. What a huge web of lies and self-deception some groups with a common defect will weave until they even manage to sway the society around them. How many justify their horrid wars of destruction with their own system of rationalization. Humans in the stages of immaturity are dragged down to act in a way harmful to themselves and others, and then, not desiring the discomfort of feeling guilty, work out a system of reasons to justify the behavior. The signs of this are all over our world. But when maturity arrives, it will be very easy to see through this self-deception, often collective self-deception, to face the music and do the right thing.

The reason people who are converted break down in tears, suddenly realizing their "sinfulness" and error, is because the system of rationalization by which they've deceived themselves to justify their wrongs suddenly breaks down and

they see the reality and truth about themselves that they were trying to evade. So many people are living a lie, fooling themselves – because they haven't the strength yet to do the right thing. So, while they deceive themselves, their "evil deeds seem fair to them". It's Psychology 101A! The Holy Books are full of such insights into human psychology.

Honey is a Cure for Men

"Your Lord inspired the bee, saying: 'Make your homes in the mountains, in the trees, and in the hives which men shall build for you. Feed on every kind of fruit, and follow the trodden paths of your Lord.'

"From its belly comes forth a syrup of different hues, a cure for men. Surely in this there is a sign for those who would give thought." (The Bee, 16:68f)

Revelation is a Cure for the Mind

"Men, an admonition has come to you from your Lord, a cure for the mind, a guide and a blessing to true believers.

"Say: 'In the grace and mercy of God let them rejoice, for these are better than the worldly riches they amass.' " (Jonah, 10:57)

Spiritual honey to heal the soul! It seems a tremendous shame that those of us down here on Earth don't get to enjoy that ginger-flavored drink that gushes forth from the fountain of *Salsabil* in Paradise. Let us be resigned – sigh! – and appreciate this Healing Honey until Heaven's Happy Hour arrives!

Good Deeds Repaid Tenfold

"He that does a good deed shall be repaid tenfold; but he that does evil shall be rewarded with evil. None shall be wronged." (Cattle, 6:160)

Only Those Who Disbelieve in God's Revelation Are Liars

"None invents falsehoods save those who disbelieve God's revelations; they alone are the liars." (The Bee, 16:105)

Satan Seduces All Who Are Not Faithful Servants

"Lord,' said Satan, 'since You have thus seduced me, I will tempt mankind on earth: I will seduce them all, except those of them who are your faithful servants.' " (Al-Hijr, 15:37)

God's Justice Would Destroy the Earth

"If God punished men for their sins, not one creature would be left alive. He reprieves them till a time ordained; when their time arrives, not for one hour shall they stay behind: nor can they go before it." (The Bee, 16:59)

"If it was God's will to punish men for their misdeeds, not one creature would be left alive on the earth's surface. He respites them till an

appointed time. And when their hour comes, they shall realize that God has been watching all His servants." (The Creator, 35:45)

God Sometimes Initiates Destruction With "The (Dreadful) Cry"

"He [Lot] said [to the homosexuals]: 'Here are my daughters: take them, if you are bent on evil.'

"By your life, they were blundering in madness! At sunrise the Cry overtook them. We laid their town in ruin and let loose a shower of clay-stones upon them.

"Surely in this there are signs for prudent men. The road on which their city stood is trodden still. Surely in this there is a sign for true believers." (Al-Hijr, 15:73f)

"And Korah, Pharaoh, and Haman! Moses came to them with veritable signs, but they behaved with vainglory in the land, powerless though they were to escape Us: and in their sinfulness, one and all, We smote them. On some We sent down a violent whirlwind; others we seized by the Dreadful Cry; some were swallowed up by the earth, and yet others We overwhelmed by the Flood. God did not wrong them, but they wronged themselves." (The Spider, 29:39)

"After him [a believer who told a city, possibly Antioch, of God's revelation], We sent down no host from heaven against his people:

this We never do. There was but one shout - and they fell down lifeless." (Yá' Sín, 36:26)

"Thamúd and 'Ad [two tribes to which the Prophets Sálíh and Húd came] denied the Last Judgement. By a deafening shout was Thamúd destroyed, and 'Ad by a howling, violent gale which He let loose on them for seven nights and eight successive days: you might have seen them lying dead as though they had been hollow trunks of palm-trees. Can you see but one of them still alive?" (The Catastrophe, 69:3f)

The Flood Waters of Noah's Time Came from "The Oven"

"So he [Noah] built the ark. And whenever the elders of his people passed by him they jeered at him. He said: 'If you mock us, we shall mock you just as you mock us. You shall know who will be seized by a scourge that shall disgrace him, and be smitten by a scourge everlasting.'

"And when Our will was done and water welled out from the Oven, We said to Noah: 'Take into the ark a pair from every species, your tribe (except for those already doomed), and all the true believers.' But none except a few believed with him." (Húd, 11:40)

Is this some reference to water coming up from the heated interior of the earth – which is like an oven? Geysers and hot springs reveal boiling water that comes up from the very hot innards of our planet. Was there a very large deposit of such water that was brought up to the surface? How would

one explain what "the Oven" is? The statement that it "welled out" suggests something like this. This is a topic for study by geologists and vulcanologists and whatever one calls those who study geysers and hot springs.

Each Person Has Guardian Angels

"It is the same whether you speak in secret or aloud, whether you hide under the cloak of night or walk about in the light of day. Each has guardian angels before him and behind him, who watch him by God's command." (Thunder, 13:10)

Devils Are Guardians Over Unbelievers

"We have made the devils guardians over the unbelievers." (The Heights, 7:27)

"He that does not heed the warning of the Merciful shall have a devil for his companion (devils turn men away from the right path, though they may think themselves rightly guided). And when he comes before Us, he shall say [to his companion]: 'Would that we were as far apart as the East is from the West.' Truly, evil is that companion." (Ornaments of God, 43:34)

There Was Once Just One Religion and Nation on Earth

"There was a time when men followed but one religion. Then they disagreed among themselves: and but for a Word from your Lord,

long since decreed, their differences would have been firmly resolved."

How interesting: it is the Word of God that kept the differences going. There must have been some wisdom in this – such as the separation and diversification of humankind before being reunited at a later time (in our future Golden Age).

Hypocrites

"When they meet you they say: 'We, too, are believers.' But when alone, they bite their finger-tips with rage. Say: 'May you perish in your rage! God has knowledge of your inmost thoughts.'"

When you are blessed with good fortune they grieve: but when evil befalls you they rejoice. If you persevere and guard yourselves against evil, their machinations will never harm you. God has knowledge of all their actions." (The 'Imrans, 3:120)

Man Is Flagrantly Contentious

"Is man not aware that We created him from a little germ? Yet he is flagrantly contentious. He answers back with arguments, and forgets His own creation...." (Yá' Sín, 36:77)

Wrongdoers Will Be Known By Their Looks

"The wrongdoers will be known by their looks; they shall be seized by their forelocks and their feet." (The Merciful, 55:37)

Our Good and Bad Deeds Are In The Books of Sijjin and Illiyyun

"Truly, the record of the sinners is in Sijjín. Would that you knew what Sijjín is! It is a sealed book." (The Unjust, 83:3)

"But the record of the righteous shall be in 'Illiyyún. Would that you knew what 'Illiyyún is! It is a sealed book, seen only by the favoured." (The Unjust, 83:21)

Much Reference to "Men of Understanding", "Men of Knowledge

"Say: '... Are the wise and the ignorant equal?' Truly, none will take heed but men of understanding." (The Hordes, 39:9)

"This is revealed by the Compassionate, the Merciful: a Book of revelations well expounded, an Arabic Koran for men of knowledge." (Revelations Well Expounded, 41:1)

A Few Correspondences with Biblical Items

Destructiveness of Gog and Magog (and Alexander the Great)

"They will ask you about Dhúl-Qarnayn [Alexander the Great]. Say: 'I will give you an account of him.

"We made him mighty in the land and gave him means to achieve all things. ...

" ...

" 'He [Dhúl-Qarnayn = Alexander the Great] then journeyed along another road until he reached the East and saw the sun rising upon a people whom We had exposed to its flaming rays. So he did; and We had full knowledge of all the forces at his command.

" 'Then he followed yet another route until he came between the Two Mountains and found a people who could barely understand a word. "Dhúl-Qarnayn," they said, "Gog and Magog are ravaging this land. Build a rampart between us, and we will pay you tribute."

" 'He replied: "the power my Lord has given me is better than any tribute. Lend me a force of men, and I will raise a rampart between you and them. Come, bring me blocks of iron."

" 'He dammed up the valley between the Two Mountains, and said: "Ply your bellows," And when the iron blocks were red with heat, he said: "Bring me molten brass to pour on them."

" 'Gog and Magog could not scale it, nor could they dig their way through it. He said: "This is a blessing from my Lord. But when my Lord's promise has been fulfilled, He will level it to dust. The promise of my Lord is true." ' "

David and Goliath

"When they [Saul's army] met Goliath and his warriors they cried: 'Lord, fill our hearts with steadfastness. Make us firm of foot and help us against the unbelievers.'

"By God's will they routed them. David slew Goliath, and God bestowed on him sovereignty

and wisdom and taught him what He pleased. Had God not defeated some by the might of others, the earth would have been utterly corrupted. But God is bountiful to His creatures." (The Cow, 2:250f)

Noah Lived for More Than 950 Years

"We sent forth Noah to his people, and he dwelt among them for a thousand years less fifty. then in their sinfulness the Flood overwhelmed them. But We delivered him and all who were in the Ark, and made the event a sign to mankind." (The Spider, 29:14)

Special Gifts Given to David and Solomon

"On David We bestowed Our favours. We said: 'Mountains, and you birds, echo his songs of praise.' We made hard iron pliant to him, saying: 'Make coats of mail and measure their links with care. Do what is right: I am watching over all your actions.'

"To Solomon We subdued the wind, travelling a month's journey morning and evening. We gave him a spring flowing with molten brass, and jinn who served him by leave of his Lord. Those of them who did not do Our bidding We shall chasten with the torment of the Fire. They made for him whatever he pleased: shrines and statues, basins as large as watering-troughs, and built-in cauldrons. We said: 'Give thanks, House of David.' Yet few of My servants are truly thankful.

"And when We had decreed his death, they did not know that he was dead until they saw a worm eating away his staff. And when his corpse fell down, the jinn realized that had they had knowledge of the unknown, they would not have remained in shameful bondage." (Sheba, 34:10)

"Bear with what they [who deny their Lord] say, and remember Our servant David, who was both a mighty and a penitent man. We made the mountains join with him in praise evening and morning, and the birds, too, in all their flocks; all were obedient to him. We made his kingdom strong, and gave him wisdom and discriminating judgement." (Sád, 38:17)

"We put Solomon to the proof and placed a counterfeit upon his throne, so that he at length repented. He said: 'Forgive me, Lord, and bestow upon me such power as shall belong to none after me. You are the Bountiful Giver.'

