

Bilal's Bedtime Stories

Part 2



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A H Sheriff & A S Alloo - XKP

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Chapter 1

FORWARD

One of the aims of this Mission has been to disseminate knowledge of Islamic principles, history and moral teachings in the form of stories so as to make their reading more interesting and appealing to young and old.

The First Part of this book published in 1975 was enthusiastically received and there have been inquiries for the following parts. The Mission now is happy to be able to publish herewith the Second Part.

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It is hoped this book will also prove interesting and serve the purpose of its publication.

BILAL MUSLIM MISSION

Chapter 2

A CALL TO PRAYERS ON A COLD WINTRY MORNING

It was a wintry morning with much snow falling coupled with the blowing of a strong cold wind. It was not easy to come out in the open air. Yet one could see people rushing to their work and students with books in their hands hastening to their schools.

In one of the mosques in Hamadan (Iran), religious students were assembling in order to attend morning class. It was an important school of Islamic theology and the tutor was also a very great learned one. His discourses were indeed very thought-provoking and so were his students quite intelligent.

The tutor was none else but the world famous and a great Persian thinker and philosopher 'Ibn Sina', popularly known in Europe as Avicenna. His lectures and writings on various science subjects had become the standard text books for hundreds of years in the universities of Europe. Students admired his deep philosophical thinking. They felt honoured to sit in his class and hear his inspiring lectures.

That cold morning, students had already assembled in the mosque and were still anxiously awaiting the arrival of their learned tutor. They were wondering if the intense cold weather that day had delayed his coming.

A few minutes had passed when suddenly the students witnessed the graceful arrival of 'Ibn Sina', their great learned tutor. They felt very happy and stood up as a mark of reverence and respect for him. He sat down at his usual place and exchanged greetings with his students. He commenced his discourse in his usual lucid manner that held his students spellbound. He also gave satisfactory answers to their questions. Among the students was one very young and enthusiastic by name 'Bahman Yar'. He was much more close and attached to 'Ibn Sina' the learned tutor. He was also the foremost among the clever and advanced students of the class. Every time he listened to the lectures of his tutor, he became more and more fascinated with his deep philosophy and knowledge on every subject. He would say to his class-mates "I wonder why our tutor 'Ibn Sina' does not claim to be a prophet despite his supreme intelligence and magic personality"

It is said that one day by chance 'Ibn Sina' was standing at a baker and loaf-seller shop. His attention was drawn to a very smart young boy who was displaying signs of much intelligence. The boy was saying to the baker "My mother is requesting for a little fire". The baker responded "Have you brought any pot to carry the fire?" "No! But I know how to carry it" replied the boy instantly. So saying he applied some ash over his palm and stretched his hand to the baker who placed a piece of burning firewood over his palm. Without any hesitation, the boy took it and went home.

Ibn Sina was rather amazed to see the intelligence and courage of this boy. He thought of having him for special training and education under his personal care. The proposal was communicated to the parents who agreed and entrusted the boy to his full care. Thus 'Bahman Yar' since then was staying in no other place except at the house of his tutor and care-taker, 'Ibn Sina'. They were all the time to be seen together. The boy being highly intelligent, derived the best of the knowledge that his tutor could impart.

Years passed and 'Bahman Yar' grew up not only in age but also in knowledge and understanding.

under the patronage of his tutor. The learned tutor was also very proud of this most capable student.

It was one of the coldest nights of the wintry season. Midnight had passed and the snow-falling was very heavy. Both 'Ibn Sina' and 'Bahman Yar' were sleeping in one room under warm thick blanket. The light in the room was already extinguished but the student was still asking intricate questions on some deep subjects. The tutor was replying in his usual impressive manner. Fascinated by the supreme knowledge and deep philosophy of his tutor, he again made the suggestion which he had made before.

“Oh my learned tutor!” he pleaded “with all this high status of knowledge that you enjoy and being master of all the sciences, why not declare yourself a Prophet? Sir! Don't you think that you even excel some of the previous prophets in knowledge and your status today is unparalleled in the world. Should you decide to claim prophethood, no one would dare challenge you. Let me assure you that I shall be the first to offer my allegiance and would serve you with full faith.

”Since 'Bahman Yar' was still young and immature, his above proposal to his tutor was rather emotional than logic. 'Ibn Sina' smiled but did not give any reply.

That night the cold weather had become extreme and there was heavy snow-falling. Both were already fast asleep. It was past midnight and suddenly 'Ibn Sina' woke up and raised his head out of the warm blanket.

Incidentally he was very thirsty and the water-mug in the room was empty. So he decided to wake up his student to go out and bring him some water. “Oh Bahman Yar! My son Bahman Yar! Please wake up and bring me some drinking water from outside” he said repeatedly. “Why is there no water in the water-mug near your goodself. Sir?” asked Bahman Yar. “No!” replied Ibn Sina.

Bahman Yar raised his head and saw heavy snowfall outside. The thrilling sound of the strong cold wind also made him nervous to go out. Again 'Ibn Sina' grumbled:“Oh Bahman Yar! Why the delay? Bring me some water, I am too thirsty.”

Bahman Yar dared not come out of the warm blankets to face the cold weather outside the room. He was, therefore, putting forward lame excuses to his tutor.

