The End of Prophethood

We have said that despite the differences in details all Prophets have delivered the same message and belonged to the same ideological school. The principles and teachings of this school were explained to human society gradually in proportion to its development till the humanity reached the stage when the entire teachings in a comprehensive form were presented. At this point Prophethood came to an end.

The Holy Prophet, Muhammad bin Abdullah (Peace be on him and his progeny) was the person through whom the complete ideology was conveyed, and the Holy Qur'an was the last celestial Book. The Holy Qur'an itself says: "In truth and justice has been perfected the word of your Lord. None can change His words." ***(Surah al-An'am, 6:115)***

Now let us see why in the past the Prophethood was renewed from time to time and so many Prophets were raised in succession, though most of them were not given a new and independent code of law and were sent to promulgate then existing code? Why did this procedure come to an end with the last Prophet since whose time no Prophet, neither a law-giving one nor a preaching one has come, nor will ever come? Here we touch upon the reasons briefly.

Reasons of the Renewal of Prophethood

Though Prophethood is one continuous process and the Divine message, as the religion is not more than one reality, the reasons of the appearance of so many law-giving and preaching Prophets in succession and the termination of Prophethood after the advent of the last Prophet are as under: Firstly the ancient man because of his intellectual immaturity was unable to preserve his celestial Book. Usually the Divine Books were either altered and corrupted or were lost totally. Therefore it was necessary that the message should be renewed from time to time.

The revelation of the Holy Qur'an corresponded with a period when humanity had passed the period of its childhood and had become able to preserve its intellectual heritage. That is why there could be no alteration in the last Divine and Holy Book. The Muslims committed to memory and recorded in writing every verse of it as it was revealed, and did away with every possibility of addition, omission or alteration in it. Thus one of the reasons of the renewal of Prophethood disappeared.

Secondly, humanity being immature, it was not previously competent enough to have a comprehensive plan for its guidance, and hence it was necessary that it should be guided by

the Prophets piecemeal and step by step.

Anyhow, by the period of the final Prophethood humanity had developed to the extent that it was able to have a comprehensive plan of conduct and it was no longer necessary that it should receive guidance stage by stage. Besides the extinction of the old celestial Books and the alteration in them, another reason for the continual renewal of Prophethood was that man in olden days was not able to receive a comprehensive plan.

When his ability sufficiently developed, a comprehensive scheme was put at his disposal and this reason of the renewal of Prophethood also disappeared. Now the Muslim scholars who were specialists in this field, can guide the Muslims in the light of this scheme and can frame the rules and procedures for them to suit every occasion.

Thirdly, the overwhelming majority of the Prophets consisted of the preaching and not the law-giving Prophets. The number of the law-giving Prophets did not exceed the number of the fingers of one hand. The task of the preaching Prophets was to propagate, interpret and promulgate the religious law prevailing during their time.

Now the religious scholars of the age of the finality of Prophethood, which is the age of knowledge, are capable of applying the general principles of Islam to the requirements of the time and place and deducing the rules of religious laws. This process is called ijtihad. The outstanding Muslim divines in this way perform many duties of the preaching Prophets and some of those even of the law-giving Prophet without being the law-givers themselves. They guide the Muslim Ummah. Thus, though the need of religion still exists and is expected to be ever increasing with the further cultural development of humanity, the need of the new Prophets and the new revealed Books has ceased to exist. And hence Prophethood has come to an end with the final Prophet.

It is clear from what has been mentioned that intellectual and social maturity of mankind has played a big role in the finality of Prophethood in several ways:

(i) It has enabled man to keep his celestial Book unaltered.

(ii) It has enabled him to receive his evolutionary programme all at once and not by stages.

(iii) It has enabled him to undertake the task of preaching and propagating religion, to set up religious institutions, to exhort people to do what is good and to restrain them from what is evil. Thus there is no longer any need of preaching Prophets who used to preach and propagate the teachings of the law-giving Prophets. This need is now being adequately fulfilled by the religious scholars and Divines.

(iv) From the viewpoint of mental development man has now reached a stage that in pursuance of his ijtihad he can interpret the revealed words and can apply the relevant

principles to all the changing circumstances. This task is also being performed by the religious scholars.

It is evident that the finality of Prophethood does not mean that man is no longer in need of Divine teachings received through revelation. Prophethood has not come to an end because as the result of his mental development man is now able to dispense with religion.

The eminent scholar and great Muslim thinker, Dr Iqbal, in spite of his extraordinarily intelligent discussions of the Islamic questions by which we have personally been greatly benefited and of which we have made use in this and other books, has been involved in a great misunderstanding while explaining the philosophy of the finality of Prophethood. He has based his conclusions on certain points, which we mention below, point by point:

(i) The word 'wahi' (revelation) which literally means 'to whisper', has been used by the Holy Quran in an expanded sense to include every kind of inspired guidance whether its recipient be inorganic material, plants, animals or man. He says: "This contact with the root of his own being is by no means peculiar to man. Indeed the way in which the word 'wahi' is used in the Holy Qur'an shows that the Holy Qur'an regards it as a universal property of life, though its nature and character are different at different stages of the evolution of life.

The plant growing freely in space, the animal developing a new organ to suit a new environment, and a human being receiving light from the inner depths of life, are all cases of inspiration varying in character according to the needs of the recipient, or the needs of the species to which the recipient belongs". (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 125)

(ii) Wahi or revelation is a sort of instinct and the guidance by means of revelations is a sort of instinctive guidance.

