

lence, duplicity and jealousy. It has always asked its followers to develop a rounded world-view instead of an angular one. As the Ephesians express the hope: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."³⁵

VII

Islam is a major world religion which came into vogue six hundred years after the birth of Christianity. The name 'Islam' was given to the faith by its founder Prophet Mohammed. It is the infinitive form of an Arabic verb, which means 'to surrender'. Thus its root meaning shows that Islam emphasises submitting oneself absolutely and fully to God, and to His commandments and Laws. The term 'Islam' is also connected with 'Aslama', meaning 'entered into peace'. The idea of peace is one of the dominant ideas with Islam and the goal to which it leads is 'the abode of peace'. The Westerners often use the term 'Muhammadanism' as a synonym for Islam—obviously, this name is coined after the name of the Founder; but the followers themselves never use this term, for it would create the impression that Islam centres around Muhammed, the Prophet, instead of around God.

Though Islam is the youngest of the major religions of the world, it claims to preach the truth of the oldest religion and claims also to be the natural

35 Ephesians, II: 31-32.

religion of man. As the Prophet says, "Every child is born in Islam, it is their parents who make them Jews or Christians." The fundamental teaching of Islam is : 'Believe in God and do good deeds'.

For the followers of Islam the Quar'an is the ultimate authority. It contains the revelations of God to Prophet Mohammed. The revelation came to him in Arabic from the Archetypical Book in Heaven. As the tradition goes, the Prophet visited a cave near the base of the Mount Hira which lies a few miles north of Mecca. During his stay there he had one night (called 'the Night of Power and Excellence') a vision of archangel Gabriel shouting at him, "Recite—Recite thou in the name of thy Lord who created." At the end of this Vision Mohammed was able to reproduce the entire revelation. But half doubting and half believing, he rushed home and narrated the whole incident to his worthy consort Khadijah. She assured him that the Vision must have revealed the Supreme Truth. But he was not easily comforted. He went to this mountain and that mountain in his desire to see Gabriel once again. Then one day he was roused by a heavenly voice beckoning him, "O Muhammed ! thou art the Prophet of the Lord, in truth, and I am Gabriel." Thus he became convinced that he was the Prophet.

After being convinced of the authenticity of the Angelic vision Prophet Mohammed began to preach, and his teachings became the creed of Islam. The divine inspirations which the Prophet had got found their expression in the holy scripture called the Quar'an. What the Prophet uttered and recorded in the

Qur'an are however the words of God as the Prophet heard them. As words of Allah (God), the Quaranic statements are not to be understood as the product of any man—they are 'uncreated'. They did not come into existence as they were revealed to the Prophet to recite. They are eternal divine Words. It is said that to any one challenging the Divine source of the Qur'an the Prophet threw the counter-challenge to produce a book like the Qur'an ; and needless to say, no one could. The Qur'an, as we have it in a book form, is divided into 114 chapters, called *sura*.

At the outset it may be noted that Imān (faith) and Islam (surrender) constitute the cardinal principles of Islamic religion. Faith here implies "faith in all the sacred books of Allah, in the messengers of Allah who preceded Prophet Mohammed, the prophet himself and those who are certain in the hereafter".³⁶ Further, faith is a combination of belief (Imān) and action (Āmal). Islam implies (as pointed out before) submission to God, a submission which no doubt springs from faith. Hence the two terms 'Imān' and 'Islam' are often used interchangeably ; but strictly speaking, they are two aspects of one composite religious attitude. Imān is the *theoretical* side of a man's belief, whereas 'Islam' is its *practical* expression, i. e., a kind of actualised faith. Faith, again, is complex, involving three steps, namely, (i) an acceptance of the religious dogma, (ii) allowing the faith to take firm roots in the heart of the believer, and (iii) expression of the faith in the supreme act of sacrifice and devotion or love. In other words, faith is 'confession by the tongue,

firm belief in the mind and good action done outwardly.'