“Oh my respected tutor! It is harmful for you to drink water now that you have just come out of the warmth of thick blankets. It is better you go to sleep again till the early morning which is not far off,” said Bahman Yar.

“My son! Bring me water, I am too thirsty. I myself am a medical expert and know better what is harmful than you do. I am unable to sleep, please bring me some water from outside” again appealed Ibn Sina.

'In response 'Bahman Yar' again put forward excuses and argued that he would catch cold and fall sick if he were to go out in that extreme cold weather. So saying he went back to sleep.

There was dead silence everywhere and no sound of anything was to be heard. Outside it was still pitch dark except the first light of Subhe Sadiq (true dawn) in the eastern horizon had commenced to appear.

Suddenly the silence broke with a melodious voice of a muezzin - caller to prayer from the top of the minaret at the nearby mosque. After reciting some verses of the holy Qur'an, the muezzin in a loud voice said "AllahoAkber" - Allah is the Greatest. "Ash-hado an la ailaha illallah" - I bear witness that there is no god except Allah.

Both the tutor and his student quietly listened to the melodious voice of the muezzin. The call to prayers then proceeded to the words "Ash hado anna Muhammadan Rasoolullah" - I bear witness that Muhammed is the Messenger of Allah. On hearing this, Ibn Sina thought of taking the opportunity of responding to the repeated proposal made to him by 'Bahman yar'. He said;“Listen to me, oh my son Bahman Yar. Now I wish to reply to your repeated suggestion.” The student sat up to hear attentively of what his learned tutor abruptly wanted to say. Ibn Sina then proceeded:

“You have been suggesting to me several times to claim prophethood, that people would put fu

faith in me and that you would be the first one to do so. Now look, you have been my close student for several years and benefitted from me a great deal, yet you did not think it prudent to obey me by coming out of your warm bed for a moment and bring me water that I badly needed to quench my thirst. Instead you chose to put forward lame excuses.”

“But think of this man who is now calling to prayers at the top of the minaret after coming out in the coldest weather and making ablution with cold water in the early hour of this morning. It is for no other purpose but inobedience to and respect for the command of Allah as conveyed by His apostle Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa(s.a.w.) some four hundred years ago.”

“What a great difference there is between me and that Prophet sent by Allah!”

Chapter 3

BAHLOOL PROVES THE THREE FACTS

Abu Hanifa was once teaching Islamic beliefs to his students. He was arguing and challenging the validity of some of the statements which had been proclaimed by Imam Jafer-e-Sadiq (a.s.). Bahlool happened to be present as well. Abu Hanifa proclaimed that he could not agree with the three understated statements as made by the Imam.

The first one was that "Allah can never be seen." According to Abu Hanifa it was impossible for anything to exist and yet be invisible!

The second things that the Imam had stated was that "Satan (devil) will be thrown in the inferno Hell which will scorch him bitterly" Abu Hanifa argued: "How was it possible for fire to hurt 'fire' the fact that Satan was created from fire itself!"

The third statement of the Imam was that "Man alone is responsible for his actions and Allah - the most powerful - has nothing to do with his actions." "How is it possible, when Allah alone guides the destiny of man without Whose will nothing can happen?" This was Abu Hanifa's third challenge.

As soon as the speaker Abu Hanifa had made these three criticisms, Bahlool got up, took a piece of brick and aiming at Hanifa, let it go and cracked Abu Hanifa's head.

Bahlool was caught and taken before the Caliph for punishment. In his defence, he pleaded that he had done nothing else except reply to the three criticisms which Abu Hanifa had made against the Imam.

The Caliph asked him to explain as to how and why he chose to reply by hitting and injuring Abu Hanifa.

Bahlool said, "This man claims that if God is there, then he must be seen. He is now complaining of pain in his head due to the brick having hurt him; if the pain is definitely there, can he show me where it is? Well! just as pain can be there, without being seen, Allah also exists without being seen."

"Secondly, he says that fire cannot burn fire. It is a fact that man is made out of clay and this brick with which I hit his head is also made out of clay, if clay can inflict pain and hurt clay, why can't fire do the same to fire?"

"The third thing he says is that man is not responsible for his own actions but Allah does all things. If this is so, then why does he want justice from you and why does he want me to be punished for hurting him? He might as well transfer the punishment to Allah - Who, according to him - is responsible for all the actions of man!"

Everyone in the court was stunned at this and Abu Hanifa was dumb founded - having nothing to say. So Bahlool was released without any punishment.

Thus, while some Muslim sects believe that Allah can be seen, perhaps on the Day of Judgement, the Shia Muslims say that Allah is the creator of everything; He was not created and as such he has no body like us that can be seen. If we can still believe in unseen things like air, electricity and human soul, why can't we believe in the unseen God?

If we are responsible for our actions and are to be punished or rewarded accordingly, then it is only fair and just that Allah should not manipulate or compel us to do things but leave us alone to act the way we see it fit, and be answerable for those actions ourselves.

