

**A Comparative Study of
WORLD RELIGIONS**

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FOREWORD

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. "O My Lord! Relieve my mind. And ease my task for me; and loose a knot from my tongue. That they may understand what I say, "(Al-Qur'an 20:25-28)

In the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, the most Merciful. O my Lord! Relieve my mind. And ease my task for me; and loose a knot from my tongue. That they may understand what I say. (Al-Qur'an 20: 25–28).

During my PhD Course in Comparative Religion I had an opportunity to make research and acquire a little knowledge about the fundamentals of all the leading religions of the world although my doctoral thesis mainly related to concept of God in these religions especially in Islam. This little research and little knowledge has prompted me to embark on the venture of writing this book despite the fact that I understand little knowledge is a dangerous thing. The pious intention behind this venture is to share my ideas with you about a subject which has always inspired interest among the readers around the world. I have no pretensions nor any claims to have attained any mastery over all the religions of the world as I believe that even a lifetime is insufficient to properly comprehend one aspect of one religion let alone pretending to know all the religions with a selective study of few years.

I have just picked up material from here and there – mainly from Encyclopedias and Holy scriptures – and have compiled it intelligently in the form of a book. About Islam I have taken material mostly from my own books. Thus the book produced by me is not a piece of an original thought, and so do not judge it by that standard. At the best it can be called a piece of research and compilation work arranged through a scientific and systematic approach. Do not consider that a writer is master of the subject about which he is writing. He may not be knowing more than what you know. It is only hard work and will which are mainly required to write a book. Kindly forgive me for my frankness.

While writing this book I have strictly followed, like a true Muslim, the direction given by God to the Prophet of Islam: "Revile not those unto whom they pray beside Allah lest they wrongly revile Allah through ignorance" – (Al – Qur'an 6:108). I have not, therefore, criticized any aspect of any religion nor I have used any harsh word about belief or practice of any religious community. Best of every religion has been taken – usually from the writings of its own followers

– and has been collected in this compendium. But still I seek your indulgence if you find any objectionable material in this book about any faith. Certainly it would be due to my ignorance and error of judgment and not due to any bad motive or deliberate action on my part. Please do not hesitate to point it out so that necessary corrections may be made in the next edition.

While dealing with each religion, more emphasis has been laid on the teachings of its founder along with his biographical sketch, beliefs and practices of its followers, concept of God held in that religion, festivals and holidays observed, daily life of its adherents, and sects or divisions which have emerged in that faith. History of the faith, philosophy and mythology connected with it, miracles performed by the gods and founders and such like other subjects have been willfully ignored.

I must acknowledge and place on record my debt of gratitude which I owe to those authors of the books and producers of encyclopedias to whose works I have many often referred. I have not only benefited from their valuable works but have also quoted large extracts from them to cover my deficiency of knowledge. May God shower His infinite blessings on them and their families!

I am also extremely thankful to my wife Dr. Nasreen Sharif who has relieved me of many of my household responsibilities and has thus enabled me to devote myself whole heartedly to research and writing. Her contribution, though indirect one, has always been more than that of mine. She can rightly be called co-author of this book and you can place her name above that of mine.

I am also grateful to Professor Abdul Jabbar Shakir, Director Libraries Punjab, who provided me access to some very useful material for the present book. My thanks are also due to those persons – publishers, composers, printers, artists – who have helped some way or the other in publication of the book.

Now I conclude this foreword with my usual prayers to the Almighty God: O My Lord! Increase me in knowledge (Al-Qur'an 20:114).

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March 23, 2003

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CHAPTER 1

JUDAISM

1 – Introduction

Judaism is the religion of ancient Hebrews and their descendants the Jews, and is the oldest among the three great monotheistic religions, the other two being Christianity and Islam. It is closely related to Christianity and Islam as the source of all the three great religions is the revelations of God through the Prophets – Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (May Allah's peace be upon them) – all descendants of Prophet Abraham. Christianity incorporated the Jewish Bible in its own scripture under the name of Old Testament, whereas Islam honours the Jewish holy places of the past as its own and believes in the great prophets of the biblical times. According to the Old Testament, Judaism is based on a covenant between God and Prophet Abraham about 1800 B.C and the renewal of covenant with Moses about 1250 B.C. The religion rests on the concept of one transcendent, Omnipotent, Eternal and Invisible true God, Whose will is revealed in Torah and Who has a special relationship with his chosen people, the Jews.

The word "Judaism" is derived from the Greek word 'Ioudaismos, first used by Greek – speaking Jews about 100 B.C. to distinguish their religion from Hellenism, and it may be traced ultimately to the name of Jacob's fourth son, Judah (Yehuda), whose descendants, together with the offspring of Benjamin, formed the southern kingdom of Judah, the capital of which was at Jerusalem. After the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel and the dispersion of its constituent tribes, the people of Judah (late known as Yehudim, Judacans, or Jews) became the principal bearers of Jewish culture and remained so even after their state was destroyed.¹

The English term "Jew," derived by way of the Greek Ioudaios and the Latin Judaeus from the Hebrew Yehudi,

originally applied to members of the tribe of Judah and in late biblical times to Jews in general (Esther 2:5). In early biblical times the ancestors of the Jews called themselves "Children of Israel," from the name that Jacob was given after his encounter with the angel (Genesis 32:29). In contact with foreigners, they called themselves Ivrim ("People from beyond the river"), from which came the Latin Hebraeus, the Old French Hebreu or Ebreu, and the English Hebrew used as an alternative for Jew. From the name "Children of Israel" is derived the English term "Israelite."²

The only generally accepted definition of a Jew is the one based on the Halakah, the traditional Jewish religious law, according to which a Jew is a person who either was born to a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism.³

The Jews are spread widely in the world and no exact statistics are available about them in most countries. In 1980 their population in the world was approximately 13 million which increased to around 14 million by the end of the century i.e. by the end of the year 2000 A.D. In Israel, the only Jewish country in the world which was created in 1948, the number of Jews is about 5 million, in the United States their number is around 6 million and in Soviet Union it is about 2 million. Rest of them live in other 80 countries of the world mostly in those of America and Europe. The Jews in numbers are not large in comparison with the world's total population, but the mark the Jews have made in the world is large and significant indeed. Their name is synonymous with wealth and Learning. In Americas and Europe their control in industry, trade, banking, press and in electronic media is much more than due on the basis of population.

2 – Prophet Moses

Moses is regarded as the founder of Judaism, the greatest Prophet and central figure in the Jewish nation. His name in

Hebrew is Mosheh. The greatness of Moses lies in the fact that he brought his people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt, "the house of bondage", received from God the Ten Commandments and the Torah on Mount Sinai, and led his people in the desert wanderings for 40 years. Above all Moses was the Prophet of God and a mediator between God and the children of Israel. According to the Jews, it is through his intermediacy that God concluded a covenant with children of Israel at Mount Sinai in which God chose them to be his people and they undertook to worship God only and obey his laws. About the name of this great Hebrew Prophet, the Bible states, though the later scholars reject it, that the Pharaoh's daughter named the infant she found in the river 'Mosheh' because she said, "I drew him out of water" (Hebrew: 'Mishiti') Historically, Moses lived between 1350 and 1250 B.C. A brief account of Moses, as constructed by Encyclopedia Americana from sacred writings of the Jews, is given below:-

Moses was the son of Amram and Jochebed, both of the tribe of Levi. Before his birth, the Egyptian Pharaoh had decreed that every male child born to his Hebrew slaves should be cast into the Nile River. In an effort to save her son, Jochebed placed Moses in an ark of bulrushes by the river's brink. He was found there by the pharaoh's daughter, who took pity on him. At the suggestion of Moses' elder sister, Miriam, his nursing was entrusted to "a Hebrew woman," who was none other than his own mother. After Moses was weaned, he was adopted by the pharaoh's daughter and raised in the royal palace.

The Bible makes no mention of Moses' upbringing at the Egyptian court. But according to Talmudic legend, his life was saved by the angel Gabriel. While a young child, Moses took the crown from the head of the pharaoh and placed it on his own head. To test whether Moses understood what he had done, a bowl of hot coals and a bowl of precious stones were placed before him. As Moses reached out for the jewels, Gabriel, who had made himself invisible, caught the child's hand and directed

it toward the coals. Moses lifted a red-hot coal to his mouth, burning part of his lip and tongue. His life was thus saved, but from then on he was "slow of speech and slow of tongue."

At some point he learned that he was a Hebrew, and was concerned about the bondage of his people. Upon reaching adulthood, Moses "went out unto his brethren" and saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew slave. He killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. When the incident became known to the Pharaoh, Moses had to flee to escape the death penalty.

He found refuge in Midian with Jethro (Reuel), a Midianite priest, and later married his daughter, Zipporah, who bore him two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. Moses lived as a shepherd in Midian for 40 years. During his sojourn with Jethro, it is possible that he absorbed Midianite ideas about the deity.

One day, while Moses tended the flock on "the Mountain of God Horeb," the Lord appeared to him in a burning bush, which was not consumed by the flames. The Lord revealed himself to Moses as the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and stated that his name was Yahweh, or Ehye ("I am," or "I cause to be"). He commanded Moses to return to Egypt to liberate his people from bondage and lead them to "a land where milk and honey flow." Moses protested that he could not perform such a task and pleaded for release because of his slow speech. But God promised to assist him and chose Moses' brother Aaron as his spokesman. Moses then returned to Jethro and, without disclosing God's revelation, sought permission to visit his brethren in Egypt. On his way back to Egypt with his wife and children, Moses met Aaron and told him of God's words. Moses and Aaron then approached the Children of Israel, who accepted them as their leaders.

Thereupon they went to the Pharaoh and declared, "This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, has said, 'Let my people go, so that they may keep a feast in the wilderness in honor of me.'"

When the pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave Egypt, God inflicted ten plagues on the nation. The pharaoh remained adamant after the first nine. But the tenth plague—the death of all the firstborn of Egypt—finally broke his resistance. The Angel of Death passed over the homes of the Israelites, whose doorways had been marked with lamb's blood. After a hasty nocturnal meal of the Passover lamb and matzo (unleavened bread), the Children of Israel marched out of Egypt.

The pharaoh soon changed his mind and sent his army in pursuit, trapping the Israelites on the shores of the Sea of Reeds (later misinterpreted as the Red Sea). Then followed the miraculous passage through the Reed Sea, which Moses parted by stretching out his hand over it. The pursuing Egyptians were drowned when the waters returned. The Israelites traveling through the wilderness complained to Moses of hunger and thirst, and at God's command he performed miracles to provide water, manna, and quail.

Moses then led his people to Mt Sinai, where they entered into a covenant with God. While the Israelites remained at the foot of the mountain, he climbed to the peak and was met there by God, who revealed to Moses his Law - the Ten Commandments. Moses stayed with God on Mt. Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights, during which time he had nothing to eat or drink.

When Moses descended, he found the Israelites worshipping a golden calf. Enraged, he shattered the tablets containing the Ten Commandments. After the people were punished and repented, God commanded Moses to go up Mt. Sinai again. Moses remained there another 40 days and 40 nights, during which time God instructed him in the law and again inscribed the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets.

Moses then led the Israelites through their wanderings in the desert for 40 years, to the border of Canaan.

According to tradition, Moses, under God's direction, wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible (known as the "Torah of Moses"). When he reached the age of 120, God warned him that he was about to die. Thereafter, Moses appointed Joshua as his successor and gave a blessing to each of the tribes. Although not permitted to enter Canaan, he was allowed to view it from Mt. Nebo, where he died.

Moses' story ends enigmatically in Deuteronomy: "He was buried in the valley in the land of Moab... and no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day." The Pentateuch conclude with a pithy eulogy of Moses: "And there hath not arisen a prophet in Israel like unto Moses whom the Lord knew face to face in all the signs and the wonders ... and in all the great terror which Moses wrought in the sight of Israel."

3 – Concept of God

Judaism is strictly a monotheistic religion and its followers are strictly monotheists. A Jew acknowledges reality of God and believes that God is one. He expresses that belief daily in the recital of the Shema, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is God, the Lord is One." The Shema is heart of every Jewish religious worship. More than this it is the heart of Judaism.

God's personal name in the Bible is JEHOVAH. In many translations of the Bible this name is found at Psalm 83:18 where we read (AV): That men may know that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the most high over all the earth." The Catholic Encyclopedia (1910) says of this divine name: "Jehovah, the proper name of God in the Old Testament." However, in Hebrew, the language in which the first 39 books of the Bible were written, God's name is represented by four Hebrew letters, YHWH. In ancient times the Hebrew Language was written without vowels. Many scholars think the name was pronounced Yahweh. So this name is also found in some

editions of the Bible. But the name Jehovah is most widely known.

Tracing the development of concept of God among the Hebrews, the authors of "Great Religions By Which Men Live" write:

"The legends show that the god was at first a tribal god, a protector and benefactor of the Hebrews, the descendants of Abraham. He was known and worshiped by Abraham, his son Isaac, and his grandson Jacob, who was later called Israel.

Gradually, the Hebrew-Jewish people became convinced that this tribal god was actually the one and only God of all creation. Of course, this process took time. It took century after century, through the periods of the great Hebrew leaders – the tribal fathers, Moses, David and the other kings, Isaiah and the rest of the Prophets. Slowly the people were gaining a world view that could not have been theirs at their beginning as wandering nomad tribes.

But now, for 2500 years, the great affirmation of Judaism has been: "...the Lord our God, the Lord is One".

For a long time, Jews did not find it important to discuss the nature of God. God exists, he is One, he is reality. Even today, there is not a creed describing the characteristics of God. The Shema is sufficient.

However, some rabbis and philosophers did become interested in describing God's qualities, though no Jew is ever required to affirm the ideas. God is righteous. He is the Creator. He is Spirit. God is a sympathetic helper to man, providing the means whereby man may save himself from the limitations of ignorance and sinfulness. God has made men as his children; thus, they reflect his nature."

Explaining the concept of God as held by the Jews, the Encyclopedia Americana writes:

"Although Judaism has no formal creed, certain basic elements can be discerned among the Jews of every age. Foremost among these is the belief in God as affirmed in Deuteronomy (6:4): "Hear O Israel the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." This statement, known as the Shema from the first word in Hebrew, epitomizes the faith of the Jews. It is included in their daily prayers and is the last thought to be uttered at the time of death. The Bible offers no theological arguments for the existence of God. His presence and gracious goodness are manifest in all creation, at all times and in all places.

For the Jewish people, however, God chose one particular time and place in which to reveal his special relationship with them. According to the scriptural account, God, speaking through Moses at Sinai, instructed the Children of Israel in every detail of the Law. By accepting the Mosaic Law the people entered into a Covenant with God that assured them his everlasting care so long as they would abide by his precepts and statutes. They became God's "peculiar treasure, a people chosen among all the nations to bear witness to him."

Highlighting Judaism's Concept of God, the Encyclopedia Encarta holds:

The idea of transcendence is introduced in the opening verses of the Hebrew Scriptures, in which God is presented as creator, and this conception impresses itself on all Jewish discourse about God. To say the world is created means that it is not independent of God or an emanation of God, but external to him, a product of his will, so that he is Lord of all the earth. This explains the Jewish antipathy to idolatry – no creature can represent the Creator, so it is forbidden to make any material image of him. Nonetheless, it is also part of the creation teaching that the human being is made in the image of God.

Thus, the Hebrew understanding of God was frankly anthropomorphic. He promised and threatened, he could be angry and even jealous; but his primary attributes were righteousness, justice, mercy, truth, and faithfulness. He is represented as king, judge and shepherd. He binds himself by covenants to his people and thus limits himself. Such a God even if anthropomorphic, is a living God. It is true that the name of God, Yahweh, was understood as "I am who I am," but this was not taken by the Hebrews of biblical times in the abstract, metaphysical sense in which it was interpreted later. The Hebrew God was unique, and his command was, "You shall have no other gods beside me!"

Regarding concept of Jews about God, the Collier's Encyclopedia writes:

"The Jew holds that God is the Creator of all things at all times; that He is at one and the same time a Mind that uninterruptedly contemplates and a Power that is eternally at work; that He is universal, ruler of all the world, which is one as He is One. The Jew believes that God is the giver not only of natural law but of moral law; that He is the guarantor of immortality, the ethical, holy and righteous One, who enforces the right; that He is the guide of history; that He is both transcendent and immanent. The Jew believes that God is man's helper and friend, father of all mankind; that He is the liberator of men and nations; that He is the saviour of all souls, helping men to be delivered from ignorance, sinfulness, and the evils within themselves, such as pride, selfishness, hate, and lust. But salvation is not achieved solely by an act of God; God requires man's cooperation in the process. The Jew holds that God recognizes no principle or power of evil in creation; that He Himself is the author of both light and darkness. Evil remains an inscrutable mystery for the Jew, and he accepts it as a challenge to overcome it wherever he finds it in the world. Whenever evil oppresses him, his faith in God sustains him in the face of it."

Jehovah is not an oppressive God. "All his ways are justice", says Deuteronomy (32:4). "True, he is "a God exacting exclusive devotion," but he is also "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth." (Exodus 20:5; 34:6) "He himself well knows the formation of us, remembering that we are dust." (Psalm 103:14 [102:14, Dy]). With Jehovah there are "wisdom and mightiness; he has counsel and understanding." (Job 12:13) Evidence of his wisdom is seen in all his creative works, in both heaven and earth."

Jews agree that we cannot know the final answers to the mysteries of life and God. But Jews declare that in the goodness of lives lived righteously, the goodness of God is known:

O Lord, how can we know Thee? Where can we find Thee? Thou art farther than the farthestmost star. Thou art as mysterious as the vast solitudes of the night and yet art as familiar to us as the light of the sun. To the seer of old Thou didst say: Thou canst not see my face, but I will make all my goodness pass before thee. Even so does Thy goodness pass before us in the realm of nature and in the varied experiences of our lives. When justice burns like a flaming fire within us, when love evokes willing sacrifice from us, when, to the last full measure of selfless devotion, we proclaim our belief in the ultimate triumph of truth and righteousness, do we not bow before the vision of Thy goodness? Thou livest within our hearts, as Thou dost pervade the world, and we through righteousness behold Thy presence.

4 – Holy Scripture

The Holy Scripture or the sacred writings of Judaism comprise two major collections – the Bible and the Talmud.

The Bible: The first and foremost among the sacred writings of Judaism is the Bible which may be called the Hebrew

Bible and which is the same as the Christian's Old Testament. There are three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible and it contains 39 books in all. First such division is represented by Torah which comprises the five books of Moses.

The Torah means 'teaching'. The Torah, Judaism holds, was divinely revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai soon after the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt (1250 B.C). It consists of Five books, sometimes, called the Pentateuch, which are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

All Jews are encouraged to study Torah. It is regularly read each year in the synagogues, a portion on each Sabbath.⁵ Traditions further tell that God Himself spoke the Ten Commandments to Prophet Moses on Mount Sinai which are found in the twentieth Chapter of Exodus. There were more commandments than these, to be sure over six hundred in all. The commandments deal with a wealth of subjects: diet, crime and punishment, religious practices, holy days, and human relationships.⁶ Torah forms the basic source of Jewish law covering every aspect of social and religious behaviour.