(iii) Wahi is a guidance from collective point of view. Human society being a moving unit and subject to the laws of motion, is definitely in need of guidance. The Prophet is just like a receiving set which instinctively receives what is required by mankind in this respect. Dr Iqbal says: "The world-life intuitively sees its own needs and at critical moments defines its own direction. This is what, in the language of religion, we call Prophetic revelation". (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 147)

(iv) In their primitive stages the living beings are guided by their instinct. As they go to the higher stages of evolution and their faculties of feeling, imagination and thinking develop, the power of instinct is reduced and is replaced by feeling and thinking Power. Thus the insects have the most numerous and the strongest instincts and man the weakest and the smallest in number.

(v) From sociological point of view human society is passing through an evolutionary process, Just as the animals in their primary stages have been in need of instinct and have gradually developed their faculties of feeling and imagination, and in certain cases of thinking also, and their instinctive guidance has been replaced by the guidance through feeling and imagination, similarly man in his evolutionary process has gradually reached a stage in which his rationality has so developed that his instinctive power (wahi or inspiration) has weakened.

Dr Iqbal says: "During the minority of mankind psychic energy develops what I call Prophetic consciousness - a mode of economizing individual thought and choice by providing ready-made judgements, choices and ways of action. With the birth of reason and critical faculty, however, life in its own interest inhibits the formation and growth of non-rational modes of consciousness through which psychic energy flowed at an earlier stage of human evolution. Man is primarily governed by passion and instinct. Inductive reason, which alone makes man master of his environment, is in itself an achievement. Once born it must be reinforced by inhibiting the growth of other modes of knowledge". (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 125).

(vi) Basically the world has passed through two ages: the age of inspiration and the age of rational thinking and reflection on nature and history. The ancient world produced a few great systems of philosophy (like Greek and Roman). Anyhow their value was limited as humanity was still passing through the period of its minority.

Dr Iqbal says: "There is no doubt that the ancient world produced some great systems of philosophy at a time when man was comparatively primitive and governed more or less by suggestion. But we must not forget that this system-building in the ancient world was the work of abstract thought, which cannot go beyond the systematization of vague religious beliefs and traditions, and gives us no hold on the concrete situations of life". (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 126)

(vii) The Holy Prophet with whom Prophethood came to end, belonged to the ancient as well as the modern world. As the source of his inspiration was revelation and not the experimental study of nature and history, he belonged to the ancient world; but as the spirit of his teachings called for rational thinking and the study of nature and history with the birth of which the job of revelation is terminated, he belonged to the modern world.

Dr Iqbal says: "Looking at the matter from this point of view, the Prophet of Islam seems to stand between the ancient and the modern world. In so far as the source of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the ancient world; and in so far as the spirit of his revelation is concerned, he belongs to the modern world. In him life discovers other sources of knowledge

suitable to its new direction. The birth of Islam is the birth of inductive intellect. In Islam prophecy reaches its perfection in discovering the need of its own abolition. This involves the keen perception that life cannot forever be kept in leading strings; hence, in order to achieve full self-consciousness, man must finally be thrown back on his own resources. The abolition of priesthood and hereditary kingship in Islam, the constant appeal to reason and experience in the Holy Qur'an and the emphasis it lays on Nature and History as sources of human knowledge, are all different aspects of the same idea of finality". (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 126)

These are the main points of the philosophy of the finality of Prophethood as conceived by Dr Iqbal. Unfortunately this philosophy is unsound and several of its principles are incorrect. The first objection to which it is amenable is that if this philosophy was accepted, that would mean that not only there was no longer any need of a new Prophet or a new revelation, but that there was also no need of any guidance by revelation at all, for experimental intellect had taken its place. This philosophy is the philosophy of the end of religion and not that of the finality of Prophethood. If this philosophy was accepted, the only thing that Islamic revelation could do was to proclaim the end of the era of religion and the beginning of the era of reason and science.

Evidently this idea is not only contrary to the belief in the necessity of Islam but is also contrary to the view held by Dr Iqbal himself. All his efforts in fact, are directed to prove that reason and science though necessary for human society are not enough. Man requires faith and religion as much as he requires science and knowledge. Dr Iqbal says in clear terms that life is in need of fixed principles as well as changing minor factors, and that ijtihad is meant to apply the set principles to the specific situations.

He says: "The new culture finds the foundation of world-unity in the principle of 'Tawhid' (monotheism). Islam as a polity is the only practical means of making this principle a living factor in the intellectual and emotional life of mankind. It demands loyalty to Allah, not to thrones. And since Allah is the ultimate spiritual basis of all life, loyalty to Him virtually amounts to man's loyalty to his own ideal nature. The ultimate spiritual basis of all life, as conceived by Islam, is eternal and reveals itself in variety and change.

A society based on such a conception of reality must reconcile, in its life, to the categories of permanence and change . It must possess eternal principles to regulate its collective life; because eternity gives us a foothold in the world of perpetual change. But eternal principles when they are understood to exclude all possibilities of change which, according to the Holy Qur'an, is one of the greatest signs of Allah, tend to immobilize what is

essentially mobile in its nature. The failure of Europe in political and social science illustrates the former principle; the immobility of Islam during the last 500 years illustrates the latter. What then is the principle of movement in Islam? This is known as 'ijtihad'. (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 147)

According to the above statement, guidance of revelation will always be required, and the guidance provided by experimental intellect will never be able to take its place. Dr Iqbal himself supports the principle of the permanent need of guidance. But the philosophy he has put forward to explain the finality of Prophethood, requires that not only there should be no need of any new Prophet and new revelation, but that religion itself should come to an end.

