Knowing Islamic Sciences
Murtadha Mutahhari

SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY

(Kalaam)

Translated by:
Najim Al-Khafaji

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Introduction

For sometime now, we have been looking at giving the up and coming generation the attention that they deserve. Our aim is to make available to them the sort of things and literature that they identify with and like in different languages, amongst which is English. It is an undeniable fact that English has become the primary language of communication between our second generations living here in the West.

Accordingly, the Alul Bayt (a.s.) Foundation for Reviving the Heritage, London, U.K. has recognised the need for setting up a publishing house whose duty it is to translate the gems of our religious and cultural heritage to the main living languages. After discussing the idea with Hujjatul Islam as-Sayyid Jawad ash-Shahristani, the establishment of Dar Al-Hadi in London, U.K. has become a reality.

It is a known fact that many members of our younger generation aspire to become acquainted with and/or study the different disciplines taught in the conventional centres of religious learning and scholarship. And yet, it has been difficult for them to materialise this aim because of the complexity of the subject matter.

However, we have been lucky enough to come across a series of books intended to untangle these often highly complex fields and make them readily discernable by the layman. The author, Martyr Murtadha Mutahhari, who is among the luminaries of our school of thought, has been known for his original thought and vast contribution to the Islamic library.

This series has been chosen to inaugurate a project that we hope will grow to satisfy a pressing need for familiarisation with such complex material, which our younger generation have heard of but yet to understand its content and objectives.

Introducing these generations to Islamic sciences in this style, which aims to unravel the vague and make meaningful the ambiguous, is our main goal.

In the end, we pray to the Almighty to make this effort of ours beneficial to those who aspire to gain this type of knowledge, and bestow success on us to produce these booklets. Our aim and hopes are to gain happiness in this world and the hereafter. And Allah is the best friend and helper.

Fadhil Bahrululum
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Foreword

It is not strange to raise the question of how can one make simpler a complex subject such as the science of *kalaam* or (scholastic theology)? This is what we have set out to do. In this booklet we have attempted to make the subject accessible as well as seeking to be as concise as possible.

This booklet is not only introduces the science of *kalaam* to the reader but attempts to answer the questions on the subject as well. As such, questions like what is exactly the science of *kalaam*? What is it trying to achieve? What does it deal with? Why is it called by this name? And how did it come into existence? are questions that the booklet will attempt to examine.

However, the final say is that of the reader.

Fadhil Bahrul Uloom

Lesson One: Scholastic Theology

The science of scholastic, or speculative, theology (*kalaam*) is an Islamic science. It is concerned with discussing Islamic beliefs, or what should be upheld of such beliefs from an Islamic perspective. Thus, *kalaam* seeks to explain the matters relating to these beliefs, advancing the evidence in support thereof and defending the same.

Muslim scholars divide the body of Islamic teachings into three categories:

1. Beliefs: This category deals with the questions and knowledge that one has to be familiar with and subsequently believe in, such as monotheism, the Attributes of the Creator, universal and exclusive prophethood, etc. However, Islamic schools of thought differed as to what constitutes the fundamentals of religion and thereby have to be espoused as such.

2. Ethics: This category deals with the issues and teachings that discuss the "status of man", i.e. those questions relating to moral qualities and spiritual characteristics, such as fairness, piety, courage, integrity, wisdom, rectitude, truthfulness, trustworthiness, etc.

3. Laws: This category takes care of matters relating to the performance and mechanics of acts of worship, such as prayer, fast, hajj (pilgrimage), jihad, enjoining good and forbidding evil, sale and hire, marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc. This category is known by another title, namely, jurisprudence.

According to such a division, Islamic teachings have become the main thrust of Islam, to the exclusion of Islamic sciences that discuss the preliminaries, such as humanities, logic, and to a certain extent philosophy.

Also, according to this dissection, there has been a focus on the relationship between Islamic teachings and man. That is, matters relating to man's intellect have been given the name "beliefs", whereas the title "ethics" has become synonymous with questions concerning man's morals and spiritual welfare. As for the issues relating to how man goes about conducting his devotions, they have been given the name "jurisprudence".

As shall, God willing, be explained, although jurisprudence is considered one science, from a juridical perspective, yet it consists of a number of sub sciences.

However, *kalaam* (speculative or scholastic theology) is the science that is concerned with Islamic beliefs or doctrines. It used to be called "fundamentals of religion" or "unity and attributes".

The origins of kalaam

It is not possible to determine with absolute certainty when the science of scholastic theology started. Yet, the middle of the second *Hijri* (Islamic lunar calendar) century witnessed the beginning of the controversy between Muslims over issues of a *kalaam* nature. Thus, questions of freewill, predestination, and justice, were debated. Perhaps, the first official seminary was that of al-Hassan al-Basri (d. 110 H.).

Two towering figures, who lived in the middle of the second century, come to mind, especially when one talks about vehement defence of man's freewill. They are Ma'bad al-Juhni [d. 80/669] and Gheelan ad-Dimashqi

[of Damascus, d. 150/767]. On the other side of the ideological divide, there were the proponents of the doctrine of predestination. The latter were known as "*jabri'ites*", as opposed to the former, "qadri'ites".

The differences between these two schools of thought had crept into other issues relating to divinity, natural and social sciences, man and resurrection. The qadri'ites were later known by the name, "mu'tazilites" [lit. the separatists, founded by Wasil bin Ata' (130/748), the student of al-Hassan al-Basri after he had turned his back to his teacher] and the *jabri'ites* [from the Arabic root *jabr* (necessity, compulsion)], "ash'ari'ites", [i.e. named after the founder of the School, Abul Hassan Ali bin Ismail al-Ash'ari (d. 324/935)].

The orientalists and their disciples are adamant that the beginning of deductive work in the world of Islam started with that sort of debate.

Nevertheless, the truth is that deductive research in Islamic fundamentals emanated from the Holy Qur'an. The prophetic traditions and the sermons of Imam Ali (a.s.) used to provide the commentary on those Qur'anic passages. It has to be noted, though, that that scholarship varied in style and substance, pursuant to the calibre of Muslim speculative theologians (mutakalimeen).

Researching or following?

The Holy Qur'an has secured the pillars of belief according to reasoning. It has always aimed to make people reach conviction by way of intellection or rational judgement. The Holy Book does not consider worship in matters of belief sufficient. Therefore, fundamentals of religion have to be examined through logic.

Questions such as the existence of God and His unity should be resolved by way of rational judgement, so as the prophethood of Mohammad (s.a.w.). This is how the science of the fundamentals of religion emerged during the first century of the Islamic era.

The embracing of Islam by non-Arabs, the existence of different ideologies and principles, and the co-existence of Muslims with the followers of other religions, such as Jews, Christians, Magians, and Sabians, had precipitated debate between Muslims. Those developments and the interaction between all those peoples were instrumental in the appearance of groups, such as atheists, thanks to the general climate of freedom, especially at the time of the Abbasid caliphate. The latter did not mind the proliferation of such trends, provided that holding such views did not constitute any divergence from the ruling establishment's general guidelines. Philosophy, which called for freethinking and the casting of doubt and false arguments, also came to the fore. All those developments called for scrutiny in the fundamental structures of Islam, with a view of consolidating them, hence the emergence of great speculative theologians (mutakalimeen) in the second, third and fourth centuries of the Islamic era.

The early issues

Perhaps, among the early issues, which became the bone of contention between Muslims, was the question of predestination and freewill. This was

quite natural, not least because it has a bearing on man's destiny, hence, the importance attached to it by any sensible person.

There might not be a single intellectually mature society whose members do not engage in debate on these matters. Moreover, since the Holy Qur'an discussed these issues in many verses, it has become the driving force behind the dialogue on such questions between people.

Therefore, we should not go far in order to find a justification for the appearance of this issue in the world of Islam. As for the orientalists, they always seek to refute the originality of Islamic sciences and thought, in any way possible, above all, by tracing such knowledge and scholarship to domains outside the realm of Islam, especially, Christianity. That is why, they try to attribute the science of *kalaam* (speculative theology) to some other ideology, i.e. not Islamic. After all, this is what they tried to do with even purely Arabic sciences, such as grammar, metrics, rhetoric, figures of speech, and Islamic gnosis, or mysticism (*Irfan*).

The research in predestination and freewill also deals with the question of decree and destiny (*qadha and qadr*). Insofar as its relationship with the human beings is concerned, it is called predestination and freewill (*jabr and ikhtiyar*). And as far as its link with God is concerned, it is called decree and destiny. The research has been extended to cover the issue of [Divine] Justice (*adl*) for the obvious correlation between predestination and injustice, on the one hand, and freewill and justice, on the other.

Justice, however, led to the study of the "inbuilt good and repugnance" (*husn and qubh*) of the human actions; this in turn led to the study of reason (aql) and intellectual independence.

As a result of discussing all these topics, yet another subject came to the fore, viz. wisdom (*hikma*), i.e. the wise intents and purposes of the Divine. The research had gradually developed to cover other topics, such as the unity of actions (*Tawheed afa'ali*) and the unity of attributes (*Tawheed sifati*). This will be discussed later on.

These scholastic theology issues and research had branched out into a plethora of subjects that have a philosophical dimension, such as the studies in the essence and manifestations of things and the composition of the body from inseparable parts. Scholastic theologians have considered carrying out those studies as necessary, i.e. preparing the ground for the discussions of the issues dealing with the fundamentals of religion, especially creation and resurrection (*mabda' and ma'ad*).

Thus, a number of issues, which used to be the exclusive domain of philosophy, had become part and parcel of the science of scholastic theology, hence the spanning of topics between philosophy and *kalaam* (speculative theology).

Reading speculative theology books, especially those written in the seventh century of the Islamic era onward, you will discover that most *kalaam* issues were the ones discussed by philosophers, Muslims in particular.

Philosophy and *kalaam* had great impact on each other. One such influence was that *kalaam* had introduced new subjects into philosophy. For its part, philosophy had widened the horizons of *kalaam*, in that discussing

philosophical questions within a speculative theology setting had become necessary. Hopefully, we shall be able to expand on this subject by giving examples later on.