The second section or division of the Jewish Bible is called "The Prophets" which contains the books of Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings, known as the Early Prophets as well as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and the 12 Minor Prophets, known as the Later Prophets.

Many people believe that the height of Jewish thought and understanding was reached in the teachings of the prophets. The Prophets were spokesmen for God, who warned of dire consequences if God's will were not followed.

Still third section of the Jewish Bible is known as "The Writings" which comprises in all 13 Books. It includes books of history recounting the adventures of the Hebrew-Jewish people and their growing understanding of their world. It includes the

Psalms and the other books of poetry. While these are not considered to be the basic Law, as the first five books are, they are still in the spirit of the Law.

All the books contained in Hebrew Bible or the old Testament, in all its three divisions are shown in the following chart:

TORAH

Genesis

Exodus

Leviticus

Numbers

Deuteronomy

FORMER PROPHETS

Joshua

Judges

1 – 2 Samuel

1 – 2 Kings

LATTER PROPHETS

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Ezekiel

The Twelve:

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Haggai

Zechariah

Malachi

THE WRITINGS

Psalms

Proverbs

Job

Song of Songs

Ruth

Lamentations

Ecclesiastes

Esther

Daniel

Ezra-Nehemiah

1 – 2 Chronicles

The Bible was composed over a period of more than 1,000 years, from the 12th to the 2d centuries B.C. Not until the 2d century A.D. was the Canon closed, excluding the books that became the Apocrypha. The original text of the Old Testament is in the Hebrew language, with a few brief passages in Armaic.⁷

The Talmud: Second to the Bible is the Talmud. It is a book containing the civil and canonical laws of the Jews and includes the Mishnah, a compilation from oral tradition written in Hebrew about 200 A.D., and the Gemara, a collection of comments and criticisms by the Jewish rabbis, written in Armaic during 3rd and 4th centuries. There are in fact two Talmuds: the one made in Palestine (The Jerusalem Talmud), finished at the beginning of the 5th century, and the other made in Babylon, completed at the end of the 6th century.

The Talmud is in effect, an extension of the Torah down into the centuries which followed the completion of the other writings. The Talmud arose to meet conditions that the Jews faced in later times. As their homes and surroundings changed, their religious and cultural needs changed. Additional laws grew out of the newer needs these were passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. From time to time, learned rabbis

commented on these oral laws and on the earlier, written ones, seeking to reinterpret them for the changing times.⁸

5 – Beliefs

Belief in God: The Most important teaching of Judaism is that there is one God who alone is to be worshipped. Judaism teaches that a person serves God by reading the Holy scriptures and by acting upon what they teach. A Jew, therefore, first of all believes that God is one, and expresses that belief daily in the recital of the Shema, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one". The Jew believes that God is spirit, the Absolute Being who calls himself, "I am who I am". Followers of Judaism thus believe in one God and worship him alone associating no idols or images with him.

Covenant with God: The Jews believe that they have a special relationship with God through a covenant that God made with Abraham the ancestor of the Hebrews. According to the Bible, God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants if they worshiped and remained faithful to Him. God renewed this covenant with Abraham's son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob. Jacob was also called Israel and so his descendants are called children of Israel or Israelites. God later renewed this covenant with the children of Israel through their leader Moses at Mount Sinai and gave Moses Ten commandments and the Torah. These commandments and the books were given to Israelites to teach them how to live and behave.

Chosen People: The Jews believe that God had elected Israel and his descendants out of all the nations of the worlds to be recipients of his revelation and to bear witness to him. They are therefore, the chosen people of God and hence they had special privileges. However, this idea of being a privileged people was condemned by their prophets. Listen to an early prophet as he tries to correct their mistaken ideas:

"Are you not like the Ethiopians in my sight,

O Israelites", is an oracle of the Lord.

"Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt,

Also the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir?"

An anonymous prophet shows that their God is the God of all people. He quotes God as saying: Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage." The whole book of Jonah is directed against narrow nationalism and the chosen people" idea held by many Jews of that time.⁹

Thus under the influence of the Prophets and the teachers, idea of chosenness was interpreted in different way. It was said that the Jews had been chosen to serve God and to teach and lead the other people of the world toward service of one God.

So chosenness came to be understood throughout Jewish history as moral responsibility. In the 19th Century the Concept of the chosen people was translated by Reform Judaism into the "Mission of Israel". The scattering of Jewish people was viewed not as punishment for sins but as a reflection of God's desire to have them bear universal witness to him so that ultimately all mankind might be turned toward worship of one god only. Later, in Reconstructionist Judaism, the concept of chosen people was dropped as it was considered inappropriate to modern universalism.

The Messiah and Kingdom of God: Traditionally the Jews believed, and many of them still believe, that God would send a Messiah to save them and establish kingdom of God on earth. In this kingdom, God's law would prevail and all men will find

justice and peace and fulfillment of their noble aspirations. Righteousness would rule the world and evil would be suppressed.

The word Messiah comes from the Hebrew word Mashiah, which means the anointed one. A descendant of David, he will reestablish the Davidic line that will rule in Jerusalem and will rebuild the destroyed sanctuary. The age of the Messiah will be a time of universal brotherhood in which all nations will acknowledge God's sovereignty and righteous of past generations will experience a resurrection. This Messianic concept is different from the Christian concept derived from it, in that its fulfillment is to be on earth and not in heaven.

The Book of Isaiah describes the Messiah as a just ruler who will unite the Jewish people and lead them in God's way. The Messiah will correct wrongs and defeat the enemies of the people.

Many Jews still expect a Messiah to come. But others speak instead of a Messianic Kingdom. They believe a period of justice and peace will come through the cooperation of all people and the help of God.¹⁰

The Promised land: The Jews have been the world's best-known displaced persons. More than two thousand years ago, world events left them without a permanent home and sent them forth to roam the earth. Wherever they settled, they kept alive their traditions and their worship of God. Often they stayed together in their own communities, in order that they might better keep their holy days and their dietary laws.¹¹

Other people found the Jewish ways different and some times difficult to understand. The differences caused some people to complain and even to persecute the Jews. The Christians particularly – accusing Jews of having killed Jesus – have been guilty of such persecution.¹²

For over two thousand years the Jews had been reminding themselves the ancient promise of God about a land that would be theirs. This was the legendary promised land sought by the Hebrews who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses. This land they had for a time, but they were conquered by one nation after another, only to be driven out in the end.¹³

Many Jews had kept alive the hope that once again the land of Palestine would be theirs. They found the opportunity at last to have their promised land when the politics of the world enabled them to create the state of Israel in 1948.

Repentance: The Jews believe in repentance which is the way to recover from the ill consequences of errors and sins. Repentance implies return to God and also forgiveness of Him when one has committed a sin by failure to live by His command. So highly regarded is repentance that the true penitent stands where not even the fully righteous can stand. Related to repentance is the concept of atonement i.e., performing a specific act (e.g. sacrifice) that helps a person become "at one" with God. In theology, atonement means reconciliation with God (or the gods) by means of sacrifice or offering. Thus in the Bible the Jewish law required that "you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement" (Revised Standard Version: Exodus 29:36). Even the altar, and also the smaller altar of incense, had to be "atoned" once a year (Exodus 30:10; Leviticus 16:18). Although the sacrifice might be eaten as food, it was effective (Exodus 29:33).¹⁴

The elaborate ritual of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is described in Leviticus 16. In addition to the sacrifice of a bull and a ram, two goats were presented to the Lord. On the head of one of the goats the sins of Israel were laid symbolically (but, in ancient thought, really), and it was then led into the wilderness and left to die. This meant the removal of the people's sins, because the goat bore them "to a solitary land."¹⁵

Hereafter: The Jews of Biblical times did not believe in life after death and reward for obedience to God promised in the Bible is "That you may live long in the land which I, the Lord your God, give to you."

As to the character of Paradise or Heaven where the righteous are rewarded, and of Hell or Gehenna, where the wicked are punished, Jews have differing interpretations. The Bible is silent on these matters; later literature contains these beliefs, but here, too, there is much difference of opinion.

6 – Worship and Practices

One of the constant features of Judaism since earliest times has been worship of God through prayer and sacrifice. Abraham, the father of the Hebrews, prayed to God and offered sacrifices. The Jews are obliged by tradition to worship three times a day: morning, afternoon and evening, with special prayers on the Sabbath and on festivals and special calendar events.

The Synagogue is the Jewish house of worship and the center of Jewish education and community activities. A synagogue has a sanctuary where religious services are held. It may also include a school where children study Judaism, the Hebrew language, and Jewish history. Most synagogues have a social hall as well. A synagogue is frequently called a temple.¹⁶

Most synagogues are constructed so that the worshipers face toward the holy city of Jerusalem during the service. At the front of the sanctuary stands the ark, a chest in which the scrolls of the Torah are kept. In front of the ark hangs the eternal light, an oil lamp whose constant flame symbolizes God's eternal presence. The sanctuary of a synagogue also includes a branched candlestick called a menorah and a tablet bearing the first two words of each of the Ten Commandments written in Hebrew.¹⁷

The Rabbi serves as spiritual leader, teacher, and interpreter of Jewish law. Traditionally, rabbis were chiefly teachers of the law. Today, rabbis also deliver sermons during worship services in the synagogue, give advice to people with problems, and perform many other functions. A person who wants to become a rabbi must spend years studying Hebrew sacred writings and Jewish history, philosophy, and law.¹⁸

The Cantor chants the prayers during worship in the synagogue. The cantor has a trained voice and special knowledge of Hebrew and the traditions of chanting. In many synagogues, the cantor also directs a choir and conducts religious education.¹⁹

Worship in Judaism takes place both in the home and in the synagogue. Important parts of home worship include daily prayers, the lighting of the Sabbath candles, and the blessing of the wine and bread at the Sabbath meal. Jews also observe many holiday rituals at home.²⁰

Worship practices in the synagogue differ among the branches of Judaism and even within these groups. Orthodox and Conservative synagogues conduct services daily, but most Reform synagogues have services only on the Sabbath and holidays. In all Orthodox and some Conservative synagogues, at least 10 men must be present for a service to take place. This minimum number of participants is called a minyan. Any male who is at least 13 years old may lead the service. In most Conservative and Reform congregations, women may lead the service and be part of the minyan.²¹

Synagogue worship consists primarily of readings from the Torah and the chanting of prayers from a prayer book called the siddur. In Orthodox synagogues, men and women sit separately and chant almost all the prayers in Hebrew. In Conservative and Reform congregations, men and women sit together, and much of the service is in the language of the

country. Conservative and Reform services may also include music and a sermon.²²

Judaism, like Islam, has no priesthood, no organized church, no religious hierarchy. People of locality choose or appoint themselves their Rabbi. Even a layman with essential basic knowledge can lead prayers in a synagogue. Judaism, like Islam, does not believe in asceticism. Hence there are no monks and nuns.

Fasting: In Judaism, apart from the great Fast of Atonement (Yom Kippur) on the 10th of the Hebrew month of Tishri, the Old Testament (Zechariah 8:19) mentions four lesser fasts, now identified as those occurring on (1) the 10th of the Hebrew month of Tebeth, when the siege of Jerusalem began; (2) the 17th of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, when the walls were breached; (3) the 9th of the Hebrew month of Ab, when the Temple was destroyed; and (4) the 3d of the Hebrew month of Tishri, when Gedaliah, governor of Judah, was assassinated (II Kings 25:25). There is also a fast of Esther (Esther 4:16), and of the firstborn on the vigil of Passover. Fasts last from sunrise until the first stars appear, except those of Yom Kippur and the 9th of Ab, which are observed "from sunset to sunset." No fast, except Yom Kippur, can fall on the Sabbath.²³

7 – Daily Life of a Jew

Judaism is essentially a social and family religion which, more than almost any other, concerns itself with the observances of every aspect of daily life. As in Islam (q.v.) details are laid down in the most minute way for the behaviour of the orthodox.²⁴

Birth: The birth of a child is regarded as an unquestioned blessing and a mark of God's favor. Especially in biblical times, children and kinfolk were the instruments for preserving the memory of persons after death.²⁵

On the first Sabbath following the birth of a girl, the father is called to the Torah during the synagogue service. A prayer is said on behalf of the mother's speedy recovery from childbirth, and the daughter is given her name. A son is named at the B'rit Milah (Covenant of Circumcision) on the eighth day after birth. At the father's request an official, called a mohel, performs the circumcision, and the child is brought into the Covenant of Abraham. Then the child receives his Hebrew name in a prayer for his well-being and the hope that he will fulfill the aspirations of his parents.²⁶

Puberty: At the age of 13, a boy becomes a full member of the Jewish community. This event is celebrated in the synagogue with a ceremony called a bar mitzvah. Some Reform and Conservative synagogues have a similar ceremony for girls called a bat mitzvah. The young person reads from the Torah during the ceremony, which is followed by a social celebration. Many congregations also conduct group confirmation services. On these occasions, young people who are 15 or 16 years old pledge to follow the teachings of the Torah.²⁷

Marriage: The commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" was the first one given to Adam and Eve. Accordingly, to marry and fulfill this commandment has always been understood to be the obligation of every Jew.²⁸

Jewish rites in connection with marriage include the following: solemnizing of the betrothal; calling of the groom to the reading of the Torah in the synagogue on the Sabbath before his marriage (not a usual Reform practice); use of the canopy under which groom and bride stand for the ceremony (not used regularly by Reform Jews); the drinking together from the wine cup; the groom's placing of the ring on the finger of the bride during the recitation of an ancient formula wherewith the man takes the woman to wife; the seven Benedictions in Praise of God (Reform uses one); the breaking of glass following the ceremony (not a Reform practice), in remembrance of the

destruction of the Temple; and the concluding priestly benediction (not used by the Orthodox). Orthodox Jews read a marriage contract (Kethubah) during the ceremony; Reform Jews do not. If a marriage breaks up, the husband must give the wife a writ of divorce called a get. An Orthodox Jew cannot remarry unless a religious divorce has been granted.²⁹

Death: At death, there is confession for the dying; rending of garments (among the Orthodox) by the bereaved; kindling of a memorial light, dressing of the dead with a white shroud (an Orthodox practice); the funeral and interment service, with the reading of the Kaddish, a prayer for the sanctification of God's name and for the acceptance of His will; a week of mourning at home (a lesser period for Reform Jews); the eleven months for recital of Kaddish by mourners at the synagogue; the setting of the tombstone at the end of a year; the *Jahrzeit*, the annual commemoration of the death by the lighting of candle and the recital of the Kaddish; and the memorial services, known as *Yizkor* services, on the Day of Atonement, Passover, Sukkoth, and Pentecost.³⁰

Conversion to Judaism. For persons who wish to embrace Judaism, a ceremony of conversion (*gerut*) is conducted by three rabbis who determine the adequacy of the candidate's preparation. Among traditional Jews, a visit to the ritual bath (*mikveh*) is required for a woman, and of circumcision for a male. Reform Judaism officially does not require either.³¹

Contrary to the practice of Muslims and Christians who actively preach their religions and convince others for conversion, the Jews do not propagate their religion and do not make efforts to persuade others. However, if someone intends to embrace Judaism, they do not close the door and welcome such a person.

8 – Dietary Laws

The Bible declares that certain animals, fowl, and fish are acceptable as food but that others are prohibited. To be acceptable, an animal must both chew the cud and have cloven hooves. For example, the camel chews the cud but does not have a cloven hoof and is forbidden, as is the swine, which has a cloven hoof but does not chew the cud. Fish must have both fins and scales. Fowl that are allowed or forbidden are listed by name. Winged animals that creep generally are forbidden, with some exceptions. Worms, mice, snails, and seafood are forbidden. A further restriction is "thou shall not boil a kid in the milk of its mother."³²

The rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud provide elaborate extensions of the biblical injunctions. Even if an animal is not forbidden, the slaughtering (shechitah) must be done by an official (shochet) trained to kill with a minimum of pain. Only the forequarters of a properly slaughtered animal may be eaten because forbidden sinews are difficult to remove from the hindquarters. Since the consumption of animal blood is forbidden (fish blood is not), the flesh must be soaked and salted.³³

The restriction of not boiling a kid in the milk of its mother led ultimately to the prohibition against mixing meat and dairy foods. In traditional Jewish homes, meat and dairy not only are unmixed but are prepared in separate utensils, served on separate dishes, and eaten with separate flatware. Food prepared in accordance with Jewish dietary laws is called Kosher.³⁴

Reform Judaism officially rejected the dietary laws as "apt to obstruct spiritual elevation," although many Reform Jews keep some form of dietary restriction. Conservative Judaism officially accepts all of the dietary regulations, except for wine, which is no longer restricted.³⁵

9 – Moral and Social Order

The insistence upon morality as a principle of religion is the very core of Judaism. In Judaism, ethics does not need to be added to religion, because it is already an essential part of it. Judaism is an ethical monotheism. In Judaism, to know God does not imply an understanding of the nature of His being but a knowledge of his government, a perception of the necessity of sound effort to follow the right way, which God has revealed and is the same for all human beings.³⁶

Man, made in God's image, has the duty not only to preserve and protect his own dignity but the dignity of all men. Thus each man is equal to all and, as such entitled to equal enjoyment of freedom and justice. The command, "Love thy neighbor as thyself," is a way of saying that man must love his fellowman because all are children of God. This view is at the basis of Judaism's concept of the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of the One God.³⁷

Judaism teaches that man must be unfailing in devotion to truth, for "the seal of the Holy One is Truth." The world itself rests upon truth, and he who fails in his duty to live, speak, and act the truth betrays the world.³⁸

Judaism teaches also that the world itself is good, that its gifts, including wealth, may be blessings if used rightly. Judaism is opposed to asceticism. It has an optimistic view as to the future of this world, believing that it is no "vale of tears from which it is necessary to escape to another world, but the very place where God bids us to establish His kingdom."³⁹

Charity is among the virtues that Jewish tradition sets forth as the duty of all. Those in need of help are not to be treated as less than equal, for they too, are the children of God. Judaism holds that charity is more than compassion, that it is a form of justice itself, a restoration of what men have been deprived of as a result of society's shortcomings. Thus charity

in Judaism is called Zedakah, "Justice," not only assistance to the needy, but righteousness itself.⁴⁰

Duty to the community imposes upon Jews the obligation to educate their children, an obligation written into the Bible itself. This duty does not mean education in the general sense alone; it means providing training for one's children so that they can earn a livelihood. Children in turn owe their parents honor and respect. The prophet Malachi taught that the Kingdom of God will be established on that day when the "heart of the fathers will be turned to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers."⁴¹

The code of conduct for a Jew has been beautifully laid down by the prophets as below: According to Isaiah, these are attributes of the man who has pondered the spirit of the law:⁴²

He who walks uprightly, and speaks sincerely,
Who scorns the gain that is won by oppression,
Who keeps his hand free from the touch of a bribe,
Who stops his ears against hearing of bloodshed,
And closes his eyes against looking on evil.

The Prophet Micah reduced the important rules to only three, in his famous declaration of a man's spiritual duty:⁴³

You have been told, O man, what is good,
And what the Lord requires of you:
Only to do justice, and to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God.