This misleading interpretation of finality by Dr Iqbal means that man's need of guidance and education by the prophets is of the same nature as the need of a class by a child. The child every year goes to the next class and changes his teacher. Similarly man in every period has gone to the next stage, and required a new code of religious law. When the child reaches the final class, he completes his education and gets a certificate to that effect. Thereafter he is no longer in need of a teacher and can carry on his research independently. In the same way the man of the age of finality with the proclamation of the end of Prophethood has secured the certificate of the completion of his education. He can now undertake the study of Nature and History independently. That is what ijtihad means. With the end of Prophethood man has reached the stage of self-sufficiency.

There is no doubt that such an interpretation of the finality of Prophethood is wrong. The consequent results of this sort of interpretation are acceptable neither to Dr Iqbal himself, nor to those who have drawn these conclusions from what he has stated.

Further, should the view of Dr Iqbal be correct, the thing which he calls 'inner experience' (spiritual light and inspirations received by saintly persons) should also cease to exist, for it is also supposedly a part of the instinct which languishes with the appearance of experimental intellect. But according to Dr Iqbal that mystic experience still continues to exist. He asserts that from Islamic point of view inner experience is one of the three sources of human knowledge, the other two being Nature and History.

Personally also Dr Iqbal has a strong mystic tendency. He firmly believes in inspiration. He says: "The idea however, does not mean that mystic experience, which qualitatively does not differ from the experience of the Prophets, has now ceased to exist as a vital fact. Indeed the Holy Qur'an regards both 'Anfus' (self) and 'Afaq' (world) as sources of knowledge. Allah reveals His signs in inner as well as outer experience, and it is the duty of man to judge the knowledge yielding capacity of all aspects of experience. The idea of finality, therefore, should

not be taken to suggest that the ultimate fate of life is complete displacement of emotion by reason.

Such a thing is neither possible nor desirable. The intellectual value of the idea is that it tends to create an, independent critical attitude towards mystic experience by, generating the belief that all personal authority, claiming a supernatural origin has come to an end in the history of man... Mystic experience then, however unusual and abnormal, must. now be regarded by a Muslim as a perfectly natural experience open to critical scrutiny like other aspects of human experience"., (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 126)

What Dr Iqbal means to say is that with the end of Prophethood the inspirations and miracles of the saintly persons have, not come to an end, though they are no longer so authoritative, as they were in the past. Prior to the birth of experimented intellect, miracles had a perfectly natural authority.

They were not open to any doubt. But for the intellectually developed man (of the age of finality) these things have ceased to be authoritative, and are now like other occurrences and phenomena open to critical scrutiny. Pre-finality period was that of miracles and supernatural events, but the age of finality is the age of reason, which does not regard any supernatural occurrence as a proof of anything. It judges every reality discovered through a mystic experience in accordance with its own standards.

This part of the remarks of Dr Iqbal is also not sound neither in regard to the pre-finality nor in regard to the post-finality period. We will make our comments on it under the following heading:

Miracles of the Final Prophet

Furthermore, the view expressed by Dr Iqbal that revelation is a sort of instinct, is also wrong. This view has led him to make several other mistakes. As Dr Iqbal himself is fully conscious, of the fact, an instinct is a purely innate, unacquired and unconscious propensity. It is a faculty lower than senses and intellect with which the primitive animals such as insects and other animals of a class lower than that of insects, have been provided according to the law of creation.

With the development of other means of guidance such as senses and intellect, instinct is weakened and becomes dormant. That is why man who among the animals enjoys the highest degree of thinking power, has the weakest instinctive power.

In contrast, revelation is a means of guidance which ranks higher than senses and intellect and to a great extent is something which is acquired. Above all, it is the highest degree of consciousness, and the field in which it makes discoveries is far vaster than the field in which

experimental intellect can work.

In a previous section of this book, while discussing the question of ideology, we have proved that in view of the variety of the individual and social capabilities of man, complexity of his social relations and the dubiousness of the end of his evolutionary journey, the ideologies propounded by the philosophers and sociologists are misleading and bewildering. There is only one way open to man to have a sound ideology and that is the way of revelation. If we do not accept the way of revelation, we shall have to admit that man is unable to have an ideology at all.

The modern thinkers believe that the future line of the development of mankind can be determined through human ideologies only stage by stage. In other words, at every stage only the next stage can be determined, and that too according to the belief of these gentlemen. As for the subsequent stages and whether there exists any final stage at all, nothing is known. The fate of such ideologies is evident.

We wish that Dr Iqbal, who more or less studied the works of the Muslim gnostics and was especially devoted to the Mathnavi of Rumi, could have gone deeper into these works and found a better explanation of the finality of Prophethood. The gnostics say that Prophethood terminated because all the individuals and social stages of human development along with the way that man should follow to attain them were revealed all together. As thereafter none could discover anything additional, it was the duty of everyone to follow this last message.