Rational and traditional debate

Despite the fact that the science of *kalaam* is a deductive and analogous one, in the premises and principles it espouses to reaching logical conclusions, it consists of two parts, i.e. rational (*aqli*) and traditional (*naqli*).

Reason comprises the questions that are the exclusive preserve of reason, or intellect. Nevertheless, if tradition is resorted to in the process, it can be considered as an extra piece of evidence on the rational judgement. Issues of debate of this sort include monotheism, prophethood, and some topics relating to resurrection, where you cannot rely exclusively on tradition, i.e. the Holy Qur'an and Prophetic tradition (*sunnah*). You have to count on reason.

Tradition is concerned with issues pertaining to the fundamentals of religion that one must believe and have faith in. However, since it is a branch of prophethood, and not above it, it is sufficient to prove the issues by way of divine revelation or authentic prophetic *hadith* (tradition), such as those questions relating to imamate; according to Shiite doctrine, imamate is among the fundamentals of religion. The same goes for the majority of the topics that are relevant to the question of resurrection.

Lesson Two: Scholastic theology, a definition

It suffices to say that scholastic theology is a science that is concerned with studying the fundamentals of Islamic faith. In other words, it aims to clearly segregate the matters that relate to the fundamentals of religion, proving their veracity with demonstrative proofs and responding to scepticism and baseless arguments levelled against them.

In books that deal with logical and philosophical issues, there is a reference to the fact that for each and every science there is a special subject and that what sets any science apart from the other and makes it different is the uniqueness of the subject it discusses.

Of course, this is true. The sciences whose topics have realistic unity fit this description. However, there can be other sciences, whose topics are numerous, yet subjective, provided that there is a common goal to be served, which is the reason for such unity and subjectivity (*I'itibar*)

Scholastic theology is of the second type, in that the unity of its issues is not intrinsic and qualitative but a subjective one. Thus, it is not essential to look for one subject for the science of *kalaam* (scholastic theology).

As for the sciences, whose subject matter can demonstrate a fundamental unity, there will not be a possibility of interlocking of their ingredients, i.e. interdependent co-existence. On the other hand, for sciences whose unities are subjective, there can be no harm if their issues intersect another science the unity of whose subject matter is central. This is the reason for the science of *kalaam* having something in common with philosophy, psychology or sociology.

Some scholars tried to come up with a subject and a definition for the science of *kalaam*, like those for philosophy. They advanced a number of theories in this regard. This is wrong. Having a unity of subject concerns the sciences that can demonstrate a natural unity of issues. Conversely, any science that lacks this intrinsic unity, in other words, it is subjective, there cannot be a single subject for it.

The name

There had been a debate concerning the name given to this science, i.e. why is it called *kalaam*? When was it given this name? Some attributed this name to the stature it gives the one who is familiar with it, in that he grows in stature the more he is involved in debate, or speech (*kalaam*) and in reaching rational conclusions. Others say that the name was derived from the introductory phrase "Debating, or speaking of, this, or that issue.." scholastic theologians (mutakalimeen) used to start their writings or deliberations with. A third party said that it was named the science of *kalaam* because it involves "debating, talking about, or discussing", the issues the traditionists, or scholars of tradition, (*ahlul hadith*) prefer to keep "quiet" about. A fourth group are of the opinion that the name can be traced back to the discussion in the context of this science about "God's speech - *kalaam*", which led to untold conflict and killings; that is why that period was branded "the age of tribulation", in that people of that time overindulged in argument and polemics about religious fundamentals and on whether God's speech was eternal or created.

Schools of scholastic theology

As there was disagreement between Muslims on juridical issues and the branches of religion, ending in the setting up of different schools of thought, such as Jafari'ite, Zaidite, Hanafite, Shafi'ite, and Hanbali'ite, there was disagreement between them over doctrinal matters. Each group had adopted special principles. The most important among *kalaam* (scholastic theology) schools of thought are Shiite, Mu'atazilite, Ash'arite, and Murji'ite.

At this juncture, a question, tinged with regret, may be posed about the disunity of Muslims over juridical and scholastic theology issues. Their differences in *kalaam* have given rise to their disunity in Islamic thought. Their differences over juridical matters have deprived them of the ability to show a united front in action.

Although posing the question and expressing regret are legitimate, yet the attention must be drawn to these two points:

1. The differences between Muslims over these issues are not so acute that they may shake the foundations of their doctrinal unity and joint programmes. The things they have in common are so many that they render the issues they disagree over insignificant.

2. Ideological and theoretical differences in a society that still demonstrate common ideological fundamentals are inevitable. So long as the differences stem from the same premises and principles and are a result of the different approaches to deduction, without compromising the main objects and aims, such differences are beneficial, in that they enhance research and scholarship. However, should these differences turn into entrenched positions, bigotry, and irrational inclinations, and the individual effort becomes obsessed with degrading others, without a real attempt to reform the approach, it would lead to disastrous results. The Shia (Shi'ite) school of thought makes it obligatory on the *mukallaf [compos mentis: The person obligated to observe the precepts of religion] to follow a living jurist (mujtahid). For their part, the jurists must exert themselves, through scholarship, to arrive at independent judgements, being vigilant as not to fall under the sway of the legal opinions of bygone generations of jurists and great personas. This ijtihad [lit. exertion: the process of arriving at judgements on points of religious law, using reason and the principles of jurisprudence "usul al-fiqh"]* and independent thinking would inevitably cause difference in opinion. However, this particular issue is responsible for giving the Shia jurisprudence the extra edge, survival, and continuity. In its general outlines, difference is not a bad thing. What is condemnable is that difference resulting from ill intentions and evil ulterior motives of those who seek to sow discord among Muslims. Questions such as exploring the history of Islamic thought and the differences that came to the fore as a result of ill intentions and prejudice, the differences of opinion that emanated from rational thinking, and whether or not we should consider all issues of *kalaam* as fundamental and juridical issues as peripheral are outside the scope of these lessons. Before starting to discuss the schools of *kalaam*, we have to allude to the fact that a group of Muslim scholars were diametrically opposed to embarking on *kalaam* or rational study in the questions of fundamentals of religion. They branded this type of scholarship

an impermissible deed and a heresy, or innovation (*bida'a*). This group is known as "*ahlul hadith*", or the proponents (scholars) of *hadith* (tradition). On top of the list of outstanding scholars of this group was Ahmed bin Hanbal [d.245/833], the founder of the Hambalite Sunni juridical school of thought. The Hanbalites are archenemies of any sort of *kalaam*, be it Mu'tazilite or Asha'rite, let alone Shiite. They are also known for their contraposition on philosophy and logic. The Hanbalite, Ibn Taymiyyah [d.728/1327], the well-known jurist passed a fatwa (edict) forbidding the involvement in scholastic theology (*kalaam*) and logic (mantiq). Jalaluddin as-Suyuti, another member of *ahlul hadith* wrote a book entitled, "*Sawn al-Mantiq wal kalaam an al-Mantiq wal kalaam*", i.e. the "preservation of logic and speech from the encroachments of the sciences of logic and scholastic theology". Malik bin Anas [d.179/795], the founder of the Malikite School of Thought, did not license any research into doctrinal issues. As we have already mentioned, the most important schools of scholastic theology are the Shiite, Mu'atazilite, Ash'arite, and Murji'ite. Some scholars considered the Kahrijite, and the Ismaelite among the schools of Islamic scholastic theology. However, we do not consider them as such. The Kahrijites have espoused a special brand of beliefs in the fundamentals of religion. Maybe, they were the first ones to do so. They have talked about some beliefs in the context of imamate, deeming those who reject it as *fasiq* (godless), whom they have branded unbeliever. Yet, (a) they did not establish an ideological school capable of deducing legal opinion; in other words, they did not set up an ideological system in the world of Islam; and (b) in our opinion, as Shia Muslims, their deviant ideological opinions have reached a proportion that they are considered outside the pale of Islam. However, this has made things palatable, in that the Khrijites have almost died out, except for a tolerant faction of them, i.e. the Abadhi'ites. The survival of the group is attributed to the broad-mindedness of its members. As for the Batinites (secretive), i.e. the Ismaelites, they have introduced so many unsavoury innovations into Islamic thought that it can be said that they left Islam in a state of topsy-turvy. For this reason, Muslims are not prepared to consider them as one of them any more. Some forty years ago, the Group for Rapprochement between Islamic Schools of Thought was established in Cairo, Egypt. The founding fathers were Twelver and Zaidite Shia, Hanafi'ites, Shafi'ites, Malikites, and Hanbalites. The Ismaelites tried very hard to be represented, but all Muslims gave them the cold shoulder. However, despite their apparent deviation from the right path, the Ismaelites, unlike the Kharijites – who did not have a distinct school of thought, have a school of thought, featuring scholastic theology and philosophy. Over the ages, famous intellectuals had emerged from their ranks, leaving behind an ideological heritage. Of late, the orientalists have shown keen interest in their opinions and books. Among the towering figures of the Ismaelites is Nassir Khisro al-Alawi, the Farsi famous poet (d. 841 H.). His known books are, Jami'ul Hukmain (the Compendium of the Two Rules), Wajhuddin (the Face of Religion), and Khawan (sic) Ikhwan (the Brothers). Abu Hatim ar-Razi (d. 332 H.), the author of A'alamun Nubbuwwah (The Beacons of Prophethood), is another great Ismaelite

figure. Another one is Abu Ya'qoub as-Sajistani (d. circa second half of the fourth *Hijri* century), the author of Kashful Mahjoub (Unveiling the Concealed); the Farsi translation of this book was printed some ten years ago. Also, among other famous personalities of the Ismaelites is Hamiduddin al-Kirmani, the student of Abu Ya'qoub as-Sajistani. He was a prolific writer on the tenets of the Ismaelites. Abu Hanifa an-Nu'man bin Tahbit, known as Judge Nu'man and widely known as well by Abu Hanifa ash-Shii, i.e. the Ismaeli Shiite, [*to differentiate him from the founder of the Sunni School of Thought, the Hanifi'ite*]. He undertook credible and good research in jurisprudence and *hadith*. His book, Da'a'imul Islam (the Pillars of Islam) is in circulation.