Chapter 4

AHLE BAIT AT MUBAHILA

In the south of Arabia, there is a place called Najran. There lived the Christian tribe of Najran who staunchly believed that Hazrat Isa (a.s.) (Jesus) was the son of God. The Prophet invited them to accept Islam. In response to that, a delegation of their priests and elders came to Madina. They wanted to discuss religion with the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (s.a.w.). Their argument was that Jesus was born without a father, so he was the son of God. The Holy Prophet explained to them that just as Allah created Prophet Adam without a father or even a mother, in the same way He created Jesus without a father. Hence Jesus was a servant of Allah as was Prophet Adam. The Christians did not agree with this simple truth. They stuck to their belief that Jesus was the son of God. The Prophet asked them to wait. Then came the following Revelation (message from Allah):

“But whoever disputes with you in this matter after what has come to you of knowledge, then say, Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our near people and your near people, then let us be earnest in prayer, and pray for the curse of Allah on the liars.” (3:61)

It was then agreed that the Christians seek MUBAHILA with the Prophet. The meaning of MUBAHILA is that both of them invoke from Allah that he, who speaks the truth may survive and he who is untrue may perish.

On the day of Mubahila, the Prophet of Islam took with him his grandsons - Imam Hasan (a.s.) and Imam Husain (a.s.), his daughter Fatima Zehra (a.s.) and his cousin and son-in-law Hazrat Ali (a.s.). But on seeing the radiant faces of these sinless members of the household of the Prophet, the Christians got scared. They decided not to seek Mubahila any more but accepted their defeat. They agreed to pay tribute and returned home.

The Prophet, before going for Mubahila, was commanded by Allah to take with him his sons, his women and his souls. The Holy Prophet obeyed this command as under:

In place of his sons, he took with him Imam Hasan (a.s.) and Imam Husain (a.s.). In place of his women, he took Fatima Zehra (a.s.). In place of his souls, he took Hazrat Ali (a.s.). This is how he showed to the world who the true and real members of his Ahle-Bait (People of the House of Prophet) were. To love them has been obligatory (wajib) command of Allah on every Muslim. The Holy Quran says: "That is of which Allah gives the good news to His servants, (to) those who believe and do good deeds. Say:

I do not ask of you any reward for it but love for my near relatives; and whoever earns good, We will give him more of good therein; surely Allah is Forgiving, Grateful." (42:23) The Prophet and his Ahle-bait sacrificed all the worldly comforts and even their lives in order to convey the true religion of Islam to us. In return of their sacrifices, we are commanded by God to love them. The aim is that through their love, we follow their footsteps. We follow the true teachings of Islam taught by them, so that we live a good and decent life in this world and earn the pleasure of God in the life hereafter.

Chapter 5

BAT - GOD'S WONDERFUL CREATURE

Hazrat Sulaiman was one of the early Prophets of Islam. He is also popularly known as King Solomon. He was sent not only as a Prophet but also as a king with power to rule over men, jinn, animals etc. Even water, air, sun and moon were under his control.

Of the countless creatures of Almighty Allah, four once came to petition to Hazrat Sulaiman. The first was the Sun which requested him to pray that it be allowed by Allah to remain stationary instead of constantly revolving round from East to West and back. The second to petition was the Snake which requested to be provided with feet like other animals instead of having to move from place to place over its tummy. The third was the Air which complained that it was made to blow all the time from one direction to another. It wanted to be allowed to rest at one place. The fourth was Water which appealed to remain still at one place instead of constant flowing from place to place and from one country to another.

Hazrat Sulaiman was also blessed with the knowledge of animal language. He called in the bat and asked its opinion on the four petitions presented to him. The bat said "O Prophet of Allah! If the sun were to remain motionless at one place, there would be no day and night. There is a purpose behind its movement, so that its rays reach every place. And the life of everything is dependant upon water. If it were to remain still at one place, Allah's creatures would perish for lack of water nearby the place of their residence. As for the snake, it is an enemy of human beings. Despite the fact that it has no hands or legs, still other creatures are afraid of it. If it were to have them, it would indulge in killing other creatures all the time. As for the wind, without its blowing, the changes in weather and seasons would not occur and harvests would suffer."

Hazrat Sulaiman concurred with these views. But those four creatures turned out to become the enemies of the bat. The sun said that wherever I see it, I shall burn its wings and hair. The water said I shall drown it. The wind said I shall destroy it and the snake vowed to poison it wherever it was found.

The bat prayed to Allah complaining that it was a weak creature to be able to survive in face of these four enemies. What it said after all only the truth about the nature of things as created by Him. The bat was assured of full protection from Allah. There is no doubt that whosoever entrusts his problems to and relies on Him, he receives His blessings and protection.

To protect it from the sun, the bat was made to see and fly only at night and unable to see and come out during the day. It was created independent of water. It has been supplied with two glands in its chest, one full of water and the other with milk so that it could suck from its own chest whenever it felt thirsty. The faeces of the bat has been made poison for the snake. Thus the snake never attempts to go near the bat as the very strong smell of its faeces is also harmful.

This shows how Allah protects those who speak the truth and pray for His protection. Allah does not desert those who rely on Him.

In this world of ours, God Almighty has created countless varieties of animals. Scientists have divided them into different classes according to their external features and characteristics. Among these different classes of animals, one group is known as MAMMAL.

Mammals are warm-blooded animals which have hairs on their bodies. They give birth to children.

and suckle them. They have four limbs and have their teeth fixed in sockets in the jaw. An exception to the rule is the BAT, they are the only animals that can fly.