For Amos, this was the spirit of the Law: "Seek the Lord, that you may live."⁴⁴

10 – Holy Days and Festivals

The Sabbath: The importance of the Sabbath to Judaism and the Jewish people is reflected in the statement, "More than Israel has kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has kept Israel."⁴⁵

The Bible provides two reasons for setting aside one day of the week for a special purpose. As stated in Genesis (2:1 – 3), God completed his creation by the seventh day and made it a day of holiness and blessing. This is discerned in the version of the Decalogue that appears in Exodus (20:11), while the version in Deuteronomy (5:15) declares that the Sabbath must be kept as a day of rest for human and beast as a reminder that the children of Israel were once slaves in the land of Egypt. Unremitting toil of servants and slaves was not to be allowed. The importance of the Sabbath is further highlighted by its being called a "sign of the covenant" between God and Israel (Exodus 31:16 – 17).⁴⁶

The Sabbath in Judaism is the seventh day of the week, Saturday, which is a holy day of rest. The Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday. On the Sabbath, Jews attend worship services in the Synagogue and have special meals and family gatherings at home. Orthodox Jews do not work, travel or carry money on the Sabbath.⁴⁷

The High Holy Days: The year begins with ten days of soul-searching and penitence known as Days of Awe and Reverence (Yamin Noraim). The first of these is Rosh Hashanah, or New Year, also known as the Day of Judgement (Yom Ha-Din). The period concludes with the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), a 24-hour fast that begins in the evening with the Kol Nidre ("All Vows") service, reminding worshipers to acknowledge and repent their sins against God and humanity.⁴⁸

In Jewish tradition, sins against God will be forgiven, but sins against human beings will be atoned for only by restoring harmony with them. To ensure that their names will be

inscribed in the Book of Life for the year to come, Jews are enjoined to solemn penitence, sincere prayer, and good works.⁴⁹

The Pilgrimage Festivals: In ancient times, Jews were expected to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem during three major festivals – Passover, Shabuot and Sukkot. Each of these festivals is associated with some part of the Jews' escape from Egypt and their journey to Canaan (now Israel).⁵⁰

Passover, or Pesah, comes in March or April and celebrates the exodus of the Jews from Egypt. Jews observe Passover at home at a ceremonial feast called the Seder. Shabuot, or Pentecost, comes 50 days after the beginning of Passover and commemorates the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai. Many congregations celebrate Shabuot by holding confirmation ceremonies. Sukkot is a harvest festival that begins five days after Yom Kippur. Jews build small huts for Sukkot as a reminder of the huts the Israelites lived in during their wandering in the wilderness.⁵¹

Other Holydays: They commemorate major events in the history of the Jewish people. The most important of these festivals are Hanukkah and Purim. Hanukkah, or the Feast of Lights, is a celebration of God's deliverance of the Jews in 165B.C. That year, the Jews won their first struggle for religious freedom by defeating the Syrians, who wanted them to give up Judaism. Hanukkah usually comes in December and is celebrated by the lighting of candles in a special Hanukkah menorah. Purim is a festive holiday in February or March that commemorates the rescue of the Jews of Persia (now Iran) from a plot to kill them. On Purim, Jews read the Book of Esther, which tells the story of this rescue.⁵²

In addition to Yom Kippur, the chief fast day is Tishah B'Av, the 9th of Av, which memorializes the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem.⁵³

Three additional holidays, marking events in the 20th century, are observed by many Jews: Yom Ha-Shoah, or Holocaust Day, on the 27th of Nisan; Yom Ha-Atzmaut, the anniversary of the founding (1948) of the State of Israel, on the 5th of Iyar; and Yom Yerushalayim, the unification of Jerusalem (1967), on the 28th of Iyar.⁵⁴

11 – Branches or Sects

At present Judaism has four major branches or sects, each representing wide range of beliefs and practices which differ from the other.

1. Orthodox Judaism: Orthodox Judaism accepts all the traditional Jewish beliefs and ways of life. Orthodox Jews believe that God revealed the laws of the Torah and the Talmud directly to Moses on Mount Sinai. They strictly observe all traditional Jewish laws, including the dietary rules and the laws for keeping the Sabbath. Orthodox Jews pray three times daily – in the morning, in late afternoon, and after sunset. Orthodox men wear hats or yarmulkas (skullcaps) at all times as a sign of respect to God.⁵⁵

The Orthodox Jews who form the majority use Hebrew in all their synagogue services. Special schools, which they support, teach their children Jewish history and the beginning of the Hebrew. Many Orthodox Jews still look for the coming of the personal Messiah.⁵⁶

2. Reform Judaism: A modern American movement has attracted many Jews in this country. It is Reform Judaism and it is a result of an effort to adapt Judaism to twentieth century Western life. Reform Jews read the Torah with an eye to its truth as determined by its agreement with reason and experience. They consider the Talmud a human creation. According to them Judaism is defined principally by the Bible. The worship is some what similar to that of Protestant Christian

churches. Families sit together for services that include organ music and choirs, with the liturgy in Hebrew, but the sermon in English. Both boys and girls are confirmed.⁵⁷

Today, Reform Jews believe that moral and ethical teachings form the most important part of Judaism. They feel that many of Judaism's ritual practices have no significance for them. As a result Reform Jews have discarded many of the traditional customs and ceremonies of Judaism.⁵⁸

They reject the idea that Jews are the chosen people and have a liberal interpretation of dietary laws.

3. Conservative Judaism: Conservative Judaism developed during the mid 1800's. Conservative Jews consider the Talmud as much an authority as the Bible. However, they believe that the scriptures should be interpreted in light of modern knowledge and culture. Like Reform Jews, Conservative Jews de-emphasize the rituals of Judaism. But they follow more of the traditional practices than do Reform Jews.⁵⁹

It is a compromise between Orthodox and Reform. The conservative Jews believe that Hebrew should continue to be used in the traditional forms of worship. On the Sabbath day they do only necessary work and try to make it a day of prayer.

4. Liberal or Reconstructionist Judaism: Reconstructionism was founded by Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan. In his book *Judaism as a Civilization* (1934), Kaplan sought to apply the conclusion of modern naturalism to the Jewish religion. The movement has its own prayer books and a Fellowship of Reconstructionist Congregations. The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College (1968) is in Philadelphia.⁶⁰

The Reconstructionists regard Judaism as a "Religious civilization" evolving in response to changes in the world. They view Israel as a spiritual center and the Diaspora as important

for Jewish development. God is the power that helps human beings to realize their potential. The liturgy is similar to that of Conservative Judaism, but it incorporates other texts and eliminates references to the "Chosen People."⁶¹

12 – Miscellaneous

Jewish Calendar: The Jewish era dates traditionally from the Creation, which as calculated by the talmudic sages of the 2d and 3d centuries A.D., began on a date corresponding to Tishri 1, 3761 B.C. Thus the year 2,000 corresponds to 5760 – 5761 of the Jewish era.⁶²

The Jewish year is lunisolar and consists of 12 lunar months of 29 or 30 days. An adjustment to the solar cycle is achieved by the intercalation of a 13th month (2d Adar) into every 3d, 6th, 8th, 11th, 14th, 17th, and 19th year of a 19-year cycle. A regular Jewish year can have 353, 354 or 355 days, while a leap year has 383, 384 or 385 days. The total number of days of any 19-year cycle, however, equals that of 19 solar years. Because of this cyclical nature of the Jewish calendar, fixed in its final form in the 9th century A.D., Jewish holidays move back and forth in relation to the civil or Gregorian calendar.⁶³

In biblical times the months usually were called by ordinal numbers – first Month, Second Months, and so on. A few months had names as well. The First Month also was called the Month of Aviv or Spring, corresponding to March-April; the second, Ziv; the Seventh, Etamin; the Eighth, Bul. Following the Babylonian Exile, these old Hebrew names were replaced by Aramaic forms of Babylonian names: 1. Nisan; 2. Iyar; 3. Sivan; 4. Tammuz; 5. Av; 6. Elul; 7. Tishri; 8. Heshvan; 9. Kislev; 10. Teveth; 11. Shevat; 12. Adar; (13 2d Adar). These names in this order are fixed in the calendar.⁶⁴

Jewish Symbols: Of all the Jewish symbols the most famous and lasting till today is six – pointed star known in Hebrew as the Magen David i.e. shield or star of David. In the 19th century the Magen David was selected as the symbol of the Zionist movement, and it was subsequently adopted by Israel for its flag.

APPENDIX

Extracts From the Holy Bible (Old Testament)

1. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
 - And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
 - And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
 - And God saw the light, that it was good: And God divided the light from the darkness.
 - And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.
 - And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.
 - And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.
 - And God made the firmament, Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

- And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.
- And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.
- And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth; and it was so.
- And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.
- And the evening and the morning were the third day.
- And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for day, and years:
- And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.
- And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also.
- And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,
- And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.
- And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

- And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.
- And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good.
- And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.
- And the evening and the morning were the firth day.
- And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.
- And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.
- And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.
- So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.
- And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the flesh of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

- And God said, behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.
- And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat; and it was so.
- And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

— Genesis 1: 1-31

2. And God spake all these words, saying,

- I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
- Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
- Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:
- Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
- And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

- Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.
- Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:
- But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:
- For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.
- Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.
- Thou shalt not kill.
- Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- Thou shalt not steal
- Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
- Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

— Exodus 20: 1-17

3. He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.
 - And if a man lie not in wait, but God deliver him into his hand; then I will appoint thee a place whither he shall flee.
 - But if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from mine altar, that he may die.
 - And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death.
 - And he that stealth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death.
 - And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.
 - And if men strive together, and one smite another with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed:
 - If he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.
 - And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished.
 - Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money.
 - If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.

- And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,
- Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
- Burning for burning, wound for wound stripe for stripe.
- And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake.
- And if he smite out his manservant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.

— Exodus 21: 12-27

5. If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.
- If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him.
 - If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.
 - If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double.
 - If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vine-yard, shall he make restitution.
 - If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed

therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.

— Exodus 22:1-6

6. And if a man entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife.
 - If her father utterly refuse to give her unto him, he shall pay money according to the dowry of virgins.
 - Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.
 - Whosoever lieth with a beast shall surely be put to death.

— Exodus 22:16-19

7. Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.
 - Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.
 - If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry;
 - And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.
 - If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.
 - If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down:

- For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? And it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious.
- Thou shalt nor revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.
- Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me.
- Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep; seven days it shall be with his dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it me.
- And ye shall be holy men unto me: neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs.

— Exodus 22: 21-31

8. And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof:
 - But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy olive yard.
 - Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed.
 - And in all things that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth.

- Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year.
- Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty:)
- And the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labour out of the field.
- Three times in the year all thy males shall appear before the Lord God.

— Exodus 23: 10-17

9. Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
- But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.
 - And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.
 - The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind deriveth away.
 - Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
 - For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

10. Give ear to my words, O lord, consider my meditation.

- Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray.
- My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.
- For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.
- The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.
- Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.
- But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.
- Lead me, O Lord, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face.
- For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulcher; they flatter with their tongue.
- Destroy thou them, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast them out in the multitude of their transgressions; for they have rebelled against thee.

- But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.
- For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.

— Psalms 5: 1-12

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CHAPTER 2

CHRISTIANITY

1 – Introduction

Christianity is the religion which was founded in Palestine in the first century A.D. in the person and work of Jesus Christ by his disciples and followers. Subsequently this faith was widely adopted in many nations. Today followers of Christianity are 1.93 billion in the world population of over 6 billion which means Christian faith is professed by thirty percent of mankind approximately. While Christians live in almost every country, there are more than 100 countries wherein they are in majority and which can conveniently be called Christian countries.

Present-day Christianity exhibits three main divisions, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox. These are convenient names rather than full official titles, and some Christian groups do not fall within any of the three. Despite long separation and much variety, all three main divisions share certain identifying characteristics of typical Christianity. These include adoration of Jesus Christ as the second person in the Trinity of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the use of sacred rites, of which the most important are designated sacraments; reverence for the Old and New Testaments as authoritative Holy Scripture; the requirement of a morally disciplined life; and the maintenance of a structure of church government and a body of trained clergy.¹

Is Christianity really founded on the teachings of Jesus Christ? This is the question which is often asked not only by non-Christian students of this religion but also by Christians themselves when they study and find wide gap between the life and message of Jesus and the teachings and practices of Christianity. To this question the authors of "Great Religions By Which Men Live" thus provide the answer: "It was from Jesus that Christianity got its start and its name. Jesus, however,

would probably feel himself a stranger in discussions of Christian belief. As Jesus had found, to his sorrow, people are often more eager to pay respect to a trusted teacher than to follow his example of courageous seeking. From the first century, Christians for got or ignored most of what Jesus taught. Instead they clung to Jesus. They saw in him many things which he apparently never dreamed of claiming for himself. Christianity is not the religion of Jesus. It is the religion about Jesus.”

2 – Jesus Christ

1. Prophet Jesus Christ, in whose name Christianity was instituted, was born in 4 B.C., or a year or two earlier in Bethlehem (south of Jerusalem), Palestine. Mary the mother of Jesus (whom the revealed book of Islam the Qur’an calls a saintly and pious woman) miraculously conceived and gave birth to Jesus. Mary and Joseph (legal father of Jesus) belonged to Bani-Israel (Israelites, the Hebrews) and lived in Nazareth of Galilee. Joseph pursued his trade as a carpenter and he and his family were devout Jews. Of Jesus’ childhood and youth little is known except that he used to attend synagogue services with his parents, memorized by heart long passages from the Torah and the “Prophets” (Old Testament) and as a child he was trained to be carpenter.

Through his legal father Joseph, Jesus belonged to the tribe of Judah and the family of David, the second king of Israel, a heritage needed by the Messiah for whom the Hebrew people were waiting. In AD 26/27 his cousin John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of the promised Messiah and baptized Jesus, who then made two missionary journeys through the district of Galilee. His teaching, summarized in the Sermon on the Mount aroused both religious opposition from the Pharisees and secular opposition from the party supporting the Roman governor, Herod Antipas. When Jesus returned to Jerusalem (probably in AD 29), a week before the Passover festival, he

was greeted by the people as the Messiah. And the Hebrew authorities (aided by the apostle Judas) had him arrested and condemned to death, after a hurried trial by the Sanhedrin (Supreme Jewish court) for blasphemy.² The Roman procurator Pontius Pilate endeavoured to procure Jesus release, as stated by early Christian sources, by offering him to the crowd as the prisoner to be released to them for that year. But the crowd cried for the release of Barabbas known as a robber, instead of Jesus.

After his baptism, Jesus had gathered 12 disciples but was forsaken by all before he was crucified. Even one of his disciples Judas betrayed him to his enemies for 30 coins. Three days after his crucifixion, there came reports of Jesus Resurrection, and later, his ascension to heaven.

2. Account of Jesus, as constructed by Encyclopedia Americana from the Gospels, is summarized below:

Birth and Early Years: Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy of Jesus, tracing his descent from Abraham and David. The genealogy serves to show that Jesus fulfills God's promises throughout the history of Israel, and the same point is made by the five stories he tells of Jesus birth and childhood. Each of the stories contains an Old Testament prophecy thought to be fulfilled in the narrative. An angel tells Joseph that the child conceived in Mary is "of the Holy Spirit" and that he should not hesitate to take her as his wife (1:18-25). Wise men come from the East to see the newborn child (2:1-12). Angel warns Joseph to take his family and flee to Egypt (2:13-15). King Herod slaughters the innocent children of Bethlehem (2:16-18). Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus return from Egypt and settle in Nazareth (2:19-23).

Like Matthew, Luke tells stories of Jesus' birth and early years in order to prove him the Messiah and the fulfillment of God's purposes in the Old Testament. His seven stories are

woven together by the theme of promise and fulfillment. An angel announces the birth of John the Baptist to Zechariah, his father (1:5-25)¹. Similarly, the angel Gabriel announces the birth of Jesus to Mary (1:26-38). The two promises are joined in the third story, when Mary visits Elizabeth, soon to give birth to John the Baptist (1:39-56). The next two stories tell of the births of John and of Jesus (1:57-2:20). The last two describe Jesus' presentation in the Temple as an infant (2:21-40) and his teaching in the Temple as a 12-year-old boy (2:41-52). Luke gives Jesus' genealogy immediately after his baptism, tracing his lineage back to Adam (3:23-38).

Mark and John tell nothing of Jesus' life before his baptism by John, but at that point they join the account given by Matthew and Luke. John the Baptist appears in the wilderness, baptizing his followers in the Jordan River. Jesus is baptized, a dove descends from heaven, and in a heavenly voice proclaims him God's Son (Mark 1:1ff.: Matthew 3; Luke 3:1-22; John 1:19ff). "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3: 21-22).

Although the Gospels describe Jesus as coming from Nazareth, they claim that he was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1 "Luke 2:4). Since Bethlehem was the birthplace of King David (the "City of David") and was the more appropriate place for the Messiah's birth, we cannot exclude the possibility of a special theological pleading in the traditions. According to Luke's evidence, Jesus was born during an enrollment for tax or census purposes when Quirinus was governor of Syria. The most likely date for this enrollment is 6 B.C. Further, Matthew explicitly and Luke implicitly date Jesus birth during the reign of King Herod, who died in 4 B.C. Certainty is not possible, but it seems reasonable to suppose that Jesus was born in Bethlehem about 6 B.C. and that he grew up in Nazareth.

Matthew and Luke claim that Jesus was conceived and born supernaturally. His virgin birth, according to Matthew, fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:18 – 25).

His Ministry: The Gospels agree in telling us that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist and that this marked the beginning of his public career. Luke supplies information that gives an exact date for this event (3:1 – 2), and 27 A.D. usually is regarded as the year to which he refers. Assuming that Jesus' ministry lasted three years, the crucifixion would be placed in 30 A.D.

John tells us that Jesus' ministry began in both Galilee and Judaea. After gaining disciples from John the Baptist (1:35-51), Jesus performs his first miracle by changing water into wine at a marriage in Cana of Galilee (2:1ff.). He enters Jerusalem and expels the merchants from the Temple (2:13-22). His ministry in Jerusalem draws the Pharisee Nicodemus to him (3:1-21). John the Baptist bears final witness to Jesus (3:22-30), who then departs for Galilee, passing through Samaria and encountering the woman at Jacob's well (4:1-42). In Galilee he heals an official's son (4:46-54). Jesus returns to Jerusalem, where he heals a paralytic at the pool of Bethzatha (chapter 5). He goes back to Galilee, where he miraculously feeds the 5,000 in the wilderness (Chapter 6). Offended by Jesus' interpretation of this miracle, many of his disciples turn away. John then turns his attention to mounting opposition to Jesus, which finally leads to his rejection and death.

The four Gospels treat Jesus' ministry as one of miracle working and teaching. Most of the miracles are healings. Demons are cast out (for example, the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5: 1ff). The blind and lame are healed (John 9; Mark 10:46ff.; Mark 2:1ff.). The lepers are cleansed (Mark 1:40ff.; Luke 17:11ff). The sick are healed - the centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5ff.) and the bleeding woman (Mark 5:25ff) – and the dead are raised – Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:21ff.), the widow

of Nain's son (Luke 7:1ff.), and Lazarus (John 11:1ff.). Jesus also performs several nature miracles. These include stilling a storm and walking on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 4:35ff. and 6:45ff). He miraculously feeds the multitudes in the wilderness (Mark 6:32ff. and 8:1ff.; John 6:1ff.). Luke gives an account of a miraculous draught of fishes (5:1ff.), a story John tells of the risen Lord (21:1ff.).