Lesson Three: The Mu'tazilites (1)

We embark on this study into the Mua'tazilites for a reason, which we will discuss later.

This group came into being towards the end of the first century of the Islamic era, or at the turn of the second century. Naturally, during this period, *kalaam*, or scholastic theology, had already developed into a fully-fledged science.

At the outset, we list down the Mua'tazilites' distinctive systems of belief. We will then make reference to their famous personalities, stating some outstanding dates in their calendar, and ending with the process of change their doctrines had gone through before they took their final shape.

The issues the Mu'tazilites had discussed were diverse, in that they were not only interested in purely religious beliefs, which should be upheld from their perspective. Any thing that has a bearing on the religious, they did not hesitate to embark on discussing. Thus, issues of philosophical, social, humanitarian, and environmental dimensions were discussed. However, according to them, these issues have a relationship with issues of faith and conviction. They believe that discussing the latter was not going to come true unless the former subjects were discussed.

The Mu'tazilites hold five tenets, they consider fundamental to their core belief:

1. Monotheism, i.e. in Essence and Attributes.

2. Justice, i.e. God is Just and is incapable of doing injustice.

3. Promise and threat, i.e. God has promised those who obeyed Him with reward. By the same token, He has threatened those who disobeyed Him with punishment. And since the promised reward will not be revoked, so will the threat of punishment. However, forgiveness is feasible only with man's repentance. Forgiveness will not be granted without it.

4. The middle way, i.e. the *fasiq* (godless), i.e. the person who has committed a cardinal sin, such as consuming alcohol, adultery, or lying, is neither a believer nor an unbeliever. That is, they are neither here nor there; in other words, half way between belief and unbelief.

5. Enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil; the Mu'tazilites argue that the way to know what is good and what is evil is not confined to sharia law, in that independent reasoning is capable of recognizing good and evil. Furthermore, they maintain that upholding this duty does not necessarily require the existence of an Imam, or leader, since it is the duty of all Muslims to uphold it. And yet, they also recognize that some aspects of this duty are the prerogatives of the leaders of Muslims, such as executing the Islamic penal code, preserving the integrity of Muslim territories, and other government affairs.

Mu'tazilite theologians discussed those fundamental tenets in detail, in works, such as al *Usul al-Khamsa* (the Five Fundamentals) by Judge Abdul Jabbar al-Mu'tazili, who was a contemporaneous to Sahib bin Abbad and as-Sayyid al-Murtadha Allamul Huda.

As is evident, monotheism and justice are the only tenets that can be considered as those of belief/faith. As for the remaining three fundamentals, they are distinctly Mu'atazilite. Even "Justice", which is a religious

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necessity, as is evident in the Qur'an, being one of the five fundamentals of religion, has been considered as one of their five tenets, because they deem it among the features of their school of thought. Otherwise, it is not different from the Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence that are among the necessities of religion and its beliefs.

According to the Shia School of Thought, Justice is one of the five fundamentals of religion. At this point, one may pose a question as to the uniqueness of this fundamental that made it one of the five fundamentals. That is, as God is Just, He is Omniscient, Living, Hearing, Seeing, and Omnipotent. Man has to believe in all those Attributes. So, why was Justice singled out with distinction above the rest?

The answer to this question is that Justice does not have any merit over and above any other Attributes. As for Shia theologians, they have made it one of the five fundamentals of the faith, whereas the Ash'arites, who constitute the majority of Sunnis, denied it, unlike the other Attributes, such as Omniscience, Life, and Will.

Accordingly, believing in Justice is one of the characteristics of Shia beliefs, as is the case with the Mu'tazilites.

Therefore, the five tenets are the main features of the Mu'tazilite School of Thought, despite the fact that not all their beliefs are reflected in those five tenets, for they put forward and discussed many subjects relating to divinity, natural sciences, sociology, and the humanities.

Monotheism

Monoteism is of different orders and categories. These include Unity of the Essence (Tawheed thati), Unity of the Attributes (*Tawheed sifati*), Unity of the Actions (*Tawheed afa'ali*), Unity of worship (*Tawheed ibadi*).

Unity of the Essence means that the Essence of God is one, none is like Him and no similitude can apply to Him. Everything else is created by Him and thus lower than Him in status and perfection; rather, it cannot be compared to Him. The Qur'anic verses, "***None is like Him***" and "***And there is none like unto Him***" testify to this.

Unity of the Attributes means that God's Attributes, such as knowledge, power, life, will, perception, hearing, and vision are not distinct from His nature. In other words, any of these Attributes could qualify for His Essence.

Unity of the Actions means that all actions, including those of man, are commissioned with the will of God.

Unity of worship means that there is no one besides God who is worthy of worship. Worshipping others amounts to polytheism (*shirk*) and thus causes estrangement from the domain of Islamic monotheism.

Exclusively worshipping the One and Only God is different from other categories, in that the other three relate to God, whereas Unity of worship relates to man.

In other words, upholding (a) the integrity of His Essence, rendering it devoid of any peer or similitude, (b) the unity of His Attributes, and (c) the Unity of the Actions, are considered His exclusive preserve. As for the unity of worship, it means that one should worship the One and Only God. And yet, unity of worship can still be considered of His own affairs, in that it

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involves calling no associates with Him and that He is worthy of worship, i.e. being the True and Only God that should be worshiped; the phrase, "***There is no god but God***" consists of all classes of monotheism. Naturally, it suggests unity of worship.

Unity of the Essence and Unity of worship are the two ancient parts of fundamentals of belief in Islam. For any Muslim to experience any mix-up in these two parts, he would not be deemed Muslim. That is why Muslims are unanimous in upholding these two fundamentals.

However, the Wahhabi sect, founded by Mohammad bin Abdul Wahhab, a follower of Ibn Taymiyyah al-Hanbali ash-Shami maintains that some of Muslims' beliefs, such as intercession, and some of their devotional works, such as pleading with the prophets and the good Muslims go against the grain of worship. And yet, the rest of Muslims do not share the Wahhabis their views.

Therefore, the disagreement of the Wahhabis with the rest of Muslims does not revolve around the issue of whether the true Unity of worship is exclusively God's or others', such as the prophets. This goes without saying. Rather, the argument concentrates on whether or not these intercessions and invocations are types of worship. Muslim scholars refuted the Wahhabi argument with detailed counterargument and plenty of evidence.

As regards Unity of the Attributes, there has been a rift between the Mu'tazilite and Ash'arites, in that the latter denied it, whereas the former upheld it. Another disagreement erupted between the two schools regarding Unity of the Actions, but this time the other way round; the Ash'arites upheld it, whereas the Mu'tazilites rejected it.

When the Mu'tazilites call themselves Ahlut Tawhid (the People of Monotheism), and deem monotheism one of their five tenets, they mean Unity of the Attributes, and not that of the Essence or of Worship – because both of them are not subject of disagreement. The exclusion also goes for Unity of the Actions, because they (a) deny it and (b) deal with their belief in it under the tenet of Justice, which is the second in the order of the five fundamentals they advocate.

Both the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites are diametrically opposed to one another regarding the categories of Unity of the Attributes and Unity of the Actions. The proponents of each school discussed their evidence in support of their respective arguments. In a separate chapter, we shall discuss the Shia belief regarding the two categories.

Lesson Four: The Mu'tazilites (2)

The origin of Justice

In the previous chapter, we mentioned, in general terms, the five tenets of the Mu'tazilites. We have, though, discussed in some detail their belief in monotheism. In this chapter, we will be discussing the second of their tenets, i.e. Justice.

It is manifestly clear that there is not a single Islamic sect that considers Justice among the Divine Attributes. No one has said that God is not just. However, the Mu'tazilites differed with their arch opponents, i.e. the Ash'arites, in interpretation. The Asha'rites advanced their argument in such a way that the Mu'tazilites regard as equivalent to rejecting it. For their part, the Ash'arites do not accept the charge that they are rejecters of Justice.

The Mu'tazilites' belief in Justice is that they maintain that some actions in themselves are just while others are in themselves unjust, such as rewarding the obedient and punishing the sinner, which are thought to be just. So, when we say, "God is Just", it is because He rewards the dutiful and punishes the offender; it is impossible that He goes contrary to that, and yet, if He does the opposite, it would count as injustice, in which case it is impossible that it could emanate from Him. By the same token, coercing man to commit vile deeds or dispossessing his willpower is regarded as unfair and unjust, which cannot emanate from God, as it is abhorrent, is not permissible, and goes contrary to the Divine affairs.

However, the Ash'arites maintain that there is no such action as intrinsically just or unjust. And yet, what God does is just. Supposing that He rewarded the sinner and punished the obedient, this is the very justice. Similarly, if He took away their willpower and made them commit that which is vile, then punished them for it, this cannot be regarded as miscarriage of justice.

Thus, the Mu'tazilites went against the Unity of Actions, because of their reading of Justice in this manner. Central to the Unity of Actions is that man should not commission the action by his own hands. In other words, God is the One who creates it, and because it is obvious that God will punish the offender and reward the compliant, punishing the sinner, who did not sin out of his free will, would be deemed unfair. This is how the Mu'tazilites concluded that Unity of Actions goes contrary to the grain of Justice.

Accordingly, the Mu'tazilites maintain that man has freewill and choice. They, therefore, defended this doctrine passionately, unlike the Ash'arites, who denied man's freewill.

The Mu'tzalites followed the tenet of Justice - which requires that some actions are inherently just and others are inherently unjust, and that it is entirely for reason to arbitrate which is which - by another wide spanning tenet, i.e. that of inherent good and repugnance of actions. Qualities like truthfulness, trustworthiness, chastity, and piety are in themselves good, as opposed to qualities such as lying, treachery, and vile deeds are abominations by nature. Thus, actions, even before God passes judgement on them, one way or the other, are capable of demonstrating their innate good or bad aspects.

This has guided the Mu'tazilites to another tenet about man's intellect, in that it is independent and capable of distinguishing what is good and what is repugnant of things. That is, irrespective of what the sharia law resolves, man can tell good from bad. However, the Ash'arites are disinclined to accept this argument.