"We subjected the winds to him, so that it blew softly at his bidding wherever he directed it; and the devils, too, among whom were builders and divers and others bound with chains. 'All this We give you,' We said. 'It is for you to bestow or to withhold, without reckoning.' In the world to come he shall be honoured and well received." (Sád, 38:34)

CHAPTER 7

END TIMES METAPHORS

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS OF THE LAST DAYS

The Resurrection

"God sends forth the winds which set the clouds in motion. We drive them on to some dead land and give fresh life to the soil after it has died. Such is the Resurrection." (The Creator, 35:9)

"We send down blessed water from the sky with which We bring forth gardens and the harvest grain, and tall palm-trees laden with clusters of dates, a sustenance for men; thereby giving new life to some dead land. Such shall be the Resurrection." (Qáf, 50:9)

"Were We worn out by the First Creation? Yet are they in doubt about a new creation [Dawood: The Resurrection]." (Qáf, 50:15)

What is The Resurrection? It means a bringing back up again, bringing new life to what was dead. The *Qur'án* could be interpreted to have this make a reference to the new life each believer will have after physical death. It could also refer to the new life that is breathed into the world when each new revelation appears. Islám was the resurrection of a dead Christian Faith. (Europe's plunge into its medieval "Dark

Ages" after Christian Byzantine civilization collapsed is sufficient testimony to this.) Christianity was the resurrection of the dead Faith of Judaism. Each springtime is the resurrection of the last springtime after the cold, dreary and lifeless period of winter. Each dawn is the resurrection of the day before after the long dark, cold night. The *Qur'án* asks us time and again to ponder the sign of the day being followed by night. What does it mean? What else could it mean than that there is a resurrection of day after the "death" of night?

Do all religions have life cycles from birth to maturity to decline to death? They certainly appear to. The horrors of the Spanish Inquisition and the crude Crusades are a far cry from the pure and beautiful spirit of the Faith of Jesus during its earliest days. The spirit of Christianity had surely died in its old age. Is Islám unique among all religions in that it does not have such a life cycle, that it doesn't have a decline and death requiring a new Resurrection? Is there anyone claiming that it has not gone through the stages of birth, rise, maturity and decline? If this is acknowledged, then are any of these claiming that it can go through all these stages without reaching a time of death when the new birth of a revelation, a new Resurrection, is required to adorn the world with a new springtime? Though each religion tends to claim finality for itself as a defense against those who say that another subsequent revelation of God has appeared, it seems likely that it is not true that "the hand of God is chained up" as the Jews complained to those who suggested that there have been Prophets of God with new revelations since the days of Moses.

Notwithstanding all the prophecies of both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible concerning the appearance of the Lord of Hosts, the King of Glory, the Glory of God, the Comforter (Paraclete), sometimes cast as the return of Jesus Himself, at other times stated as the return of another like Him,

Christians too are found to be insisting that it all ends with Jesus, that there will be no more revelations from God with a new name:

"And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name." (*Bible*, Isaiah,62:2).

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth {it}." (*Bible*, Revelations, 2:17)

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, {which is} new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and {I will write upon him} my new name." (*Bible*, Revelations, 3:12))

Now we find Muslims insisting on the same thing, saying the equivalent of what the Jews and the Christians said, claiming that the statement that Muhammad is the *Seal of the Prophets* (The Confederate Tribes, 33:41) means that he is also the last Messenger of God, not just the last of the prophesiers of the Prophetic Cycle before the start of the Cycle of Fulfilment. They confuse the term *nabí* (prophesier kind of prophet) with *rasúl* (messenger of God). Muhammad is the seal of the *nabí* (the prophesiers), not the seal of the *rasúl* (the

messengers of God). He closes the Prophetic Cycle and is the final revelation before the opening of the Cycle of Fulfilment.

Please consider how very strange and bizarre it sounds to a thinking person who has studied the various religions to say that after God has sent down so many Prophets – the *Qur'án* lists them one after another, tells their stories and insists that there are even many others it hasn't mentioned – that after this very long line of messengers of God's revelation, suddenly it's all going to come to a stop, that God will finally close the door of His mercy on the world and stop sending His messengers, that all these appearances of a new springtime will suddenly stop, that the rising of the sun of Truth will suddenly cease. How strange that each religion finds some pretext, some excuse, for claiming finality for itself – in spite of protests against this in the Holy Books. It's even more interesting that God seems to actually provide some kind of excuse or pretext for us, perhaps as a test to see who uses it and who is reasonable. How often He gives a way out, an excuse, a pretext, a rationalization, for those who cannot bear staying in. He puts stumbling blocks and other tests right in His own revelations to find out who truly recognize Him and who are just along for the ride.

The *Qur'án* seems filled with statements hinting in veiled and allusive language at the coming of a new revelation after that which came through Muhammad. In fact, the writer is quite convinced that the process of progressive revelation will never stop, that all the Prophets of God have verified and confirmed the reality of the Prophets of the past, and most all of them have told of the coming of the next one. It is we very rebellious humans, religious leaders in particular, who insist that it all stops with our own Faith, whichever one it is, in order to deny the validity of revelations that have appeared afterwards.

"Woe on that day to the disbelievers! In what **revelation, after this**, will they believe?"
(Those That Are Sent Forth, 77:50) [emphasis mine]

"In what revelation, after this, will they believe?" This surely suggests a continuation of revelation. Some understand the "Resurrection", the "Day of Judgement", the Last Hour and so on to mean both a "time" after physical death when a believer is judged as to how he or she has conducted his or her life, and a time when humans collectively are judged by how they respond to the next revelation of God. Weren't the Jews being judged by God through the appearance of the Messiah, Jesus? Whatever their response was to him and what he says was in reality their response to God because the Prophet of God carries the Message of God. Weren't the Christians and Jews of Muhammad's time judged by their response to this next revelation from God? If it is true that a revelation of God has appeared in fulfilment of these indications in the *Qur'án* (as well as so many prophecies in the Bible, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism and elsewhere), then surely the Muslims of today, and all others in the world, are being judged by their response to it!

And if so many of the previous religion are the deniers of the next revelation, then surely it is the Hour of Doom, the Catastrophe, for them as they fail to recognize it as their Day of Judgement.

The Day of Judgement (Day of Decision or Day of Sorting Out)

"When the stars are blotted out; when the sky is rent asunder and the mountains crumble into

dust; when the apostles are brought together on the appointed day - when will all this be? Upon the Day of Judgement!" (Those That Are Sent Forth, 77:2)

Here's another quote from the *Qur'án* with something very similar:

"When the sun ceases to shine; when the stars fall down and the mountains are blown away; when camels big with young are left untended, and the wild beasts are brought together; when the seas are set alight and men's souls are reunited; when the infant girl, buried alive, is asked for what crime she was slain; when the records of men's deeds are laid open, and heaven is stripped bare; when Hell burns fiercely and Paradise is brought near: then each soul shall know what it has done." (The Cessation, 81:1f)

Let's now look at something comparable from the Christian New Testament of the Bible. It gives a part of Jesus' answer to His disciples' question: "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what {shall be} the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (*Bible*, Matthew, 24:3):

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of

man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

"And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.". (Matthew, 24:29-31)

Consider how very similar this is to those passages from the *Qur'án*, especially the first one. Let's compare the first *Qur'án* quote (*Qur'án* 1) in two different translations (Dawood and Shakir), and the second *Qur'án* quote (*Qur'án* 2) with this passage from Matthew in the Bible:

Qur'án 1: "When the stars are blotted out;"
[Shakir: "So when the stars are made to lose their light,"]
Qur'án 2: "When the sun ceases to shine; when the stars fall down
Bible: "shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven"

Qur'án 1: "when the sky is rent asunder"
[Shakir: "And when the heaven is rent asunder,"]
Qur'án 2: "and heaven is stripped bare"
Bible: "the powers of the heavens shall be shaken"

Qur'án 1: "and the mountains crumble into dust;"
[Shakir: "And when the mountains are carried away as dust,"]
Qur'án 2: "and the mountains are blown away"
Bible: -

- Qur'án* 1: "when the apostles are brought together on the appointed day"
[Shakir: "And when the messengers are gathered at their appointed time"
Qur'án 2: -
Bible: "they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other - "
Qur'án 1: "when will all this be? Upon the Day of Judgement!" (Those That Are Sent Forth, 77:2)
[Shakir: "To what day is the doom fixed? To the day of decision."
[Yusuf 'Ali: "To the day of Sorting out"]
Qur'án 2: "when the records of men's deeds are laid open" (The Cessation, 81:1f)
Bible: "then shall appear the sign of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew, 24:29-30)

This correlation is very remarkable! The *Qur'án* and the New Testament of the Bible are saying very much the same thing in different language, using much the same symbols. It would almost seem as if they had the same author. And indeed they do; the Creator of the universe is their author!

The last verses match up the "Day of Judgement", "day of decision" or "day of Sorting out" with the appearance of "the sign of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" – which is not a correspondence but an

association. The suggestion is that the appearing of the Son of man is the Day of Judgement, "when the records of men's deeds are laid open" on "the day of decision", "the day of Sorting out". If this last line from the Bible seems not to correspond well with either of the two quotes from the *Qur'án*, then let this next *Qur'án* quote fill this lack:

"Are they waiting for God to come down to them in the shadow of a cloud, with all the angels? Their fate will have been settled then...." (*Qur'án*, The Cow, 2:210)

The Day of Judgement is the day when "their fate will have been settled then". And this is when God comes "down to them in the shadow of a cloud, with all the angels". This confirms the strong association.

The real lack of correspondence (between the first *Qur'án* quote and the quote from Matthew in the Bible) concerns the mountains that "crumble into dust". There's nothing corresponding to it in the Matthew quote. We'll save a more adequate discussion of this with a number of supporting quotes from the Holy Books for just a little later. For now, if we go to the Old Testament of the Bible, we can find more references to the rending of the heavens, the darkening of the stars and the day of decision:

"Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence,

"As {when} the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, {that} the nations may tremble at thy presence!" (Isaiah, 64:1-2)

"The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining:

"And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp {is} very great: for {he is} strong that executeth his word: for the day of the Lord {is} great and very terrible; and who can abide it?" (Joel, 2:10-11)

"And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.

"The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come." (Joel, 2:30-31)

"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord {is} near in the valley of decision.

"The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining.

"The Lord also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord {will be} the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. (Joel, 3:14-16)

If we are to interpret these images literally and physically, it gives a dramatic picture. But are such physical events really so important that the Creator must speak only of them in His Holy Book? Even the statement that "the sky is rent asunder" seems to suggest that perhaps there are other deeper meanings behind such outward pictures of calamity.

The second quote (above) from Joel in the Old Testament of the Bible mentions "pillars of smoke" that God will display as "wonders in the heavens and in the earth." Before commenting on these signs, let's supply a matching statement from the *Qur'án* concerning this smoke:

"Wait for the day when the sky will pour down visible smoke, enveloping all men: a dreadful scourge...." (Smoke, 44:10) [Rodwell translation: "On the day when the heaven shall give out a palpable smoke, which shall enshroud mankind: this will be an afflictive torment."]

Though there might be physical events that actually demonstrate such things – we can easily imagine "pillars of smoke" from powerful nuclear weapons, smoke and clouds blocking out the light of the sun, moon and stars, mountains being crumbled in mighty earth changes involving immense earthquakes, etc. – the spiritual meanings behind these signs and symbols might be far more important and much closer to the point of what the prophets of old, of what Jesus and Muhammad, have said.