His Last Days and Resurrection: Jesus words and deeds are unacceptable to his own people. Rejected at Nazareth (Mark 6:1ff.), misunderstood by his own family (Mark 3:31ff.), and constantly in controversy with the scribes and Pharisees (Mark 2:1-3:6, 3:22ff., 7:1ff., 8:11ff.), he is attended by a sense of doom on his final journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. The Passion and Resurrection narratives (Mark 14:1ff.; Matthew 26:1ff.; Luke 22:1ff.; John 18:1ff.) describe Jesus' fate. In the synoptic Gospels his cleansing of the Temple provokes the final crisis. In John it is the raising of Lazarus that resolves the Jewish Sanhedrin to have him executed. After the Last Supper with his disciples (a Passover meal in the synoptic Gospels) Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he is betrayed by Judas and arrested. He is taken before the Sanhedrin, which interrogates him and hands him over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate ends by ordering his execution, and Jesus is crucified between two thieves on Calvary. He is buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, and early the following Sunday morning women find his tomb empty. The risen Lord appears to various disciples, and the story ends with his commissioning the disciples for their work in the world. Luke, both in his Gospel and in Acts, adds an account of Jesus' Ascension into heaven.

Judaism's attitude toward Jesus and the reasons of his rejection by the Jews have been analysed by the Colliers Encyclopedia as under:

"Judaism's rejection of Christianity is based not only upon its judgment that Jesus turned out not to have been the Messiah, but upon its inability to accept the Pauline elements introduced into Jesus' teaching. These elements are listed by Milton Steinberg in his work *Basic Judaism* as follows; "The insistence that the flesh is evil and to be suppressed; the notion of original sin and damnation from before birth of all human beings; the conception of Jesus not as a man but as God made flesh; the conviction that men can be saved vicariously, that indeed this is the only way in which they can be saved, and that Jesus is God's sacrifice of His only begotten son so that by believing in him they may be saved; the abrogation of the authority of Scripture and the Traditions and the nullification of the commandments of the Torah; the faith that Jesus, having been resurrected from the dead, bides his time in Heaven until the hour is come for him to return to earth to judge mankind and establish God's Kingdom; the final and climactic doctrine that he who earnestly believes these things is automatically saved, but that he who denies them, no matter how virtuous otherwise, is lost."

3 – Teachings of Jesus

Jesus was sent as Prophet and reformer to the Israelites. He himself is stated to have said: "I have come to reclaim the lost sheep of house of Israel." During his ministry, which lasted only for a period of 3 years from 27 A.D. to 30 A.D., the central theme of his teachings was the reality of God, Kingdom of God and relationship of man with God whom he addressed as Father or "Father in Heaven." He spoke in simple and un-technical language about the central issues in religion. Being a born Jew and having been sent to reform the Israelites, Jesus was truly Jewish in his thinking.

Matthew summarizes Jesus' teaching by organizing it into five great discourses. The sermon on the Mount (4:25-7:29), paralleled by the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:17ff., presents

the new Law given by Jesus as the Messiah. The Commissioning of the Twelve (10:1-11:1) consists of instructions to the disciples for their mission. The Parable Discourse (13:1-53) presents Jesus' parabolic teaching about the Kingdom of God (The familiar parables of the Good Samaritan and of the Prodigal Son are found only in Luke 10:29ff. and 15:11ff.) The Discourse on the Kingdom (18:1-19:1) describes the character of the Christian community. Finally, in the Discourse on the Last Things (24:1-26:1), an elaboration of what scholars call the synoptic apocalypse, Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the end of the world, and his own Second Coming as the heavenly judge.³

Christians say that Jesus message is timeless, because he drew teachings directly from the experiences of people he knew. To them, many of his statements are as true today as when he uttered them. Numbers of devoted Christians have been inspired to thoughtful living by his parables or by his Sermon on the Mount. Studied carefully and used thoughtfully, such teachings still bring peace of mind to present-day Christians.⁴

The sum and substance of Jesus' message and his teachings is given as under:

God: Like his predecessors in Israel, Jesus never debated the case for belief in God; he simply assumed it. He never argued that God is the Creator of the universe, but he pointed to the lilies that God has clothed in all their beauty. He never discussed God's omnipotence, but he asserted that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's will. He never theorized about divine providence, but he invited men to pray for their daily bread. He never speculated about God's omniscience, but he declared that even the hairs of our heads are numbered.⁵

God for Jesus was the God of uncompromising righteousness. Because He is radical goodness, He cannot tolerate iniquity. There is no shallow sentimentalism in Jesus' thought. The overtones of Jesus' word are those of God's majesty and justice, but the tones are those of His mercy and His love.⁶

The majesty and the mercy of God, the righteousness and the loving kindness of God, the justice and the love of God all are summed up by Jesus in the name "Father." Others had used the title before him, but it was he who put the thought of God as Father at the heart of religion. To a great extent all his preaching was an exposition of his distinctive concept. God may be known in many ways, but the thought of Him as Father transcends and crowns them all.⁷

Kingdom of God: It is unanimously held by the scholars that the burden of the message of Jesus was proclamation of the "kingdom of God." Mathew uses the expression "kingdom of Heaven", but it means the same thing since "heaven" is a Pharisaic term for God. Kingdom means "reign" or "rule" and so Jesus spoke of the rule of God. Unlike his immediate predecessors who spoke kingdom of god to come in future, Jesus spoke of the kingdom as both a future as well as a present reality. At the future level, Jesus was predicting the end of the world and the approach of a time when God's reign would triumph over every evil. This aspect of his message was not strikingly different from expectations found elsewhere in 1st century Judaism.

However, Jesus saw the signs that the reign of God had anticipated the end of the world and is presently at work in his person and ministry. God not only will be King after this world order has been destroyed but is already King in Jesus work. Several of the parables indicate the way in which Jesus understood the relationship between the present and the future dimensions of the Kingdom. Presently, the Kingdom is like

leaven in dough (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21), and its work will be completed at the end. The parable of the sower (Mark 4:10ff.) as preserved in the synoptic Gospels calls attention to the various responses to Jesus' message. But the form critics suggest that its original meanings had to do with the assurance that the present character of the kingdom would find its consummation after this world order in the "new age." The contrast between the broadcast sowing of wheat and the abundant harvest serves to assure Jesus' followers that the present hidden and lowly character of the Kingdom will be followed by an open and glorious consummation in the future.⁸

Jesus' message of the Kingdom as both future and present is one of promise and assurance. His followers seem to have been recruited largely from the outcasts of his society – poor fishermen from Galilee, harlots, tax collectors. But the message is a challenge as well as a promise. It carries with it the demand for a new life and a new righteousness. The rich young man is commanded not only to obey the Law but also to sell His goods for the poor and to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:16ff.). The disciple must be willing to embrace poverty and persecution. The ethical norms of the Kingdom reflect a radical obedience to God that goes far beyond obeying a set of rules.⁹

Jesus' view of Jewish Law: Jesus revered the law as "the commandment of God" but challenged the validity of the scribal tradition. He confirmed the authority of the moral law but questioned the sanctions of ceremonial legislation. He emphasized motive and attitude rather than precept and prescription—a set of the will rather than conformity to a pattern. He even described some commandments in the law as faulty and held that they were superseded by higher principles. No doubt Jesus was accused of violating the Sabbath, refusing to observe laws of ritual cleanliness, and failing to observe the Jewish fasts.¹⁰

What is less clear is the degree to which Jesus intended to break with Judaism. There can be little doubt that he accepted the authority of the Old Testament and sought to deepen and radicalize its meaning. If the Old Testament prohibited murder and adultery, Jesus took the Law a step further by prohibiting the attitudes of anger and lust that lie behind these sins. More problematic is his attitude toward the Pharisees' legal interpretations of the Old Testament, known as the Oral Law and finally embodied in the Talmud. According to Matthew 23 he attacked the Pharisees for failing to practice what they preached and insisted that his followers obey the Oral Law. But according to Matthew 15; 1ff. he rejected aspects of the Oral Law and claimed that they violated the spirit of God's law in Scripture. Perhaps the best conclusion is that Jesus' radical interpretation of the law was intended to draw out the true meaning of Judaism, but his attitude was perceived by the Jewish religious leaders as rejection of their authority and their views.¹¹

Moral Teachings of Jesus: According to Jesus, the qualities that fit a man for the kingdom of God are sincerity, fidelity, humility, and obedience. These already had been highly praised in Hebrew prophecy and Jewish wisdom, but in Jesus' articulation of them they emerge in a singularly radical phrasing. Radical devotion to God tolerates no vacillation, no half measures, no divided allegiance. It requires utter freedom from all selfishness, covetousness, sensuality, and desire for revenge. It prohibits the lustful passion as well as the adulterous act. It demands absolute truthfulness rather than the mere avoidance of perjury. It forbids retaliation in any form for injustice. It enjoins complete detachment from earthly treasures and anxieties. It calls for unreserved commitment of one's whole self to the kingdom of God. It requires an attitude of love that includes God, one's neighbor, and one's enemy.¹²

It is difficult to exaggerate the absolute character of the Gospel ethic. We are to serve God and no other master. We are

to eschew all anger rather than content ourselves with inhibiting its fruits. We are to love our enemies as God in His love embraces all men. We are to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. The complement in the Gospel to this radical ethic of obedience is the message of the love, the mercy, and the forgiveness of God. The God who demands that we be perfect as He is perfect is also the God who is ever ready to renew the fellowship with Himself that is broken by our sin. The God of the Sermon on the Mount is also the God of the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost prodigal son.¹³

Social Teachings of Jesus: 1. Many of the people whom Jesus knew had lost a sense of their own true worth. They felt that they were not important to God or to men. The priests and religious teachers had only added to their problems by labeling them "sinners" and "unclean." To such troubled people, Jesus preached a message of confidence. "You are the salt of the earth!" "You are the light of the world!"¹⁴

2. To remove anxiety of those who have unnecessary worries about countless things in life – big and small – Jesus said: Do not worry about life, wondering what you will have to eat or drink, or about your body, wondering what you will have to wear. Is not life more important than food and the body than clothes? Look at the wild birds. They do not sow or reap, or store their food in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.¹⁵

3. Jesus taught people that they should love their neighbors in the same way that they love themselves. If we are to love other people, we must first love ourselves. We have often been told to love ourselves last. But if this were the case, we would never love anyone. Loving oneself wisely is the basis of loving others well.¹⁶

4. Jesus taught suppression of anger, patience and forgiveness. He is reported to have said: if someone slaps on your right cheek, turn to him your left one also.¹⁷

Jesus was well aware of the fact that if one does not truly forgive, he himself cannot be happy: "If you forgive others when they offend your heavenly Father will forgive you too. But if you do not forgive others when they offend you, your heavenly Father will not forgive you for your offenses."¹⁸

And in the familiar prayer based on Jesus' suggestions to his followers, there is this request: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."¹⁹

5. He taught his followers to be honest and straight. He enjoined the people to refrain from hypocrisy and show off. To Jesus, inner honesty was of first importance in living to good life. He called for people to be good, not just to practice goodness. He was distressed by pretenders who stood up to pray in the synagogues or on the street corners so that people would think them pious. Jesus said that the prayer said in the privacy of one's own heart and home was far, far better than a prayer for its public effect. He told his followers that they would get nowhere in the spiritual search by repeating "empty phrases".²⁰

6. No doubt Jesus was accused of having soft corner for the Zealots who had rebellions attitude towards the Roman government and also of proclaiming himself as king of the Jews (although he had not done it), and was tried and crucified on these charges. But he never took part in politics, never incited rebellion against the Romans. He is stated to have advised his followers: Give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's.

4 – Holy Scripture

New Testament is the name given the collection of 27 sacred writings that supplement the Jewish Scripture in the Christian Bible. The Jewish Scriptures accordingly are called the Old Testament. The English word "Testament" is, however, an inadequate translation of the Greek word *diatheke*, which was meant to convey the idea of covenant rather than of a document governing inheritance (that is, "last will and testament"). Thus the title of the Revised Standard Version (1946) reads: "The New Covenant commonly called the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."²¹

The New Covenant was viewed not only as the supplement to the Old but also as its real climax: from the beginning of the long course of divine revelation God had intended to proclaim this final and complete "covenant," "new law," or "way of salvation" (Hebrews 1:1-4, John 1:1-18). Hence the Christian Scriptures include both Old and New Testaments: the New does not supplant the Old but completes it.²²

As mentioned above the Christian Bible contains 27 books that constitute the New Testament. The name of these books are as under, according to the King James version in English:

Matthew
 Mark
 Luke
 John
 Acts
 Romans
 1 – 2 Corinthians
 Galatians
 Ephesians
 Philippians
 Colossians
 1 – 2 Thessalonians
 1 – 2 Timothy

Titus
 Philemon
 Hebrews
 James
 1 – 2 Peter
 1 – 2 – 3 John
 Jude
 Revelation of John

It is known that Jesus himself did not write down his teachings, but relied upon his disciples to go about preaching what he taught, from memory. It is generally assumed by historians that, after his death, some of them did write down his sayings, with occasional notes of the historical setting, before they should be forgotten, and that, thus a document, or group of documents, came into being, which scholars call "Q" (from the German word *Quelle* or "source"). It is generally considered that, 'Q' was coloured by the prepossessions of the early Christians, and had sayings added to it, which were mistakenly ascribed to Jesus. It is from Q and other oral traditions which formed primary source material for the Gospels.²³

The earliest of these, Mark, comes from Rome, about 68, and was designed to encourage the persecuted Christians under Nero to stand fast and die rather than renounce Christ (see especially 8:34-38; 13:35-37).²⁴

A few years later, perhaps about 85-95, Luke wrote his Gospel (based on Mark and Q) and Acts, a two-volume work designed as an apology for Christianity, to show that the new religion was the true Judaism (or "true Israel") and therefore entitled to religious freedom like the Judaism of the Jews and that it was not inimical to law and order. The work was dedicated (presented) to Theophilus (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3), perhaps a Roman official.²⁵

Later still, perhaps a little later than 100, the Gospel of Matthew was compiled, a didactic, perhaps even a liturgical arrangement of Jesus' deeds and words (based on Mark and O) in five divisions for use in the church's teaching and worship.²⁶

Finally, the Gospel of John was written (about 100–125?) to repudiate and to repel the Gnostic or Docetic interpretation of Christ's life and teaching which represented him as a divine phantom.²⁷

5 – Beliefs

Belief in God: Christians believe that there is one God and that He created the universe and continues to care for it. Cradled as it was in Judaism, Christianity took this belief in the reality of God from its parent religion. However, Christian view of God is marked by increased emphasis on the fatherhood of God, a theme vividly presented in the teachings and prayers of Jesus. Thus at the foundation of the Christian structure of belief is the affirmation of God in terms of creation and of fatherly concern for man.

Christians have offered many descriptions of God, even though they admit that God is beyond human understanding and description. He is unlimited in power, in wisdom, in mercy, and in love. He is boundless, invisible, and gracious. He is Judge, Lord, Father.²⁸

Belief in Jesus: Belief in Jesus Christ is perhaps the central theme of Christianity around which the whole religious structure revolves. Typically a high concept of Christ pervades the Christian mind, signalized by such terms as "Son of God", "Our Lord" and "Saviour".

Jesus of Nazareth, in his belief in God, stood firmly in the prophetic tradition. God, he taught, was just and merciful and personally concerned for all his creation. But in two respects the

influence of Jesus modified the inherited prophetic faith. First, Jesus approached God with an unprecedented intimacy, evidenced in his addressing of God as Abba, the familiar and affectionate word for "father." Second, the followers of Jesus saw in him the revelation of God, who had of his own choice entered into human life for the sake of man. Henceforth Christian belief in God was to be inseparable from faith in Jesus Christ.²⁹

The accounts of Gospels regarding his birth of a virgin and his identification with Logos (creative and light-giving Word of God) together with reports of his resurrection after death, ascension to heaven and destined return to earth have given rise to the concept of divinity of Jesus. Although some Christians regards Jesus as a great but human teacher yet a vast majority of them views Jesus as God Incarnate, i.e., a divine being who took on the human appearance and characteristics of a man. They believe that Jesus is the saviour who died on the cross to save humanity from sin.

Christians have said that Jesus is a personal savior. Usually, they call him the Christ, which means Deliverer or Messiah. They say that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Most Christians have believed that he shares in God's divinity, that he is God himself. He lived and died as a man and for men. But he arose from the grave and ascended into heaven to "sit at the right hand of God," as one famous creed declares.³⁰

One of the greatest debates in Christian history was about whether Jesus was a god, like God, or the God. After a great deal of angry oratory, it was finally decided that Jesus was "very God of very God."³¹

Belief in Holy Spirit: Christians also believe in Holy Spirit. They believe that after Jesus' earthly life, God sent Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit to lead people into better ways of life.

For many years, great arguments were held in orthodox circles as to the place and function of the Holy Spirit. Most modern Christians are no longer concerned with such debates. The Holy Spirit is looked upon as God in another form. It is the power of God working in and through the life of the believer to sustain him and to keep him in right relationship to God.³²

The belief that in one God there are three persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – is known as the doctrine of the Trinity. Roman catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches and many Protestant Churches accept this doctrine as the central teaching of Christianity.

Christians are usually indignant when someone says that Christianity is not monotheistic. However, people in non-Christian lands find it very difficult to understand how God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit can be one God. Christians often answer that God can appear in many roles, just as one man may be a son, a husband and a father.³³

Other Beliefs: The Christians also believe in doctrine of original sin and atonement. According to their belief, mankind laboured under the burden of original sin which they inherited from their parents Adam and Eve who earned it by disobeying God's command regarding the forbidden tree in Paradise. In order to redeem mankind from this sin, God took pity and sent his only begotten son Jesus Christ who paid the ransom by embracing death on the cross.

We would discuss the Doctrine of Trinity and Doctrine of Atonement in detail in the subsequent sections.

6 – Worship and Rituals

Forms of Worship: Christian worship, despite its modern variety, generally retains certain of its earliest features. It reflects the influence of the synagogue in the public reading of

the Holy scripture normally with comment or exposition. Two practices common in Christian worship which take place usually in the Church are Baptism and the Eucharist. The ceremony of Baptism takes place when a new person enters into Christianity, The Eucharist, also called Holy communion or Lord's supper, represents the last supper, the final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion and which he commanded as memorial to himself. Worshippers share bread and wine in the Eucharist as a sign of their unity with Jesus and with each other.

The seven sacraments recognized in the medieval Christianity and in modern Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy are: Baptism; Confirmation; Marriage; Extreme Unction, the Eucharist, Penance, and Ordination. These will be elaborated in the section relating to Roman Catholicism under the head "Divisions of the Church".