Bats are said to be found in all countries and climates except in the polar regions. The greatest number of these are found in the tropics where climate is generally warm. Those that live in cold climates migrate to warmer countries. It is said there are at least 2000 species - varieties of Bats existing in this world.

In general, they can be divided into two main groups: the fruit eaters and the insect eaters. There are others which feed on meat, fish, nectar and blood.

A bat's wings are different from those of birds. They are formed from membranes or webs of skin which are supported and spread out by the bat's very long front limbs and fingers.

Scientists have only recently found the feature of Bats and described them, but over 1300 years ago, Islam had given to the world the facts about the Creation of this animal and its existence. Hazrat Ali (a.s.), the First Imam, was giving a sermon in which he was praising Almighty God and explaining how he created everything with perfection and without specimen or a model made by Somebody else. To those who wanted to know the art and wonders of the creation designed by Him, the 1st Imam advised them to study deeply how the body of a bat has been created. The Imam said:

“He (Almighty God) granted to a bat wings of flesh (not of feathers) and whenever it so desires, it can rise and fly with their help. They appear as if they are parts of its ears, having neither feathers nor bones but you can very easily see the line of arteries and veins running in them. These two wings are neither so thin as to snap nor so thick as to be too heavy. When it flies its young one adheres and attaches itself to its mother's body, taking shelter under its expanding wings, it goes up and comes down along with mother and never parts from its parent unless it grows strong and its wings grow powerful and sturdy enough to bear the weight of its body, and unless it develops enough animal instinct to recognize its food and the factors of its safety and well-being.” (Nahjul Balaghah sermon 155)

The main feature of bats is that they sleep during the day and feed at night. The remarkable thing is their 'radar' system, which enables them to find their way about on the darkest night. This is because they have extremely sensitive ears which operate a kind of radio detection called echo-location. From the throat, they send out fast vibrations in the form of shrill sounds which strike nearby objects. The echo bounces back and the time this takes tells them exactly how close an object is. These super sonic sounds can't be heard by the human ears.

On this wonderful feature of bats, Hazrat Ali a.s. said, “Day light, the medium, with whose help most of the animals see, behold, observe and perceive things and distinguish one from the other makes a bat blind. Darkness which sends many of the animals to retirement, acts as a medium of vision to it. It has been prevented to move from place to place during day light and to sleep out its days in its lair. But it converts its nights into days. Dark night is like a bright day to it. It comes out to search for its food. Pitch darkness is for it no obstacle to convey itself from one place to another and to see things clearly. But as soon as a day dawns and the sun rises sending its light in every nook and corner it goes back to its hide out closing its eyes to the brightness of the sun, it satisfies itself with what it had gathered during the night. Glory be to God Who made the darkness of a night act for a bat as the light of a day to work and search for its food Who made the day a time for its rest and retirement” (Nahjul Balaghah sermon 155)

Chapter 6

GOD SEES YOU EVERYWHERE

A teacher had many good students in his class but had particular regard and high respect for one of them.

Some of the students one day asked the teacher the reason for this. In reply he said “I shall tell you tomorrow.”

The next day, he handed to each of those students one live chicken. He asked them to take the chickens to a place where they would not be seen by anyone and then slaughter them. After a while they returned with their chicken duly slaughtered. But his favourite student came back with his chicken alive.

The teacher asked him why he had not slaughtered it. He replied, “You had asked me to go to a place where nobody would see me. I tried hard to find a place where God Almighty could not see me. But I failed.

Everywhere I went I was sure that God could see me and I could not hide from Him. So I could not carry out your instructions.” On hearing this, the teacher turned to the other students and remarked, “The reason why I respect this student more is because of his constant awareness of the existence of God who can always see him, no matter where he is. Consequently, he does not commit any sin.”

The sixth Imam, Jaafar-e-Sadiq (A.S.), said to one of his friends, Ishaq Bin Ammar, “Fear God as if you are able to see Him because He sees you. And if you think that He is not able to see you, then you become an on-believer. And if you believe that He sees you and you commit a sin in His presence, then you consider Him as the lowest of those seeing you.”

Chapter 7

TIT FOR TAT

It is a law of nature that whatever action we take in this world, there is always a reaction. If we do good, we expect to gain a good reward. If we do bad, we should expect a bad outcome ultimately. “What you sow, so you reap” is a popular saying.

The Holy Qur'an has also guided us on this subject.

It says:

“If you do good, you will do good for your own souls, and if you do evil, it shall be for them. So when the second promise came (We raised another people) that they may bring you to grief and that they may enter the mosque as they entered it the first time, and that they might destroy whatever they had gained ascendancy over with utter destruction.” (17:7)

One of the companions of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.) was very fond of this verse of the Qur'an.

He used to recite it loudly and repeatedly wherever he went.

A Jewish woman who had heard him once wanted to prove him wrong and thus make him unpopular among his people. She thought up a plot against him.

She prepared some sweets mixed with poison and sent them to him as a present. When he received them, he went out of the city with them. On the way, he met two men who were returning home from a long journey.