In order to get a feeling for these much more important spiritual meanings, let's first recall the illustration given earlier (in the section discussing Purity in Chapter 2) of the three kinds of matter – solid, liquid and gas, or earth, water and air. What is heaviest naturally falls to the lowest position, while what is lightest rises to the top. Recalling the Yogi lotus analogy, rocks, dirt and mud can represent the lower aspects of the human world: our animal nature. Water can symbolize the world of selfish ego and clever mind. Air can correspond to what is of the spirit, what is highest and best in us. The attribute of mercy lifts up what is lower into the realm of what is higher and mixes the earth, water and air. The sun lifts up

the water into the air through evaporation to produce clouds that block out the light of the sun that lifted them up. The mud of the animal realm clouds the water of intelligence so that it can no longer see and reason well. Smoke is the reduction of the solid world of earth into tiny particles that are light enough to rise up into the air. Consider how smoke is the sign of fire, confusion, chaos and darkening of the sky. Volcanoes belch out clouds of smoke, fine particles from inside the earth, to fill the skies to such an extent that the sun, moon and stars are dimmed. When the mighty Krakatoa (between Java and Sumatra in Indonesia) erupted, it was the loudest noise ever heard and the smoke it poured into the atmosphere caused the sun's light to be diminished, the moon to appear dark and reddish, and the stars to be hardly seen. What is from the lower world rises up to the higher worlds to block out the light, to bring horrible destructive storms and fill the world with trouble.

Justice, as was explained, brings everything back to its home. The smoke particles eventually fall back to the earth – often through the help of the rain which is in itself the falling back to its home, the ocean of water, of what had been lifted up from it. Justice separates, purifies, and brings order, peace and fruitfulness.

The Prophets of God each appear at a time when They are most needed.

" ... When Righteousness
Declines, O Bharata! when Wickedness
Is strong, I rise, from age to age, and take
Visible shape, and move a man with men,
Succouring the good, thrusting the evil back,
And setting Virtue on her seat again."
(Hindu Texts, *Bhagavad-Gita*, Chapter 4)

The appearance of the Prophet with the new revelation of God stings the worst of humans into such fierce opposition that they become like the smoke that fills the air with darkness and like clouds that loom dark and threatening, blocking out the sunlight and filling the world with frightening storms. But eventually these storms must spend their energies. In time, the clouds rain their rain on the earth to let the sun shine brightly and warmly once again. This justice pulls down the mighty that were once so high and returns them to their lower home. And it lifts up those who were "brought low in the land" and oppressed. (The bubbles of gas rise through the water and up out of the earth to return to their home in the atmosphere – if we need an analog for this.)

Solid land, however, can rise up high even without having to be ground up into a powdery dust to create smoke and airborne dust. Through powerful collisions between the (tectonic) plates of solid earth that ride across the earth's surface, mountains are built up. The tallest mountains in the world, the Himalayas, are the result of a big island, what is today the Indian subcontinent, breaking off millions of years ago from Antarctica and other pieces of land, travelling across the ocean and colliding with Asia. The highest mountain resulting from this immense collision, Mt. Everest, has a summit almost nine kilometres or five and a half miles above the level of the ocean. The solid earth rises up to the high heavens without even leaving its solid home behind!

Disturbances on the surface of the liquid ocean, seen during fierce storms, cause the waves to rise up high. Similarly, even greater disturbances affecting the earth's crust cause rocky mountains to pile up far higher.

But mountains also block the view – even if they don't cloud the air. There's a story about some American tourists from the state of Kansas (most of which is very flat, with no mountains) travelling to the Alps of Switzerland for a vacation or holiday. When asked how they liked their visit to Switzerland, they replied: "It was okay – except for the mountains that kept getting in the way of the scenery." When there are no mountains or hills, when the land is as flat as it is in most of Kansas, one can see for a very long way. Vision is unobstructed. Such mountains and valleys can symbolize the turbulence, the ups and downs of a disturbed life. And as we said, it was disturbances in the earth that caused such mountains to appear. The manic-depressive or bi-polar personality has an emotional life that puts him or her at the mountain tops of joy, excitement and enthusiasm for a while, and then into the dark and gloomy valleys of despair, misery and depression after that. Back and forth it goes. The world is like that too. One moment our country is in the heights of supposed success, and the next it's in the dark pits of ruin and failure, perhaps after a foolish war or some natural calamity. Flat land, a plain, can represent what is smooth and free of disturbed extremes. It's the product of justice, while mercy brings about the mixing and disturbance. As stated, acting with mercy to let the wolf free to mix with the sheep is calamity. Separating them with justice is peace.

This writer has just finished re-reading the words of Bahá'u'lláh explaining the meanings of these signs of the Last Days in his *Kitáb-i-Iqán* (Persian) or *Kitábu'l-Iqán* (Arabic) or *The Book of Certitude* and is so overwhelmed at their power, beauty and ability to make these ideas clear, that he feels it to be silly to try to paraphrase these brilliant explanations. Why replace what is far superior with a far inferior rendition? So please permit Bahá'u'lláh himself to continue with this explanation. He interprets the meaning of this very same quote

from the New Testament of the Bible that was quoted above. Since it matches up so closely with the *Qur'án's* similar passages, it is appropriate to offer it here.

It cannot be emphasized enough that these ideas are not comprehended by just simply scanning over them without adequate thought and meditation. For this reason, Bahá'u'lláh's statements will be interspersed at periodic intervals with a brief comment from this writer for little other reason than to encourage the reader to give some time for what Bahá'u'lláh has said to sink in and register consequent to some careful contemplation.

"And now, concerning His [Jesus'] words — 'The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give light, and the stars shall fall from heaven.' By the terms 'sun' and 'moon,' mentioned in the writings of the Prophets of God, is not meant solely the sun and moon of the visible universe. Nay rather, manifold are the meanings they have intended for these terms. In every instance they have attached to them a particular significance. Thus, by the 'sun' in one sense is meant those Suns of Truth Who rise from the dayspring [place on the horizon where the sun rises] of ancient glory, and fill the world with a liberal effusion of grace from on high. These Suns of Truth are the universal Manifestations of God [Prophets of God] in the worlds of His attributes and names. Even as the visible sun that assisteth, as decreed by God, the true One, the Adored, in the development of all earthly things, such as the trees, the fruits, and colours thereof, the minerals of the earth, and all that may be

witnessed in the world of creation, so do the divine Luminaries, by their loving care and educative influence, cause the trees of divine unity, the fruits of His oneness, the leaves of detachment, the blossoms of knowledge and certitude, and the myrtles of wisdom and utterance, to exist and be made manifest. Thus it is that through the rise of these Luminaries of God the world is made new, the waters of everlasting life stream forth, the billows of loving-kindness surge, the clouds of grace are gathered, and the breeze of bounty bloweth upon all created things. It is the warmth that these Luminaries of God generate, and the undying fires they kindle, which cause the light of the love of God to burn fiercely in the heart of humanity. It is through the abundant grace of these Symbols of Detachment that the Spirit of life everlasting is breathed into the bodies of the dead. Assuredly the visible sun is but a sign of the splendour of that Day-star [Sun] of Truth, that Sun Which can never have a peer, a likeness, or rival. Through Him all things live, move, and have their being. Through His grace they are made manifest, and unto Him they all return. From Him all things have sprung, and unto the treasures of His revelation they all have repaired. From Him all created things did proceed, and to the depositories of His law they did revert." (p 34)

In this passage, he shows how the sun is a symbol of the Prophets of God. The sun is the cause of life on earth. Without the sun, trees cannot bring forth their fruit, plants will not grow, the water isn't lifted up from the ocean to form

clouds to water these trees and other plants. Just as clouds and smoke and high mountains can block out the sun and prevent us from seeing that sun, other kinds of clouds, which will be discussed soon, prevent the people of the world from recognizing the revelation from God. He continues:

"The term 'suns' hath many a time been applied in the writings of the 'immaculate Souls' unto the Prophets of God, those luminous Emblems of Detachment. Among those writings are the following words recorded in the 'Prayer of Núdbih' ['Lamentation' attributed to the Twelfth Imam]: 'Whither are gone the resplendent Suns? Whereunto have departed those shining Moons and sparkling Stars?' Thus, it hath become evident that the terms 'sun,' 'moon,' and 'stars' primarily signify the Prophets of God, the saints, and their companions, those Luminaries, the light of Whose knowledge hath shed illumination upon the worlds of the visible and the invisible. (pp 35-36)

Here, the meaning of the symbolism is extended to include the saints and holy ones. These give light too – even though it might be reflected. But in the next section, another meaning is added:

"In another sense, by these terms is intended the divines [priests, clergy] of the former Dispensation, who live in the days of the subsequent Revelations, and who hold the reins of religion in their grasp. If these divines be illumined by the light of the latter Revelation they will be acceptable unto God, and will shine

with a light everlasting. Otherwise, they will be declared as darkened, even though to outward seeming they be leaders of men, inasmuch as belief and unbelief, guidance and error, felicity and misery, light and darkness, are all dependent upon the sanction of Him Who is the Day-star [Sun] of Truth. Whosoever among the divines of every age receiveth, in the Day of Reckoning, the testimony of faith from the Source of true knowledge, he verily becometh the recipient of learning, of divine favour, and of the light of true understanding. Otherwise, he is branded as guilty of folly, denial, blasphemy, and oppression. (p 37)

Leaders of religion have usually been the primary opposers of the new revelation of God when it appears. They turn their unthinking followers away from the new revelation of God. The new Prophet of God challenges their authority. They don't wish to give it up. (Their station as priests and leaders usually has no basis in the words of the Prophets anyway!) Aside from a handful who recognize the new revelation and become its supporters and defenders, most tend to become darkened, to lose their light, to lead their followers astray. They are like stars that become darkened or fall. That they are said to "fall on the earth" certainly means that, spiritually, their hearts and minds may once have lived in the heavens of high ideals and noble principles, close to the higher spirit of holiness, but disobedience to God's laws and commands, corruption and worldliness pull them down to the earth of animal and egoistic qualities. They were once in the "heavens" of their higher self, and then they fall to "the earth" of their lower self.

"It is evident and manifest unto every discerning observer that even as the light of the star fadeth before the effulgent splendour of the sun, so doth the luminary of earthly knowledge, of wisdom, and understanding vanish into nothingness when brought face to face with the resplendent glories of the Sun of Truth, the Day-star of divine enlightenment." (p 37)

The moon and stars are very noticeable at night because they stand out against the dark sky. When the darkness of ignorance is everywhere, then even those with a little knowledge and understanding shine out in this darkness. It's said that the one-eyed is king in the land of the blind. But when the dawn of a new Day arrives and the Sun of Truth rises, then its light is so powerful, so brilliant, that the light of the moon and stars fades away into insignificance. Who notices the stars in the middle of the day? What do human leaders, priests, preachers and other clergy have to say when God sends His new revelation? What do the puny second-hand ideas of humans have to compare with the fresh new revelation from our Creator? What is the one-eyed and half-blind compared to Him who sees with two eyes as sharp as those of a hawk or an eagle? The new revelation is the rising of the Sun of Truth. In the next section, yet another meaning is given to the sun, moon and stars.

"In another sense, by the terms `sun', `moon', and `stars' are meant such laws and teachings as have been established and proclaimed in every Dispensation, such as the laws of prayer and fasting. These have, according to the law of the *Qur'án*, been regarded, when the beauty of the Prophet Muhammad had passed beyond the veil, as the most fundamental and binding laws of His dispensation. To this testify the texts of the

traditions and chronicles, which, on account of their being widely known, need not be referred to here. ... The traditions established the fact that in all Dispensations the law of prayer hath constituted a fundamental element of the Revelation of all the Prophets of God—a law the form and the manner of which hath been adapted to the varying requirements of every age. Inasmuch as every subsequent Revelation hath abolished the manners, habits, and teachings that have been clearly, specifically, and firmly established by the former Dispensation, these have accordingly been symbolically expressed in terms of `sun' and `moon'. 'That He might prove you, which of you excel in deeds.' (*Qur'án*, Sovereignty, 67:2)
" (pp 38-39)

Fasting and prayer are compared to the sun and moon because they are a "light" to the soul and spirit of humans.