Protestants base worship on Scripture and early church practice and use in it language of the people. They view negatively all ceremonial accretions and reduce the sacraments to Baptism and the Eucharist only. Besides worship in the Church, the protestants also hold domestic worship. In modern times, the assembly of the household about the so-called family altar (as the service commonly is called) occurs principally in the families of Protestant clergymen, either daily or on Sunday, usually before or after breakfast, but occasionally in the evening. Here and there among the pious laity such services also occur, ordinarily only on Sunday. The worship is short and simple. It includes normally, although exceptions and variations exist: (1) reading of a Biblical passage, customarily by the father of the family; (2) an extemporaneous or occasionally set prayer, ordinarily also by the father; and (3) singing a hymn, with or without musical accompaniment, by all the family. Sometimes the reader from the Bible or another (older) person will offer a brief meditation on the reading by demonstrating its pertinence to historical or modern times.³⁴

By far the majority of Christians have said that Jesus was an essential part of God's way of making salvation possible. This had led Christians to pray to the Christ and to worship him, just as they worship God. In Jesus Christ, many Christians have found all the god they know.³⁵

Schedules of worship: Sunday morning, associated in Christian memory with the Resurrection of Christ, has always been the most favoured time of Christian worship. This has been made convenient by the recognition under most governments of Sunday as weekly holiday. However the worship is not confined to Sundays only as frequent occasions for it are provided on other days.

Besides weekly routines of worship, there is annual round of solemn occasions collectively known as the Christian Year. The great feast of Easter has been celebrated in remembrance of Christ's Resurrection from the earliest times. Lent, the period of 40 days (not counting Sundays) before Easter, came to be kept as a season of special penitential abstinence, ending with Holy Week, when the passion of the Christ is vividly recalled in special acts of Worship. Easter Day has traditionally brought a great release of gladness, with pealing bells and chanting choirs. The Christian Year begins, however, with the Advent season, which includes the four Sundays preceding Christmas Day. The 25th December is the Christmas Day and is celebrated as Jesus' birthday. Previously this day was celebrated by the pagans as birthday of Mithra the sungod.³⁶

Monasticism: The term "Monasticism" comes from the Greek monos, meaning "alone", "one", "only", It connotes that monastics separate themselves from society to live alone. It, as a way of life, is the religious, cultural and sociological complex of beliefs and practices characteristic of monks and nuns. Monasticism entered into Christianity in the third century when it began in Egypt and rapidly spread to other regions. It arose to check the declining moral character of the majority of

Christians. The movement represented an effort on the part of the pious to conform to what they believed were the commands of the Christ.

The most widely practiced forms of monastic asceticism are obedience, celibacy and poverty. Monasteries provide a supportive framework for the monastic. Discipline is imposed on one's eating and sleeping habits and on one's total behaviour. The goal of this self denial is self – improvement toward contemplative alertness. Christian monks and nuns dedicate themselves to the service of the Christ. Monasticism developed a detailed system of conventional worship, with seven times of prayers and psalmody daily. However, their Breviary containing these services was revised by pope Gregory VII in 11th century.

Fasting: In Christianity, fasts, originally voluntary, became the subject of legislation only in the 4th century. The Roman Catholic Church distinguishes between fast and abstinence. The former, obligatory on all persons over 21, permits only one full meal in 24 hours; the latter, which binds all over 14, forbids meat or dishes made from meat. The only obligatory fasts today are those of Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The faithful are also required to observe a one-hour fast before receiving Holy Communion. Formerly, fasting was enjoined throughout Lent (except on Sundays), on Ember Days, on vigils of the more solemn festivals, and on all Fridays except between Christmas and Epiphany and between Easter and Ascension. According to universal church law, abstinence was prescribed for all Sundays in Lent, St. Mark's Day (if not in Easter Week), Rogation Days, all Saturdays, and all Fridays except those noted above. The universal law, however, was usually adjusted by local custom and dispensation. The older system is followed, at least nominally, by the Church of England.³⁷

The Greek Orthodox Church recognizes 266 fast days in the year. These include every Wednesday and Friday; the 40 days before Christmas and the 40 before-Easter; the fast of the

Apostles, between Whitsunday (Pentecost) and the feast of St. Peter; and the Lent of the Virgin, from August 1 until August 15 (the feast of the Assumption, or, as it is called in the East, the Dormition). In contrast to the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox never keep Saturday as a day of abstinence.³⁸

The Eastern Orthodox permit all food except meat during the first week of Lent. Thereafter, however, fish, cheese, butter, oil, milk, and eggs are also banned, except on Saturdays and Sundays. The Copts and Nestorians add a 3-day "fast of the Ninevites" before Lent.³⁹

The reformed churches of Europe fasted during Lent only; the Scottish Presbyterians recognized only fasts with Scriptural authority.⁴⁰

7 – Doctrine of Divine Trinity

We have already made a brief reference to the doctrine of Divine Trinity while discussing Christian beliefs. Trinity comprises, according to the Christians, God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We have already explained all the three separately. This doctrine has not been mentioned in the Gospels nor it can be directly proved from them.

The writer of the book "The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life" has laboured hard to prove that Trinity does not appear in the Bible nor the early Christians believed in it. Let us reproduce his thoughtful discourse.

Many religions of Christendom teach that God is a "Trinity," although the word "Trinity" does not appear in the Bible. The World Council of Churches recently said that all religions that are part of that Council should advocate the belief that there is "one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit," that is, three persons in one God. Those teaching this doctrine admit that it is "a mystery." The Athanasian Creed, of about the eighth

century of the Common Era, says that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (Spirit) are all three of the same substance, all three are eternal (and hence had no beginning), and all three are almighty. So the creed reads that in the "Trinity none is afore or after other; none is greater or less than another."* Is that reasonable? More importantly, is it in agreement with the Bible?

This doctrine was unknown to the Hebrew prophets and Christian apostles. The New Catholic Encyclopedia (1967 edition, Vol. XIV, p. 306) admits that "the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not taught in the OT [Old Testament]." It also admits that the doctrine must be dated as from about three hundred and fifty years after the death of Jesus Christ. So the early Christians who were taught directly by Jesus Christ did not believe that God is a "Trinity."

"When Jesus was on earth he certainly was not equal to his Father, for he said there were some things that neither he nor the angels knew but that only God knew. (Mark 13:32) Further-more, he prayed to his Father for help when undergoing trial. (Luke 22:41, 42) Also, he himself said: "The Father is greater than I am." (John 14:28) Because of this, Jesus spoke of his Father as "my God" and as "the only true God."—John 20:17; 17:3.

After Jesus' death, God raised him to life again and gave him glory greater than he had before. However, he was still not equal to his Father. How do we know? Because later the inspired Scriptures state that God is still "the head of the Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:3) The Bible also says that Jesus is to reign as God's appointed king until he has put all enemies under his feet, and that then shall "the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all." (1 Corinthians 15:28, AV) Clearly, even since his resurrection Jesus Christ is not equal with his Father.

But did not Jesus say on one occasion, "I and the Father are one"? (John 10:30) Yes, he did. However, that statement does not even suggest a "Trinity," since he spoke of only two as being one, not three. Jesus was surely not contradicting the scriptures we have already read. What he meant by this expression he himself made clear later when he prayed regarding his followers that "they may be one just as we are one." (John 17:22) Jesus and his "Father are "one" in that Jesus is in full harmony with his Father. And he prayed that all his followers might likewise be in harmony with his Father, with Jesus and with one another.

What about the statement at John 1:1 (AV), which refers to Jesus as "the Word," saying: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"? Does that not prove the "Trinity"? No. Notice, first of all, that only two persons are mentioned, not three. Also, in this same chapter, verse 2 says that the Word was "in the beginning with God," and verse 18 says that "no man hath seen God at any time," yet men have seen Jesus Christ. For these reasons, and in full harmony with the Greek text, some translations of verse 1 read: "The Word was with God, and the Word was divine," or was "a god," that is, the Word was a powerful godlike one. (AT;NW) So this portion of the Bible is in agreement with all the rest: it does not teach a "Trinity."

As for the "Holy Spirit," the so-called "third Person of the Trinity," we have already seen that it is, not a person, but God's active force. (Judges 14:6) John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize with holy spirit even as John had been baptizing with water. Water is not a person nor is holy spirit a person. (Matthew 3:11) What John foretold was fulfilled when God caused his Son Christ Jesus to pour out holy spirit on the apostles and disciples during the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., (so that "they all became filled with holy spirit." Were they "filled" with a person? No, but they were filled with God's active force.—Acts 2:4, 33. What then, do the facts show as to the

"Trinity"? Neither the word nor the idea is in God's Word, the Bible. The doctrine did not originate with God. But, you will be interested to know that, according to the book *Babylonian Life and History* (by Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, 1925 edition, pp. 146, 147), in ancient Babylon, the pagans did believe in such a thing; in fact, they worshiped more than one trinity of gods.

2. Development and indoctrination of Christian concept of Divine Trinity has been discussed by Collier's Encyclopedia under the head Trinitarian controversy as follows:

"The Church. found it necessary to define its position on several theological issues which divided its constituency. What, precisely, was the relation of the Son to the Father, and how were the divine and human in Jesus related? The Church early became committed to the doctrine of the Trinity, namely that God is one and that he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The first Christians, as Jews, had been nurtured on the basic conviction that God is one. Jesus taught that God is Father. Through what they had seen of him in his life, his death, and the idea of resurrection, his disciples became convinced that Jesus was also God. But how could they still believe that God is one? How are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit God, and how are they related to one another?"

"In the second and third centuries, Christians devoted much thought to these questions and differed widely in their answers. In the Greek word Logos, which had wide currency in contemporary philosophy and which is loosely translated as "word," they found a term which seemed to be usable, and they sought to give it a content which would be consistent with what they believed about Christ. But how was the Logos related to the Father? One school of thought became known as Arianism from a leading exponent Arius (256-336), a priest in the church of Alexandria. Arianism held that the Father had created the Son, that there had been a time when the Son had not existed, and that he was subordinate to the Father. So acute did the

controversy become that Constantine feared that the division within the Church might jeopardize the uneasy unity of the Empire which he had achieved. To resolve the issue, he called a council of the church in 325 at Nicaca, not far from Constantinople. It became the first of what the Christian Church has regarded as "ecumenical councils," that is, representative of the entire church. After a stormy debate it condemned Arianism. The creed which is today called Nicene embodies the findings of the council. On the major issue it declares: "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." The creed was later elaborated, but without doing violence to the original meaning. The Greek in which it was first phrased employed terms to which a distinctive meaning was given. One term, *homoousion*, translated as "the same substance," was central. It meant that Christ was truly God – "very God of very God" according to the English translation – and was no subordinate to the Father. Arianism, however, continued to be influential for several centuries; it was endorsed by some later emperors and was the form of Christianity to which several of the German people were converted."

"Since the Council of Nicaca left unresolved the relations of the human to the divine in Jesus, three subsequent ecumenical councils examined this question. The last council which met at Chalcedon in 451 and is called the fourth of this series, adopted a statement to which Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglicans, and most Protestants still adhere declares that Jesus Christ is of the same substance (*homoousion*) as ("consubstantial" with) the Father and also of the same substance as men – that he is both fully God and full man. Moreover, it states that the two natures, divine and human, are in Him, but that in such a union both are preserved without being separated into two persons. Some Eastern churches, while insisting that they held to Nicaca rejected Chalcedon. The

separation was partly on political and ethnic grounds and arose from unwillingness to submit to the Greek and Latins who controlled the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church. The view of the Eastern churches – often but incorrectly called Monophysite – stressed the divinity and minimized the humanity of Christ; it is still held by Armenian, Egyptian Coptic, Ethiopian, and Syrian (Near Eastern and Indian) Christians.”

3. About Christian concept of Trinity, the Encyclopedia Encarta says:

“Christianity began as a Jewish sect and thus took over the Hebrew God, the Jewish scriptures eventually becoming, for Christians, the Old Testament. During his ministry, Jesus was probably understood as a holy man of God, but by the end of the 1st century Christians had exalted him into the divine sphere, and this created tension with the monotheistic tradition of Judaism. The solution of the problem was the development of the doctrine of the triune God, or Trinity, which, although it is suggested in the New Testament, was not fully formulated until the 4th century. The God of the Old Testament became, for Christians, the Father, a title that Jesus himself has applied to him and that was meant to stress his love and care rather than his power. Jesus himself, acknowledged as the Christ, was understood as the incarnate Son, or Word (Logos), the concrete manifestation of God within the finite order. Both expressions, Son and Word, imply a being who is both distinct from the Father and yet so closely akin to him as to be “of the same substance” (Greek *homousion*) with him. The Holy spirit – said in the West to proceed from the Father and the Son, in the East to proceed from the Father alone - is the immanent presence and activity of God in the creation, which he strives to bring to perfection. Although Christian theology speaks of the three “persons” of the Trinity, these are not persons in the Modern sense, but three ways of being of the one God.”

4. The Encyclopedia Americana explains the concept of Trinity as under:

"The central and characteristic Christian doctrine of God is that He exists in Three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. ("Holy Ghost" is the traditional English translation of Sanctus Spiritus and means the same as "Holy Spirit.") At the same time, the Christian church insists that God is One in "substance" (Latin substantial, existence or inner essence), and thus combines in a "mystery" (a formula or conception which really transcends human understanding) the truths set forth in the Holy Scriptures. It is held that although the doctrine is beyond the grasp of human reason, it is, like many of the formulations of physical science, not contrary to reason, and may be apprehended (though it may not be comprehended) by the human mind."

"It is probably a mistake to assume that the doctrine resulted from the intrusion of Greek metaphysics or philosophy into Christian thought; for the data upon which the doctrine rests, and also its earliest attempts at formulation, are much older than the church's encounter with Greek philosophy. The earliest development of the doctrine may in fact be viewed as an attempt to preserve the balance between the various statements of Scripture, or their implications, without yielding to views which, though logical enough, would have destroyed or abandoned important areas of Christian belief. The simplest affirmation is that God is "Three in One, and One in Three," without making use of such technical terms, derived from law or philosophy, as "substance" or "person." God is Father, and the Father is God; God is Son, and the Son is God; God is Spirit, and the Spirit is God. The statement is often seen, in Latin, in early stained-glass church windows, with three circles at the corners of a triangle and an inner circle connected with each (Fig. 1). The doctrine thus graphically symbolized might perhaps better be described as that of the divine "Triunity" rather than the "Trinity." At best the terms "substance" and

"person" are themselves only symbolic, and point to a mysterious reality which cannot be either literally described or mathematically formulated. Furthermore, these two terms are, in English, only the rough equivalents of their Latin originals, which had far wider connotations than the English words now possess. The term "Trinity" (Greek Trias) was first used by Theophilus of Antioch (fl. c. 180 A.D.), and provided a convenient term of reference, though it did not provide a definition."

8 – Doctrine of Atonement

6. Christian doctrine of original sin, its atonement through crucifixion of Jesus and deliverance of mankind from it is explained, in the words of the author of "The Truth that leads to Eternal Life", as under:

When Jehovah God created Adam and Eve, He said to Adam: "From every tree of the garden you may eat to satisfaction. But as for the tree of the knowledge of good and bad you must not eat from it, for in the day you eat from it you will positively die" – (Genesis 2:16-17) Satan the devil, however, speaking through the serpent misguided Eve, Adam's wife, representing the tree's fruit as being able to cause her to be like God, deciding for herself what was "good" and what was "bad". Eve then disobeyed God by eating of the fruit from the tree of knowledge. Adam, her husband, upon finding out what she had done, did not oppose her course but joined her in it. By this disobedience to God's command, they became guilty of sin and hence were driven out of the garden of Eden. This sin was inherited by all mankind being children of Adam. Since God intended to forgive mankind and bless them with eternal peace, He sent his only son Jesus to earth to be offered as ransom for deliverance of mankind.

Jesus knew that his coming to earth as a man was a direct part of God's arrangement for releasing humankind from sin

and death. So he said: "The Son of man came ... to give his soul a ransom in exchange for many." (Matthew 20:28) Exactly what does that mean? Well, a ransom is the price paid to obtain deliverance from captivity. In this case, Jesus' perfect human life offered in sacrifice was the price paid to obtain mankind's release from bondage to sin and death. (1 Peter 1:18,19) Why was such a release needed?

This was because Adam, the forefather of us all, had sinned against God. Thus, Adam became imperfect and lost the right to life. As a willful violator of God's law, he came under its penalty of death. God had also established laws of heredity, which assure that we all receive physical characteristics and other traits from our parents. According to these laws, Adam could pass on to his offspring only what he himself had; so we received from him an inheritance of sin and death. (Romans 5:12) All mankind therefore has been dying in payment of the penalty of sin. How could this death penalty be lifted and the requirements of justice still be met?

God did not weaken and compromise as to his own laws. This would have merely encouraged further lawlessness by a bad example. Yet he did not turn his back on mankind and leave them without hope. While sticking to his laws, God lovingly provided relief, not for the willful sinner Adam, but for Adam's offspring, who, without any choice in the matter, suffered the effects of his wrong. God did this in harmony with a legal principle that he later included in the Mosaic law, namely, "soul will be for soul." (Deuteronomy 19: 21) Let us see how that principle applied in the ransom provided through Jesus.

The "living soul" Adam, who forfeited life for mankind, was a perfect human. In exchange for what he lost, another human soul, equal to Adam, was needed, one who would offer his own perfect life as a sacrifice on behalf of mankind. (1 Corinthians 15:45) No offspring of Adam qualified for this, because all were born imperfect. As a result they all die because

they are sinners, and they have no right to human life that they can sacrifice on behalf of others. (Psalm 49:7 [48:8,Dy]) So God sent his own Son to earth. Jesus was born as a human, because it was a human life that was required. But he was born without the aid of a human father, so that he would be perfect as Adam was. God alone was the Father of the human Jesus, as he had also been Adam's Father. (Luke 3:38) Thus Jesus was fully qualified to offer his life as a "corresponding ransom." – 1 Timothy 2:6; Ephesians 1:7.

On Nisan 14 of the year 33 C.E. Jesus' enemies put him to death on a torture stake. He could have resisted, but he did not. (Matthew 26:53, 54) He willingly laid down his life in sacrifice for us. As his apostle Peter tells us: "He himself bore our sins in his own body upon the stake, in order that we might be done with sins and live to righteousness. And 'by his stripes you were healed.'" –1 Peter 2:24; see also Hebrews 2:9.

That was indeed a marvelous expression of God's love for mankind! The Bible helps us to appreciate it, saying: "God loved the world so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, in order that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life." (John 3: 16) If you are a parent who has a dearly loved son, no doubt you can appreciate, at least to some extent, what that meant to God. It surely should warm our hearts toward him to realize that he cares for us so much. –1 John 4:9-11.

Jehovah God did not leave his Son dead in the grave, but raised him to life on the third day. He was not given human life again, because that would have meant that he was taking back the ransom price. But he was "made alive in the spirit." (1 Peter 3:18) During a period of forty days after his resurrection he appeared visibly to his disciples a number of times, in materialized bodies, to prove that he really had been raised from the dead. Then, with the disciples looking on, he ascended heavenward and was caught out of sight in a cloud. He returned

to heaven, there “to appear before the person of God for us” bearing the value of his ransom sacrifice as the great high priest. (Hebrews 9:12, 24) The requirements of divine justice had been met; relief was now available for mankind.

Even now we may benefit greatly from the ransom. By exercising faith in it we can enjoy a clean standing before God and come under his loving care. (Revelation 7:9, 10, 13-15) When, due to imperfection, we commit a sin, we can freely seek forgiveness from God on the basis of the ransom, with confidence that he will hear us. (1 John 2:1, 2) Furthermore, the ransom has opened up the way for preservation through the end of this present wicked system of things. It makes possible the resurrection of the dead. And it provides the basis for gaining eternal life in God's new system of things, where it will be applied to mankind in order to wipe away all the effects of inherited sin. –1 Corinthians 15:25, 26; Revelation 7:17.