They appeared tired and hungry, so he thought of doing them a good turn. He offered them the sweets. Of course, he was not aware that they were secretly mixed with poison. No sooner had the two travellers taken the sweets, they collapsed and died. When the news of their death reached Medina, the city where the Prophet resided, the man was arrested. He was brought in front of the Prophet and he related what had actually happened. The Jewish woman who had mixed poison with the sweets, was also brought to the court of the Prophet. She was stunned to see the two dead bodies of the travellers there. They in fact turned out to be her own two sons who had gone away on a journey.

She admitted her evil intention before the Prophet and all the people present. Alas, the poison she had mixed in the sweets to kill the companion of the Prophet had instead killed her own two sons.

What a splendid example of a tragic reaction to a bad action. It shows how one reaps what he sows.

“Do as you would be done by” are words of wisdom from the learned and wise men of the past. They teach us to do good to others in the same way as we like others to do good to us.

Chapter 8

CO-OPERATION - THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Co-operation is to work together for a common good. It is to undertake a job in which everyone plays his part sincerely to finish it. People in co-operation pool their resources for their common benefit. We come to hear or see co-operative societies established in many countries. Their benefit has been the dignity of labour and self dependence. The co-operative movement has been the cause of rapid economic progress in many countries.

There is a story of an old man who was on his death-bed. He called his sons and asked them to break a bundle of sticks which was bound together. Although the sons were strong and tried hard to break it, they failed. The old man then advised them to untie the bundle and to break the sticks separately. Everyone of them could do so very easily. The bundle of sticks is like co-operation and working together in unity which cannot be destroyed. Thus co-operation is strength.

The Prophet of Islam, Hazrat Mohammad (S.A.W.), was once travelling with his companions.

They stopped at a place to have something to eat and then rest. They decided to slaughter a sheep and roast it.

One of them said, "I shall do the slaughtering"

The other said "I shall remove the skin."

The third one said, "I shall do the roasting."

Each one of them volunteered to do one piece of work.

The Prophet of Islam said, "I shall collect and bring the firewood from the forest."

The companions said, "Oh Prophet! You need not take the trouble. We shall attend to everything."

The Prophet said, "I know you can do everything. But I do not like to enjoy a preferential treatment from you.

God Almighty — does not like to see a person distinguishing himself from his companions." Then the Prophet went and brought firewood from the forest.

This is one of the examples set by the Prophet of Islam on co-operation and working together for a common good.

Chapter 9

SHE HAD TRUE FAITH

Abu Baseer was once in the company of Imam Jaafer Sadiq (A.S.) when a woman came and said to the Imam, "I have come to ask a question. I am ill. Physicians in Iraq have told me to take liquor. Now I want to know what to do in such circumstances?"

The Imam asked her, "Why don't you drink what the doctors have prescribed for you?"

She replied, "As I am your follower, I shall obey what you say. If you permit me, I shall drink it; if not, I shall keep away from it; so that if I am asked by the Almighty God on the Day of Judgement why I did so, I shall reply that I followed the instructions of the Imam of the day."

Imam Jaafer Sadiq (A.S.) turned to Abu Baseer and said "O Abu Baseer. Did you listen to what the woman has to say? Are you not moved by her faith? In spite of her illness, she is refraining from taking liquor without the Imam's permission."

The Imam then turned to the woman and said, "By God, I do not permit you to drink. If you do so you shall be sorry when your soul reaches your throat (that is at the time of death)."

So saying the Imam pointed at her throat; and asked her three times if she understood what he had said.

The woman nodded her head.

One of the things which Islam has strongly forbidden is the taking of any intoxicating drink, like beer, wine.

They are harmful to the body and mind. Under their influence one loses one's senses and is apt to commit criminal acts. We read of fatal accidents and crimes committed because of drinks.

Even trading in liquor and sitting in bars where people are drinking are also forbidden in Islam so that there is no temptation in the way of people to taking them.

The holy Qur'an says,

"O you who believe! intoxicants and games of chance and (sacrificing to) stones set up and (dividing by) arrows are only an uncleanness, the Shaitan's work; shun it therefore that you may be successful.

The Shaitan only desires to cause enmity and hatred to spring in your midst by means of intoxicants and games of chance, and to keep you off from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. Will you then desist?"(5: 90-91)

The above verses from the Qur'an warn us of the effects of drinking.

The first Imam, Ali (A.S.), said, "Suppose a drop of liquor is put in a well and from its water a land is irrigated.

Grass grows on the land and a sheep grazes there. That sheep then gets mixed in a flock of other sheep who have grazed elsewhere. If all the sheep are slaughtered making it difficult to identify the meat of the sheep who had grazed on a land which was irrigated from the water of the well, then they shall not eat any of that meat."

Thus Hazrat Ali (A.S.) has emphasized the evil of Alcohol.

For the sake of our own physical, mental and spiritual welfare, we should always keep away from drinks.

Chapter

AL QURAN - THE GREAT AND HOLY BOOK

About a hundred years ago, England had a powerful Prime Minister. He was a Christian belonging to the high section of the Anglican Church. His name was Gladstone. One day in the year 1882, he was speaking in the British Parliament on how to weaken the power of Muslims in Egypt so that the British could continue to rule over them.

At one stage he raised a copy of the Holy Qur'an in his hand and said that so long as this book remained with the Muslims in that country and they respected and followed it, the British would never be able to dominate them. He added that the only solution was to try and separate the Holy Qur'an from the Muslims of Egypt.