Let us now go into greater details. The quintessence of Islamic faith is well expressed thus : "O, ye, believe in God and His apostles and the Books which He has sent down to His apostles and the Books which He has sent down formerly. He who disbelieves in God and His angels, His books and His apostles, and the Last Day has strayed far away."³⁷ From this it is clear that the first article of faith is God. The most succinct profession of faith is : 'There is no god, But God (Allah) and Mohammed is His Prophet' ('lailaha illa'llah muhammadun rasulu'llae'). This is known as *Sāhādā*, and it constitutes *the* basic principle from which all other tenets and injunctions follow. Belief in One God in rigid exclusion of any form of polythesim is the foundation on which the entire superstructure of Islam stands. Any one who would import any creaturely or anthropomorphic conception into the idea of one God would be guilty of 'Shirk', the unpardonable sin of associating the creaturely with the power, majesty and glory of God. The Jewish and the Christian contemporaries of the Prophet might have had the notion of one God, but they could not fully realise its true import, said the Prophet. As Hutchison and Martin comment, "The Supreme Being who had seemed to Muhammad's contemporaries to be remote and unreal seemed to Muhammed himself to be ever present and supremely real. The absolute, unity, the exclusive sovereignty, and the complete

transcendence of Allah were, for him, matters of passionate and compelling certainty."³⁸ The Prophet emphasised that Allah alone is God from eternity to eternity. No attribute can strictly be applied to Him. But certain descriptive terms may be used with regard to Him. Such descriptive terms as they appear in the Qur'an are called 'Ninety-nine Beautiful Names' (Āsmāul Husnā). Allah is described as Creator, Supreme power, Guide etc. ; and besides these majestic aspects, the Qur'an also stresses his loving kindness and magnificent bounty. Allah is repeatedly addressed as 'The Compassionate' and 'The Merciful'—He is also the protector and the pardoner. He is to be approached not simply with holy fear, but is also to be adored, loved and regarded as the ultimate Redeemer who is ready to turn to sincere repentants. He is the Mighty and the Wise, the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward.

The fundamental belief in Allah is followed by belief in the Angels. The prophet himself was addressed by the angel Gabriel. The angels are the Heavenly Messengers. The angels have a peculiar status. They are creatures and yet they are super-human. They are the creatures and servants of Allah, and they worship Him continually. They are innocence incarnate. Thus they are to be distinguished from human creatures. While men are created out of soil, the angels are created out of light (nur). Again, ordinary men are forgetful of Allah, and if they worship Him, they do so only in a discontinuous manner ; but the angels worship Him

38 Hutchison & Martin, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

continually. There are many angels who vary in rank, position and authority. Kerāman and Kātenin are the two guardian angels who keep a watch on every man and who act as witnesses for or against men on the day of Judgment. Similarly, there is one angel as the Master of Heaven and another as the Master of Hell. There are also angels of death.

Intermediate between men and angels there is another class of superhuman beings, called Jinn. The jinns are created out of fire. Jinns, like men, may be divided into believers and non-believers. The believers have an appointed place in Heaven, while the non-believers will be judged and condemned to hell. The non-believing rebellious jinns are called the devils or shaitans. Their leader the Shaitan is the permanent adversary of God. Once he had a place amongst the angels ; but he did not prostrate himself before Adam, even though commanded by Allah ; and so he was thrown out of the world of angels.

The belief in the Prophets is an important article of faith with the followers of Islam. God revealed himself through his chosen Prophets to whom his Eternal Book was revealed. The Eternal Book of God was being revealed to man through his Prophets from time immemorial ; but the revelation was completed in the case of the Prophet Mohammed, and such revelations are contained in the Holy Book Quar'an. It may be asked : How many Prophets were there ? Indeed, it is difficult to give an exact number, for it may run to 'one or two lakhs and twenty four thousand'. The Quar'an itself

speaks of twenty-eight Prophets, beginning with Adam. The last and the greatest of all Prophets is Mohammed himself. Other important Prophets are : Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. It should be noted that Islam does not believe in Divine Incarnation, i.e., does not believe that God Himself appears in the form of a human or sub-human being ; but it believes in divine inspiration.