The sufis say: that the final is he, who has finalized all stages, and leaves no stage uncovered. This is the basis of finality, not the development of the experimental intelligence of society as conceived by Dr Iqbal. If he had made a deeper study of the works of only those sufis to whom he himself was devoted, (like Rumi), he could know that revelation is not an instinct. It is a spirit and soul superior to the rational spirit. Rumi, the mystic poet says:

"Know that the soul of man is different from that of a cow and a donkey, and again the soul of a Prophet and a saint (holy man) is different from that of an ordinary man."

"The body is visible, but the soul is hidden. Again intellect is more hidden than soul. The spirit of revelation is still more hidden. The intellect of the Holy Prophet could be perceived by anybody. But the spirit of his revelation was not so perceptible". "He was guided by the Protected Tablet and that is why was protected from any mistake and error. Divine revelation is neither astrology nor geomancy nor a dream. It is a fact and reality".

It appears that Dr Iqbal has unconsciously made the same mistake as was made by the Western world, which holds that. knowledge has replaced faith. Of course Dr Iqbal was severely opposed to this theory of replacement. But his philosophy of the finality of

Prophethood somehow leads to the same conclusion. Dr Iqbal describes revelation as a sort of an instinct. He also asserts that instincts cease to function when intellectual and thinking faculties begin to work. This remark of his is correct but is applicable to those cases in which thinking power performs the same function that was previously performed by an instinct. But in those cases in which their functions are different, there is no reason why an instinct should cease to work when thinking power becomes active. Therefore even if we suppose that Divine revelation is a sort of instinct whose function is to put forward a sort of world conception and an ideology not produced by intellect and thinking power, there, is no reason why with the development of inductive intellect, in the words of Dr Iqbal, the function of this instinct should come to an end.

The fact is that Dr Iqbal in spite of all his outstanding talent, extraordinary intelligence and love of Islam is basically a product of Western culture, for his entire education was Western, though he made some studies in Islamic culture, especially in Islamic law, mysticism and philosophy. That is the reason why he sometimes makes grave mistakes. In the preface of our book, Principles of Philosophy and Method of Realism, vol. V, we have referred to the faultiness of Dr Iqbal's ideas about deep philosophical questions. That is why it is not proper to draw a comparison between him and Sayyid Jamiluddin Asadabadi.[1]

Though from the viewpoint of mental endowments Jamaluddin is not comparable to Dr Iqbal, his original education was Islamic and Western education was only his secondary acquisition. In addition, the late Jamaluddin, owing to his vast travels in the Muslim countries and a close study of their affairs was more conversant than Dr Iqbal with the situation in the Muslim world. Therefore unlike Dr Iqbal he did not make any grave mistakes in evaluating certain events which took place in some Muslim countries like Turkey and Iran, for he could judge them better.

Miracle of Finality

The Holy Qur'an is the everlasting miracle of the last Prophet. The miracles of the former Prophets like Prophet Ibrahim, Prophet Musa and Prophet 'Isa, each of whom had a revealed Book and also wrought miracles, were distinct from their revealed Books. They wrought such miracles as the transformation of a blazing fire into 'coolness and peace', the conversion of a dry piece of wood into a serpent and bringing the dead to life.

Obviously each of these miracles, was temporary and passing. But in the case of the last Prophet his Book itself was his miracle. It is the proof of his Prophethood. As such, the miracle of finality, unlike any other miracle, is everlasting, not passing nor meant only for the time being.

The fact that a Divine Book is the miracle of the last Prophet is absolutely in comformity with his time, the age of the advancement of science, knowledge, culture and education. The eternity of this Holy Book is also in consonance with the eternity of its message which is never to be abrogated.

The Holy Qur'an in several verses of it has expressly proclaimed this extraordinary and superhuman aspect of itself. One of these verses says: "If you are in doubt about what We have revealed to Our bondman, then bring a chapter like it." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:23) It has also expressly mentioned several other miracles wrought by the last Prophet.

The Holy Qur'an has dwelt on a number of questions related to the miracles. It declares that a Divine message must be accompanied by some miracles, that a miracle is a decisive evidence and definite proof, that the Prophets work the miracles by the will of Allah and that they work them to prove the veracity of their claim, and that they are not bound to accede to every request of everybody in this respect. In other words, the Prophets are not expected to hold an exhibition of miracles or to set up a factory of them.

As the Holy Qur'an has dealt with these questions, it has also expressly recounted the stories of the miracles of many of the former Prophets like Nuh, Ibrahim, Lut, Salih, Hud, Musa and 'Isa, and has categorically confirmed them.

Some orientalists and Christian clergymen on the basis of those verses in which the Holy Qur'an responded negatively to the demand of the idolaters to work the miracles proposed by them, have claimed that the Prophet of Islam told the people that he had no miracle other than the Holy Qur'an, and if they did not accept it, he could do nothing further.

Some 'liberal-minded' Muslim writers also have accepted this view, and explaining it, they say that the miracle is an argument which can convince only immature humanity looking for something extraordinary and fantastic. A mature man is not impressed by such things and is concerned only with the things rational. As the age of the Prophet of Islam was that of rationality, not of myths and fancy, he declined by the will of Allah to accept any request for a miracle besides the Holy Qur'an.

One writer says: "To seek the help of the miracles was unavoidable for the former Prophets, for in those days it was almost impossible for them to convince people with any rational arguments. At the time the Prophet of Islam appeared, humanity had passed the period of its minority. It had reached the stage of its intellectual majority.