Nevertheless, this question has led to a host of issues, some relate to the Divine and others to man. The question of God's works is one of these issues. That is, is there any purpose behind God's creation? The Mu'tazilites said: If there were no aim behind God's creation, this would amount to committing something that is repugnant, in which case it is rationally inadmissible. How about asking man to do what is not in his power? That is, can God ask man to do that which he cannot do? The Mu'tazilites say that this is both repugnant and out of the question. Is man capable of upholding unbelief? The Mu'tazilites answer in the affirmative, in that if the believer is not capable of becoming one and the unbeliever is not able to becoming one, the institution of "reward and punishment" would be rendered nonsensical. The Ash'arites take the opposite position.

Monotheism

Promise means the hope for reward and threat is the risk of getting punished if you fell foul of the Law. The Mu'tazilites argue that since God took it upon Himself to reward the Law-abiding among His creation, as He has declared in the Holy Qur'an, "***Our Lord! Thou are He that will gather mankind together against a Day about which there is no doubt; for Allah never fails in His promise." (3/9)***. And since there is unanimity between Muslims on this, He will not break His promise insofar as punishment is concerned. Therefore, God will fulfil all the threats with punishment issued to the godless and the debauchee, unless they repent in their lifetime. Thus, repentance without forgiveness is not possible.

According to the Mu'tazilites, this would entail withholding the threat, which can be equated with breaking the promise of reward, i.e. if they were true, they would necessarily be both repugnant and inconceivable. This belief of the Mu'tazilites stemmed from the question of rational good and repugnance, which is linked to the issue of forgiveness.

The middle way

The tenet of the Mu'tazilites of the middle way came as a reaction to two beliefs, which were dominant in the world of Islam then, i.e. unbelief/belief of the *fasiq* (godless). The Kharijites were the first ones to hold that committing a cardinal sin is akin to unbelief (kufr).

As is known, the Kharijites were catapulted on the Islamic ideological scene after the incident of "arbitration" (*tahkeem*) in Siffeen war [*between the then Caliph, Imam Ali (a.s.) and Mu'awiyah, the then governor of Shaam (Syria)*] in the first half of the first century of the Islamic era, i.e. circa 37 H.

It has been reported in Nahjul Balagha (The path of eloquence) [*a collection of Imam Ali's sermons, letters, axioms, etc.*] that the Imam (a.s.) engaged them in debate and refuted their claim with conclusive evidence. After the rule of Imam Ali (a.s.), the Kharijites took a hostile position vis-à-

vis all the rulers that came after him. They took it upon themselves to uphold the duty of "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil" to the letter; they were as well the proponents of declaring people godless and unbelievers (at-tafseeq wat-takfeer). And since the majority of the caliphs were committing cardinal sins, the Kharijites branded them unbelievers. That is why they were always on the opposite side of the policies of the ruling establishment.

In opposition to the Kharijites there appeared another sect known by the *Murji'ites* (Procrastinators), or should we say the ruling establishment established it. They teach that the judgement of every true believer, who has been guilty of a grievous sin, will be deferred [yurj'a, hence the name murji'a], or left in a state of suspension, till resurrection. They also hold that disobedience with faith does not do harm, and that, on the other hand, obedience with infidelity would not benefit the person.

The ruling establishment benefited from the opinions of the Murji'ites, in that people were given licence to overlook the godlessness and profligacy of the rulers. It did not stop there; the wrongdoers among the rulers were even considered for future places in paradise. The Murji'ites maintain, "*The imam's (leader's) position should not be encroached upon, even though he be a sinner. He should be obeyed and prayer behind him [in congregation] is technically deemed a proper one*".

The Mu'tazilites teach that whoever is guilty of grievous, or cardinal, sin is neither a believer nor an unbeliever; he is in the middle ground between faith and unbelief. That is why they gave it the name, "middle way, or position".

It is reported that the first one to espouse this view was Wasil bin Ata' [d. 130/748], student of al-Hassan al-Basri. It is said that one day he was attending one of his teacher's lectures on the difference of opinion [on the question of the *fasiq* (godless)] between the Kharijites and the Murji'ites. Before his teacher gave an opinion, he intervened, saying: I believe those guilty of cardinal sins were *fasiq* (godless) and not unbelievers. He then left the place; it is also said that his teacher expelled him. Having severed his relations with his teacher, he set up a seminary of his own and started imparting his views. He was joined by his brother-in-law and student, Amr bin Ubaid. This had led al-Hassan al-Basri to remark, "I'itazalana Wasil, i.e. he left our company". However, the wider public would say, "They [i.e. Wasil and Amr] disagreed with the unanimous word, or view, of the umma (Muslim community)".

Enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong

This duty [in Arabic: *al amr bil ma'rouf wan nahi anil munkar*] is considered among the essentials of Islam. Muslims are unanimous in upholding this tradition, although they may differ as to its boundaries and stipulations. The Kharijites, for instance, say that there are no strings attached to upholding it in all circumstances.

However, some ideologues say that it should be implemented, provided there be a good result, and also with the proviso that carrying it out would not attract unsavoury reaction. And yet, the Kharijites chose to differ. While others suppose that "enjoining good, or right, and forbidding evil, or wrong"

relates to one's conscience and tongue, the Kharijites have made it compulsory that it be upheld, so much so that, in certain circumstances, they take to the sword to defend it.

Among those who teach that in upholding this duty one should not go beyond verbal counselling was Ahmad bin Hanbal [d.245/855]. At some stage during the Umayyad dynastic rule, this view was taken on board, so much so that campaigns to root out objectionable actions (mukaraat) were ruled impermissible.

The Mu'tazilites accepted the parameters of this duty, without confining it to the verbal. They, however, believe that if objectionable behaviour became widespread, or governments turned out to be repressive and unjust, it becomes incumbent on Muslims to uphold the duty.

This view of the Mu'tazilites goes contrary to that of *Ahlul Hadith* (the People of the tradition) and the Sunnis, whereas it concurs with that of the Kharijite, irrespective of the other differences between these schools of thought.

Lesson Five: The Mu'tazilites (3)

What has been discussed in the previous two lessons relate to the core beliefs of the Mutazilite School of Thought. However, and as we have already mentioned, they advanced many views and opinions and defended them fervently. Some of those views relate to different disciplines, such as divinity, physics (or natural sciences), sociology, and man. Insofar as subjects of divinity, or metaphysics, are concerned, there are those, which involve the public aspects, and those that deal with the intimate aspects. It goes without saying that, in common with other speculative theologians, the Mu'tazilites have aimed to deal with the latter, which revolve around the core of religious beliefs. As regards the discussion on public affairs, it is deemed as a prelude to the wider issues of discussing metaphysics. The same applies to natural sciences. That is, should theologians embark on any question in the domain of physics, they do so as a lead up to proving a religious belief or solving a problem relating to it. We give below a summary of those views, starting with metaphysics.

The Divine

Unity of the Attributes.

Justice.

The Word, or speech, of God; is it created, i.e. is the Word a characteristic of the Action, and not of the Essence?

God's actions have aims, i.e. each and every action that emanates from God has a purpose and serves an interest.

Forgiveness without repentance is not possible. This is one of the fundamentals, i.e. promise and threat.

Asking man to do more than that in his power is inconceivable.

Man's actions are not created by God in any form. God's will has no say in man's own actions.

The universe has been brought into existence (haadith). This view is diametrically opposed to what philosophers hold.

Physically seeing God, whether in this world or the hereafter, is impossible.

Natural science

The body is composed of indivisible atoms.

Smell is caused by atoms, travelling in the atmosphere.

Flavour is nothing but particles that influence the taste of man.

Light consists of particles travelling in the atmosphere.

Interference of bodies is not inconceivable. This view is espoused by some Mu'tazilites.

Impulsive motion is not inconceivable. This view too is held by some Mu'taziltes.

Man

Man has freewill and choice and is not coerced. This idea relates to the idea of creation of actions and the issue of Divine Justice.

Power, i.e. man has the power to decide, before embarking on any activity, to go ahead with it or abandon it.

The believer is capable of turning into an unbeliever and vice versa.

The godless is neither a believer nor an unbeliever.

Reason, or intellect, is capable of distinguishing certain matters independent of any prior guidance from the sharia Law.

When tradition goes contrary to reason, the latter should take precedence over tradition.

The Holy Qur'an can be interpreted by way of intellection.

Social and political issues

It is compulsory to uphold the duty of enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil, even if it requires taking to fighting with the sword.

The succession to power of the Guided Caliphs in the order it took place is sound.

Ali was more superior to those who preceded him to power. This view, however, is espoused by some Mu'tazilites. The majority of them, except Wasil bin Ata', were of the opinion that Abu Bakr was more superior. However, later generations maintain that Ali was more superior.

It is permissible to criticise the Companions [of the Prophet (s.a.w.)], study and analyse their works.

Undertaking a comparative study of the political programmes of both [the Guided Caliphs] Omar and Ali.

The above list is by no means exhaustive. In some of those issues, the Mu'tazilite views agree with those of the Ash'arites, the philosophers, the Shiites, the Kharijites and the Murj'ites.

It is to be noted, though, that the Mu'tazilites had never fallen under the influence of Greek thought, so much so that they had never espoused any of its philosophical heritage that was in vogue at the pinnacle of the Mu'tazilite ideological acumen. They even went further in writing books, refuting the claims of philosophers. The struggle between speculative theologians (mutakalimeen) and philosophers benefited both the camps, in that the gulf between the two rivals was made very much narrower, in spite of the fact that there remained some issues, on which the two sides chose to differ.

The process of change and history

Naturally, these issues did not come to the fore at one go and were not advanced by a single person or a particular group. They were propagated by several vanguards and espoused and developed steadily by others through the passage of time.

Among those contentious issues was the question of compulsion and empowerment, or delegation, (*jabr* and *tafweedh*), which was the oldest. The Mu'tazilites adopted the principle of delegation. The Holy Qur'an discussed this question in many passages; this might have given rise to mind provoking exercises.

On the one hand, the Holy Qur'an states unequivocally that man has freewill and choice in whatever actions he takes and in his general conduct, i.e. he is not coerced to do anything he is not willing to do.