At the end of the speech; a committee was formed to decide upon ways and means of carrying out Gladstone's recommendation. The committee resolved to send some experts to Egypt who would launch a campaign which would weaken the faith of people and make them suspicious of the truth of the Holy Qur'an. The aim was to discourage people to refer to the Holy Book and gradually make them turn against the Islamic way of life.

In the course of this political and vicious programme, a learned man by the name of Dunlop was sent to Egypt as a teacher. He prepared many books containing lessons which were nothing but propaganda in disguise. One of the lessons on history was based on showing how Egypt was lagging behind and was not making progress because of Islam and the Qur'an. It alleged that people of Egypt were much more civilized prior to the coming of Islam.

Such ill-intentioned programme first succeeded to a small extent in influencing the youths in schools.

Then the Holy men of Al-Azhar university protested to the authorities and demanded that an end be put to it.

Now let us find out what are the qualities of this book which the enemies wished to remove from the Muslims.

The Holy Book is known as 'Al Qur'an' which means 'The Reading', the reading of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) Islam who never went to any school. Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) had retired to a cave on Mount Hira not far from Mecca. One day Angel Jibrail (Gabriel) came to him and said "Read". The Holy Prophet said: "What should I recite?" Jibrail said: "Read in the name of thy Lord, who created; created man out of a mere clot of concealed blood; read; and thy Lord is most bountiful; He who taught (The use of) pen; taught man that which he did not know."

The Holy Qur'an as word of God, the Almighty, as revealed to his Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). This book gives guidance for our daily life. It appeals to our power of reasoning, and exhorts us to follow the commands of Allah. It is a living miracle of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), the last of the Prophets who came from God. It is not surprising at all that this Holy Book has remained intact for the last 1400 years. And it shall remain so till the day of judgement, for Allah has taken it on himself to protect it.

"Surely We have revealed the Reminder and We will most surely be its guardian." (15:9)

The Qur'an is divided into 114 chapters (Suras). There are in it 6226 verses (Ayats) containing

99,464 words made up of 330,110 letters.

~~Imam Jaafer Sadiq (A.S.) has said that one should at least recite 50 Ayats everyday. Let us~~
therefore, value and respect this Great Book by reading it with understanding and follow its teachings

MUST GOD BE JUST?

Kisra, A Persian King, was once asked, "How did you learn Justice?"

He replied, "Because I know for sure that every man will be judged according to his deeds."

He was then asked: "How do you know that?"

He replied: "One day when I was on my way to the forest, I saw a Gazelle. I sent my dog after it and it caught the Gazelle by the leg. But the dog did not catch the Gazelle in the usual way, for it bit and broke the Gazelle's leg.

Not long after, the dog was in front of a horse, that kicked it in the leg and the dog's leg was broken.

Soon after, the horse's leg slipped into a hole and it broke.

Therefore, I realised that every person's award depends upon his deeds. When he does a good deed he will be rewarded for it, and if he does an evil deed, he will be punished. Hence, I always do good deeds."

God does no wrong or evil. Anybody who commits wrong or injustice does so either because he does not know that it is wrong (but God knows everything) or because he needs something which cannot be obtained without wrong doing (But God has no need) or because he has been compelled by somebody else to commit that wrong (But God is all-powerful and nobody can compel Him to do anything). So it makes sense that it is impossible for God to do any injustice or wrong.

So logically we say that God is Adil, meaning that he is just. He is neither cruel nor does he do anything that lacks in wisdom. Whatever he does be it endowing life or giving sustenance or depriving us of anything, it has inherent benefit in it; Though the Benefit may not be apparent to us.

For example, when a doctor treats an illness, we know the patient benefits from the treatment though we do not know how the treatment brings about the benefit. Thus, when we see God endowing one with riches, while leaving another in poverty, or granting one person greatness while denying it to the other, or bestowing health on one while the other is stricken with disease, we have to accept that these actions are based on rationalism even though we may not be able to understand the wisdom behind them.

"This is for what your own hands have sent on before, and because Allah is not in the least unjust to the servants" Qur'an: (8: 51)

FROM THE SHADOW OF A TREE TO THE SHADOW OF ISLAM

Taif is a fertile green area around Mecca in Saudi Arabia. It has plenty of fruit gardens and a pleasant climate.

The people of the tribe of Bani Sakeef used to relax under the shadow of fruit trees in the Taif area. From the travellers of Mecca passing by, they used to hear reports about the Mission of Hazrat Muhammad (S.A.W.).

They came to learn from them how truthful, trustworthy and kind the Prophet of Islam was. They also came to know that among women Hazrat Khadija, the Prophet's wife and among the men Hazrat Ali (A.S.) — the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law were the first to declare faith and accept Islam.

They were also informed that the followers of the Prophet were still very few. That majority of the people from the tribe of Quraish did not yet accept Islam and were opposing to the spread of the religion. They had even offered Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W.) bribes of large sums of money and high post if he would stop preaching against idol worship.

One day when the people were resting under the shadow of fruit trees, they received news that Abi Talib, his uncle had come and told the Prophet “O my Nephew! the leaders of Quraish say that whatever wealth you demand they are willing to give provided you abandon the teaching of Islam.”