"Moreover, in the traditions the terms "sun" and "moon" have been applied to prayer and fasting, even as it is said: "Fasting is illumination, prayer is light." ...

"... We made reply [to a visiting Muslim]: 'Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets, and the most distinguished of God's chosen Ones, hath likened the Dispensation of the *Qur'án* unto heaven, by reason of its loftiness, its paramount influence, its majesty, and the fact that it comprehendeth all religions. And as the sun and moon constitute the brightest and most prominent luminaries in the heavens, similarly in the heaven of the religion of God two shining

orbs have been ordained—fasting and prayer.
`Islám is heaven; fasting is its sun, prayer, its
moon.' " (pp 40-41)

He summarizes now:

"This is the purpose underlying the symbolic words of the Manifestations of God. Consequently, the application of the terms 'sun' and 'moon' to the things already mentioned hath been demonstrated and justified by the text of the sacred verses and the recorded traditions. Hence, it is clear and manifest that by the words 'the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven' is intended the waywardness of the divines, and the annulment of laws firmly established by divine Revelation, all of which, in symbolic language, have been foreshadowed by the Manifestation of God. None except the righteous shall partake of this cup, none but the godly can share therein. 'The righteous shall drink of a cup tempered at the camphor fountain.' (*Qur'án*, Man, 76:5) "

Bahá'u'lláh states here that these subtle spiritual ideas cannot be understood without the help of God. The "disbelievers" will fail to grasp what is said here, misinterpret and misunderstand in accord with the warped mirror of their own minds and hearts, and complain about what they have misunderstood. Their protests all revolve about themselves and never actually touch what God is trying to convey to humankind. In reality, they complain not about what God has said but about their misunderstanding of it. It is God that gives faith and the light of illumined knowledge that sees behind the

outer meanings of words. "None except the righteous shall partake of this cup, none but the godly can share therein." One reader finds his heart and spirit opened with joy and illumination while another is unable to reflect much of the light of revelation and, like the bats of night, may even find the light offensive.

Bahá'u'lláh now explains how such a misunderstanding of these terms by many Christians led them to fail to recognize the light of the revelation of God through Muhammad.

"It is unquestionable that in every succeeding Revelation the 'sun' and 'moon' of the teachings, laws, commandments, and prohibitions which have been established in the preceding Dispensation, and which have overshadowed the people of that age, become darkened, that is, are exhausted, and cease to exert their influence. Consider now, had the people of the Gospel recognized the meaning of the symbolic terms 'sun' and 'moon,' had they sought, unlike the froward and perverse, enlightenment from Him Who is the Revealer of divine knowledge, they would have surely comprehended the purpose of these terms, and would not have become afflicted and oppressed by the darkness of their selfish desires. Yea, but since they have failed to acquire true knowledge from its very Source, they have perished in the perilous vale of waywardness and misbelief. They still have not awakened to perceive that all the signs foretold have been made manifest, that the promised Sun hath risen above the horizon of divine Revelation, and that the 'sun' and 'moon' of the teachings, the laws, and learning of a former

Dispensation have darkened and set." (pp 41-42)

Concerning the "the sky is rent asunder" or "the heavens are cleft asunder". Bahá'u'lláh says:

"... strive thou to comprehend from these lucid, these powerful, conclusive, and unequivocal statements the meaning of the 'cleaving of the heaven'—one of the signs that must needs herald the coming of the last Hour, the Day of Resurrection. As He hath said: 'When the heaven shall be cloven asunder.' By 'heaven' is meant the heaven of divine Revelation, which is elevated with every Manifestation [Prophet of God], and rent asunder with every subsequent one. By 'cloven asunder' is meant that the former Dispensation [of a revelation of God] is superseded and annulled. I swear by God! That this heaven being cloven asunder is, to the discerning, an act mightier than the cleaving of the skies! Ponder a while. That a divine Revelation which for years hath been securely established; beneath whose shadow all who have embraced it have been reared and nurtured; by the light of whose law generations of men have been disciplined; the excellency of whose word men have heard recounted by their fathers; in such wise that human eye hath beheld naught but the pervading influence of its grace, and mortal ear hath heard naught but the resounding majesty of its command—what act is mightier than that such a Revelation should, by the power of God, be 'cloven asunder' and be abolished at the

appearance of one soul? Reflect, is this a mightier act than that which these abject and foolish men have imagined the 'cleaving of the heaven' to mean?

This was the point made earlier: that however dramatic the physical darkening of the sun and moon and stars, the rending of the sky and the destruction of the mountains into dust might be, such physical events have nowhere near the importance of the spiritual events that they symbolize. For astronomers and earth scientists such physical phenomena would be of the greatest interest if they were to happen. But in the realm of religion, it is the spiritual events that these symbolize that are what is vitally important. Bahá'u'lláh points out how powerfully this darkening of the sun, moon and stars, this cleaving of the heavens, affects the Prophets of God:

"Moreover, consider the hardships and the bitterness of the lives of those Revealers of the divine Beauty. Reflect, how single-handed and alone they faced the world and all its peoples, and promulgated the Law of God! No matter how severe the persecutions inflicted upon those holy, those precious, and tender Souls, they still remained, in the plenitude of their power, patient, and, despite their ascendancy, they suffered and endured." (Bahá'u'lláh, *Kitáb-i-Iqán*, pp 44-45)

Consider how the stars have fallen. Priests of all past religions have been falling for quite some time. But now it is being made evident, clear and public. How many thousands of degraded priests and leaders of religions around the world are being discovered to be

degenerate rather than holy, corrupt rather than godly, worldly rather than heavenly! The stars have fallen!

Let's now fulfill a promise made a little earlier and look at the sign of the crumbling of the mountains into dust. Here are some more quotes from the *Qur'án* concerning this. There are others as well.

"The mountains, firm though you may think them, will pass away like clouds. Such is the might of God, who has perfected all things. He has knowledge of all your actions." (The Ant, 27:88)

"They ask you about the mountains. Say: 'My Lord will crush them to fine dust and reduce them to a desolate waste, with no hollows nor jutting mounds to be seen.'" (Tá' Há', 20:105)

"And the day on which We will cause the mountains to pass away and you will see the earth a levelled plain and We will gather them and leave not any one of them behind." (Shakir, *Qur'án*, The Cave, 18:48)

"When the sky is rent asunder, and hearkens to (the Command of) its Lord, and it must needs (do so);- and when the earth is flattened out, and casts forth what is within it and becomes (clean) empty, O thou man! Verily thou art ever toiling on towards thy Lord- painfully toiling,- but thou shalt meet Him." (Yusuf 'Ali, *Qur'án*, The Sundering (Rending), 84:1f)

Some comments have already been made concerning what mountains symbolize. This writer has the greatest confidence in whatever Bahá'u'lláh says concerning these things, so let's look at what he has to say concerning the flattening or levelling of the mountains into a plain "with no hollows nor jutting mounds to be seen".

"If the learned and worldly-wise men of this age were to allow mankind to inhale the fragrance of fellowship and love, every understanding heart would apprehend the meaning of true liberty, and discover the secret of undisturbed peace and absolute composure. Were the earth to attain this station and be illumined with its light it could then be truly said of it: 'Thou shalt see in it no hollows or rising hills.' " (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p 260)

The quote from the *Qur'án* there uses another translation. To get some feeling for what this could mean, after the hint made earlier, let's think for a moment of the fluid ocean for a moment instead of the more solid land. When the winds are calmed, the ocean lies flat and undisturbed. It's "undisturbed peace and absolute composure". But when the winds pick up and perturb the ocean's surface, swells and waves build up. As the winds get even stronger, the peaks or crests of the waves tower high above the dark troughs between them. A boat caught on such a stormy sea will be tossed from the highest points down to the lowest points. Storms are symbols of the disturbance that the lowest among humankind bring about in our world – especially when they occupy the highest positions. They make life a rough ride for everyone, especially the higher kind of person.

"Thus, for that they move on these three differing planes, the understanding and the words of the wayfarers have differed; and hence the sign of conflict doth continually appear on earth. For some there are who dwell upon the plane of oneness and speak of that world, and some inhabit the realms of limitation, and some the grades of self, while others are completely veiled. Thus do the ignorant people of the day, who have no portion of the radiance of Divine Beauty, make certain claims, and in every age and cycle inflict on the people of the sea of oneness what they themselves deserve. 'Should God punish men for their perverse doings, He would not leave on earth a moving thing! But to an appointed term doth He respite them....' (*Qur'án*, The Bee, 16:63) (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, p 21)

Solid land, even rocks, have some degree of fluidity and changeability too. But to see this one must look over a very long stretch of time, even millions of years. Geologists tell us that there have been times in the Earth's ancient history when immense mountain ranges were thrust up from the floors of the oceans – that's how those sedimentary rocks got there – when huge amounts of molten rock, lava, flowed out to build up the land and even form volcanic mountains and ridges. Over the eons, rain and wind erosion slowly wear down these mountains until they are like hills. And then these are finally smoothed out into more level land – unless catastrophic change again suddenly intervenes.

Huge mountains have also been crushed and tumbled down through immense forces. These catastrophic events happen infrequently on our human scale of time, but to a time

scale of the earth's lifetime, such great changes are quite regular. Earth scientists have pointed out for quite some time that the magnetic orientations of the cooling molten rock emerging from the mid-oceanic ridges show us that the magnetic poles of the earth suddenly flip roughly every 20,000 or 30,000 years or so. Some have even suggested that this is due to an actual physical flip. One investigator calculated that huge islands of ice breaking off of the Antarctic ice shelves and moving north might be sufficient to initiate such a flip of the axis of rotation of the earth. (One such immense ice island was the size of the European country of Luxembourg and began to travel northwards towards South America. This continues as the global climate warms.) Most people, including many good scientists, just laughed at the idea. But when it was brought to the attention of Albert Einstein, he said that it was quite a valid idea, mathematically and physically sound, and should be taken seriously. Einstein's reputation was such that it quickly put an end to the snickers and ridicule of some.

On a much larger scale, it appears that there are immense catastrophes that happen very roughly about once every 26 million years to cause immense extinctions of so many species of plants and animals on Earth. These probably involve massive changes on the earth's surface. Some of the larger of these define the boundaries of the great eras and periods of the fossil record.

Solid land, even solid rock, does indeed move – but perhaps on a very large and slow scale. The continent of Africa is rising a few millimetres each year. The continents of South America and Africa are slowly moving apart. And mountain ranges are slowly worn down by rain and wind. Periodically there are immense catastrophic changes that could easily iron out whole mountain ranges and even put them and other dry land at the bottom of an ocean.

The point here, however, is not that such catastrophic events will be happening in our lifetimes (though they conceivably could), but rather that the shape of the land, whether in the form of mountains and valleys or level plains, gives a large-scale analogy (large in both size and time) for the same changes we see on the much more quickly acting oceans. The level plain represents peace, calm, order and a long uninterrupted vision – the result of justice. And the mountains and valleys represent disturbance and great change with a shorter-range vision.