The child of yesterday no longer depended on his mother and was able to stand on his own feet and use his brain. In such circumstances it was not unreasonable that the Prophet of Islam resisted the pressure of the disbelievers and his opponents demanding from him to work

miracles. To prove the truth of his mission he solely relied on rational arguments and historical evidence.

In spite of the insistence of the disbelievers the Prophet of Islam by the order of Allah refused to work miracles similar to those of the former Prophets. He relied on the Holy Qur'an alone as an incomparable miracle. Its incomparability is in itself a proof of the finality of Prophethood. It is a Book that contains truths, teachings and guidance in complete conformity with all aspects of life. It is a miracle worthy of mature humanity, not an immature humanity believing in myths and fables.

The so called our liberal-minded Muslim writer adds: "The atmosphere in which the ancient man lived was always full of myths, idle stories and supernatural ideas. Hence he was not impressed by anything unless it was contrary to what was reasonable and perceptible. That is why we find mankind throughout history to be fond of what is unknown and in search of what is supernatural.

This sentimental attitude towards what is imperceptible and unreasonable is more acute among the more uncivilized. The more men are close to nature, the more they are fond of what is extra-natural. Myths are an evil outcome of this situation. The man of the desert is always looking for a miracle. His world is full of spirits and wonderful mysteries. The spirit of a primitive man is moved only by what is marvellous and mysterious.

That is why we see that not only the Prophets, but also the kings, the heroes and the sages of every nation have resorted to something supernatural to justify what they claimed. In these circumstances the Prophet whose mission was based on the invisible had to have recourse to a miracle more than others, for at this period of history supernatural events were more effective than logic, science and indisputable facts".

However, the life of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him and his progeny) is an exception to this rule. He announced that his miracle is a Book. He made this announcement in a society, in the largest commercial city of which the number of those who knew the art of writing was not more than seven. This society never thought of anything other than boasting, the sword, the camel and the male child. It is in itself a miracle that in this society he announced that his miracle was a Heavenly Book.

He announced this in a country where no Heavenly Book ever existed. His Lord, Allah, the Creator swears by the ink, the pen and the writing before a people who regarded the pen as the tool of a few helpless and weak persons.

This is a miracle in itself. Only that Book is a miracle which can always be seen. Unlike any other miracle it is the only miracle the marvellous and extraordinary nature of which can be

more accurately understood and appreciated by those who are more wise and more learned in comparatively advanced and cultured societies. It is the only miracle the belief in which is not confined to those who have faith in supernatural things.

Its supernaturalness can be acknowledged by any knowledgeable person. It is the only miracle which is not for the common people. It is for the intelligentsia, unlike other miracles it is not intended to stimulate the admiration of the onlookers and to persuade them to accept a message on that basis. It is meant to educate those who accept it. It is a message in itself.

The miracle of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace be on him and his progeny), though not a human product, is not something not concerned with the human beings. Unlike the miracles of the past, it is not a device used only to make people believe, and having no other use. But his miracle represents a sort of the display of the highest human talent. It is also the best model for exercise and training, and for that a model which is always available.

The Holy Prophet tried to divert human inquisitiveness from what was extraordinary and supernatural to the rational, logical and intellectual problems and social and moral questions. His task was not so easy, especially in view of the fact that the people with whom he had to deal were not willing to submit to anything except what was unnatural. It is really astonishing how he called himself a Prophet, invited people to accept his Divine message and at the same time admitted formally that he was not aware of the "unknown".

Apart from the human value of this admission, what is striking is the extraordinary truth which is felt in his actions and which compels every heart to bow to him in admiration and respect. Some people asked him to foretell what price their goods were to fetch so that they might plan accordingly to be able to earn profit and make money. The Holy Qur'an ordered him to say: "I have no power to acquire for myself a benefit or to avert any trouble except by the will of Allah. If I had the knowledge of the unknown, I would have certainly acquired for myself much that is good and no harm would have touched me. I am no more than the one who gives warning and brings good news to a believing people." *(Surah al-A'raf, 7:188)*

A Prophet who could make no prophecy, who did not converse with the spirits, the fairies and the jinn and who did not work a miracle everyday, was no good in the sight of the people of the desert. The Holy Prophet called upon them to look into the universe, to observe piety, uprightness and faith, to acquire knowledge and to understand the meaning of life and destiny, but they ceaselessly continued to ask him to work a miracle and make a prophecy. On the other hand Allah prompted him to say: "Glory be to my Lord! I am no more than a human messenger." (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:93)

Those who deny the occurrence of miracles rely mostly on the following Qur'anic verses

saying: "They say: We will not believe you unless you make a spring gush forth from the earth for us; or you have a garden of date-palms and cause rivers to flow abundantly in their midst; or you cause the sky to fall on us in pieces as you have asserted, or you bring Allah and the angels before us; or you have a house of gold; or you ascend to heaven. But even then we will not believe in you until you bring down for us a book which we can read. Say: Glory be to my Lord. I am nothing but a human messenger.""(Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:90 - 93)

They say that these verses show that the idolaters asked the Holy Prophet to work a miracle other than the Holy Qur'an, but he declined to accede to their demand.