The Quraish tried again by sending Ataba to persuade the Prophet and offered everything that he would wish to have. In reply the Prophet recited this verse from the Holy Qur'an:

“Say: I am only a mortal like you; it is revealed to me that your god is one Allah, therefore whoever hopes to meet his Lord, he should do good deeds, and not join any one in the service of his Lord. (18:110)

Ataba was very moved to hear this and returning to the Quraish saying, “From Mohammed (S.A.W.), I have heard words which did not at all sound a poem nor witchcraft!” He advised the Quraish to leave him on his own and added “Mohammed grew up among you and has always been most trustworthy and of good character. Now that he has come out with a message of one God, it is not fair to accuse him of witchcraft or lying. Do not molest him and let us see what will happen!”

Thus the Prophet of Islam went on preaching the message of one God and persuaded people to abandon the worship of Idols. On the other hand, the people of Quraish continued to interfere and oppress him and the new followers of Islam.

They asked everyone to boycott and not to have any dealings with them. They wrote the following orders on the skin of a sheep and hung it on the door of Kaaba in Mecca.“

Do not buy or sell to Muslims.

Do not salute the Muslims nor speak to them.

Do not give or take daughter in marriage from any Muslim.

Do not have any dealings with them.

“Thus the people of Quraish went on oppressing and torturing the Prophet and his followers, the Muslims. They would throw dirt on him when he walked in the street of Mecca.

One day Prophet Mohammed (S.A.W.) secretly went out of Taif to convey the message of Islam to

the people there. But the leaders of that place laughed and jeered at the Prophet. They were always intoxicated by drinking wine made from the grapes. The Prophet was persuading them to leave this bad habit and was saying that drinking wine has no benefit, it makes man senseless, it badly affects health and more so, it draws man far away from God.

That day, the Prophet having conveyed to the people of Taif what he wished to about Islam, decided to return to Mecca. But on the way the children threw stones and laughed at him. When he managed to rid them, he took shelter and rested under the shadow of a grape tree. He raised his face toward the sky and said:

“Oh God! I complain to Thee for my inability

Oh God! I pray to Thee to lead these people to the right path

Oh God! You are the forgiver and kind”.

Incidentally Ataba and his brother Shaiba were in the same garden. On hearing this prayer of the Prophet, they felt sorry.

They called their servant Adas and gave him a plate full of sweet grapes and asked him to deliver them to the Prophet so that he may recover from fatigue.

Adas took the plate of grapes and presented it to the Prophet. Before he started eating the grapes, the Prophet said “Bismillah” (in the name of one God).

Adas was a Iraquan Arab. On hearing this, he began to wonder and asked what are these words! He had never heard them before!

Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.) asked, “Where are you from?” Adas replied, “I have come from Nainawa” (a region in Iraq presently known as Kerbala).

The Prophet asked, “Have you heard of the Prophet Yonus?” Adas said, “Yes! Yonus was a Prophet. But why have you mentioned his name to me?” The Prophet replied, “I like Yonus, also am a Prophet and have come from the One God for the guidance of mankind.”

Adas had already heard before of the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.). Now he became attracted towards him because of his kindness and good character. With tearful eyes he said; “Oh Mohammad! I put my faith in your prophethood, because no one would be willing to face such torture and trouble unless he was on the right path and had come to lead others on the path!” This is how Adas, a pagan unbelieving Arab accepted the religion of Islam whilst under the shadow of a grape fruit tree and joined the Islamic brotherhood.

Thus Islam spread gradually, not with compulsion or at the point of a sword, but through nobility of character and kindness of Prophet Mohammad (S.A.W.).

Chapter

ON THE PATH OF RELIGION

In a class at the Jaffery Primary School of Mombasa, it was time for religious instruction. The subject was:

The meaning and benefits of following a religion. This is how the lesson went.

Pupil: Please, Sir, tell us the meaning of religion.

Teacher: Religion is a collection of beliefs. It lays down the rules of character, how to deal with your family members as well as with other people. It also teaches us rules concerning money matters. They have been taught to us by the Prophets who were messengers of God, sent for the guidance of Mankind.

Pupil: May I know what benefit do we get from following a Religion?

Teacher: By following the teachings of true religion, a person becomes happy in this world as well as in the next one.

Pupil: Please, Sir, tell us what religion teaches us.

Teacher: The teachings of religion mainly consist of:

1. Beliefs: To believe in One God, who created this world, the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, and other planets and everything in them. Because of his kindness, he did not leave human beings without guidance. He sent Prophets to guide them to the right path so that they fulfill the duties he has laid down. Those who follow the teachings of the Prophets would be successful and happy in this as well as in the next world.

2. Character: Religion teaches us to be good and kind to everyone, to love everyone, to respect parents and teachers, to seek useful knowledge, to protect our rights and those of others and to live moderately.

3. Social and Economic Guidance: A perfect religion lays down rules about how to behave and deal with people when they do wrong. It also teaches us rules about money matters, how one should earn one's living, how one should take care of the poor and needy relatives, what type of business is allowed.

4. Worship: Religion teaches us that we pray to God and fast, so that by such actions we remember God and purify our Body and Mind.