Mountains appear immense, strong, stable and firm. Consider how passionately the followers of a religion cling to their teachings for centuries. As Bahá'u'lláh notes, consider what an immense act of courage and power it is for a Prophet of God to enter the world, change the old laws, institute new ones, and challenge all that was held dear and precious by so many for so long. How violently did the inhabitants of Ur, including Abraham's own father, resist him when he told them that their long-established religious habits of worshipping so many gods was wrong! How fiercely was Moses opposed by Pharaoh and his people when he announced a new revelation of God! Even his own people resisted so powerfully, reverting to the worship of the Golden Calf when he was absent for a while. How powerfully did the Jews resist Jesus Christ and condemn him to be crucified! How vigorously was Muhammad opposed and persecuted by those who felt he had no right to change the old ways! And how very savage and brutal was the unbelievable oppression, torture and mass-murder of over 20,000 followers of the young Báb and Bahá'u'lláh in 19th and 20th century Persia when these two saintly Founders of the Bábí and Bahá'í Faiths claimed to bring the next twin revelation after that of Muhammad! To this day that oppression continues. How interesting that the Báb foretold

the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, and Bahá'u'lláh made it clear that there would be a long succession of Prophets of God after Him, the next one to appear after one thousand years.

The mountain can represent all that was once so solid, established and secured in a society through its dominant religion. The appearance of the next revelation reduces it to dust, just as it cleaves the heavens of religious truth asunder in preparation for the next stage in the spiritual and religious development of humankind. It also has other meanings as already offered earlier.

For those who might be interested, here are a few more selections from the Bible that speak of the mountains being brought down or changed, along with yet more references to the darkening of the sun, moon and stars, that speak very much in the same language as the *Qur'án*:

"Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat {them} small, and shalt make the hills as chaff.

"Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, {and} shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel. (Isaiah, 41:15-16)

"I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools. (Isaiah, 42:15)

"For, behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth.

"And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, {and} as the waters {that are} poured down a steep place. (Micah, 1:3-4)

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

"And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.

"And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. (Revelations, 6:12-14)

"And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.

"And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, {and} so great.

"And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

"And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

"And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, {every stone} about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great. (Revelations, 16:17-21)

We've spent some considerable time here because these matters seem to be of the greatest importance.

The Trumpet

"On that day the Trumpet shall be sounded and all who dwell in heaven and earth be seized with fear, except for those whom God will choose to spare. All shall come to him in utter humility.

"The mountains, firm though you may think them, will pass away like clouds, Such is the might of God, who has perfected all things. He has knowledge of all your actions.

"Those that have done good shall be rewarded with what is better, and shall be secure from the terrors of that day.

"But those that have done evil shall be hurled headlong into the Fire. Shall you not be rewarded according to your deeds?" (The Ant, 27:85f)

"They must be waiting for a single blast, which will overtake them while they are disputing. They will have no time to make a will, nor shall they return to their kinsfolk.

"The Trumpet will be blown and, behold, they will rise up from their graves and hasten to their Lord. 'Woe to us!' they will say. 'Who has

roused us from our resting-place? This is what the Lord of Mercy promised: the apostles have told the truth!' And with one blast they shall be gathered all before us.

"On that day no soul shall suffer the least injustice. You shall be rewarded according to your deeds." (Yá Sín, 26:49f)

"The Trumpet shall be sounded, and all who are in heaven and earth shall fall down fainting, except those that shall be spared by God. Then the Trumpet will be blown again and they shall rise and gaze around them. The earth will shine with the light of her Lord, and the Book will be laid open. The prophets and the witnesses shall be brought in, and all shall be judged with fairness: none shall be wronged. Every soul shall be paid back according to its deeds, for He best knows all that they did." (The Hordes, 39:68)

In many statements involving "The Trumpet" they might be taken to refer to a time facing each individual after physical death, when each will be judged. That fate occurs in what the *Qur'án* calls "the abode of the hereafter" (The Confederate Tribes, 33:28). Clearly that abode is not the same as this physical world otherwise the *Qur'án* would have spoken of it as occurring here on Earth. And a blast on a Trumpet surely indicates something like a broadcast notice, a warning, an announcement. Surely such an announcement is more appropriate to the Announcement of God in His next revelation.

The last quote, where there are **two** blasts on The Trumpet, suggests that there is a meaning involving not just an

individual's fate but this life on this earth: "The earth will shine with the light of her Lord, and the Book will be laid open." This surely means that the veiled and mysterious language of the Book will be explained through the new revelation. It sounds remarkably like the prophecies of the Old Testament of the Bible:

"And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord.

"As for me, this {is} my covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that {is } upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever.

"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee (Isaiah, 59:20-60:1)

"And {it was} according to the appearance of the vision which I saw, {even } according to the vision that I saw when I came to destroy the city: and the visions {were} like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell upon my face.

"And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect {is} toward the east.

"So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the Lord filled the house. (Ezekiel, 43:3-5)

"Behold, {is it} not of the Lord of hosts that the people shall labor in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?

"For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.(Habakkuk, 2:13-14)

Here is another quote referring to **two** blasts on The Trumpet:

"By those who snatch away men's souls, and those who gently release them; by those who float at will, and those who speed headlong; by those who govern the affairs of the world! On the day the Trumpet sounds its first and second blast, all hearts shall be filled with terror, and all eyes shall stare with awe." (The Soul-Snatchers, 79:1)

This has great significance for Bahá'ís, who, as mentioned, believe that there were two Messengers of God appearing after Muhammad – first The Báb ["Gate"] and then Bahá'u'lláh ["Glory of God"] – appearing in quick succession, just 19 years apart, in 19th century Persia. Ezekiel's statement, "And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect {is} toward the east", could just as well be translated, using these Arabic titles, as "And Bahá'u'lláh came into the house by way of The Báb in the East".

What else could a reference to a blast on The Trumpet be than a Great Announcement from God, and new revelation from the Creator? And two blasts on the Trumpet certainly suggests two revelations, one right after the other.

Here are some selections from the *Bible* that mention a "trumpet" in this same context and that make it quite clear that it denotes the Announcement of God, which is the revelation from God. The sections where mention of trumpets is made are emphasized by the author.

"And it shall come to pass in that day, {that} **the great trumpet** shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the Lord in the holy mount at Jerusalem." (Isaiah, 27:13)

"And the Lord shall be seen over them, and his arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord God shall blow **the trumpet**, and shall go with whirlwinds of the south." (Zechariah, 9:14)

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me **a great voice, as of a trumpet,**

"Saying, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send {it} unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.' " (Revelations 1:10-11)

And yet again:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall

from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

"And he shall send his angels with **a great sound of a trumpet**, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matthew, 24:29-31) [emphasis mine]

The Hour of Doom, the Catastrophe

Did you think that that was all? It goes on and on. Here is just some of what remains:

"He [Jesus] is a portent of the Hour of Doom. Have no doubt about its coming and follow Me." (Ornaments of Gold, 41:61)

"Wait for the day when the sky will pour down visible smoke, enveloping all men: a dreadful scourge. Then they will say: 'Lord, lift up the scourge from us. We are now believers.' But how will their new faith help them, when an undoubted prophet had come to them and they denied him, saying: 'A madman, taught by others!' " (Smoke, 44:12)

"On that day the heaven will shake and reel, and the mountains move and pass away. On that day woe betide the unbelievers, who now

divert themselves with vain disputes." (The Mountain, 52:8)

"When that which is coming comes – and no soul shall then deny its coming – some shall be abased and others exalted.

"When the earth shakes and quivers, and the mountains crumble away and scatter abroad into fine dust, you shall be divided into three multitudes: those on the right (blessed shall be those on the right); those on the left (damned shall be those on the left); and those to the fore (foremost shall be those). Such are they that shall be brought near to their Lord in the gardens of delight: a whole multitude from the men of old, but only a few from the later generations." (That Which Is Coming, 56:1f)

"When the Trumpet sounds a single blast; when earth with all its mountains is raised high and with one mighty crash is shattered into dust - on that day the Dread Event will come to pass.

"Frail and tottering, the sky will be rent asunder on that day, and the angels will stand on all its sides with eight of them carrying the throne of your Lord above their heads. On that day you shall be utterly exposed, and all your secrets shall be brought to light." (The Catastrophe, 69:12f)

Again, it's hard to read this without thinking of the modern-day exposure of so many thousands of leaders of religion who have sunk to the lowest depths of disobedience to God's Laws and utterly lost their spiritual station.

"The Catastrophe: and what is the Catastrophe? Would that you knew what the Catastrophe is!

"Thamúd and 'Ad [peoples to which the ancient Prophets Sálíh and Húd appeared] denied the Last Judgement. By a deafening shout was Thamúd destroyed, and 'Ad by a howling, violent gale which He let loose on them for seven nights and eight successive days: you might have seen them lying dead as though they had been hollow trunks of palm-trees. Can you see but one of them still alive?" (The Catastrophe, 69:1f)

The Catastrophe, the Day of Judgement, the Resurrection, the Hour of Doom, the Trumpet, the cleaving of the heavens, the blotting out of the stars, the destruction of mountains, the shaking of the earth, the day when the sky will pour down visible smoke – these all seem to be warning of an extremely momentous time, a time of utter disaster for those who don't pass the tests of the Day of Judgement, a time of joyous victory for those who do.

Coming in the Clouds of Heaven

There's another symbol that has been left unexplained: that referred to in -

"... they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"
(Matthew 24:30)

The thoughtful reader will probably have been able to put together this statement with the frequent references to

clouds as being something of a lower realm being lifted up to a higher realm where they block out the light of the sun. The Prophet of God appears amidst the ungodly of the time, even those such as priests and other religious leaders who are lifted up high into the heavens of the current religion, but who have become like dark clouds. But Bahá'u'lláh explains this far better and gives more interpretations. In the process, He also explains a few other symbols as well. The paragraphs from His *Kitab-i-Iqan (Book of Certitude)* are broken by brief paraphrases of what He says, again, not because these add anything of real value to what is said but rather to give a pause and let the reader think about these very profound words.