Unfortunately we cannot agree to this theory, especially in view of the points mentioned above and in view of what we have said in regard to the superiority of the Holy Qur'an to all other miracles. From our point of view the disputable points are as under: (i) The Prophet of Islam had no miracle other than the Holy Qur'an. He refused to fulfil the demand of the idolaters who wanted him to produce some other miracle. The verses of the Surah Bani Isra'il prove this point.

(ii) As for the value and effectiveness of miracles, it may be said that they were compatible with the period of the minority of mankind when reason and logic were not effective. Even the sages and the kings had recourse to supernatural things to justify themselves. The Prophets also had to resort to them to convince their people. The Prophet of Islam whose miracle is a Book is an exception to this rule. He justifies himself by means of a Book or actually by reason and logic.

(iii) The Prophet of Islam tried to divert the attention of the people from the unusual and supernatural things to the rational and logical questions and to turn their sensitivity from wonders to the actualities and facts. Now let us discuss one by one the points made by the opponents of the miracles: Is it true that the Prophet of Islam had no miracle except the Holy Qur'an? Apart from the fact that this view is unacceptable from the viewpoint of history and traditions reported by numerous authorities, it is contrary even to what the Holy Qur'an itself says.

The miracle of the split of the moon is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an itself. Suppose someone explains away the verse mentioning this miracle, though it is not amenable to any explanation, how will the story of the ascension of the Holy Prophet mentioned in the Surah Bani Isra'il be explained? The Holy Qur'an expressly says: "Glory be to Him who carried His slave by night from the Masjidul Haram (in Makkah) to the Masjidul Aqsa' (in Jerusalem), the precincts of which We have blessed. (We took him on this journey) to show him some of Our signs." (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:1) Is this occurrence not a supernatural event and a miracle?

In Surah at-Tahri'm there is an event saying that the Holy Prophet told a secret in confidence to one of his wives who divulged it to another wife of his. The Holy Prophet asked the first wife why she disclosed the secret to the second one and recounted a part of the conversation which had transpired between the two. That wife was surprised and asked the Holy Prophet how he came to know all that. The Holy Prophet replied that Allah had apprised him of the event. When the Holy Prophet confided a fact to one of his wives and when she afterwards divulged it and Allah apprised him thereof, he made known to her of part thereof and passed over the rest. And when he told it to her, she said: "Who has told you?" He said: "The Knower, the Aware has told me". Does this not mean telling the unknown? Is this not a miracle? What has been mentioned in Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:90 - 93 and some other verses does not at all indicate what has been inferred from it. The idolaters were not asking for a proof of Prophethood and sign with a view to gain satisfaction. They were actually asking for something else. These verses as well as Surah al-'Ankabut, 29:50 throw ample light on the unique mentality of the idolaters who were apparently demanding a miracle. These verses also make clear the philosophy of the Holy Qur'an about the miracles of the Prophets.

In Surah Bani Isra'il the idolaters begin their talk saying virtually: "We will not join you unless you on your part make a spring gush forth for us in this arid land of Makkah." This is just a bargain.

They further say: "Or you have a garden of date palms with rivers flowing in their midst or you have a house full of gold, so that we may share these things with you." This is again a bargain, as they wanted these things for their own benefit. They say: "Or you cause the sky to fall on us in pieces as you think that it will fall on the Day of Resurrection." This is asking for a punishment and the end of everything, though apparently they asked for a miracle.

"Or you ascend to heaven or you bring Allah and the angels be fore us." (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:90 - 93)

This is again a bargain, though this time they were not asking for riches, but were asking for something they could be proud of. Anyhow, they ignored the fact that it was impracticable to fulfil their demand.

The words actually used by the idolaters are notable. They did not says: 'Lan numina bika', that is we will not believe you. Instead they said: 'Lan numina laka', meaning we will not join you to your advantage. This difference in meaning has been pointed out by the scholars of the principles of jurisprudence while explaining similar expressions in Surah at-Tawbah, 9:61. Further, the intention of the idolaters is clear from the way they put their demand. They asked the Holy Prophet to make a spring gush forth for them in exchange for their support and

expedient faith. Evidently this is a demand for remuneration and not for a proof and a miracle.

The Holy Prophet came to make the people believers, not to purchase their opinion and faith. The writer whom we quoted above, himself says: "The idolaters asked the Holy Prophet to foretell the price their goods would fetch so that they could earn profit". Evidently this demand for a miracle was not made in order to know the truth. They wanted to use the Prophet as a means of making money.

Naturally his reply was: "If I had the knowledge of the unknown , I would have certainly used it to acquire for myself much that is good in this world. Obviously miracles are not meant for such purposes. I am a Prophet. I only give warning and bring good news to a believing people". The idolaters, thought that the Prophet could work a miracle to order, any time and for any purpose. That is why they wanted him to make a spring gush forth, to have a house of gold and make a prophecy about the market rates. But the fact is that a miracle is just like a revelation. Its occurrence is determined from "that side", not "from this". Just as a revelation is not subject to the wish of the Prophet and is a process which influences his will, similarly a miracle is also a process that proceeds from the other side and influences the will of the Prophet, though it is worked by him. That is what the words, 'by the will of Allah' signify both in the case of a revelation and a miracle. And that is what is meant by the following verse of Surah al-'Ankabut, which has been misinterpreted by the Christian missionaries: "The signs are with Allah alone. I am nothing but a plain warner". (Surah al-'Ankabut, 29:50)

The same is the case with the revealing of the unknown miraculously. As far as the personality of the Holy Prophet is concerned, he is not aware of the unknown. The Holy Qur'an says: "Say: I do not say to you that I am an angel, nor am I aware of the unknown."