In its eschatology Islam upholds belief in after life and in the day of Last Judgment. Like Christianity, it upholds the view that the present world is steadily moving towards 'a climactic and cataclysmic end' when its hidden meanings will be completed and the world will come to an end—the dead will then rise from their graves and will be summoned to appear before God Who will deliver His final judgment on the deeds and misdeeds of man. On this occasion a last trumpet will be sounded, mountains will be brought low, heavens will be opened, graves will be uncovered and men and jinns will be resurrected to stand the trial of the Day of Last Judgment. Those who are good will have a place in Heaven where they will enjoy all sorts of delights of Paradise (e. g., good food and drink and beautiful companions), while those that have done wrong will have to suffer the horrors of hell. Thus Islam repudiates belief in a cycle of births and deaths. It puts man on trial only once ; if he fails on this occasion, he will get no further chance. It may be asked : What will be the condition of souls during the intervening period of death and the day of Last Judgment ? It is held that there is an interven-

ing state called *Burzah* lying between the mundane world and the world hereafter, and the spirits dissociated from the shell of body have a temporary abode there.

So far about the theoretical aspects of Islam. But it has an important practical aspect. As Iqbal says, "The Quar'an is a book which emphasises *deed* rather than *idea*."³⁹ Indeed, the essence of the Prophet's teaching lies in the dictum, 'Hear and Obey' and not so much as 'See and understand'. Hence every devout follower of Islam engages himself in certain specific religious acts. We now turn to them.

The chief duty of a Moslem is 'to walk in the straight path'—indeed, in his daily prayer he begs of Allah to guide him in the straight path. But what is this straight path that spells out duties to the followers of Islam? It rests on five pillars, viz., the profession of faith (*Shāhādā*), the institution of prayer (*Salāt*), charity (*zākāt*), fasting (*Rāmādān*) and pilgrimage (*hajj*).⁴⁰

The cardinal article of Islamic faith, as pointed out above, contained in the *Sahada*, "There is no god but Allah, and Mohammad is His Prophet." This states in a very crisp and simple fashion the monotheistic principle of Islam. It consists of two parts.

39 Sir Mohammed Iqbal, *The Re-construction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p.v.

40 The Prophet himself said: "Islam is put on five principles—Belief in the Single God and in Mohammed as His Messenger, performance of prayer, payment of religious tax, keeping of the month of Ramadan, and pilgrimage to the holy Mecca by whoever finds the way clear to do it." (*Bukhari*, 2 : 1).

The first part, viz., 'There is no god but Allah' states in a very simple and short fashion the cardinal principle of monotheism. The second part, viz., 'Mohammad is His Prophet' refers to the Moslem's faith in the authenticity of Mohammad as Divine Messenger and in the validity of the Holy Book which he gave to his followers. Every Moslem believes that divine revelation reached its culmination in Mohammad, and the Koran, too, contains the final expression of the unchangeable Divine Will.⁴¹

The institution of prayer is the second strong pillar. It involves 'a pouring forth of the soul' by the person praying before the Majesty of Allah. There are two themes in such a prayer—(i) expression of praise and gratitude, and (ii) supplication.⁴² It is a conscious recognition of the supreme majesty of God and of our absolute dependence on Him. A devout follower is expected to pray five times during the day : at dawn, when the dawn has broken out immediately before the sunrise, at high noon, in late afternoon, after sunset and between sunset and midnight. The call to prayer is made by the 'muezzin' from the minaret of the mosque. A mosque is essentially a house of prayer. In a mosque the prayer is led by the Imam. The Imam, it should be remembered, is not an ordained priest, for Islam does not believe in priesthood. Each individual has an *unmediated* responsibility for the purity of his life, and no priest can help an individual. Besides the

41 See Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, p. 2.

42 Cf. the Moslem saying : 'Every time a bird drinks a drop of water it lifts its eyes in gratitude towards Heaven'.

Imam, there are teachers or Ulemas who are learned in the Qur'an.