"And now, with reference to His words: 'And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.' These words signify that in those days men will lament the loss of the Sun of the divine beauty, of the Moon of knowledge, and of the Stars of divine wisdom. Thereupon, they will behold the countenance [appearance, face] of the promised One, the adored Beauty, descending from heaven and riding upon the clouds. By this is meant that the divine Beauty will be made manifest from the heaven of the will of God, and will appear in the form of the human temple. The term 'heaven' denoteth loftiness and exaltation, inasmuch as it is the seat of the revelation of those Manifestations of Holiness, the Day-springs of ancient glory. These ancient Beings, though delivered from the womb of their mother, have in reality descended from the heaven of the will of God. Though they be dwelling on this earth, yet their true habitations

are the retreats of glory in the realms above. Whilst walking amongst mortals, they soar in the heaven of the divine presence. Without feet they tread the path of the spirit, and without wings they rise unto the exalted heights of divine unity. With every fleeting breath they cover the immensity of space, and at every moment traverse the kingdoms of the visible and the invisible. Upon their thrones is written: 'Nothing whatsoever keepeth Him from being occupied with any other thing;' and on their seats is inscribed: 'Verily, His ways differ every day.' (*Qur'án*, The Merciful, 55:29) They are sent forth through the transcendent power of the Ancient of Days, and are raised up by the exalted will of God, the most mighty King. This is what is meant by the words: 'coming in the clouds of heaven.' " (pp 66-67)

The Prophet of God has a reality that is from "heaven" though His human nature and body belong to this world of matter. The *Qur'án* has emphasized the human nature of the Prophet so that ignorant humans will not identify Him with God. These ignorant ones would do this because even their conception of God greatly belittles the Creator; they would imagine Him to be like a human. But once we have recognized the immense gulf between a finite and limited human being and the infinite and unlimited Creator, there's room for Someone in this vast stretch between humans and the Creator. And this is where the Prophet of God fits in. The Prophets are far far above us while being far far below God. So there is no real contradiction with the *Qur'án*. Muhammad did indeed have a human station, just like all the Prophets, and this is what was referred to in the *Qur'án*, and which Jesus, in His great humility, stressed at times to His followers by calling Himself

the “son of man”. But these Prophets of God also have a station above the human one – a station that we cannot understand at all because it is high above us. A careful reading of the Holy Books makes this clear. And Bahá'u'lláh's words make it crystal clear. He continues:

"In the utterances of the divine Luminaries the term 'heaven' hath been applied to many and divers things; such as the 'heaven of Command,' the 'heaven of Will,' the 'heaven of the divine Purpose,' the 'heaven of divine Knowledge,' the 'heaven of Certitude,' the 'heaven of Utterance,' the 'heaven of Revelation,' the 'heaven of Concealment,' and the like. In every instance, He hath given the term 'heaven' a special meaning, the significance of which is revealed to none save those that have been initiated into the divine mysteries, and have drunk from the chalice of immortal life. For example, He saith: 'The heaven hath sustenance for you, and it containeth that which you are promised;' (*Qur'án*, The Winds, 51:22) whereas it is the earth that yieldeth such sustenance. Likewise, it hath been said: 'The names come down from heaven;' whereas they proceed out of the mouth of men. Wert thou to cleanse the mirror of thy heart from the dust of malice, thou wouldst apprehend the meaning of the symbolic terms revealed by the all-embracing Word of God made manifest in every Dispensation, and wouldst discover the mysteries of divine knowledge. Not, however, until thou consumest with the flame of utter detachment those veils of idle learning, that are current amongst men,

canst thou behold the resplendent morn of true knowledge." (pp 68-69)

The word "heaven" has many meanings in the Holy Books, but one must throw away all one's "idle learning" that humans so value and cleanse the mirror of the heart in order to be able to see which meaning is intended. A new eye, a new ear, a new mind, a new heart, are needed to grasp these things. They are the gift of God to those who "have been initiated into the divine mysteries" and who have "drunk from the chalice of immortal life". The Words of God themselves have the power to bring about this transformation in a person so that she sees with a new eye, so that he hears with a new ear. Having made this auxiliary statement, He now explains what "the clouds" of heaven means.

"By these luminous, these conclusive, and lucid statements, the meaning of 'heaven' in the aforementioned verse hath thus been made clear and evident. And now regarding His words, that the Son of man shall 'come in the clouds of heaven.' By the term 'clouds' is meant those things that are contrary to the ways and desires of men. Even as He hath revealed in the verse already quoted: 'As oft as an Apostle cometh unto you with that which your souls desire not, ye swell with pride, accusing some of being impostors and slaying others.' (*Qur'án*, The Cow, 2:87) These 'clouds' signify, in one sense, the annulment of laws, the abrogation of former Dispensations, the repeal of rituals and customs current amongst men, the exalting of the illiterate faithful above the learned opposers of the Faith. In another sense, they mean the appearance of that immortal Beauty in the

image of mortal man, with such human limitations as eating and drinking, poverty and riches, glory and abasement, sleeping and waking, and such other things as cast doubt in the minds of men, and cause them to turn away. All such veils are symbolically referred to as 'clouds.' (pp 71-72)

Clouds can symbolize whatever obstructs our vision and understanding. This obstruction and veiling is brought about when God reveals what runs counter to our desires and pet beliefs. When we hear what we don't like and don't want to hear, the clouds and veils may rise up in our minds and hearts. We've been taught for most of our life that some things are true and then God arrives to tell us that the matter is different. We are taught that certain laws must apply for all time, and God reveals in a new revelation that the laws are changed. It's a big test. We might not want to accept such profound changes. The clouds and veils rise up and prevent us from seeing truth and living in reality. We would rather tell God how His revelation is to be instead of humbly submitting and acknowledging that the All-Knowing One Who created us surely knows better than we do what is best for our development. And the clouds also symbolize the appearance of the Prophet in a human body with all the limitations it has. As Bahá'u'lláh states in the next paragraph. It is these clouds that cause the "heavens" of human understanding to be "cleft asunder".

"These are the 'clouds' that cause the heavens of the knowledge and understanding of all that dwell on earth to be cloven asunder. Even as He hath revealed: 'On that day shall the heaven be cloven by the clouds.' (*Qur'án*, Al-Furqán, 25:25) Even as the clouds prevent the eyes of men from beholding the sun, so do these things

hinder the souls of men from recognizing the light of the divine Luminary. To this beareth witness that which hath proceeded out of the mouth of the unbelievers as revealed in the sacred Book: 'And they have said: "What manner of apostle is this? He eateth food, and walketh the streets. Unless an angel be sent down and take part in His warnings, we will not believe." ' (*Qur'án*, Al-Furqán, 25:7) Other Prophets, similarly, have been subject to poverty and afflictions, to hunger, and to the ills and chances of this world. As these holy Persons were subject to such needs and wants, the people were, consequently, lost in the wilds of misgivings and doubts, and were afflicted with bewilderment and perplexity. How, they wondered, could such a person be sent down from God, assert His ascendancy over all the peoples and kindreds of the earth, and claim Himself to be the goal of all creation, – even as He hath said: 'But for Thee, I would not have created all that are in heaven and on earth,' – and yet be subject to such trivial things? You must undoubtedly have been informed of the tribulations, the poverty, the ills, and the degradation that have befallen every Prophet of God and His companions. You must have heard how the heads of their followers were sent as presents unto different cities, how grievously they were hindered from that whereunto they were commanded. Each and every one of them fell a prey to the hands of the enemies of His Cause, and had to suffer whatsoever they decreed." (pp 72-73)

Some called to Jesus on the cross and taunted Him, asking Him why cannot He save Himself if He is from God. He surely could have done so easily. He did many miracles. But His purpose in coming to Earth was not to save Himself but to save ordinary humans. So He submitted to the suffering. This so disheartened the Christian believers that one could say that Christ's Faith had also died for a few days. It was Mary Magdalene who understood the spiritual reality of Christ and His Faith and started a new process that conquered a large part of humanity with new standards and virtues. There were also times when Jesus was so poor, so rejected by people, that He had to sleep outside in the fields and had very little to eat. This must have seemed very surprising to those who saw Him do the miracles of providing a table full of food for others and making the blind see. The Prophet of God is not self-serving, even when in dire need. His vision is focused on the betterment of the human world. But those who live in those days and see the Prophet of God being subject to such deprivations and limitations might easily think that He should be like us and do all He can to make life good for himself. Seeing that He doesn't, they wonder if He is really from God after all. The clouds and veils cover their vision.

"It is evident that the changes brought about in every Dispensation constitute the dark clouds that intervene between the eye of man's understanding and the divine Luminary which shineth forth from the dayspring of the divine Essence. Consider how men for generations have been blindly imitating their fathers, and have been trained according to such ways and manners as have been laid down by the dictates of their Faith. Were these men, therefore, to discover suddenly that a Man, Who hath been living in their midst, Who, with respect to every

human limitation, hath been their equal, had risen to abolish every established principle imposed by their Faith—principles by which for centuries they have been disciplined, and every opposer and denier of which they have come to regard as infidel, profligate and wicked,—they would of a certainty be veiled and hindered from acknowledging His truth. Such things are as 'clouds' that veil the eyes of those whose inner being hath not tasted the *Salsabíl* of detachment, nor drunk from the *Kawthar* of the knowledge of God. Such men, when acquainted with these circumstances, become so veiled that without the least question, they pronounce the Manifestation of God an infidel, and sentence Him to death. You must have heard of such things taking place all down the ages, and are now observing them in these days." (pp 73-74)

It was mentioned in the preface of this book that *Salsabíl* is the name of a fountain in Paradise that gives forth a ginger-flavored drink. (Man, 76:17f) . *Kawthar* is a source of abundance, like a fountain gushing forth, a cornucopia of bounty, that was given to Muhammad. (Abundance, 108:1)

These words are so clear. It's pointless trying to paraphrase them. And it seems silly, maybe even irreverent and full of gall, to intersperse what the author believes are the Words of God, which seem like diamonds sparkling in the divine sunlight, with his own words which are more like dull stones. Hopefully the reader can see the vast difference between the gold and the lead here and realize where the value lies. But fragrant and delicate flowers are separated by plain dirt, and shining stars have vast stretches of black space between them. Please understand that the writer's words are

just meant to fill in space and have no real value in themselves other than to give the reader a chance to think over the words of Bahá'u'lláh here.

"It behooveth us, therefore, to make the utmost endeavour, that, by God's invisible assistance, these dark veils, these clouds of Heaven-sent trials, may not hinder us from beholding the beauty of His shining Countenance, and that we may recognize Him only by His own Self. And should we ask for a testimony of His truth, we should content ourselves with one, and only one; that thereby we may attain unto Him Who is the Fountain-head of infinite grace, and in Whose presence all the world's abundance fadeth into nothingness, that we may cease to cavil at Him every day and to cleave unto our own idle fancy.

"Gracious God! Notwithstanding the warning which, in marvelously symbolic language and subtle allusions, hath been uttered in days past, and which was intended to awaken the peoples of the world and to prevent them from being deprived of their share of the billowing ocean of God's grace, yet such things as have already been witnessed have come to pass! Reference to these things hath also been made in the *Qur'án*, as witnessed by this verse: 'What can such expect but that God should come down to them overshadowed with clouds?' (*Qur'án*, The Cow 2:210) A number of the divines, who hold firmly to the letter of the Word of God, have come to regard this verse as one of the signs of that expected resurrection which is born of their idle fancy. This,

notwithstanding the fact that similar references have been made in most of the heavenly Books, and have been recorded in all the passages connected with the signs of the coming Manifestation." (pp 75-76)

It's so dangerous to be a priest or religious leader. The temptation is to try to create a special station for certain humans that is above the rest of humanity when there is nothing in any of the Holy Books to justify this. Then, when such a person believes himself to be an authority and guide for others, he can become puffed up with personal pride and want to lord it over others. This disease of the heart and spirit runs into extreme trouble when it encounters the Prophet of God. It opposes God's Will. What clouds result! Since there were some quotes concerning "smoke" from heaven or from earth, it's fitting to continue this explanation from Bahá'u'lláh where He covers this point.