But when he comes under a supernatural influence he tells of what is hidden, and when he is asked how he knew that, he replies that Allah, the All-knowing apprised him of the unknown matter.

When the Holy Prophet says that he does not know the unknown and if he had known it he would have earned a lot of money through that knowledge, he wants to refute the false presumption of the idolaters; and makes it clear that the knowledge of the unknown falls within the range of a miracle for he receives it through Divine revelation only. Had his knowledge of the unknown been automatic and had he been able to use it for any purpose he liked, he would have used it to fill his own coffers instead of telling the future market rates to others in order to enable them to fill their pockets.

In another verse the Holy Qur'an says: "He is the knower of what is hidden and He reveals His secret to none, except to a Messenger He has chosen." (Surah al-Jinn, 72:26 - 27)

The Holy Prophet was certainly His chosen Messenger. Furthermore, the Holy Qur'an has recounted many miracles of the former Prophets like Prophet Ibrahim, Prophet Musa and Prophet 'Isa. Then how was it possible that the Holy Prophet when asked to work a miracle like that of the former Prophets; should say that he was no more than a human messenger? Had not the idolaters a right to retort and say: "You yourself describe the miracles of the former Prophets so eloquently. Were they not human beings or were they not Prophets?" Is it possible that such a glaring contradiction should exist in the Holy Qur'an? Is it imaginable that the idolaters did not take notice of such a glaring contradiction? Should the thinking of these liberal-minded be correct, the Holy Prophet instead of saying: "Glory be to Allah! I am no more than a human messenger", should have said: "Glory be to Allah! I being the last Prophet, am excluded from the rule applicable to other Prophets. Therefore do not ask me to do, what the other Prophets were asked to do". Anyhow, he did not say so. On the other hand he said: "I am a messenger like all other messengers". This shows that what the idolaters, demanded from the Holy Prophet was not a miracle or a sign with a view to find out the truth. They were asking for something else and their demand was such that the Prophets usually do not accede to it. That is why the Holy Prophet declined to give a positive reply to their selfish and arrogant demand. They were actually asking for something impossible.

We admit that the common people are inclined to invent the stories of the miracles and ascribe them not only to the Prophets and the Imams but even to any grave, stone or tree. But that is no reason why we should deny that the Holy Prophet had miracles other than the Holy Quran. Further, there is a difference between a Prophetic miracle and a saintly miracle. A Prophetic miracle is a Divine sign and a proof to prove that there is a Divine assignment. It is always linked together with a challenge. It has certain special conditions and takes place for a special purpose. As for a saintly miracle, that is a supernatural event which is purely an outcome of the spiritual power and personal sanctity of a perfect or a semi-perfect man and does not take place to prove the truth of any Divine mission. It is almost an affair with no special conditions attached to it. A Prophetic miracle is the voice of Allah in support of a particular person. But that is not the case with a saintly miracle.

Value and Effect of a Miracle

What is the value of a miracle? The logicians and the philosophers divide the material that is used to argue a case into several kinds. Some arguments have a proving value. They are something beyond any reasonable doubt, as is the case with the data used by a mathematician. Some other arguments have only a persuasive value, as is the case with the

arguments advanced by the rhetoricians. If the arguments of the latter are analysed, they often do not prove to be convincing. But so long as they are not dissected, they prove quite moving. Some other arguments are merely emotional or have some other value.

Value of a Miracle From the Viewpoint of the Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an describes the miracles of the Prophets as the signs and clear proofs, and regards them as a convincing and logical evidence of the existence of Allah in the same way as it regards the creation as the incontrovertible proof of His existence.

The Holy Qur'an has elaborately dwelt on the question of the miracles. It considers the demand of the people for a miracle and their refusal to submit to the Prophets unless a sign was shown to them, to be reasonable and justified, provided the demand was not made for ulterior motives or just as a pastime. It has eloquently narrated many stories of the practical response of the Prophets to such demands. The Holy Qur'an has nowhere indicated that a miracle is only a persuasive argument suitable to the simple-minded people and appropriate to the period of the minority of mankind. On the other hand it has called it a clear proof.

Nature of the Holy Prophet's Guidance

The miracle of the 'Finality' being a Book, a piece of literature and a treasure of culture and knowledge, is an everlasting miracle. Many of its miraculous aspects are still gradually coming to light. Some wonderful features of the Holy Qur'an which have become known to the people of our times were not known and could not be known in the past.

The value of a Book-miracle is better grasped by the thinkers than by the common people. It is true that this miracle because of its special merits, is appropriate to the period of the finality, but, is it also true that this miracle has the nature of a Book because it is intended, among other things, to divert the attention of man from the unknown to the known, from the unreasonable to the reasonable and logical, and from the supernatural to the natural, Does the Holy Prophet try to draw of the inquisitiveness of people from the unusual and supernatural things to the rational, logical, intellectual, scientific, social and moral questions and to turn their sensitivity from wonders to the realities?

That does not appear to be true. Should it be true, that would mean that all other Prophets were inviting people to the unknown and only the Holy Prophet invited them to the known. If this is the case, then why have hundreds of the verses of the Holy Qur'an been devoted to the description of miracles?