And yet, there are many Qur'anic passages that state that everything is subjected to the Will of God.

This is how the misunderstanding has happened, as those two sets of Qur'anic verses look seemingly contradictory. Therefore, some took to interpreting the first set to conclude that man has freewill over his actions. Others chose to side with the second set of verses, i.e. those concerning God's will and decree and destiny (*qadha and qadar*), deducing that everything is in the hands of the Divine.

However, there is a third group, who maintain that there is no contradiction between the two sets of verses.

This subject had been extensively discussed in Imam Ali's words and sermons. However, debating the subject was synonymous with the emergence of Islam as a force to be reckoned with. On the other hand, Muslims taking sides on, and splitting into factions over, this issue came into being during the second half of the first century of the Islamic era.

It is said that the idea of man's freewill was first put forward by Ghelan ad-Dimashqi and Ma'bad aj-Juhni [during the Umayyad rule]. The Umayyad wanted to disseminate the ideology of compulsion (*jabr*) among the wider general public for their political ends. Under the slogan, "We believe in divine decree (qadha'), whether good or bad", they used to justify their unjust and imposed rule. For this reason they persecuted the proponents of the doctrine of man's freewill and freedom. Similarly, they executed both Ghelan and Ma'bad. The followers of this school were called the Qadri'ites [i.e. the believers in man's freewill and choice].

As for the issue of *fisq* (godlessness), it was debated even before the question of compulsion and freewill. Its first exponents were the Kharijites, during the rule of Imam Ali (a.s.). However, they did not debate it in a scientific and structured way, as was the case in the discipline of *kalaam* (scholastic theology). This, though, was taken up by the Mu'tazilites, who developed it, using *kalaam* techniques. The result was the espousal of "the middle way, or position", [i.e. the godless is neither a believer nor an unbeliever; he is half way between the two].

Discussing the question of decree and destiny had led to a host of other issues. Divine Justice, rational good and repugnance, justifying Divine Actions by way of intents and purposes, and the inconceivability of requiring man to do what is beyond his power and reach, to name but a few.

In the second half of the second century of the Islamic era (*Hijri*), a man called al-Jahm bin Safwan [d.127/745] circulated new ideas concerning the Attributes of the Divine. The historians of sects and factions (milel and nihel) allege that Unity of the Attributes, i.e. God's Attributes are His very Essence, which the Mu'tazilites deem the bedrock of Monotheism, as well as the question of the dissimilarity between God and His creation, i.e. (tanzih) [the principle of elimination of "form and qualities of man" from the conception of the Divine], was first advanced by al- Jahm bin Safwan; his followers were later known by the Jahmi'ites. In the doctrine of empowerment (*tafweedh*), The Mu'tazilites followed in the footsteps of the Qadri'ites. As regards monotheism and tanzih they chose to follow the Jahmi'ites. As for bin Safwan himself, he was a *Jabri'ite*.

Thus, and as has been reported, the Mu'tazilites, in two of their fundamental beliefs – monotheism and justice, followed two other groups. That is, in monotheism, they adopted what the Jahmi'ites advocate, and in justice, they emulated the Qadri'ites. It can, therefore, be said that the Mu'tazila school of thought represents the development of the views of the two groups into a distinct shape.

The founder of this school of theology, i.e. who turned it into a distinct sect, was Wasil bin Ata' al-Ghazzal [d. 130/748], who was a disciple of Al-

Hassan al-Basri. He deserted his teacher after he gave an opinion on the matter of the godless (*fasiq*) before waiting for his teacher to reply and left to set up his own seminary. That is why his disciples and the followers of his school are called the deserters, or separatists, i.e. Mu'tazilites. However, others are of the opinion that the name was first given to a group of people who chose to take a neutral position vis-à-vis the wars of al Jamal and Siffen, [which were fought during the rule of Imam Ali], such as Sa'ad bin Abi Waqqas, Zaid bin Thabit, and Abdulla bin Omar. At a later date, when the question of faith or unbelief of the *fasiq* (godless) was raised by the Kharijites, a question which divided Muslims into two camps, a third group took a third way, preferring to stay neutral. In other words the approach personalities such as bin Waqqas adopted in a political matter. This theological group espoused in an ideological issue, hence the name, Mu'tazilite (non-aligned).

The studies of Wasil bin Ata' were confined to the issues of God's Attributes, *tafweedh* (man's freewill), the middle way [of the godless], promise and threat, and some other opinions on the differences of the Prophet's Companions (Sahaaba).

After his departure, Amr bin Ubaid, his brother-in-law and leading disciple, developed his opinions. Among other prominent teachers of this school were Abul Huthail al-Allaf (d. 235H.) and Ibrahim an-Nidham (d. 231H.). At the hands of the last two, the science of *kalaam* (speculative theology) took a philosophical tone. Abul Huthail studied the books of the philosophers and wrote critical essays of them. An-Nidham came up with new and numerous theories in physics, among which was the "atoms of bodies".

Among other luminaries of the Mu'tazilites was Al-Jahidh, the famous man of letters, writer, and author of the book, "Al-Bayan wat Tabyeen" (The Declaration and Elucidation), who lived in the third century of the Islamic era (i.e. *Hijri*).

The Mu'tazilites were not on good terms with the rulers of the Umayyad dynasty. In the early days of the Abbasid dynasty, they took a neutral position. However, al-Ma'moun [d. 256/870], the famous Abbasid Caliph took notice of their dogma and granted them protection; this had continued during the rule of both al-Mu'tasim and al-Wathiq, who succeeded him in the office of Caliphate. Those three caliphs were known to be of a Mu'tazilite persuasion.

In those days, *kalaam* issues were hotly debated, so much so that debate travelled far and wide in the Islamic world. The question of the Word, or Speech, of God, i.e. is it of the domain of His Actions or His Essence? Is it created or eternal, such as Omnipotence, Life, and Omniscience? And is the Qur'an, which is the Word of God, created and caused or not created and eternal?

The Mu'tazilites are of the opinion that the Word of God is created and that the Qur'an is created and caused; they went even further in declaring those who believe in the eternity of the Qur'an as unbelievers. Others took the opposite view. Al-Ma'moun issued an order, punishing any person who

maintained that the Qur'an is eternal. As a result many people were imprisoned and tortured.

The Abbasid Caliphs al-Mu'tasim and al-Wathinq continued the policy of their predecessor al-Ma'moun, in cracking down on dissent. Ahmad bin Hanbal [d.245/833], the founder of the Hanbalite School of Thought was the most famous of their prisoners. The Caliph al-Mutawakkil turned his back to the Mu'tazilites and persecuted them. During those testing times, a lot of blood was spilled and properties ransacked. Muslims dub that period as "tribulation".

That onslaught by al-Mutawakkil almost decimated the Mu'tazilites. The arena was left for *Ahlus Sunnah* (The Sunnis) and *Ahlul Hadith* (the People of the Tradition).

Nevertheless, even during the periods of their weakness, they managed to produce outstanding ideologists, such as Abul Qassim al-Balkhi, also known as al-Ka'bi (d. 217 H.), Abu Ali al-Jibba'i (d. 303 H.), his son, Abu Hashim al-Jibba'i, Judge Abdul Jabbar al-Mu'tazili (d. 415 H.), Abul Hassan al-Khayyat, who lived at the lifetime of as-Sahib bin Abbad, az-Zamakhshari (d. 583 H.) and Abu Ja'far al-Iskafi.

Lesson Six: The Ash'arites

As we have already explained in the previous lessons that the ideas that led to the emergence of the Mutazilite School of Thought can be traced back to the second half of the first century of the Islamic era.

In an attempt to understand the fundamentals of religion and propagating them, they advocated an approach that was a mixture of logic and deduction. It goes without saying that the first parameter in this approach was giving precedence to the independent judgement of reason over any other thing. It is obvious too that the wider general public are not concerned with reasoning and examination, considering "practicing religion" synonymous to "worship", and the manifest, or exoteric, meaning of Qur'anic verses and *hadiths* (Prophetic traditions), especially the latter, as a forgone conclusion. They even believe that any reasoning or exerting effort in this regard is a kind of rebellion against religiousness. This is particularly so, when the ruling establishment encourages this type of thinking; more so, if some of the clergy are proponents of such strand of ideas, and worse still if some are pseudo-clerics. Examples of these abound. The intolerance shown, and harsh smear campaigns waged, by the *Ikhbaris [a Shia sect that depends solely on reported tradition (Akhbar) in formulating its juridical rulings*] against the fundamentalists and the *mujtahids [jurists, who depend on reason, in addition to other tools of jurisprudence, such as the Qur'an, and Sunna "Prophetic tradition", in arriving at religious judgements*] is one such example. Another is the attack by some jurists and speculative theologians on the philosophers in the Islamic world.

The Mu'tazilites had made great leaps in understanding Islam, propagating and defending it against the *Dahriyeen [proponents of the doctrine of the eternity of the world, a materialistic, atheistic trend in medieval Islam*], Jews, Christians, Magians, Sabians, and others. They were responsible for educating scores of propagators and sending them far and wide to promote Islam. They, nevertheless, were threatened from within the camp of Islam at the hands of Dhahirites, i.e. *Ahlul Hadith*, or *Ahlus Sunna*. They were fatally stabbed in the back, so much so that they waned and eventually died out.

In the beginning, i.e. until late in the third and early fourth centuries of the Islamic era, there were no theology schools that were opposed to their school, as was the case much later. All differing views were reactions to the views that were advanced by the Mu'tazilites that boiled down to *hadith* and *sunnah*. However, originally, the chief exponents of the school of *Ahlul Hadith*, such as Malik bin Anas [d.179/795] and Ahmad bin Hanbal [d. 245/833] declared the study and inference in matters of belief taboo. Thus, the Sunnis not only had no school for scholastic theology (*kalaam*) to counter the Mu'tazilite one, but they denied *kalaam* and made dabbling in it unlawful (haraam).