"Likewise, He saith: 'On the day when the heaven shall give out a palpable smoke, which shall enshroud mankind: this will be an afflictive torment.' (*Qur'án*, Smoke, 44:10) The All-Glorious hath decreed these very things, that are contrary to the desires of wicked men, to be the touchstone and standard whereby He proveth His servants, that the just may be known from the wicked, and the faithful distinguished from the infidel. The symbolic term 'smoke' denotes grave dissensions, the abrogation and demolition of recognized standards, and the utter destruction of their narrow-minded exponents. What smoke more dense and overpowering than the one which hath now enshrouded all the peoples of the

world, which hath become a torment unto them, and from which they hopelessly fail to deliver themselves, however much they strive? So fierce is this fire of self burning within them, that at every moment they seem to be afflicted with fresh torments. The more they are told that this wondrous Cause of God, this Revelation from the Most High, hath been made manifest to all mankind, and is waxing greater and stronger every day, the fiercer groweth the blaze of the fire in their hearts. The more they observe the indomitable strength, the sublime renunciation, the unwavering constancy of God's holy companions, who, by the aid of God, are growing nobler and more glorious every day, the deeper the dismay which ravageth their souls. In these days, praise be to God, the power of His Word hath obtained such ascendancy over men, that they dare breathe no word. Were they to encounter one of the companions of God who, if he could, would, freely and joyously, offer up ten thousand lives as a sacrifice for his Beloved, so great would be their fear, that they forthwith would profess their faith in Him, whilst privily they would vilify and execrate His name! Even as He hath revealed: 'And when they meet you, they say, "We believe"; but when they are apart, they bite their fingers' ends at you, out of wrath. Say: "Die in your wrath!" God truly knoweth the very recesses of your breasts.' " (*Qur'án*, The 'Imrans, 3:119) (pp 76-78)

Bahá'u'lláh's explanation of "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven" hasn't been covered here.

The reader is encouraged to read His *Book of Certitude* for beautiful explanations of this and so many other matters. (Very briefly, it refers to the appearance of both a physical sign in the sky such as a bright star or comet, as well as a human star such as John the Baptist who foretells the near advent of the Prophet of God.) This will close with a summary from that passage.

"Ere long, thine eyes will behold the standards of divine power unfurled throughout all regions, and the signs of His triumphant might and sovereignty manifest in every land. As most of the divines have failed to apprehend the meaning of these verses, and have not grasped the significance of the Day of Resurrection, they therefore have foolishly interpreted these verses according to their idle and faulty conception. The one true God is My witness! Little perception is required to enable them to gather from the symbolic language of these two verses all that We have purposed to propound, and thus to attain, through the grace of the All-Merciful, the resplendent morn of certitude. Such are the strains of celestial melody which the immortal Bird of Heaven, warbling upon the Sadrih [holy tree] of Bahá', poureth out upon thee, that, by the permission of God, thou mayest tread the path of divine knowledge and wisdom." (p 78)

This last predicts the Days of Victory, when "the signs of His triumphant might and sovereignty" are "manifest in every land".

The Days of Victory

"Tell the believers to pardon those who dread the days of victory [Dawood: lit: the days of God], when God will reward men according to their deeds.

But why would there be such an emphasis on the negative – all this doom and gloom? Even the days of victory are dreaded by some. Could it be because those of the previous religion are so opposed and ruin their souls by failing the test and are judged negatively in the Day of Judgement? Could it be because only a small minority, a tiny handful actually pass the test and are judged well? Diamonds are few; worthless rocks are many. And why is it that these stern warnings have to be put in very symbolic and veiled images? These are things that a true seeker might ponder carefully.

A POWERFUL REPLY

One of Pharaoh's kinsmen who was secretly a true believer in Moses' revelation said to Pharaoh:

"... Long before this, Joseph came to you with veritable signs, but you never ceased to doubt them; and when he died you said: 'After him God will never send another apostle.' Thus God confounds the doubting transgressor...." (The Forgiving One, 40:34)

"The Jews say: 'God's hand is chained.' May their own hands be chained! May they be cursed for what they say! By no means. His

hands are both outstretched: He bestows as He will." (The Table, 5:64)

So the Jews, believing that God cannot send another Prophet, believe that He hasn't sent any more Messengers with His revelation. They won't accept Jesus, the Messiah; and they won't accept Muhammad. And the Christians insist on the same – that Jesus is their "Seal", the end of all of God's Manifestations. They utterly ignore Jesus' clear statement:

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

"And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

"Of sin, because they believe not on me;

"Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;

"Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, {that} shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

"He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew {it} unto you.

(John, 16:7-14)

And, of course, so many Muslims, believing they are being faithful to God, Islám and Muhammad, continue this

same tradition of denying the next revelation of God and insisting that their Prophet is the final one. They focus on the phrase "seal of the prophesiers" and ignore the true meaning of the "Last Day", the Day of Judgement", the "Resurrection", of the "cleaving of the heavens, the darkening of the sun, moon and stars, the crushing of the mountains to dust". And so they themselves fulfil the *Qur'án's* stern warning prophecies concerning the "Catastrophe" and the Hour of Doom"

"Woe on that day to the disbelievers! Eat and enjoy yourselves a while. You are wicked men....

"Woe on that day to the disbelievers! **In what revelation, after this, will they believe?**" (Those That Are Sent Forth, 77:43f) [emphasis mine]

Concerning all these signs, here is Bahá'u'lláh's powerful response:

"O thou who hast set thy face towards the splendours of My Countenance!

"Vague fancies have encompassed the dwellers of the earth and debarred them from turning towards the Horizon of Certitude, and its brightness, and its manifestations and its lights. Vain imaginings have withheld them from Him Who is the Self-Subsisting. They speak as prompted by their own caprices, and understand not. Among them are those who have said:

" `Have the verses been sent down?'

" Say `Yea, by Him Who is the Lord of the heavens!'

" `Hath the Hour come?'

" `Nay, more; it hath passed, by Him Who is the Revealer of clear tokens! Verily, the Inevitable is come, and He, the True One, hath appeared with proof and testimony. The Plain is disclosed, and mankind is sore vexed and fearful. Earthquakes have broken loose, and the tribes have lamented, for fear of God, the Lord of Strength, the All-Compelling.'

"Say: `The stunning trumpet-blast hath been loudly raised, and the Day is God's, the One, the Unconstrained.'

"And they say: `Hath the Catastrophe come to pass?'

"Say: `Yea, by the Lord of Lords!'

" `Is the Resurrection come?'

" `Nay, more; He Who is the Self-Subsisting hath appeared with the Kingdom of His signs.'

" `Seest thou men laid low?'

" `Yea, by my Lord, the Most High, the Most Glorious!'

" `Have the tree-stumps been uprooted?'

" `Yea, more; the mountains have been scattered in dust; by Him the Lord of attributes!'

"They say: `Where is Paradise, and where is Hell?'

"Say: `The one is reunion with Me; the other thine own self, O thou who dost associate a partner with God and doubttest.'

"They say: `We see not the Balance.'

"Say: `Surely, by my Lord, the God of Mercy! None can see it except such as are endued with insight.'

"They say: `Have the stars fallen?'

"Say: `Yea, when He Who is the Self-Subsisting dwelt in the Land of Mystery. (Adrianople or Edirne in Turkey near the Greek border) Take heed, ye who are endued with discernment!'

"All the signs appeared when We drew forth the Hand of Power from the bosom of majesty and might. Verily, the Crier hath cried out, when the promised time came, and they that have recognized the splendours of Sinai have swooned away in the wilderness of hesitation, before the awful majesty of thy Lord, the Lord of creation.

"The trumpet asketh: `Hath the Bugle been sounded?'

"Say: `Yea, by the King of Revelation! when He mounted the throne of His Name, the All-Merciful.'

"Darkness hath been chased away by the dawning light of the mercy of thy Lord, the Source of all light. The breeze of the All-Merciful hath wafted, and the souls have been

quicken'd in the tombs of their bodies. Thus hath the decree been fulfilled by God, the Mighty, the Beneficent.

"They who reject the truth have said: `When were the heavens cleft asunder?"

"Say: `While ye lay in the graves of waywardness and error.'

"Among the faithless is he who rubbeth his eyes, and looketh to the right and to the left.

"Say: `Blinded art thou. No refuge hast thou to flee to.'

"And among them is he who saith: `Have men been gathered together?"

"Say: `Yea, by My Lord! whilst thou didst lie in the cradle of idle fancies.'

"And among them is he who saith: `Hath the Book been sent down through the power of the true Faith?"

"Say: `The true Faith itself is astounded. Fear ye, O ye men of understanding heart!"

"And among them is he who saith: `Have I been assembled with others, blind?"

"Say: `Yea, by Him that rideth upon the clouds!"

"Paradise is deck'd with mystic roses, and hell hath been made to blaze with the fire of the impious.

"Say: `The light hath shone forth from the horizon of Revelation, and the whole earth hath been illumined at the coming of Him Who is the Lord of the Day of the Covenant!"

"The doubters have perished, whilst he that turned, guided by the light of assurance, unto the Dayspring of Certitude hath prospered.

"Blessed art thou, who hast fixed thy gaze upon Me, for this Tablet which hath been sent down for thee—a Tablet which causeth the souls of men to soar. Commit it to memory, and recite it. By My life! It is a door to the mercy of thy Lord. Well is it with him that reciteth it at eventide and at dawn. We, verily, heard thy praise of this Cause, through which the mountain of knowledge was crushed, and men's feet have slipped. My glory be upon thee and upon whomsoever hath turned unto the Almighty, the All-Bounteous. The Tablet is ended, but the theme is unexhausted. Be patient, for thy Lord is patient." (*Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh after Aqdas*, pp 117-19)

CHAPTER 8

FINAL COMMENTS

The Revelation of Jesus Christ shed the light of a new understanding on what the Revelation of Moses was really about. The Revelation of Muhammad enlightens us about the Christian Faith, showing to us that the ideas of the Trinity, of Jesus' equivalence to God, are incorrect. We get a better understanding of Christianity and Judaism by adding the Revelation of Muhammad to them. Similarly, if it is true that the Revelations of The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are the next grade in God's Curriculum for humankind, then it is reasonable to suspect that gaining some understanding of the Bahá'í Revelation is a key to understanding the *Qur'án*. And even if one does not believe that this is true, it's very difficult to deny that the Writings of both The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh unfold the meaning of the *Qur'án*, and the New and Old Testaments of the Bible, to a degree that is simply stunning and awe-inspiring.

Therefore, this writer feels that just as the *Qur'án* is essential in giving a fuller explanation of the Revelations of Moses and Christ, the Bahá'í Revelation unfolds – even unseals! – the meanings of the *Qur'án* and the older Holy Books to a degree that is not merely stupendous but majestic and glorious! Perhaps the reader catches the writer's inability to convey how very greatly this new Revelation explains the previous ones.

Consequently, any complaints that a book about the *Qur'án* should not bring in other Holy Writings, a subsequent

one in particular, are not justified. All these Revelations are part of one great Divine Process of educating the inhabitants of this planet, and each stage explains yet more of the previous stages. Clearly, to leave out the most recent stage in this majestic Process would be unreasonable and leave this book incomplete. Those who insist that this new Revelation is not from God and does not thoroughly elucidate the meanings of the *Qur'án* and other Holy Books would need to provide some sort of reasonable argument to support their claim. While they are at it, they might also try proving that the sun doesn't give out any light. The blind might be convinced of it. The Writings of The Báb and Bahá'u'lláh more than superbly argue for their validity in this long line of Revelations, sufficiently to convince this writer, a one-time agnostic, anti-religious philosopher and mathematician, that his attempt to find some flaws or contradictions in them and thus prove this religion false was a futile effort. He was backed into a corner with nowhere else to go but acknowledge that God's latest Revelation is logically solid and water-tight in every way. And it was only by accepting the Bahá'í Revelation that he was led to accept the Divine Missions of Moses, Christ and Muhammad as well as of those of Krishna, Zoroaster and Buddha.