✓The third important pillar of Islam is Charity or alms-giving. Those that have must part with a portion of their earnings and accumulations for those that have not. Charity should be shown to those who are in dire need, to the slaves who try to get back or purchase their freedom, debtors unable to meet the demands of their creditors, to wayfarers and to those who collect alms for distribution among others. The devout Moslem is asked to remember that wealth belongs to God and is therefore to be used for the welfare of God's creatures. The haves are enjoined to pay at least two and half per cent of their incomes by way of 'religious tax'.

Observance of Ramadan is the fourth pillar of Islam. Ramadan is a month of Arabic calendar which received its holy character because in this month Prophet Mohammed received his initial divine commission. In this month every able-bodied Moslem is expected to fast from sunrise to sunset. This 'fast' implies total abstinence from eating, drinking, sexual intercourse and from every kind of physical gratification. It is a month of 'Universal patience' during which a positive effort is made for mental, moral and physical betterment.⁴³ Moreover, by fasting the rich can actually experience what pangs of hunger mean for the poor who are unable to fill their bellies adequately almost round the year; and Ramadan compels the rich to feel for the poor.

⁴³ Al-Ghazzali says: "Satan permeates the blood of a human being, but he is suffocated when the person fasts."

The fifth strong pillar of Islam is Pilgrimage. A pilgrimage to Mecca at least once during his life is a duty on the part of every follower of Islam (provided of course he is in a position to undertake the journey). The pilgrim is required to don a white seamless robe and to perform *tāwāf* or circuit, i.e., going round the Kaba seven times with the kissing of the little sacred black stone. This is followed by other important ceremonies each of which is accompanied by traditional prayers.

¶ The followers of Islam form one Brotherhood. As the Prophet said in his 'farewell pilgrimage' to Mecca : "Know ye that every Muslim is a brother to every other Muslim, and that ye are now one brotherhood". Further, Islam has condemned violence in matters religious. The crucial verse in the Qur'an is : 'Let there be no compulsion in religion'.⁴⁴

The Moslems are divided into different sects and groups. The two major groups are Sunnis and Shias. The Sunnis are the followers of Sunna and they regard first three Calips—Abu Bekr, Omar and Othman—as rightfully elected. The majority of moslems belongs to this group. As distinguished from them, Shias hold that they are the 'partisans' of Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed, and that the three aforesaid Caliphs were not rightfully elected. They also do not attach importance to the authority of Sunna.

Before we conclude we cannot do no better than quote the following as signifying the fundamentals of Islam : "An absolute monotheism, a divine univer-

sal message revealed by Allah, the one and the only God, to Mohammed, the last of His Prophets and Messengers to mankind, the five cardinal obligations or confessions of faith 'There is no god, but God, and Mohammed is the Apostle of God', ritual, prayers, regular charity, fasting in Ramadhan, the pilgrimage to Mecca, belief in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Apostles, in future life and resurrection, submission to the Will of God, striving after righteousness and peace ; a dogma which is simple and rational, a creed which is practical and free of mystries and ambiguities, a faith which is natural and progressive, a supreme ideal of unity—these are the fundamentals of Islam as a religion".⁴⁵

VIII

Buddhism is another very important religion claiming over 50 crores of followers. Buddhism owes its origin to Siddhārtha Gautama, a prince belonging to the noble Sakya clan. He was born in 563 B. C. The dates of his life are however controversial. It is said that he resorted to renunciation when he was 29, attained enlightenment when he was 35, and he left the world at 80 in 483 B. C.

Buddha's father was King Śuddhodana of the Śākya clan. His clan occupied a territory which spread partly from the slopes of the Himalayas to the plains below. The principal town of the territory was known as Kapilāvastu, and Buddha was born near this place in a beautiful grove known as Lumbini. Buddha's mother Māyā Devi died after seven days of

45 Z. Ali, *Islam in the World*, p. 17.