However, at the close of the third and the turn of the fourth centuries, a new development took place on the ideological landscape. Abul Hassan al-Ash'ari [d. 324/935] arrived at the scene. He was a towering figure endowed with genius. He studied for years at the hands of Judge Abdul Jabbar al-Mu'tazili. He defected to the Sunni camp. He drew on his experience and

Mu'atazilite roots and managed to set up a distinct Sunni School of Thought, championing deduction in arriving at the fundamental beliefs of the Sunnis.

Contrary to the leaders of *Ahlul Hadith*, such as Ibn Hanbal, al-Ash'ari sanctioned the use of critical examination, deduction, and logic in the fundamentals of religion. He substantiated his research with evidence from the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah* (Prophetic tradition). He wrote a book in this regard entitled, "A treatise in approving of the embarkation on *kalaam* (scholastic theology)". With the advent of the Asha'rite school, *Ahlul Hadith* (the People of the tradition) were split into two groups, the Asharites, who endorsed the involvement in *kalaam*, and the Hanbalites who made the involvement in this type of theology unlawful. It is to be noted, however, that Ibn Hanbal wrote a book, justifying the barring of experimenting in logic and scholastic theology.

It did not come at a worse time for the Mu'tazilites, i.e. when they had already been weakened by the blows they had suffered. Ordinary people started deserting them in droves, especially during the events of "tribulation", that is, when they attempted to force their way of thinking on the people under duress, making use of rulers who were sympathetic to and supportive of their brand of doctrine. Among the most vexing issues was the question of "the creation of the Qur'an". It is well documented that the events, which were given the name, "tribulation", led to many deaths; and people were persecuted and made prisoners of conscience. The people blamed the Mu'tazilites for those events and thus became averse to their doctrines because of what they saw of their responsibility for the mayhem.

The people's welcoming the arrival of the new school of thought, the Asha'rite, was due to these two reasons. After the departure of Abul Hassan al-Asha'ri, there appeared new figures, who contributed to cementing his ideas and developing them. Among them were Abu Bakr al-Baqillani (d. 403 H.), who was a contemporaneous of ash-Sheikh al-Mufid, Abu Ishaq al-Isfarayeeni, Imam al-Juwaini, the teacher of al-Ghazzali, Imam al-Ghazzali (d. 505 H, 1111 CE) himself, the author of the book, "*Ihya' Uloomuddin* – Revival of the sciences of religion", and [physician, philosopher, chemist and freethinker], Imam Fakhruddin ar-Razi [c.250/864 – 313/925 or 320/932].

The Ash'arite School had undergone gradual change, especially at the hands of al-Ghazzali, who watered down its *kalaam* image, giving it a gnostic, i.e. mystic or sufi, colour. During the time of al-Fakhr ar-Razi, it bordered on the philosophical. However, when the time of al-Khawaja Nasiruddin at-Tusi [the theologian, philosopher, scientist, and vizier 597/1201 – 672/1274] came, and wrote his book, "Tajridul I'tiqad – Uncovering of Belief", he took the science of *kalaam* (speculative theology) to an almost entirely philosophical domain. The book of this Shiite philosopher and theologian set the agenda for all scholastic theologians, who succeeded him, be they Ash'arite or Mutazilite.

After "*Tajridul I'tiqad*", at-Tusi wrote "*al-Mawaqif* – The Positions" and "*al-Maqasid* – The Intents", and the annotations that went with them. In style and approach, the last two were not different from "*Tajridul I'tiqad*".

In fact, with the passage of time, the Ash'arites had become far removed from the teachings of the founder of their school, becoming closer to the Mu'tazilite ideology and philosophy.

We give below a broad list of the tenets of al-Ash'ari, who defended the fundamental beliefs of the Sunnis, or more appropriately made these beliefs clearly defined, in some measure:

The disunity of the Attributes [of God] with His Essence.

The universality of the Divine will, decree and destiny across the board of all occurrences, i.e. the opposite position taken by the Mu'tazilites and in conformity with the view of the philosophers.

Both evil and good originate from God.

Man has no freewill.

What is judged as good or repugnant is the exclusive preserve of the sharia Law, i.e. these characteristics are not inherent.

It is not incumbent on God to show grace and choose what is in the best interest of man. This goes contrary to the Mu'tazilite standpoint.

Man's power to commission any action is activated while he is carrying it out not before embarking on it.

There is not such a thing as complete "tanzih", i.e. the principle of elimination of "form and qualities of man" from the conception of the Divine.

Man does not create his action; rather, he earns it.

God can be physically seen in the hereafter.

The godless is a believer.

There is no problem in the Divine granting forgiveness, even without man repenting. Likewise, a believer can be punished.

There is no problem in intercession.

The universe is created, i.e. in time.

God's Word is eternal, i.e. self-speech rather than the spoken word.

God's actions do not necessarily follow a purpose or an aim.

There is no objection to requiring man to do what is not in his power.

Abul Hassan al-Ash'ari was a prolific writer, so much so that it is said that he wrote more than two hundred works. Some one hundred titles of these are mentioned in the bibliographies. It is evident, though, that most of these books had been lost. However, the most famous of his books could be, "*Maqaaltul Islamiyyin* – The Tracts of the Islamists". Anther book is, "Alluma' – The Brilliancy".

Al-Ash'ari's views left an indelible mark on the Islamic doctrinal landscape, and this is regrettable. However, the Mu'tazilites and the philosophers wrote many books, refuting his opinions. Many of his beliefs and views were mentioned in Ibn Sina's (Avicenna's) book, "Ash-Shifa' - The Healing, without quoting the source, and were disproved. Not only this, some of his followers, such as Judge al-Baqillani and Imamul Haramain al-Juwaini had revised his theory on man's compulsion.

Although Imam Mohammad al-Ghazzali was Ash'arite, and was instrumental in consolidating the doctrinal principles of the Ash'arite School, yet he revamped it with new ideas. He was responsible for bringing the science of *kalaam* (scholastic theology) closer to gnosis (*irfan*) and Sufism. The Iranian poet ar-Rumi, the author of the book, "al-Mathnawi" was Ash'arite, and yet, he was more inclined to radical *irfan*. Because of

Imam ar-Razi's philosophical background, he gave the Ash'arite *kalaam* a new impetus and a breath of fresh air.

The triumph of the Ash'arite in the world of Islam came at a high cost. It is a victory for inflexibility, or inertia, and prohibitive practices over freedom of thought. Although the warring was mainly between the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites, i.e. within the Sunni branch of Islam, yet the Shia World did not escape unscathed. However, there were historical as well as social reasons for this victory. Furthermore, certain political developments had a great influence on this front.

The Abbasid Caliph, al-Mutawakkil, had played a significant part in making the Sunni School of Thought gain the upper hand. A century later, Abul Hassan al-Ash'ari gave the School a speculative theologian touch. It goes without saying that had al-Mutawakkil been of the same persuasion of his predecessor, al-Ma'moun, the Mu'tazilites would not have faced that fate.

It is noteworthy that the ascendancy of Turkic Seljuks in Iran had played a part in the triumph and spread of the Asha'rite doctrines. The Seljuks were not people of thought and liberty, unlike aal-Buwaih, during whose rule, Shi'ism and Mu'tazilte ideology made a comeback. Ibnul Ameed and as-Sahib bin Abbad, among the politicians and scholars, were anti Asha'rite.

We are not trying to defend the beliefs of the Mu'tazilites, in that we will take issue with several of their simplistic ideas. However, one is left with no alternative but to sing the praise of their rational methodology, which died out with their departure from the Islamic ideological scene. As is known, a religion as rich and as profound as Islam is in need of *kalaam*, which is based on the freedom of the intellect and well founded belief and faith.

Lesson Seven: The Shia (1)

The turn now is for the discussion of *kalaam* (scholastic theology), as advocated by the Shia. This science, which deals with rational judgement and logic in the field of the fundamentals of Islamic beliefs, has a unique and excellent place with the Shia. Above all, *kalaam*, in the view of the Shia, has, on the one hand, a strong link with their reported tradition (*ahaadith*). On the other hand, it meshes with their philosophy. As we have already mentioned, *kalaam*, in the view of the Sunnis, is a phenomenon that contravenes *hadith* and *sunnah* (Prophetic tradition). And yet, according to the Shia, *kalaam* does not go contrary to *hadith* and *sunnah* only, but has a special place in both of them.

The secret of this is that the traditions of the Shia, unlike those of the Sunnis, comprise a number of *hadiths* that deal with logic, metaphysics, and sociology, which have undergone critical study and examination.

In the body of Sunni *hadiths* these subjects do not feature a lot. Should you come across issues, such as decree and destiny, God's Will and His Attributes, man's soul, and life after death, imamate, caliphate, reckoning and the book [of good and bad deeds], you will not find a detailed study that should go with any of those issues. When it comes to the Shia *hadiths*, you will find, as a matter of course, discussions and elucidations backed by ample evidence. It suffices to compare the sections, pertaining to these subjects, in the six Sunni authentic compendia of *hadith* with the corresponding ones in al-Kulaini's al-Kafi.

Consequently, in the Shia reported tradition, *kalaam* has been employed to mean intellection, i.e. rational analysis. It is for this reason too that the Shia did not split into two opposing schools, viz. *Ahlul Hadith* (traditionists) and *Ahlul Kalaam* (speculative theologians) as had been the case with the Sunnis.

Just to recap, according to Sunni sources, we have already mentioned that the first issue of controversy, over one of the fundamental beliefs of Muslims, was the question of the unbelief (kufr) of the *fasiq* (godless) by the Kharijites. Second in order was the question of man's freewill and choice, which was advanced by Ma'bad al-Juhni and Ghelan ad-Dimashqi, contrary to what the Umayyad rulers used to advocate. In the first half of the first century of the Islamic era, the debate erupted about the unity of the Attributes and the Essence, championed by al-Jahm bin Safwan. The idea of man's freewill, as espoused by Ma'bad and Ghelan, was taken on board by Wasil bin Ata' and Amr bin Obaid, co-founders of the Mu'tazilite School; they also took up the idea of the unity of the Essence and Attributes from al-Jahm. However, the idea of "the middle way", regarding the unbelief or belief of the godless was their own child. This was the beginning of the Islamic science of *kalaam*.