9 – Divisions in the Church

The differences between the East and West which were partly political, partly racial, and partly religious particularly over the pope's authority led to split in the Christian religion in the year 1054 breaking it into Roman Catholic Church for the West and Eastern Orthodox Church for the East. The Roman Catholic Church of the West was again divided in the sixteenth century when desire to reform Christianity led to coming into existence of Protestantism independent of Roman Catholicism. These divisions have come to stay and thus Christian religion today has three main branches or sects, namely: Roman Catholic Church, Protestant Church and Eastern Orthodox Church. Doctrines, beliefs and practices of each Church are briefly discussed as under:

Roman Catholic Church: The Roman Catholics trace their origin back to a conversation which took place between Jesus and Peter as reported in Matthew (16: 17-19). Jesus told Peter

that he is the foundation of the Church and gave to him the keys of the kingdom. Peter was thus appointed first pope with the authority to judge between right and wrong and also to forgive sins or withhold forgiveness. This brought into existence the Roman Catholic Church under the headship of Peter who was succeeded by a line of Popes till today. Each Pope receives the authority which was once Peter's. Pope is the visible head of the Church while Jesus is the invisible ruler.

2. According to Roman Catholic beliefs, the Church is an essential part of God's plan for salvation of men. God, out of His love and grace, established the Church to make clear and definite the means of man's redemption. The catholic is not asked to understand the plan of salvation, nor to understand God as he cannot. He is asked to believe and obey. All men need to be saved because of their share in original sin that mankind's parents Adam and Eve committed by rebelling against God. God provided, however, a way of salvation from the burden of sin when His only son Jesus paid the debt by death on the cross and thus making it possible for all the people to receive salvation. The salvation brings a person the highest happiness he can know, the Beatific Vision i.e., the experience of coming face to face with God, which would be possible in the heaven after death.

3. The Roman Catholic Bible includes the familiar books of the Old and New Testaments and an additional section known as the Apocrypha. Catholics revere the Bible chiefly because it contains the story of salvation. They believe that there are no errors or uncertainties in the Bible. However, most Catholics do not study the Bible personally. They are not expected to interpret it for themselves, since the Church teaches a meaning for most of its passages. It is far more important that a Catholic study the teachings of the Church than that he read the Bible.⁴¹

4. A Roman Catholic receives seven sacraments from the Church which give him guidance and strength on the path to salvation. These are:

- a) Sacrament of Baptism which he receives in infancy and which removes the guilt of original sin;
- b) Sacrament of Confirmation is given when he reaches the age of understanding and it bestows the blessings of the Holy Spirit;
- c) Sacrament of Matrimony confers God's blessings and approval upon marriage and upon children to be born to the couple;
- d) Sacrament of Ordination is given to purify and dedicate men for service in the priesthood;
- e) Sacrament of Extreme Unction which grants forgiveness from the last sins;
- f) Sacrament of Eucharist which is celebrated on each Sunday and on certain other days when Catholics are expected to attend a service called the Mass; and
- g) Sacrament of Penance which includes regretting the sin, confessing to a priest, accomplishing penalties assigned by the priest, and obtaining forgiveness from the priest.

5. The saints honored by Roman Catholics include the early disciples, some members of holy orders, and others whose faith and actions showed their full dedication to the search for salvation. Catholics believe that these saintly persons lived the life that leads to salvation so successfully that they can help others. Through prayer to the saint, through burning candles

before his image, and through other acts of honoring his spirit, the Roman Catholic believes that he may obtain some of the saint's merit for himself.⁴²

Roman Catholics revere the mother of Jesus as "Holy Mary, Mother of God." They believe that she was extraordinarily honored by God when he chose her to be the virgin mother of his miraculously conceived son. To many Catholics, Mary seems nearer and more concerned with their daily problems than either Christ or God, who inspire worshipers with awe. They sometimes call her "Queen of Heaven," and they ask her to pray for them, now and at the time of their deaths.⁴³

Eastern Orthodox Church: The Eastern Church has no Pope. Eastern Christians believe that they are members of the only authentic church stemming directly from the work of the first Christians.

1. The Eastern churches have not changed the creeds, but they do not interpret them literally. Roman Catholics have concentrated upon the salvation available through the death of Jesus. But Eastern Catholics have been far more interested in his divine-human nature. Roman Catholics have tried harder to obey the teachings of the Church. But Eastern Christians have tried harder to feel at one with God. Other Christians have been occupied with winning salvation for the next life. But Eastern Christians have sought a spiritual rebirth in this life.⁴⁴

2. Sacraments. The Eastern Orthodox Christians observe seven sacraments. Like Roman Catholics, they consider the mass their most important act of worship but both the cup and the bread are offered to the congregation.⁴⁵

3. Priesthood. Priests are looked upon as necessary agents between God and man. A priest may be married, if the marriage takes place before his ordination. Monks, of course, take the usual vows of devotion, chastity, obedience, and

poverty. From among the monks, bishops are chosen for each patriarchate. They are known as patriarchs or metropolitans. They are equal in rank, though one may be designated as honorary leader.⁴⁶

4. Worship. The formal and impressive services of worship are dear to the Eastern Christians. Their priests intone the words of the ritual in Greek, or in Old Church Slavonic. Churches are decorated with special religious paintings called icons—never with statues.⁴⁷

5. Scriptures. The scriptures are substantially the same as the Bible familiar to all Christians. Priests encourage their people to read the Bible, and all may interpret what they read.⁴⁸

6. The Eastern Orthodox Christian has usually felt that his religion demanded a change in his inner life. He has not felt that it asked great changes in society or governments.⁴⁹

Most of the Eastern orthodox Christians are found in eastern Europe, in Asia, and in Egypt.

Protestant Church: Protestant Reformation was a revolt against the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope which was led by Martin Luther, a German priest, when he questioned a highly publicized sale of indulgences offered by an official of the Pope which guaranteed forgiveness of sins.

Luther disagreed with church teaching about the role of human effort in salvation. Like Saint Paul, Luther argued that people are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Luther believed that faith was a gift from God. This position contradicted the Roman Catholic doctrine that salvation could be achieved through effort, or good works. According to Luther, the Bible alone and not traditional church doctrine should guide Christians. The Lutheran movement based on his teachings

spread rapidly through northern Germany and the Scandinavian countries during the 1520s.⁵⁰

The teachings of John Calvin, a French Protestant thinker, greatly influenced the Reformation in Switzerland, England, Scotland, France, and the Netherlands. Calvin agreed with Luther about salvation through faith. But Calvin was more interested in how Christianity could reform society. Calvin urged Christians to live in communities according to the divine law expressed in the Bible.⁵¹

In England, King Henry VIII influenced Parliament to establish the Church of England after he had declared his independence from the pope in 1534. But Calvinists in England wanted further reform. Their disputes with the Church of England led to the formation of the Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches in the 1600s.⁵²

Later leaders made other extensive "protests" against the authority of the Church. Their motives varied, but all of them had one belief in common. The way to salvation was not exclusively linked with the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope. Most of the protests were against the church system, not against the doctrine. For most Protestants, there are still no radical doctrinal disagreements.⁵³

There are now scores of different sects in Protestantism with no single authority over them all. Most Protestants believe in the rights of others to choose their own religious beliefs and their own religious fellowships. Freedom of belief and choice of church have led to many variations on the Protestant theme. Despite this, Protestants are finding increasing areas of agreement, in their creeds and in their social-service efforts.⁵⁴

1. Salvation by Faith. Most Protestants claim that no person, regardless of what he does, can earn salvation for himself or anyone else. Salvation is a gift of God. One must believe

that Jesus' life and death enabled people to regain a harmonious relationship with God. God's greatest blessing lies in this plan of salvation, which is open to all. All that is required is faith.⁵⁵

2. Dedicated Living. The religious life does not require that a person leave marriage, family, and daily human interests. Protestants have almost no monks or nuns, and their ministers are usually men with families. Faith, not works, constitutes the path to salvation. Faith does not depend on one's occupation, but God does call a person to give of his best efforts wherever he is. Religion is not a matter of church-going and pious meditation. It is the way you live each day.⁵⁶

3. The Priesthood of All Believers. Each person can go directly to God for himself. The task of the Church and its ministers is to teach men, not to act for them or command them. This is the real core of Protestantism. There are different reasons for the existence of the Church: to interpret God's will, to foster a fellowship of mutually helpful members who seek the same goals. Church governments vary, some being directed by ministers, some by ministers and designated members, and some by the entire membership.⁵⁷

4. The Bible. Most Protestants believe that the Bible contains the rules for faith and practice of religion. Protestants therefore study their Bibles seriously, reading them in their own language. Although many Protestants are now interpreting the Bible much less rigidly, there are still some who claim for it full authority, to the smallest word, without regard for its historical meaning.⁵⁸

5. Worship. Protestants are encouraged to pray sincerely and frequently. To some, prayer is a method of asking God for things. Or it is a way of helping friends from a predicament or "converting" someone. To the most thoughtful, it is an attempt to see things for what they really are, to come into a right

relationship with oneself, with one's God, and with one's world.⁵⁹

Most Protestants observe two sacraments, baptism and communion. They do not believe the doctrine of transubstantiation. To Protestants, a person's feelings and intentions when he takes a sacrament are more important than the rites of the sacrament. This is also true of other religious duties, which include an offering to support the church, attendance at services, and participation in the Christian fellowship.⁶⁰

A Protestant is free to live the best and most dedicated life he can, choosing the fellowship in which he feels most able to do it. For help in living this way, some Protestants lean in faith on Jesus as their personal Savior and the Savior of all who believe. Others gain inspiration for the religious life from the noble example of Jesus' life.⁶¹

Some Protestant sects have claimed that certain teachings are fundamental to Christianity. Especially do they stress the complete truth of the Bible and all the miracles it reports. These Christians are called Fundamentalists. They are known for their strong emotional attempts to convert others to their faith.⁶²

Appendix

Extracts From the Holy Bible (New Testament)

1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
 - The same was in the beginning with God.
 - All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.
 - In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

- And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.
- There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
- The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.
- He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.
- That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.
- He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.
- He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
- But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:
- Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
- And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.
- John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.
- And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.
- For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
- No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

2. And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:
- And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,
 - Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
 - Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
 - Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
 - Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
 - Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
 - Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
 - Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 - Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
 - Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.
 - Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.
 - Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

- Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candle stick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.
- Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.
- Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.
- For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.
- Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men, so he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
- For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.
- Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:
- But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.
- Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;
- Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

- Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.
- Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.
- Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:
- But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.
- And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
- And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
- It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:
- But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.
- Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thy self, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:
- But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:

- Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.
- Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.
- But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.
- Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:
- But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
- And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.
- And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.
- Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.
- Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.
- But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;
- That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.
- For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?
- And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?

- Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

— St. Matthew 5: 1-48

3. Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.
 - Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the street, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
 - But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:
 - That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.
 - And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
 - But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.
 - But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.
 - Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.
 - After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name.

- Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
- Give us this day our daily bread.
- And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
- And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
- For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
- But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.
- Moreover when ye fast be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
- But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face.
- That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.
- Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:
- But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:
- For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.
- The light of the body is the eye if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

- But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. Therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!
- No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.
- Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?
- Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?
- Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?
- And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:
- And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
- Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?
- Therefore take no thought, saying, what shall we eat? Or, what shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?
- (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

- But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.
- Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

— St. Matthew 6: 1-34

4. Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
 - Saying, the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
 - All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.
 - For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders' but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.
 - But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,
 - And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,
 - And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.
 - But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.
 - And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.
 - Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

- But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.
- And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.
- But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.
- Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.
- Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.
- Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!
- Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?
- And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.
- Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gifts?
- Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.
- And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.
- And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

- Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.
- Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.
- Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.
- Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.
- Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.
- Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.
- Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous,
- And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.
- Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.
- Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.
- Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

- Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:
- That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.
- Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.
- Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!
- Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.
- For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

— St. Matthew 23: 1-39

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CHAPTER 3

ISLAM

1 – Introduction

Islam is the religion of those who follow Prophet Muhammad (571 – 632 A.D) (may Allah's peace be upon him). The name 'Islam' or Al-Islam is an Arabic word which means 'submission' or 'surrender, 'peace' or 'commitment'. Its adherents or followers are called Muslims which mean the 'submitters' or 'surrenderers'. Thus Islam describes proper relationship between man and God, and the Muslim are those who submit or surrender to the will of God. The Muslims believe that submission before Allah (God) brings peace and fulfillment. They do not like to be called 'Muhammadans' and their religion to be called 'Muhammadanism' because these expressions imply that they worship Muhammad while they worship only Allah and consider Muhammad as Allah's messenger and servant and a mortal human being.

Islam is one of the three great monotheistic religions and is the youngest one, the other two Judaism and Christianity being its predecessors. On the basis of numerical strength of its followers, Islam is the second big religion. Today there are 56 Muslim countries in the world and there are over 1200 million Muslims, almost one-fifth of the total world-population. Although Muslims are found in every country of the world but majority of them live in Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, China, Malaysia, Middle East, Central Asian Republics of former Soviet Union, North Africa, Eastern Europe.

According to the Qur'an, the last revealed book of God, Islam is the only religion acceptable to God. It is not the religion only of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers, rather it has been religion of all the Prophets and their people which preceded Muhammad – right from Adam to Jesus. All of the Prophets, whether mentioned in the Qur'an or not, came with

sole and common mission to guide mankind to worship Allah, the One God of universe, and therefore, they had the same religion. This fact the Holy Qur'an confirms when it says to Prophet Muhammad: "He (God) hath ordained for you that religion which He commended unto Noah and that which we inspire in thee (Muhammad), and that which we commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus....." (42:13). Since the teachings of Islam received through prophets by the previous nations were corrupted with the passage of time and even the names of the religion were attributed to the names of the founders or the prophets, the need arose for the renewal of Islam through raising of new prophets. Thus Islam was purified of various modifications and corruptions which had entered into it and was strengthened with additional truths till it reached perfection with Allah's final messenger Muhammad (PBUH) and with God's last message, the Qur'an, which God has undertaken to preserve it in original form till Doomsday. Encyclopedia Americana beautifully discusses this belief as follows:

"The Koran presents Mohammad as the seal of the Prophets. According to developed Islamic theological thought, God in His mercy bestowed prophecy upon the first man, Adam, so that he and his descendants might have guidance for the proper way to live. Sadly, this guidance was first ignored and then corrupted and lost by successive generations, so God found it necessary to send other prophets to renew it. Among the prophets whom the Koran mentions are some known from the Bible, such as Abraham, David, and Jesus, and others unknown, such as Salih and Hud. The revelations to Mohammad were a renewal of the message of the prophets before him and, like theirs, came in the form of a divine book. Mohammad was the last of this prophetic tradition but also its confirmation, climax, and proof."

Another great fact about Islam has been brought home by writers of the book, "Great Religions By Which Men Live", as under:

"Most modern world religions became organized religions by an accident of history. In many cases, their roots are buried so deep in time that we cannot know the incidents that helped them to develop. But-Islam was distinguished by two facts from the start. First, it became a religion as the result of deliberate planning and well-considered efforts. Second, its whole development took place after world history had begun to be carefully recorded."

"In a short span of years, Mohammed had lifted himself to a unique position of leadership among his people. He had the time and the opportunity to plan thoroughly to meet all the social and spiritual needs of his fellow men. Mohammad, convinced that he spoke for Allah, had given rules for beliefs, for religious duties, and for proper conduct. As a result, Moslems found themselves with a guide to almost every activity or situation undertaken by human beings."

That is why, the followers of Islam hold their religion as perfect which provides a complete code of life to them.

2 – The Prophet Muhammad

Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Prophet of Islam, is the last of the messenger of God sent to mankind for guidance. According to the Qur'an, which is the revealed book of Islam, God sent messengers to every nation and to every township of the old and, therefore, their number must be in thousands if not in millions. The Qur'an, however, mentions by name only a few messengers, not more than two dozens, the most famous among them being Adam (the father of mankind), Noah, Hud, Saleh, Abraham, Ismael, Isaac, Jacob, Shuaib, Moses, David, Jesus Christ and Muhammad (may Allah's peace be upon them all). The chain of the Prophets starts from Adam who was the first human being as well as first prophet and it ends with Muhammad (PBUH) who is the final Prophet of Allah, the God of universe and of all mankind. Some of these messengers were

given books such as Moses who was given the Torah, Jesus who was given the Bible, David who was given the Psalms, and Muhammad who was given the Qur'an. It is hinted in the Qur'an that Abraham was also given some book but the name of the book is not reported. The Qur'an is thus the last revealed book of God as Muhammad (PBUH) is the final prophet. Character and conduct of Muhammad (PBUH) was declared by the Qur'an as model for the believers. Unlike the previous Prophets who were sent to their own tribes or nations having a limited mission, Muhammad (PBUH) was sent to the whole of mankind with universal mission.

Muhammad (PBUH) the Prophet of Islam was born at Makkah in Arabia (today called Saudi Arabia), in the Hashemite branch of the tribe of Quraish who were descendants of Prophet Abraham through his eldest son Ishmael. He was born on Monday, the 12th of Rabi-ul-Awwal 53 years before Hijrah corresponding to 23 rd April, 571 A.D. Muhammad lost his father Abdullah before his birth, his mother Aminah at the age of six and his loving grandfather Abdul Muttalib at the age of eight and was thus left to the care of his uncle Abu Talib who brought him up with great love and affection like his own sons. Since Abu Talib was not a man of substantial means, Muhammad had to engage himself in trade at very early age to earn livelihood. His excellent conduct and dealings with the people earned him the names of al-Sadiq (the truthful) and al-Amin (the trustworthy) at young age. At the age of 25, Muhammad married a rich widow of his tribe Quraish who was 15 years senior to him. All of Muhammad's children (who were reportedly seven or eight) except one son Ibrahim were born of Khadija.

For the next fifteen years of his life, Muhammad (PBUH) lived very quietly, mostly attending to the business of his wife and appearing only occasionally in public life. From early youth he was devoted to meditation and it was his practice to retire for month of Ramadan every year to a cave in Mount Hira, not

far from Makkah. It was there one night that Muhammad (PBUH) experienced his prophetic call. While he lay in the cave wrapped in his mantle, he had a vision of an angel commanding him to recite the word of God. He was forty at that time and the year was 610 A.D. and the month was Ramadan when Muhammad (PBUH) received the light of first revelation. The call caused Muhammad (PBUH) great distress and he returned home with great fear and depression. When he related to his wife Khadijah what had happened to him at the cave, she not only consoled him but also took him to her relative Waraqa bin Nowfal who was a Hanif (a member of a group of enlightened men among Quraish who devoted to one God) and a reputed man of religious insight. Waraqa told Muhammad (PBUH) that he need not be depressed as he had been chosen by God as His messenger and the angel who had come to him was Namus (Gabriel), the same angel, who used to come to Moses.