Undoubtedly it is one of the basic distinctions of the Holy Qur'an that it calls for the study of nature and describes the natural phenomena as Divine signs. But a call for the study of nature does not mean diverting the attention of people from everything that does not pertain to nature.

On the other hand a call for the study of natural phenomena as signs means passing from nature to what is beyond nature and from what is perceptible to what is intelligible.

The importance of the work of the Holy Prophet lies in the fact that just as he calls the people for the study of nature, history and society, he also persuades those who submit to nothing but supernatural to submit to reason, logic and science also. He similarly tries to make those who are fond of reason and logic and submit to nothing but what is natural and perceptible, to get acquainted with a higher logic as well.

The basic difference between the world presented by the religion on the whole, and especially by Islam, and the world depicted by purely human sciences and philosophies, is that as William James has put it, in the construction of the world of religion certain other elements have gone in addition to the material elements and the laws generally recognized by mankind.

The Holy Qur'an does not want to divert the attention from natural and perceptible things to supernatural and imperceptible things. The importance of the Holy Qur'an lies in the fact that besides paying attention to what is natural or in the words of the Holy Quran, is the seen, it puts the belief in the unseen in the forefront of its teachings: "This is the Book about which there is no doubt. It is a guidance to the pious, who believe in the unseen." (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:2 - 3)

How can the Holy Qur'an divert the attention of people from what is supernatural when it is itself a miracle, and so many other miracles have been described in more than hundred verses of it. We are unable to understand what is meant by saying that the Book is the only miracle, the belief in which is not confined to those who believe in the supernatural things.

What belief? Does the writer mean the belief that the Holy Qur'an is a Book the contents of which are very valuable and sublime, or the belief that it is a miracle? The belief that a thing is miraculous in the sense that it is a Divine sign, amounts to the belief in its supernaturalness. How can a man have a belief in a miracle and at the same time not have a belief in anything supernatural?

It has been said that the miracle of the Prophet of Islam does not belong to the category of non-human matters though it is a non-human act. To us the meaning of this statement also is not clear for it can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly it may mean that the Holy Qur'an being a revealed Book, not having been composed by the Holy Prophet is a non-human act, but though it is the word of Allah, not of any human being, it belongs to the category of human matters and is an ordinary act, like other human acts.

It appears to be improbable that this is what the writer means, for in the case of the acceptance of this view, the Holy Qur'an would have no distinction over other revealed Books.

All the other revealed Books have also issued from the same source of revelation, but as they have no supernatural aspect, they not belong to the category of superhuman acts.

There is a category of the sayings of the Holy Prophet known as Hadith al-Qudsi. These sayings are the revealed words of Allah but still they are neither miraculous nor superhuman.

The Holy Qur'an is distinguished from other revealed Books and from Hadith al-Qudsi in that it is superhuman. It is revealed as well as superhuman and supernatural. That is why the Holy Qur'an says: "Say: If all human beings and jinn were to combine to produce the like of the Quran, they would surely fail to compose the like of it, even if they helped one another." (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:88)

The other interpretation of the above-mentioned statement may be that unlike the miracles of other Prophets such as converting a staff into a serpent and bringing the dead to life which definitely do not belong to the category of human acts, the miracle of Muhammad (Peace be on him and his progeny) being a sort of learned speech and dissertation, belongs to that category, but it is still superhuman, having sprung from a supernatural source. Should this interpretation be what is intended, and it should be, then this statement in itself is an admission that there exists what is supernatural and extraordinary and that there are things which are unseen and unknown.

Then why should we think of a miracle as if it is something mythical and irrational. Why should we not from the very beginning distinguish between the miracles on the one hand and the myths and superstitions on the other, so that the less-informed people may not form that impression of the miracles which we do not want them to form. Why instead of saying clearly and in a straightforward manner that the Book of the Prophet of Islam is a miracle, should in a roundabout way say that his miracle is a Book?

In one of the last works of the same writer an article has been published under the heading: 'The Quran and the Computer'. This article may be considered to be a correction of his earlier view about the miraculousness of the Holy Qur'an and a sign of the gradual development of his thinking. In this article he has proposed the replacement of the letters of the Holy Qur'an by the computerized signs and the use of this great manifestation of human culture for the discovery of the Qur'anic knowledge. This is a timely and sound suggestion.

The writer has hinted at the endeavours made and being made by some Egyptian and Iranian scholars in this field. He has also made an interesting discourse under the caption: 'How to Prove the Inimitability of the Qur'an'. In this article he has referred to a valuable book entitled, 'The Process of the Development of the Qur'an', which has lately been published and in which its learned author has proved that the size and the length of the verses and the words revealed

to the Holy Prophet in over 23 years form and exact and regular curve. Commenting on the discovery made in this book the writer says: "Is there any speaker in the world the year of whose sentences may be ascertained from their length, especially when these sentences do not form the text of any literary or scientific book produced by an author in a regular manner? In contrast, they are the sentences which came from time to time on the lips of a man over a long period of twenty-three years of his busy life. They do not form a book written on a particular subject, nor do they pertain to even any pre-conceived field. They cover multifarious questions which arose in society from time to time. Some of them answer the specific queries made, and some others deal with the problems that came up in the course of a long-drawn struggle. They were revealed to a great leader and were collected and arranged later."

:Note

[1] Popularly known as Jamaluddin Afghani.