Indeed, this is one interpretation for the emergence of religious rational discussions in Islam, which was advocated by the orientalists and professors of Islamic thought in the East and the West.

Those people [i.e. the orientalists] had deliberately however, overlooked the role of Imam Ali (a.s.) in bringing these serious deductive and rational studies to the fore.

It is a known fact that raising such thought-provoking issues in the domain of Islamic thought was done by Imam Ali in his sermons, appeals, and letters. He was the first to talk about the Essence and the Attributes, Eternity and Transience, simplicity and complexity, unity and multiplicity, and other profound questions, the majority of which can be found in Nahjul Balagha (Path of Eloquence), an anthology of Imam Ali's words, and other authentic Shia reports. Those discussions and studies were characterized by the spiritual, which was completely alien to the *kalaam* techniques of the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites that were the product of the thought prevalent in their own day and age.

Sunni historians recognize that Shia thought has been woven of a philosophical fibre. In other words, their intellectual and rational approach is based on deduction. Shia thought is dissimilar to the Hanbilite thought, which unequivocally reject the use of reason and evidence in reaching conviction in religious beliefs. It is also not like the Ash'arite thought, which takes its cue from reason and makes it subservient to the apparent meanings of expressions per se. And it is contrary to the Mu'tazilite thought, which unleashes the rational tendency, because it is based on argumentation that lack substance and proof.

As a result, most of the Muslim philosophers were of Shia persuasion. The heart of Islamic philosophy had and is still being kept pumping by the efforts of Shia scholars who have been imbued with this spirit by their Imams, especially the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (a.s.).

Shia philosophers did not approach philosophical argumentation with the same methodology of *kalaam*, shuttling between demonstrative wisdom (*himkah burhaniyya*) and a dialectic one (*hikmah jadaliyya*). Rather, they succeeded in reinforcing the fundamental beliefs of Islam, inspired by the Holy Qur'an and the emanations of the great Imams of religion. That is why if we want to compile a list of Shia scholastic theologians, meaning those expounders of Islamic Shia beliefs, we will include in it a group of transmitters of *hadith* and philosophers. This is so because Shia traditions (*hadith*) and philosophy have served the purpose of *kalaam* in a better way than the science of speculative theology (*kalaam*) itself.

However, if it is meant those scholars who fell under the sway of Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite are speculative theologians, we should confine the list to a very small number. And yet, we do not see any reason for this.

Putting aside the statements of the great Imams (a.s.) on beliefs, which are contained in their sermons, reports, and supplications, the first among Shia scholars, who wrote a book on this subject was Ali bin Ismael bin Maythem at-Tammar. Maythem at-Tammar himself was a companion of Imam Ali (a.s) and was a great orator and communicator. His grandson Ali bin Ismael lived during the lifetime of Amr bin Obaid and Abul Huthail al-Allaf, who were among the first generation of Mu'tazilite scholastic theologians in the first half of the second century of the Islamic era (i.e. *Hijri*).

Among the disciples of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) [148/765], there was a group who earned the name, "scholastic theologians – *mutakalimmeen*)", such as Hisham bin al-Hakam [d. 198 H/812 CE], Hisham bin Salim,

Humran bin A'yen, Abu Ja'far al-Ahwal, known as Mu'min at-Taq, and Qais bin Masir. In his monumental compendium of *hadith*, al-Kafi, al-Kulaini reports on a debate that took place between this group and an opposing one, with whose results Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) was joyful.

Those scholars were instructed by Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq during the first half of the second century of the Islamic era. This is a clear proof that the Imams (a.s.) not only took it upon themselves to engage in *kalaam*, but brought up in their seminaries generations of scholars in this discipline. Hisham bin al-Hakam, for example, excelled in *kalaam* and not *hadith* or Qur'anic commentary. Even when he was of a tender age, Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) used to give him a special treatment over others of his companions and students. There is agreement between observers that he earned this special treatment due to his outstanding scholarship in *kalaam*.

In raising the station of Hisham, the scholastic theologian, over the scholars of *hadith* and jurisprudence, Imam as-Sadiq wanted to stress the importance and value of doctrinal studies and give preference to *kalaam* over the other two subjects.

It is obvious that this type of conduct by the Imams (a.s.) played a role in spreading *kalaam* and shaping Shia rational thinking into a distinct *kalaam* and philosophical school.

Imam ar-Ridha (a.s.), [who was heir apparent to the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'moun, d. 220/833], used to take part in the polemic sessions convened by al-Ma'moun for speculative theologians of different schools of thought. The proceedings of those debates have been recorded in the Shia books.

As the orientalists overlooked the ideological heritage of Imam Ali (a.s.), they did the same thing with those historical facts that show the Imams (a.s.) sparing no effort in initiating and promulgating rational research into doctrinal issues. And this is both puzzling and questionable.

Al-Fadhl bin Shathan an-Nashabouri, who was a companion of the Imams ar-Ridha, al-Jawad, and al-Hadi (a.s.), was a jurist, traditionist (*hadith* scholar), and scholastic theologian. He wrote several books in *kalaam*.

The majority of members of the House of Banu Nawbakht were scholastic theologians. Among them were al-Fadhl bin Abi Sahl, who was chief librarian of *Baitul Hikmah* (the House of Wisdom) Library during the rule of [Abbasid Caliph Haroun] ar-Rashid and was a reputed translator, Ishaq bin Abi Sahl, his son, Ismael, the latter's son, Ali and his grandson, Abu Sahl – who is known in the Shia circles as *Sheikhul Mutakalimmeen* (the teacher, or master, of speculative theologians), al-Hassan bin Mousa, the nephew of Ismael bin Ali, and others of this family of scholarship.

In the third century of the Islamic era, there emerged another luminary, i.e. Ibn Qubba ar-Razi. In the beginning of the fifth century of the Islamic era, a reference could be made to Abu Ali [Ahmad] bin Miskawaih al-Hakim [d. 421/1030], [who was a member of a distinguished group of thinkers who combined political careers with philosophical activity] and also a famous physician and author of the work, "Taharatul A'raaq – Purity of the Dispositions".

Shia scholastic theologians are many. Among them is Khawaja Nasiruddin at-Tusi [597/1201 – 672/1274], a well-known philosopher and mathematician, the author of the work, "*Tajridul I'itiqaad* – Uncovering the Belief". Allama (Scholar) al-Hilli, a very well-known jurist, the author of annotations on *Tajridul I'itiqaad*.

In his book *Tajridul I'itiqaad*, at-Tusi wrote an unrivalled and strong defence of *kalaam*, so much so that speculative theologians, who succeeded him, be they Sunni or Shia, followed in his footsteps. To him goes the credit of introducing significant and qualitative change into philosophy or wisdom (*hikmah*), in that he moved it away from argumentation to demonstrative proof. In later stages, though, this change was made complete, i.e. the break was irreversible between the old methodology and the new one. In fact all have become followers of wisdom of the proof (*hikmah burhaniyya*). On the other hand, *kalaam* (scholastic theology) lost its independence in favour of philosophy.

After at-Tusi, Shia philosophers used to discuss *kalaam* issues in a philosophical manner and context and achieved success in this regard more than their predecessors among scholastic theologians (*mutakalimmeen*). Sadrul Muta'aliheen and Allama Sabzwari, who were not considered among *mutakalimmeen*, reached the pinnacle of eloquence and influence in this discipline.

As a matter of fact, if we consult the pristine sources of Islam, such as the Qur'an, Nahjul Balagha (Peak of Eloquence) and the traditions of the Prophet and his Pure Progeny, we would find out that this approach is closer to these sources than the first, [i.e. *kalaam* methodology].

Lesson Eight: The Shia (2)

In this lesson we shall discuss in brief some Shia theories in the context of *kalaam*, of the sort that are common between Muslim scholastic theologians.

During the discussion of the Mu'tazilte School, we have already mentioned that they maintain that their beliefs are based on five fundamentals, i.e. monotheism, justice, promise and threat, the middle position and enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil. We have also said that what distinguishes these fundamentals from other ones they uphold is the fact that they are unique to them, and thus set them apart from other schools of thought. We should, therefore, not be deluded that they represent the fundamentals of their faith and the rest represent the branches.

Similarly, Shia scholars, and not their Imams (a.s.), stated the five fundamentals of Shiism, namely, monotheism, justice, prophethood, imamate, and resurrection.

It is widely recognized that these are the fundamentals of religion and what comes next is of the branches. In this respect, a question begs for an answer, i.e. if what is meant by the fundamentals of religion are those that are sufficient to be upheld by man in order to be Muslim, then would believing in monotheism and prophethood alone suffice? What verifies this is the implication of the testimony of faith (*ash-Shahadatain*), [i.e. the two-part statement of: I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Mohammad is the Messenger of Allah]. The second part of this declaration of faith relates to the prophethood of our master Mohammad (s.a.w.), the Seal of Prophets, in particular. As regards the prophethood of the other prophets, it is outside the remit of the declaration of faith. And yet, the reality is that what constitutes part of the fundamentals of religion and thereby warrant believing in is the prophethood of all God's prophets.

However, if fundamentals of religion imply, from an Islamic perspective, those ones that are of belief and faith, to the exclusion of practical acts of worship, there remain other matters that merit believing in, such as the angels:

"The Messenger believed in what had been revealed to him from his Lord, as do the men of faith, each one (of them) believed in Allah, His angels, His books, and His Messengers.." (2/285)

Again, what sets the Divine Attribute of Justice apart from the other Attributes, such as Omniscience, Omnipotence, Life, Hearing, etc. to warrant a place among other articles of faith? If believing in God's Attributes is fundamental, it then follows that one has to believe in all the Attributes. If it is not the case, no other Attribute should be left out.

The crux of the matter is that the reasons for choosing these fundamentals are that they are regarded as fundamentals worthy of advocating in the view of Islam. On the other hand, they represent one of the distinct features of the [Shia] School of Thought. However, Islam has validated the fundamentals of monotheism, justice, and prophethood, and thus upholding them is considered one of Islam's goals. As for the fundamental of justice, it is distinctively Shia.

That is, although Justice is not different from the other Attributes, nor is it one of the objectives of the faith, yet it represents the Shia's special vision of Islam.