Thus started Muhammad's (PBUH) prophetic career and he was instructed to arise and preach to his people that God is One, that He has no partner and that He should be worshipped alone. For the first three years of his mission, the Prophet preached only to his family and close associates. The first to accept his mission and to abandon idolatry were his wife Khadija, his cousin Ali, his friend Abu Bakr and his freed slave Zaid. At the end of third year Muhammad (PBUH) received the command to preach in public. It was then, when he began to speak against their gods (idols), that Quraish became actively hostile, ill treating him and his followers, some of whom were tortured to death. Since the first converts to Islam were mostly humble and poor who could not defend themselves against oppression, the prophet allowed some of them to migrate to a distant Christian country, Abyssinia. But in spite of the severest persecution and emigration, the followers of Muhammad (PBUH) were growing in number upon which the pagan Quraish were seriously alarmed. At first they tried to bring the Prophet to a compromise by offering him every temptation but when their efforts at negotiation failed, they redoubled their

persecution and finally decided to ostracise the Prophet's whole clan as well as Muslims who followed him. Then for three years, the Prophet had to live with his kinsfolk in a place later to be called Shab-e-Abi Talib in complete isolation. When the document of boycott was destroyed miraculously by white ants and the kindlier among the Quraish agreed to remove the ban, the Prophet was again free to go about the city. But meanwhile the opposition to his preaching had grown rigid. His attempt to preach in the neighbouring city of Taif also failed. It was at this time that help of God came and the Prophet met during the season of pilgrimage, a little group of men from city of Yathrib who listened to him gladly and accepted his mission. Next year the Yathribites sent a deputation to invite Muhammad (PBUH) to their city.

Muhammad (PBUH) migrated to Yathrib and reached the city on Friday, 2nd July 622 A.D. at the age of fifty-three. This is called the Hijrah from which dates the Islamic Calendar. The people of yathrib welcomed the Prophet and his Makkan followers, who had abandoned their homes, with great enthusiasm. Henceforth the old name of the city was changed and it was to be called Madinat un Nabi, the city of the Prophet or shortly, Madinah, the name it bears ever since. A mosque was built for the purpose of worship of the God and for establishing prayers. The Prophet immediately applied himself to the task of organizing a sort of common wealth on proper basis at Madinah. He concluded a tripartite agreement between the Emigrants (mahajreen who had come with the Prophet from Makkah), the Helpers (the Muslims Residents of Madinah who had invited Muhammad) and the Jews (Yahud) of Madinah. This agreement is known in the history of Islam as Charter of Madinah. It is a historic document by which all blood-feud was abolished and lawlessness repressed. It secured equal rights to all the parties who had signed it and gave religious freedom to the Jews. This document is in fact the first written constitution of the world which established first Islamic state at Madinah with the Prophet as its head.

The pagans of Makkah were, however, not happy that the Prophet and his followers should live in peace at Madinah and their religion should spread. So the pagans (the Quraish of Makkah) decided to crush the Muslims and advanced toward Madinah with one thousand strong army. Thus the first battle between the Muslims and the Quraish took place at Badr on Friday, 17th Ramadan 2 A.H. (13th March, 624 A.D.). The Muslims won and the forces of disbelief perished. To avenge the defeat, the Quraish of Makkah again came to invade Madinah in the next year and the battle called the Battle of Uhud was fought on 6 Shawal, 3 A.H. i.e. on 21st March, 625 A.D. Although the battle remained indecisive, the Muslim losses this time were greater than those of their enemy. In the fifth year of the Hijrah in the month of Shawal (February – March of 627 A.D.) the Quraish, aided by the great desert tribe of Ghatafan, again invaded Madinah with a large army of 10,000 men. The war is known as War of the Clans or War of the Trench. The Prophet, under the advice of Salman the Persian, caused a deep trench to be dug before the city and defended Madinah with only 3000 men. The army of the clans was stopped by the trench, a novelty in Arab warfare. The siege of the city continued for a month or so. While the Muslims were awaiting the assault, the news came that Banu Qureyzah, a Jewish tribe of Madinah had gone over to the enemy. The situation looked grim, but one who was secretly a Muslim managed to sow distrust between the Quraish and their Jewish allies, so none could attack. Meanwhile came a bitter wind from the sea accompanied with rain which blew for three days and nights so terribly that not a tent could be kept standing, not a fire lighted, not a pot boiled. Therefore Abu Sufiyan the leader of the Quraish gave the order to lift the siege and thus retired the enemies without achieving their nefarious designs.

In the year 6 A.H. the Prophet had a vision in which he found himself entering the Holy Kaaba at Makkah for a Umrah. Attired as pilgrims, and taking with them the sacrificial animals the Prophet and a 1400 followers of him started their journey

to Makkah. As they approached near the city they were told by a friend that the Quraish were preparing for war and that they would not let the Muslims enter the city. The Prophet then encamped at a place called Al-Hudeybiyah from where he started negotiations with Quraish trying to explain them that he had come only as a pilgrim. Negotiations resulted in a truce which is called Truce or Treaty of Hudeybiyah. According to the treaty, the Prophet was to return to Al-Madinah without visiting Kaaba that year; in the next year he might pay a visit to Kaaba with his companions for a period of 3 days during which Quraish would evacuate the city; deserters from Quraish to the Muslims were to be returned to Quraish whereas the deserters from the Muslims to the Quraish were not to be returned to the Muslims; and any tribe who wished to join in the treaty as ally of the Quraish or as ally of the Muslim could do so.

In the seventh year of the Hijrah, the Prophet led a campaign against Khaiybar, the stronghold of the Jewish tribes, which had become a center of intrigues against Islam. Khaiybar was conquered and the Jews were subdued who thenceforth became tenants of the Muslims till their expulsion from Arabia in the caliphate of Umar the great. In the year 8 A.H, the Quraish broke the truce and, therefore, the Prophet marched to Makkah with a strong army of 10,000 men and conquered the city. The Makkans were expecting vengeance for their past misdeeds. However, the Prophet who has rightly been called by the Qur'an a mercy for the worlds, showed clemency unparalleled in the history of man. He proclaimed a general amnesty and not only forgave his arch enemies like Abu Sufiyan but also declared Abu Sufiyan's house a place of safety. In the same year the Battle of Huneyn was fought against the pagan tribes who had gathered to regain the Kaabah. A lot of booty fell into the hands of the Muslims for many of the hostile tribe had brought with them all that they possessed. Subsequently Taif was also conquered as the tribe of Thagif had joined the other tribes in the Battle of Huneyn. Then the Prophet returned to Madinah.

In the year 8 A.H., the Prophet had sent an expedition against the Syrians who had reportedly gathered at Mutah for the destruction of Islam. Though the campaign was unsuccessful as the three leaders appointed by the Prophet fell and the survivors under Khalid bin Walid managed their escape to Madinah, yet the campaign impressed the Syrians with the valour of the Muslims who beings only three thousands had not hesitated to join battle against a hundred thousand. In the next year it was reported that the Syrians were again mustering an army to attack Islamic state, so the Prophet issued call to all the Muslims to support him with men, arms and funds. At the head of 30,000 men the Prophet marched to Tabuk, on the confines of Syria, only to learn that the enemy had not yet gathered. Thus the expedition ended peacefully and the Prophet returned to Madinah.

By the year 9 A.H. Al-Islam had become dominant in all Arabia, so Declaration of Immunity was revealed. It was read by Ali to the Multitudes at Makkah in the Hajj season when Abu Bakr had already been there as head of Muslim pilgrims. The Declaration (contained in first few verses of chapter IX of the Holy Qur'an) forbade the idolaters to performs Hajj (pilgrimage to Kaabah) even to enter the precincts of the Holy House from the next year. Thus the proclamation marks the end of idol-worship in Arabia. The ninth year of Hijrah is also known "the Year of Deputations" because deputations from all parts of Arabia came to Madinah to swear allegiance to Prophet and embrace Islam. The Prophet had become, in fact, head or king of the whole of Arabia, but his way of life was as simple as before.

In the year 10 A.H. on the 25th of Zul-Qaad (23rd February, 632) the Prophet left Madinah with a multitude of Muslims to make a farewell pilgrimage to Makkah. It was during this last pilgrimage that the Prophet delivered the famous sermon on the mount of Arafat known in the annals of history as the Sermon of the Farewell Pilgrimage which is gist of Islamic

teachings. Life, honour and property of each Muslim was declared sacred and inviolable; all believers were declared brothers being children of Adam who was created of dust; Arabs and non-Arabs were declared equal; discriminations on racial and linguistic basis were abolished, and above all usury, which has been main instrument of economic exploitation of the poor by the rich, was abolished. The Prophet also abolished blood-feuds among the warring and revengeful tribes of Arabia and established Islamic fraternity and unity. He enjoined on the believers the rights of the woman, of the slaves and of the minorities. The believers were also reminded their religious duties, to be fair to each other and to avoid committing injustice. This sermon of the Prophet has rightly been hailed as a universal charter of human rights.

Soon after his return to Madinah, the Prophet fell ill. He breathed his last on Monday, 12th Rabi-ul-Awwal 11 A.H. (8th of June, 632 A.D). The Prophet had eleven wives and seven children. Although the Prophet was survived by many of his wives, none of his children except one daughter Fatima survived him. All the three sons of the Prophet had died in their infancy or early childhood.

Marmaduke Pichthall, a great translator and commentator of the Holy Qur'an, has beautifully summed up the achievements of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) particularly of his last ten years of life in his brief remarks as under:

"The number of the campaigns which he led in person during the last years of his life is twenty-seven, in nine of which there was hard fighting. The number of the expeditions which he planned and sent out under other leaders is thirty-eight. He personally controlled every detail of organization, judged every case and was accessible to every suppliant. In those ten years he destroyed idolatry in Arabia; raised woman from the status of a chattel to complete legal equality with man; effectually stopped the drunkenness and immorality which had till then

disgraced the Arabs; made men to live with faith, sincerity and honest dealing; transformed tribes who had been for centuries content with ignorance into a people with the greatest thirst for knowledge; and for the first time in history made universal human brotherhood a fact and principle of common law. And his support and guide in all that work was the Qur'an".

3 – Concept of God

The proper or personal name of God, according to Islam is "Allah" while He has many other Attributive names (of which only 99 have been mentioned in the Qur'an). The word "Allah" is an Arabic word which comprises "Al" and "Ilah". "Al" is the definite article which means "the", while "Ilah" means "The being who is worshipped". When these two words were joined, the letter "i" at the beginning of the second word was dropped for easier pronunciation and thus the word "Allah" resulted. Thus "Allah" means "The God", i.e. "the supreme being who is worshipped by all creatures and to whom all turn and pray for fulfillment of their "need".

2. God, according to the Qur'an which is the Holy scripture of Islam, is the Almighty, All-Powerful, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, All-Knowing and All-Seeing God of the whole of the Universe. He is the Beneficent, the Merciful, the Forgiving. There is no God save Him. He is One and He alone is to be worshipped. He has no partner, no parents, no offspring. He is the Alive, the Eternal, the Helper, the Protector. He is the Sovereign – Lord of the heavens and the earth and shares His Sovereignty with none. He is the creator of everything in the Universe. Whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him. He produces everything, then reproduces it. He gives life and death and is the Master of the Day of Judgment. He would resurrect every human after his/her death and would reward the righteous for good deeds with Paradise and would punish the wicked for evil deeds with Hell. He sent messengers and revealed books for the guidance of mankind.

3. Islam does not give any philosophical or scientific arguments for the existence of God. Its revealed book, the Qur'an, does not try to prove God by theological reasoning. It provides creations of God, His signs, portents scattered in the Universe, in the nature around us and in ourselves, as the proof of existence of God. "Lo! In the creations of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of night and day, and the ships which run upon the sea with that which is of use to men, and the water which Allah sendeth down from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after its death, and dispersing all kinds of beasts therein, and (in) the ordinance of the winds, and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth; are signs (of Allah's existence and sovereignty) for people who have sense"-says the Holy Qur'an (2:164). "And of His signs is this: He created you of dust, and behold you as human beings, ranging widely! And of His signs is this: He created for you helpmates from yourselves (women) that ye might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo! herein indeed are portents for folk who reflect" (al-Qur'an 30:21-21).

4. God is infinite. We mortal human beings having only finite and limited knowledge cannot define Him nor describe Him. All we know about Him is through His signs which are scattered in the nature around us and through Prophets and revealed books. The Qur'an, the last such revealed book which is the word of God, tells us: "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light, Allah guideth unto His light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is knower of all things" – (24:35). "Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth....." (Al-Qur'an 2: 255).

5. God is Omnipresent according to Islam. He is everywhere. There is no fixed place where we can say that He resides. To God belong the East and the West, whithersoever you turn, there is the Presence of Him. God is with you wheresoever you go. "And when My servants question thee concerning Me, then surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he crieth unto Me. So let them hear My call and let them trust in Me, in order that they may be led aright", tells God to Prophet Muhammad (al-Qur'an 2: 186). "We verily created man and We know what his soul whispereth to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein", says God in the Qur'an (50:16). "There is no secret conference of three but He is their fourth, nor of five but He is their sixth, nor of less than that or more but He is with them, wheresoever they may be; and afterwards, on the Day of Resurrection, He will inform them of what they did. Lo! Allah is knower of all things." (Al-Qur'an 58:7).

6. Islam is strictly a monotheistic religion. It believes God is one and there is no God except Him. Unity of Godhead is the fundamental teaching of Islam. The belief in the Oneness of God is the first and the foremost among the five pillars or articles of Islamic faith which every follower of Islam is under obligation to profess and adhere to. None can enter into Islamic brotherhood nor one can remain a Muslim until and unless he declares by tongue and also truly believes in his heart that there is no God but Allah. "Your God is One God; there is no God save Him, the Beneficent, the Merciful," says the Holy Qur'an (2:163). It is Allah alone whom the Muslims worship; "Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds, the Beneficent, the Merciful. Owner of the Day of Judgment, Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help" – is the prayer of the Muslims in every worship. Addressing the Christians, the Qur'an says: "O people of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which he conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah

and His messenger, and say not "Three" – cease! (it is) better for you! Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth..." (4: 171).

7. God, the Almighty Lord of the cosmos, has neither parents, nor any spouse, nor any son, nor any daughter. The Qur'an says: "Praise be to God, who hath not taken unto Himself a son, and who hath no partner in the Sovereignty, nor hath He any protecting friend through dependence" (17:111). God is alone and one. He neither begets nor was begotten. "Say: He is Allah, the One! Allah, the eternally besought of all! He begetteth not nor was begotten. And there is none comparable unto Him", commands the Holy Qur'an (112:1-4). God has no partners and associates in His sovereignty and dominion nor in His attributes. Polytheism is condemned, holding partners unto God is the biggest and unpardonable sin. "Lo! Allah pardoneth not that partners should be ascribed unto Him, He pardoneth all save that to whom He will. Whosoever ascribeth partners unto Allah hath wandered far astray" – Thus warns the Holy Qur'an (4:116).

8. No mortal human being – neither an ordinary one nor even the blessed one like a prophet – can see God. Human eye cannot see God as eye – sight is limited. Prophet Moses expressed his desire to see God but, as the Qur'an tells us, lightening seized him and he fell down unconscious. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ascended the heaven but when he was asked had he seen God, he replied: God is light, how can I see Him? The Qur'an says: "Vision comprehendeth Him not, but He comprehendeth (all) vision. He is the Subtile, the Aware" – (6:103). "And it was not (vouchsafed) to any mortal that Allah should speak to him unless (it be) by revelation or from behind a veil, or (that) He sendeth a messenger to reveal what He will by His leave. Lo! He is Exalted, Wise". (42:51)

9. God has knowledge of everything whatsoever is in heavens and in the earth. He knows your secrets and what you hide in your breasts. He is knower of the visible and the invisible, seen and the unseen, indeed of everything of past, present or future. "Lo! nothing in the earth or in the heavens is hidden from Allah" says the Qur'an (3:5). "And with Him are the keys of the invisible. None but he knoweth them. And He knoweth what is in the land and the sea. Not a leaf falleth but He knoweth it, not a grain amid the darkness of the earth, not of wet or dry but (it is noted) in a clear record" – (al-Qur'an 6:59). The Qur'an further tells us: "Lo! Allah! With Him is the knowledge of the Hour (Doomsday). He sendeth down the rain, and knoweth that which is in the wombs. No soul knoweth what it will earn tomorrow, and no soul knoweth in what land it will die. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware". (31:34).

10. God is the best and the greatest creator. He is the only one Who is the originator and the creator of the universe, the heavens and the earth, and of everything which is visible or invisible to human eye and which is known or unknown to man. Heavens and earth, sun and stars, moon and planets, night and day, light and darkness, air and wind, storms and clouds, rain and water, oceans and rivers, mountains and hills, flowing streams and gushing springs, glaciers and icebergs, life and death, plants and gardens, fruits and vegetables, corn and crops, forests and trees, animals and beasts, birds and fish, milk and honey, fire and water are all His creations. He created man of potter's clay, angels of light and Jinn of fire. The Qur'an tells us that God created everything in pairs and created life of water. When God intends to do a thing, He simply says unto it: Be! And it is.

11. God is the sovereign Lord of the whole cosmos. Sovereignty over heavens and the earth and over everything belongs to God. He has no partner in sovereignty. Command over all belongs to Him. He rules over everything. He is the Regulator and the Perfector. He is the Supreme Law-Giver and

Supreme – Judge. He is Almighty and All-Powerful. He is the source and fountain of power. None can benefit or harm except God. If God intends to give you benefit, none can withhold it; if He intends you harm, none can protect you. He bestows daughters upon whom He will and bestows sons upon whom He will or makes barren whom He will.

12. God created man of the best stature and made him the best of many of His creatures. He created Adam of potter's clay and asked the Angels to prostrate before him. All did except the Satan who was declared outcast. However, God accepted Satan's challenge and gave him reprieve till the Day of Resurrection. So Satan misleads the man from right path. He, first of all, misguided Adam and made him to eat from the forbidden tree and thus got him expelled from heaven. Since the Devil misleads Adam's children to the path of evil and of Hell, God sent messengers and revealed books for the guidance of man. It is against this background that great Prophets like Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them) were sent and books like Torah, Gospel and the Qur'an were revealed. Those who follow the Prophets, worship God, do good deeds and lead their lives in accordance with guidance revealed by God through His messenger would be rewarded on the Day of Judgment with Paradise wherein they would lead peaceful eternal life. But those who reject the Prophets, do not believe in God, do evil deeds and follow the Satan would be thrown in Hell wherein they would burn and boil and have a worst possible life.

13. God has appointed man Khalifa (viceroy or deputy) in the earth. God has bestowed many favours on man. The Qur'an tells us that many things have been created for service to and benefit of man. The Qur'an says: "Allah is He Who created the heavens and the earth and causeth water to descend from the sky, thereby producing fruit as food for you, and maketh the ships to be of service unto you that they may run upon the sea at His command, and hath made of service unto you the rivers.

And maketh the sun and the moon, constant in their courses, to be of service unto you, and hath made of service unto you the night and the day." (14:32-33). "See ye not how Allah hath made serviceable unto you whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the earth and hath loaded you with His favours both without and within? Yet of mankind is he who disputeth concerning Allah, without knowledge or guidance or a Scripture giving light." (31: 20)

God is great benefactor of man. His favours and bounties on man are innumerable. Some of His favours have been counted by the Qur'an in its above verses, whereas there are countless favours of God which are not even known to man. God's favours within the man are man's eyes with which he sees, ears with which he hears, hearts with which he reflects, hands with which he works and feet with which he walks. Indeed man is a great handiwork of God and his every limb is of immense use to him.