The general Revelation of God that shines out from the Creator is like a bright white light that shines down on the world. Each thing reflects a part of this white light in accord with its capacity. Black tar soaks up all the frequencies of light and reflects no light at all leaving the same impression on the eye as what one sees in a dark cave where there is no light present. A green leaf soaks up all the colors and reflects only the green frequencies or wavelengths of light. A red rose reflects just the red wavelengths of light. A white piece of paper reflects all the colors but in a scattered and irregular way. And a polished mirror reflects all that light in a very faithful

and orderly way. Each thing reflects that one complete and full light in accord with its capacity.

When this Light of God shines down in some particular Revelation, it takes a form that is suited to the capacity and limitations of the people it comes to. When it shone down on the Hebrew slaves of Egypt through Moses, it took a form perfectly suited to the requirements for their development. When it shone down on the people of India at one time through Krishna, it appeared in one way, and when it came again through Buddha at a later time it appeared in another way. It took a form that we see in the Teachings of Christ when applied to the people of that time. And when that Holy Light shone down with a central focus on the people of the Arabian Peninsula of a time about 1400 years ago it took the form we see in the Holy *Qur'án*.

We could also compare the Revelation of God to an ocean of liquid water, and the culture, temperament and stage of development of a people to a container of some particular shape. The Water takes the shape of whatever container it is poured in to. And the container does not hold the entire Ocean.

That this one Complete Light or Water takes different forms limited by human conditions should not surprise us or lead us to imagine that the religions of God have different sources and are in conflict with one another. This point is expressed quite beautifully in the following:

"O Son of Beauty! By My spirit and by My favor! By My mercy and by My beauty! All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, hath been in accordance with thy capacity and understanding, not with My state

and the melody of My voice." (*Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Arabic #67)

So, one should not ask, "Why does God speak in such a threatening way in the *Qur'án*, and in the Old Testament?" Rather, one should ask, "Why were we humans in such a condition that God had to speak to us in this way so that we might grow and develop spiritually?" We shouldn't ask why the Water took some particular shape. We should ask why we and our society are receptacles of that shape and size.

When one looks behind the outward threats and great sternness of the Voice of God in the *Qur'án*, one discovers that it is compassion and mercy that dominates in actuality, that the opening phrase "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate" that starts most of the chapters of the *Qur'án* is really the ruling principle of this Revelation. Consider this carefully: God states quite clearly in that *Qur'án* that He does not destroy those who defy and deny His Revelation until after some time. He gives them whatever they want in this world. Mercy reigns during the lifetime of the wayward and foolish until it is time for them to leave this life. Only then does that Justice take over from the Mercy. And even then that "death" is really just a transplanting of the soul from one realm to another.

"He that desires the reward of this world shall have it; and he that desires the reward of the life to come shall have it also." (The 'Imrans, 3:145)

"... Alláh does not desire to put on you any difficulty, but He wishes to purify you and that He may complete His favor on you, so that you may be grateful." (Shakir, The Table, 5:6)

This is very merciful. Those who submit and wish to develop spiritually, to be purified, go through whatever exercises and training are required for that. Those that don't want this get the things they want of this life – and then end up in loss and regret after life's end when they discover that they wasted their life. Giving the wolf mercy is a means of training the sheep who want to be purified, who want to fulfill life's purpose. The wolf does his dirty work and then, when that is finished, he discovers to his utmost grief and loss that he had wasted his life and ended up a loser, that all his evil had done little other than train and discipline those who were wiser and ended up winners.

"Whoso desireth the harvest of the Hereafter,
We give him increase in its harvest. And whoso
desireth the harvest of the world, We give him
thereof, and he hath no portion in the Hereafter."
(Pickthal, Counsel, 42:20)

Have you seen the person who follows his selfish desires and laughs at the laws of God? Have you wondered how it is that he seems to get his way, that so much seems to come to him? Mercy surrounds him on every side. Yet he feels no gratitude. The hope is that he will wake up and think instead of making all the feeble rationalizations for not accomplishing life's purpose. Mercy surrounds him and he gets his wishes for this life fulfilled because that's all he gets. He's like the hungry fisherman who has no patience and eats his bait fish. He loses out on the big fish he could catch by sacrificing the little fish as bait and then waiting patiently. Those who want to eat their bait get mercy because "that's all they get". They have deprived themselves immensely. When they see the wiser ones who sacrificed the bait of their lower desires in this world and who dine luxuriously on the much larger and tastier

fish that comes to those who do what is right and wait patiently, they will understand their great loss.

This gives the appearance of there being no justice in this world. It seems so often that the bad ones have life their way and the good ones suffer for it. Apparently the Creator has left it to us to be the instruments of bringing about that more immediate justice in this world. Until the present day, we have gladly acted with injustice and oppression towards others and left our world in chaos. But when our maturity arrives, we will at last recognize what is in our own best interests and establish justice in this world so that the good are rewarded and the bad are punished – finally! What a change this will bring to our bleeding, war-torn, strife-filled world! God has left this part of Justice in our hands, and it's up to us to establish it firmly. God is immensely merciful to His weak children. Despite all the stern language, justice only arrives as a final act, and even that is seen to be merciful from a larger perspective.

Mercy and kindness flood over the ignorant losers who seek only this world – as though they would live forever here – because it's all they get. They get to eat their bait. The stern words of the *Qur'án* are an attempt to awaken those who can be awakened to fulfill life's purpose. The world of the baby fetus in the mother's womb is dark and confined. It's all that new human life knows. If it had a choice as to whether it would grow its eyes, its mouth, its arms and legs, it might decide not to since these are of little or no use in that womb. If these fetuses could be told that there is a life after the death in the womb, that they will live in a new condition after they leave that womb world that is much wider and freer, and that they should develop their eyes, ears, nose, mouth, arms and legs, perhaps some would be heedful and others would not. Maybe some would deny that there is any truth to that message and insist that the life of the womb is all there is and ridicule

those who would prepare for a future life outside that womb. But the Day of Judgement arrives when the baby dies to that womb world and is born into this much larger world. Those who chose not to grow eyes, ears, nose, mouth, arms and legs would find themselves alive and yet as though they were dead: blind, deaf, unable to eat, unable to walk anywhere or use hands and arms. And those who did prepare these things would find the new life exciting and wonderful! Hell and Paradise!

All the Revelations of God seem to suggest that this life is a preparation for a "next life" in a "next world" that is much "larger" and far more wonderful than this world, and that we will need to develop here in this life the spiritual strengths and powers needed in that next world.

"... The world beyond is as different from this world as this world is different from that of the child while still in the womb of its mother. When the soul attaineth the Presence of God, it will assume the form that best befiteth its immortality and is worthy of its celestial habitation." (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p 157)

"Say: If ye be seekers after this life and the vanities thereof, ye should have sought them while ye were still enclosed in your mothers' wombs, for at that time ye were continually approaching them, could ye but perceive it. Ye have, on the other hand, ever since ye were born and attained maturity, been all the while receding from the world and drawing closer to dust. Why, then, exhibit such greed in amassing the treasures of the earth, when your days are

numbered and your chance is well-nigh lost?
Will ye not, then, O heedless ones, shake off
your slumber?

"Incline your ears to the counsels which this
Servant giveth you for the sake of God. He,
verily, asketh no recompense from you and is
resigned to what God hath ordained for Him,
and is entirely submissive to God's Will.

"The days of your life are far spent, O
people, and your end is fast approaching. Put
away, therefore, the things ye have devised and
to which ye cleave, and take firm hold on the
precepts of God, that haply ye may attain that
which He hath purposed for you, and be of them
that pursue a right course. Delight not
yourselves in the things of the world and its vain
ornaments, neither set your hopes on them. Let
your reliance be on the remembrance of God,
the Most Exalted, the Most Great. He will,
erelong, bring to naught all the things ye
possess. Let Him be your fear, and forget not
His covenant with you, and be not of them that
are shut out as by a veil from Him." (*Gleanings
from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp 127-28)

This is the message of the *Qur'án* in a new language
suited to our current age. It's simple: this life is only a
preparation for the real life once this brief training, preparation
and testing here is completed. All the laws, commands and
admonitions are means of preparing the soul for that next
existence. These also bring about well-being, order and
civilization in this world too.

A Bahá'í who studies the *Qur'án* and the Bible deeply
will find herself imbued with a profound new understanding of

her own Faith. And the same will happen for a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Zoroastrian, a Christian, or a Muslim who studies the immense Ocean of Revelation in the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith. Since all these religions are parts of one great Religion of God, each revealed in accord with the needs and stage of development of humans in some time and place, it is certain that the more one learns of other portions of this one Religion of God, the greater is one's understanding of it and the more likely it will be that one accomplishes his life's purpose.

"By Him Who is the Great Announcement!
The All-Merciful is come invested with
undoubted sovereignty. The Balance hath been
appointed, and all them that dwell on earth have
been gathered together. The Trumpet hath been
blown, and lo, all eyes have stared up with
terror, and the hearts of all who are in the
heavens and on the earth have trembled, except
them whom the breath of the verses of God hath
quickenened, and who have detached themselves
from all things.

"This is the Day whereon the earth shall tell
out her tidings. The workers of iniquity are her
burdens, could ye but perceive it. The moon of
idle fancy hath been cleft, and the heaven hath
given out a palpable smoke. We see the people
laid low, awed with the dread of thy Lord, the
Almighty, the Most Powerful. The Crier hath
cried out, and men have been torn away, so
great hath been the fury of His wrath. The
people of the left hand sigh and bemoan. The
people of the right abide in noble habitations:
they quaff the Wine that is life indeed, from the
hands of the All-Merciful, and are, verily, the
blissful.

"The earth hath been shaken, and the mountains have passed away, and the angels have appeared, rank on rank, before Us. Most of the people are bewildered in their drunkenness and wear on their faces the evidences of anger. Thus have We gathered together the workers of iniquity. We see them rushing on towards their idol. Say: None shall be secure this Day from the decree of God. This indeed is a grievous Day. We point out to them those that led them astray. They see them, and yet recognize them not. Their eyes are drunken; they are indeed a blind people. Their proofs are the calumnies they uttered; condemned are their calumnies by God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. The Evil One hath stirred up mischief in their hearts, and they are afflicted with a torment that none can avert. They hasten to the wicked, bearing the register of the workers of iniquity. Such are their doings.

"Say: The heavens have been folded together, and the earth is held within His grasp, and the corrupt doers have been held by their forelock, and still they understand not. They drink of the tainted water, and know it not. Say: The shout hath been raised, and the people have come forth from their graves, and arising, are gazing around them. Some have made haste to attain the court of the God of Mercy, others have fallen down on their faces in the fire of Hell, while still others are lost in bewilderment. The verses of God have been revealed, and yet they have turned away from them. His proof hath been manifested, and yet they are unaware of it. And when they behold the face of the All-

Merciful, their own faces are saddened, while they are disporting themselves. They hasten forward to Hell Fire, and mistake it for light. Far from God be what they fondly imagine! Say: Whether ye rejoice or whether ye burst for fury, the heavens are cleft asunder, and God hath come down, invested with radiant sovereignty. All created things are heard exclaiming: 'The Kingdom is God's, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.' " (*Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp 40-42)

drg - November 12, 2001 - Lesiaceva, Savusavu, Fiji Islands