With Shia, two features characterize Justice, in that it falls within the domain of the articles of the faith and clearly defines the boundaries of their distinctive School of Thought.

Going back to the belief in the angels, which is predetermined in the Holy Qur'an, why did it not feature among the five fundamentals? The answer to this question is that those five fundamentals of belief fall within the objectives of Islam, in that the Prophet (s.a.w.) called on people to embrace them and that his noble mission was contingent on this belief. As for believing in the angels and all necessities of religion, such as prayer and fast, they are not among the goals of the Prophetic Message. Nevertheless, they go hand in hand with it. In other words, this belief is deemed a prerequisite to believing in prophethood, and not among its aims.

Should we consider the fundamental of Imamate from social and political perspectives, i.e. power and leadership, it is like Justice, i.e. it does not come under the umbrella of matters of faith. However, if we view it in moral terms, where the Imam is dubbed as "*Hujjat Ullah* – the Proof of God" and "*Khalifat Ullah* – the Representative, or Caliph, of God", and the moral relationship between every Muslim and sensible men at all times are considered a forgone conclusion, Imamate would become part of the articles of faith.

Now, we give below *kalaam* doctrines relating to the Shia, in addition to the five fundamentals:

1. Monotheism:

Which is one of the five fundamentals endorsed by both the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites. It is worth noting that the monotheism in which the Mutazilites believe, and which is unique to their School, is the Unity of the Attributes that the Ash'arites rejected. As for the type of monotheism in which the Ash'arites believe, it is the Unity of Actions, which the Mu'tazilites refuted.

We have already mentioned that there is unanimity on both Unity of the Essence and Unity of worship, and thus they do not feature in this discussion.

In addition to Unity of the Essence and Unity of worship, the brand of monotheism to which the Shia subscribe is the one, which consists of Unity of the Attributes and Unity of the Actions. However, with them, Unity of the Attributes is different from that advocated by the Mu'tazilites. Similarly, their type of belief in the Unity of Actions is unlike that upheld by the Ash'arites.

According to the Mu'tazilites, Unity of the Attributes means that the Divine Essence is devoid of any Attribute. With the Shia, Unity of the Attributes means that the Attributes are the very Essence, i.e. they are indivisible.

For more details, you can consult the Shia works of philosophy and *kalaam* (scholastic theology).

As held by the Shia, Unity of the Actions is different from that espoused by the Ash'arites, as they deny the influence of any being, apart from God, in that they say that the Originator of acts of worship is God, and that man is not capable of commissioning his own actions and embarking on them. This type of belief entails pure compulsion (*jabr*). However, it has been disproved with sufficient evidence. Unity of actions, as advocated by the Shia, means that the law of causality is original. That is, each and every effect, which is dependent on a cause that is close to it, is simultaneously existential by the Absolute Truth (Thatul Haqq), [i.e. God]. The two are symmetrical not asymmetrical (or contradictory).

2. Justice:

Both the Shia and the Mu'tazilites agree on the fundamental of Justice. This means that God emanates, is merciful, gracious and causes affliction in accordance with intrinsic merits. The world of beings (creation), which is contingent upon emanation (*faydh*), mercy, affliction, grace, reward and punishment, has been based on a meticulous system. The Asha'rite deny this fundamental and the system that goes with it. They maintain that upholding Justice, in this sense, entails the infringement upon the Thatul Haqq, or God, and this, they add, goes against the grain of Him being the All-poweful (*Qahiryya mutlaqah*).

3. Freewill and choice:

The Shia's belief in this precept is more or less similar to that espoused by the Mu'tazilites. According to the latter, freewill is akin to *tafweedh* (delegation, or empowerment), i.e. man is left to his own devices, that is, independent of the Divine Will. Obviously, this, as we have already made clear, is impossible.

With the Shia, freewill means that God created man with freewill. However, in his existence and other affairs – the domain of actions included, man, as is the case with the other creation, is dependent upon the Thatul Haqq, drawing on His Will and Providence.

Accordingly, freewill with the Shia is a middle position between the compulsion of the Ash'arites and the empowerment of the Mu'tzilites. This belief is contained in a famous *hadith* related from the Imams (a.s.), "It is neither *jabr* (compulsion) nor *tafweedh* (delegation), but a position between the two". This tenet is a branch of the fundamental of Justice.

4. Inherent good and repugnance:

The Mu'tazilites are of the opinion that actions, in themselves, may be good or bad (repugnant). Justice, for instance, is good in itself, whereas injustice is repugnant in itself. Thus, a sensible person is the one who embarks on actions that are good and keeps away from those that are repugnant. And since God is Wise, His wisdom necessitates that He commissions actions that are good; He is incapable of doing bad things. Therefore, the requirements of good/repugnant things (actions) are something and God's Wisdom is something else. That is why it is said that it is incumbent on God to carry out certain actions, whereas He is incapable of doing some other things that are repugnant.

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The Ash'arites are diametrically opposed to this idea, in that they reject the intrinsic goodness or repugnance of things; they also reject what is incumbent and not so on God.

Some Shia theologians were influenced by the Mu'tazilite line of thinking and accepted their argument. Others got bogged down with the intricacies of thought, and although accepted the case for inherent goodness and repugnance of things, yet they did not consider it applicable to the Divine.

5. Graciousness and opting for what is in the best interest of man:

The Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites engaged one another in debate about God's Grace, meaning that He always opts for what is in the best interest of man (intikhabul aslah). That is, does this system have prevalence in the universe? The Mu'tazilites maintain that Grace (*lutf*), as an obligation or duty [towards man], is incumbent on God, whereas the Ash'arites reject this assertion.

It goes without saying that the principle of Graciousness, or Kindness, (*lutf*) branches out from the two fundamentals of Justice and rational good and repugnant (*alhusn wal qubh al 'aqliyyain*). Some Shia scholastic theologians took this principle on board, and yet dismissed the idea of "God is obligated to be gracious to His creation" as manifestly wrong. They also have discussions about the claim, "God always opts for what is in the best interest of man", which we cannot dwell on in this study.

6. Originality of the intellect, its independence and authoritativeness:

The Shia have said that the human mind is imaginative, authoritative and independent more so than the Mu'tazilites. In the reports from the Infallibles (a.s.), there are many references to the intellect being described as the messenger within as opposed to the Prophet (s.a.w.) being the manifest messenger. In Shia jurisprudence, reason, or intellect, is one of the four principles, or tools, of deducing religious rulings.

7. The aim behind God's Actions:

The Ash'arites deny this principle. They argue that "intents and purposes" are the exclusive preserve of man, or similar creations. Allah is far above (*munazzah*) these things, because, they hasten to add that, if it is like this, God would appear as though He were coerced to do such actions.

The Shia subscribe to this Mu'tazilite doctrine, and yet they differentiate between the objective of the action and the intent of the doer. What is inconceivable is that God becomes an objective in Himself in His Actions. As for the objective that relates to the created, it does not detract, in any way, from the loftiness of [God's] Essence, its Perfection, and Independence.

8. Bada', or change of mind, of the Divine Action is acceptable:

As it is acceptable for God to abrogate the laws, it is acceptable for Him to change His Mind.

[However, when the word bada' is used in relation to God, it means to express. That is, there are certain commandments, which come into force according to expediency for the time being only and thereafter the same are abrogated or some new commandments take their place. When the word bada' is used in relation to man, it is said that after taking a decision to do something, he decides to abandon it. This change of mind is due to man's inability to understand as to what is good for him or may be it is due to his repenting of his past actions. Bada', in this sense is impossible in the case of God because He is free from ignorance and defect. Thus, the Shia do not attribute this meaning of bada to God].

For further reading on this topic, you may consult the books of philosophy, such as the work, "*Kitabul Asfar al-Arba'a* – The Four-volume Book", by Sadrul Mata'aliheen.

9. Seeing God: The Mu'tazilites vehemently deny this question.

They believe that man reaches the stage of believing in God per se. And this is a matter for man's conscience and intellect, which are the only two paths that lead to certitude in the existence of God, and the latter is the highest point of faith. God cannot be physically seen in any manner. The proof on this is this Qur'anic verse:

"No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision; He is subtle well-aware". (6/103).

As regards the Ash'arites, they are adamant that God can be seen, but only on the Day of Judgement. Their proof on this is contained in some reports and Qur'anic verses, such as these ones:

"Some faces, that Day, will beam (in brightness and beauty); - Looking towards their Lord.." (75/22-23).

As for the Shia, they maintain that it is absolutely impossible to see God by way of physical eyesight, neither in this world nor in the next. They further argue that the highest point of faith is not achieved only through rational and conscious conviction. Rational certitude is the knowledge of certainty (*ilmul yaqeen*); above it in order is conscious certainty (*al yaqeenul qalbi*), which is the very, or absolute, certitude (*ainul yaqeen*); that is, perceiving God by heart. God Almighty cannot be seen by physical vision; rather by the heart. Imam Ali (a.s.) was asked, "Did you see your Lord? He replied: I do not worship a Lord that I cannot see. Neither eyes nor vision can see Him. The hearts see Him by virtue of the certainties of faith". Some Imams (a.s.) were asked, "Did the Messenger of God see his Lord in his ascension to the seventh heaven (*Mi'raaj*)? They answered: Not with the eye but by the heart". The experts attribute this tenet to the Shia.

10. The belief of the godless:

In this issue, which has already been repeated on a number of occasions in this study, the Shia agree with the opinion of the Ash'arites on it, unlike the Kharijites who maintain that the godless is deemed unbeliever (kafir) and the Mu'tazilites who came up with the idea of "the middle position".

11. The infallibility of the Prophets and the Imams:

Among the beliefs of the Shia, which are distinctly Shia, is their belief that the Prophets and the Imams are infallible, i.e. they are incapable of committing any vile deed, be it serious or petty.

12. Forgiveness and intercession:

The Shia disagree with the Mu'tazilites in their rigid belief that if the wrongdoer dies without repenting for his misdeeds, he is denied forgiveness and intercession. The Mu'tazilites are also at odds with the Ash'arites as regards random forgiveness.