We should obey God only and not follow people. God has created all of us. Therefore he knows better what is good for us. He has laid down a code of life for our benefit. Therefore, it is in our interest to follow it.

Pupil: May I know, Sir, how belief in a religion affects our lives?

Teacher: Belief in Religion not only affects a person's spirit or soul but also his body and action.

A person who believes in one God, acts differently from a person who does not believe in God. ~~A person who believes in God cannot at any time become proud, because he knows that whatever he has~~ acquired has been given to him by God and God can take it back whenever he wishes.

He does not look down upon other people as he knows that all of them have been created by God the same way as he was created.

He does not bow down before anyone but God. He knows that everything has been created by God and he provides for all our needs. He alone is worthy of being worshipped.

He also believes in life in the next world and always tries to do good and refrains from doing bad. The better his deeds, the better will be his life in the next world.

A person who believes in God does all the good work even if he is not paid for it or appreciated by others. He continues to do good to others. He sacrifices his time, money and energy in serving people for the sake of God, as this pleases God. He does not become selfish.

Thus belief is connected with character and character with actions. They are all connected to each other.

Pupil: Now Sir, can you tell us what would happen if a person did not believe in Religion?

Teacher: A person who does not believe in God and life in the next world does not know who created him, why he was created and what is the purpose of his life. He is like a traveller who is lost and moves around aimlessly.

When such a person falls into trouble, he has no where to look for help. If he wants anything, he has no one from whom he can ask to fulfill his wishes.

A person who believes in religion asks for help from God when he is in difficulties. He asks God to fulfill his wishes. He is sure that God will help him and will grant him his desires if they are good for him. But a person who does not believe in God has no one.

A non-believer acts according to his whims. He is most of the time selfish. He is not prepared to help others for he does not expect to get God's reward for his sacrifices for the trouble he takes for others.

His only aim in life is to find happiness for himself at all cost. He does not know what is the purpose of his life. He does not hesitate to tell lies, steal, hurt others and do all sorts of bad things; these actions will gain something for him. He does not know that God will punish him for his bad deeds in the next world.

A person who believes in religion is afraid of God and will not do bad things. He knows that any difficulty that comes to him in this world is meant to test his faith in God. He, therefore, faces it patiently and prays for God's help. He knows that this will please God and he will be rewarded for it by God in the next world.

The bell rang. It was time for another lesson. When the children went home, they fully realised their need for a religion. Since then, they respected their religious teachings more and more and made every effort to follow them. In so doing they became happier and successful in life.

THE ANT PRAYS FOR RAINS

Once there was a big famine in Palestine. It was during the time of the Prophet Hazrat Sulaiman (King Solomon). He came out with his people and proceeded to an open place in the desert to pray for the rains to come. Suddenly, he saw an ant standing on its two legs, raising its hands up towards the sky and saying, "Oh Allah! We are but very small among all Thy creatures. We cannot survive without Thy grace. Please bestow upon us Thy sustenance and do not punish us because of the sins of human beings. Please send down the rains so that trees can grow, farms become green and grains become available and we have our food to eat."

Hazrat Sulaiman knew the language of all Animals. He told his people, "Let us go home. The prayer of this ant is enough." It then rained heavily and all the land became green and productive.

The ant is an intelligent creature. During warm days, it collects and stores grain inside the holes. It knows that during wet and cold months, it would not be able to go out to search for food. For fear that the grain may start growing because of wetness, it splits it into two or more pieces. At times, during moonlight nights, it brings the split grains out of the stores for drying and preservation against decay. The holes under the ground are made very carefully and covered with shelter to prevent the rain water from getting inside the holes. The ant, unlike the other animals, can lift a burden twice its own weight. It is not a selfish creature. When an ant finds some store of food grains, it runs up to its group and takes its fellow ants to that place. It shows everyone of them its own find of the store. They always behave in this manner. They work and live in co-operation with each other.

This shows how the Ant works for the group and how each of them fulfils the needs and livelihood of its fellow-beings. How shame-full it is for a man, who has no regard for another man; who has no concern for his fellow human beings who could be starving because of want of food.

Once, while Hazrat Sulaiman was travelling together with hosts of men, jinn and birds, they reached a valley of Ants.

When the chief of these Ants witnessed the pomp and the glory with which Hazrat Sulaiman and his companions were approaching toward it. He warned all the ants to get into their holes lest they get trampled and crushed unknowingly by the approaching men and Jinn. Hazrat Sulaiman smiled at the warning sounded by the ants' chief, and ordered his companions to wait till the ants went inside the holes. "None of us should hurt any ant while passing over their land", he said.

It is said that Hazrat Sulaiman addressed the chief of the Ants and said: "How could my people hurt you or your fellow ants when they are floating through air! Don't you know that I am a messenger of God and would never act unfairly?" The chief of the Ants replied: "O messenger of God! My cautioning the ants was not for any hurt that they would suffer but to prevent them getting astray and forgetting the glory of God after seeing your pomp and show."

There is a deep meaning in this event. It shows that even the most humble and smallest of creatures has been endowed with the necessary wisdom to live safely and avoid being hurt as far as possible. It also shows, how even a small Ant does have the natural understanding of the true position of Allah. It imparts a lesson that one should not forget the true might and glory of Allah when one experiences great power and dignity of any creature in this world.

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