14. God is the greatest and the best Sustainer, Provider, Preserver, Protector and Nourisher of all created-beings. He provides subsistence, food and other means of living to all living beings. The Qur'an says: "He placed therein (in the earth) firm hills rising above it, and blessed it and measured therein its sustenance in four days, alike for all who ask." (41:10). The Qur'an reminds the man of Allah's favour in providing food: "Who hath appointed the earth a resting place for you and the sky a canopy; and causeth water to pour down from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you", (2:22). Allah provides sustenance to everyone. "And there is not a beast in the earth but the sustenance thereof dependeth on Allah..." (Al-Qur'an 11:6). It is God who increases and decreases subsistence. "Allah enlargeth livelihood for whom He will, and straiteneth it for whom He will (al-Qur'an 13:26). Allah preserves the heavens and the earth." His throne includeth the heavens and the earth and He is never weary of preserving them..." (al-Qur'an

2:255). ".....Have they not seen the birds obedient in mid air? None holdeth them save Allah..." (Al-Qur'an 16:79).

15. All creatures and all things worship and glorify God in their own way." Have they not observed all things that Allah hath created, how their shadows incline to the right and to the left, making prostration unto Allah, and they are lowly? And unto Allah maketh prostration whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth of living creatures, and the Angels (also), and they are not proud. They fear their Lord above them, and do what they are bidden" – says the revealed book of Islam (16: 48-50). "The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein praise Him, and there is not a thing but hymneth His Praise; but ye understand not their praise (Al-Qur'an 17:44). "Haste thou not seen that unto Allah payeth adoration whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is in the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the hills, and the trees, and the beasts, and many of mankind....." (Al-Qur'an 22:18).

16. Man is God's best creation and God has made man viceroy in the earth, has set many of His creatures to serve man and has bestowed on man many favours, which we have mentioned above. So man owes more gratefulness and more thanksgiving to God than other creatures. Therefore, there are many obligations of man towards his creator. He should believe in Him and should worship Him alone. He should glorify God and hymn His praise. He should love God and remember Him always, sitting, walking, lying. He should fear God and be kind and merciful to others. He should pray to God alone and seek help only from Him. He should trust in God and seek His refuge from Satan the outcast. He should follow the Prophets and lead his life in accordance with their teachings. It is only then that man would succeed and would justify his creation. He can then hope for reward when God resurrects the dead on the Day of Judgment.

17. About Islam's concept of God, Encyclopedia Encarta writes as follows:

"Islam arose as powerful reaction against the ancient pagan cults of Arabia, and as a consequence it is the most starkly monotheistic of the three biblically rooted religions. The name Allah means simply "the God," He is personal, transcendent, and unique, and Muslims are forbidden to depict him in any creaturely form. The primary creed is that "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the apostle of Allah." Allah has seven basic attributes: life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, seeing and speech. The last three are not to be understood in an anthropomorphic sense. His will is absolute, and all that happens depends on it, even to the extent that believers and unbelievers are predestined to faith or unbelief."

4 – The Holy Scripture

Al-Qur'an is the name of the last revealed book of Allah which forms the Holy or religious scripture of Islam. It was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the last messenger of Allah to mankind, in parts in a span of twenty two and half years between 610 A.D. to 632 A.D. i.e. from his appointment as apostle at the age of forty till his death at the age of sixty three. The first revelation was made on 27th of Ramadan and the last on 9th of Zil Hijah of 10th A.H. The period comprises 12.5 years of Prophet's life at Makkah during which 90 or 91 Surahs (chapters) were revealed and last 10 years of Prophet's life at Madinah during which 23 or 24 Surahs are reported to have been revealed.

2. The Qur'an comprises 114 Surahs (chapters) divided into 6238 (according to some research scholars, 6247) 'Ayahs' (Verses). Each Surah bears a name taken from something mentioned in it, e.g. the second Surah is called "Baqarah" (the 'cow') because of the mention of a cow which the children of Israel were required by the Lord to sacrifice. In every case

(except Surah nine) all the Surahs are introduced by "Bismillah", "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful." Of these Surahs, 29 are such which begin with the letters or alphabets that are mysterious and have always been the object of explanations and comments among scholars of the Qur'an. For the convenience of the reader or reciter, the Qur'an is also divided into 30 paras (or parts) and 7 manazal (or portions). The arrangement of Ayahs and Surahs is not in order in which they were revealed, but in accordance with a plan sanctioned by the Prophet himself under guidance of Allah. Most of the verses which embody rules of law were revealed to settle questions that actually arose for decision. That may be one of the reasons why the book was revealed in stages. To this fact reference is also found in the Qur'an itself in its verses 32 and 33 of chapter 25 (Surah Al-Furqan). Mainly the law of Islam is found in chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 17, 24, 33, 49, 65, of the Qur'an.

3. The Qur'an calls itself by various names, most famous of which are: al-Qur'an, al-Furq'an, al-Kitab, al-Dhikr, al-Hakim, etc. The term Qur'an is used in two ways: as participle it means to read; as an object, it means a thing which is read. The Holy Qur'an was brought by the Archangel Gabriel to the Prophet of Islam in Arabic language.

4. All the surahs of the Qur'an had been recorded in writing before the Prophet's death, and many Muslims had committed the whole Qur'an to memory. But the written surahs were dispersed among the people; and when, in a battle which took place during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr – that is to say, within two years of the Prophet's death – a large number of those who knew the whole Qur'an by heart were killed, a collection of the whole Qur'an was made and put in writing. In the Caliphate of Uthman, all existing copies of surahs were called in, and an authoritative version, based on Abu Bakr's collection and the testimony of those who had the whole Qur'an by heart, was compiled exactly in the present form and order,

which is regarded as traditional and as the arrangement of the Prophet himself, the Caliph Uthman and his helpers being Comrades of the Prophet and the most devout students of the revelation. The Qur'an has thus been very carefully preserved.¹

The Qur'an has preserved its text and language in pure form since the very beginning. Unlike the previous revealed scriptures, no tampering has been made in the Qur'an. Not even a single word or letter has been altered, deleted or added or has been changed or modified. Allah is its Protector and Guardian Who had taken responsibility upon Himself to save it from any corruption till the Day of Judgment.

5. It is the fundamental belief of the Muslims that their religious book, Al-Qur'an is complete code of human life. Al-Qur'an provides guidance to human beings in all spheres of human activity starting from individual to socio-political, from family life to national and international relations, and from religious to mundane affairs. Encyclopedia Americana writes:

"Muslims consider the Qur'an to be the very words of God Himself. The messages given to Muhammad by the angel were taken from Heavenly Book, uncreated and eternally coexistent with God, that is called the Mother of the Book or the Well-Preserved Tablet. This eternal book represents the eternal Speech of God, the expression of His truth and His will for the universe. Books of previous prophets, such as the Gospel of Jesus or the Torah of Moses, were also taken from this source. The Koran is but another yet the highest and final instance, of God's offering guidance to straying men through Scripture brought by His chosen messengers. Followers of previous prophets, like the Christians and Jews had corrupted their messages, thereby necessitating the sending down of the Qur'an to restore the purity of divine guidance."

"As the very words of God, the Qur'an is the foremost authority for Muslims in all matters of faith and practice. They

pay it enormous reverence and have been at pains to preserve its contents exactly as they were received from the Prophet.

There is probably no other book in history, including the Bible, that has been so much studied or commented upon. Studies that deal with its various aspects fill entire libraries and have been composed in all the important languages of the Islamic world."

6. Besides seeking guidance from the Qur'an on every important issue, every Muslim holds the Qur'an in high reverence. The book is kept at the cleanest place in the house and is never laid on the ground. Not even a word or leaf of it is thrown into dust or waste paper basket. No believer touches it except after performing ablution or purifying bath. The verses of the book are recited at every religious or social ceremony and daily prayers also include its recitations. In the month of Ramadan the whole of Qur'an is recited in special prayers. All over the Muslim world there exist schools (called madaris) specifically reserved to teach and memorize the Qur'an to children. One who learns the Qur'an by heart is called 'hafiz' (memorizer) and he is held in high esteem. The memorizing of the Qur'an is regarded an act of great religious merit and spiritual excellence. In every Muslim country there are hundred of thousands of persons who have committed the Qur'an to memory.

Since the Muslims consider the words of the Qur'an to be the words of God, historically they have lavished their highest art on the calligraphic presentation of the Qur'anic text. Verses from the Qur'an in elegant calligraphy decorate the facades and walls of mosques, religious seminaries, tombs of saints and other public buildings.²

7. In addition to the Qur'an, there is another source of guidance for a Muslim in his individual and social life, and that is the Sunnah (traditions) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

As we have seen, Prophet Muhammad lived a very practical and eventful life. He was Prophet, a reformer, a revolutionary, a statesman, a commander, an administrator and head of state in his public life. In his individual life he was a son, a husband, and a father. His deeds, behaviour, character and conduct is a precedent and role model for his followers. The Qur'an says: Verily in the messenger of Allah ye have a good example for him who looketh unto Allah and the last day" – (33: 21), The Prophet is reported to have said, during his sermons at Farewell Pilgrimage: And I have left among you a thing which if you adhere to, you will never be misguided after this – the Book of Allah and what you get from me by questions (traditions, sayings and precedents).

The Prophet of Islam who had initially prohibited the writing of Hadith (traditions) for the fear that it may not be mixed up with the book of Allah, later on allowed his companions to do so. His companions had wonderful memory who memorized each and every word uttered by the Prophet and also recorded each and every act of the Prophet with complete commitment and religious zeal. Some of them had even reduced into writing the Ahadith (sayings and traditions) of the Prophet in the form of compilations known as Sahifas – such as Sahifa Ali, Sahifa Sadiqa, Collection of Rafi, Collection of Jarir bin Abdullah, Sahifa Samura bin Jundab and compilations of famous transmitter like Abu Huraira, Abdullah bin Abbas and Abdullah bin Masud. Thus the preservation of Hadith was started during the lifetime of Muhammad (PBUH) and was continued immediately after him as the believers knew its importance.

But despite the initial work of companions to keep record of Hadith in writing, the work of compiling of Ahadith in the form of proper and systematic books was completed in the second century A.H. The most famous and authentic of these books are Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Abu Daud, Tirmizi, Ibn Majah, Nisai, Muwatta of Imam Malik, Masnud of

Imam Ahmad-bin-Hunbal. The first six of these compilations are regarded as the most reliable and are known as Sihah-e-Sittah or the Six Correct.

The above mentioned compilations of traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) along with the Qur'an (which is the Holy Scripture of Islam) may be called sacred writings of Islam.

5 – Fundamental Articles of Faith

The edifice of Islam is built, as enjoined upon the Muslims by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), on five pillars called five fundamental articles of Islamic faith. These are: Profession of Belief (Iman); establishment of Prayers or worship (salat); payment of compulsory charity (Zakat); fasting (Saum) during the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage (Hajj) to Makkah. These articles, (which in a way are basic religious duties or obligations of man toward God) are elaborated as under:

1. Belief (Iman): It is the first and foremost pillar of the Islamic faith. The Qur'an has prescribed for the followers of Islam to believe in Allah (the one God of cosmos), His messengers, His Angles, His scriptures and the Hereafter. It says: "O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His messenger and the Scripture which He hath revealed unto His messenger, and the Scripture which He revealed aforetime. Whoso disbelieveth in Allah and His angles and His scriptures and His messengers and the last day, he verily had wandered for astray." (4:136) Profession of belief in short, is to proclaim the following statement or formula, (Kalima) with the tongue and affirm its truth with the heart: "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the apostle of Allah."

Said publicly, this profession of faith is sufficient to gain recognition as a member of the community of Muslims. The above short statement may further be reinforced by a little longer statement of attestation, which is:

"I bear witness that there is no God but Allah who is one and has no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and Apostle of Allah."

Allah, the Eternal, is the source of all creation. Therefore, the central confession of all believers is belief in Allah Who is the Almighty and only one God of the universe. He is the creator and sustainer of each and everything in the cosmos. He is Eternal and Ever-Living Who never takes rest. He has no partner, no children, no parents, no spouses as He neither begets nor He was begotten. He is all-powerful, Unique in Essence and Attributes, All-perfect, Sovereign Lord, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient, All-Knowing, All-seeing, Just, the Beneficent, the Merciful, the Forgiving. The heavens and earth are full of His signs and blessings. He gives life and death and would revive the dead on the Day of Resurrection. He sent Prophets and revealed scriptures for the guidance of man. He is only to be worshipped; He is only to be asked for help.

Belief in God's messengers is another belief which the Muslims are obliged to hold. For guidance of man Allah sent many messengers who not only conveyed God's message to mankind but also acted upon the message to set pattern of conduct for their followers. Muslims believe in all messengers of God from Adam to Muhammad – who include Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ismael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad – without rejecting anyone and without making any distinction between them.

Muslims also believe in all scriptures which were revealed to Prophets for guidance of man, such as: Torah which was given to Moses; the Psalms given to David; the Gospel given to Jesus, and the Qur'an given to Muhammad. The followers of Islam are required to believe in Angels who were created from light, are not visible to human eye, have no sex and are appointed to glorify God and carry out His commands. Most

famous among them are: Gabriel, 'the Angel of Revelation', charged to convey God's messages to His prophets; Israfil who will blow the Trumpet on the Day of Resurrection; Mickail or Mical appointed for arranging rainfall; Izraeel, the 'Angel of Death', charged to take souls.

Followers of Muhammad are also required to believe in Hereafter or afterworld. The world would end on the Last Day called the Doomsday when every living creature would die. The Hereafter would start after death. God would then resurrect or revive the dead on the Day of Resurrection also called the Day of Judgment. And then He would judge between mankind. He would reward those who believed in Him and followed His teachings and guidance; and would punish those who rejected His messengers, rebelled against Him and followed the Devil. The former would be given Paradise – heavenly dwelling with flowing waters, refreshing beverages, fruits and fowl, and youths and maidens serving the needs of the inhabitants; the latter would enter into Hell – a bad place to live in with fire, scorching heat, boiling water and big torments.

Although the followers of Islam believe in God and besides Him in His Apostles, Books, Angels and the day of Judgment and the reward and punishment in the Hereafter, but no body should be led to misconceive that Muslims hold the Apostles or the books or the Angels as deities or as associates of God. Islam is strictly a monotheistic religion and Muslims believe in and worship only one God who is Allah, the Almighty Lord of universe, all the other objects are His creatures. In fact, belief in God's Prophets, His books, His angels and the Day of Judgment in compliance with God's command is re-affirmation of one's central belief in God.

2. Prayer (Salat): It is the second pillar of Islam and in importance it is next to belief. An adult Muslim, male or female, is duty-bound to pray five times every day, i.e., at dawn, just after midday, in mid-afternoon, just after sunset and at

nightfall. Children of 7 years and above are encouraged to offer prayer. Men are obliged to establish prayer in the mosque while women are encouraged to offer it in their home. Prayer is offered facing toward Kaaba which is at Makkah. The prayer in the mosque is said in the congregation which is lead by an Imam (prayer-leader). Summons to prayer are given by a caller (Muaizzin) who proclaims call (Azan) from the minarets of the mosque or from some other raised platform in the mosque. Before saying prayer, a believer is required to purify or cleanse himself by performing ablution (wadhu) or ritual bath. In the prayer, verses of the Holy Qur'an, short statements of praise of God and some other supplications are recited. The prayer comprises a series of standings, bowings, prostrations and sittings. It signifies one's complete submission before the Almighty and at a higher spiritual level it is a recognition of the fact of God's constant presence. Fridays are special days for public prayer in the mosque. Male Muslims, sometimes women also, go to mosque of their area or locality in large numbers to participate in Friday's congregation prayer. The Friday prayer is preceded by a sermon and readings from the Holy Qur'an which the leader or the preacher (Imam or Khatib) gives. This prayer substitutes on Friday the daily prayer of midday (Zuhr). Mosque are simple buildings which are designed in such a way that the believers face Kaaba when praying.

While five daily prayers are obligatory, piety encourages Muslims to offer additional prayers whenever they can in order to earn pleasure of Allah. When some Muslim dies, funeral prayers is offered in congregation which is led by an Imam. Twice in a lunar year, the Muslims offer special thanks – giving prayers to their Lord on two religious festivals – Eid-ul-Fitar and Eid-ul-Azha – which are widely celebrated in the Islamic world. The Muslims pray when they are happy; they pray when they are sad. Indeed the true followers of Islam are obliged to remember God and pray to him in every situation in order to seek his blessings and support.

3. Compulsory Charity (Zakat): It is the third pillar which in importance is only next to prayer. Besides having religious importance, Zakat plays very important role in the socio-economic life of the Muslim community and it forms corner – stone of the financial structure of the Islamic state. Since it is collected from the rich and is spent on the poor, the Zakat ensures fair distribution of wealth in the Islamic state to finance its welfare activities. Every rich and well-to-do Muslim who possesses wealth at a certain prescribed minimum level (U.S. \$ 50 or so) or above is bound to pay annually a certain percentage (normally 2.5%) of his wealth for the cause of the needy and poor people. This rate and minimum level is applied in case of cash, gold and silver, bank deposits, shares and stocks, merchandise, etc. In case of cattle wealth, agricultural produce, treasure trove and mineral wealth, different rates and taxable limits have been prescribed. In the days of the prophet and early Muslim caliphs Zakat was compulsorily collected by the state as a tax and was spent strictly on the welfare of the poor and destitute as prescribed by the Qur'an. However the later Muslim rulers did not pay their proper attention to its collection on behalf of state and so it became a private charity, each believer paying it at his will to the poor in his locality. Recently the forces of Islamic revival have made several Muslim states to create institutions for collection of Zakat on behalf of government and for spending of it for the cause of the welfare of the poor. Although people are not generally forced to pay Zakat, but still most of them pay it as a religious duty in order to earn pleasure of Allah.

4. Fasting (Saum): Another pillar of Islam and a religious obligation of an adult Muslim is fast during Ramadan which is ninth month of Islamic Lunar calendar and may consist of 29 or 30 days depending on the position of moon. Ramadan is considered a sacred month as the Holy Qur'an was revealed in it. Fasting starts from the dawn and terminates at sunset of every day of Ramadan. The Qur'an commands the believers to refrain from all food and drink during the fast and also to

abstain from sexual intercourse. Very old persons, small children, sick persons, wayfarers, pregnant or menstruating woman are excused from fast. However, the sick and the wayfarers are required to fast the same number of other days when they recover health or their journey ends. Special prayers in the mosque at nightfall are offered during the nights of Ramadan wherein the whole of the Qur'an is recited. Those who cannot hear the Qur'an in these prayers due to some valid excuse, try to read it in their homes. The last nine or ten days of the month are spent in special worship called secluded devotion (Itikaf) when the men sit in the mosque and women in secluded place at homes and read the Qur'an and pray. The day following the end of the month is called Eid day or day of celebrations and is a holyday. On that day, the Muslims felicitate each other, give charity, exchange gifts, visit each other, purchase new clothes especially for children and enjoy good food. Fasting, according to Islam, promotes piety. It teaches self-discipline, control of passions and elevates the faster to spiritual heights.

5. Pilgrimage (Hajj): The fifth article or pillar of faith is pilgrimage (Hajj or visit) to Makkah. It is compulsory for an able – bodied and a well-to-do Muslim to perform pilgrimage at least once in his or her lifetime. The pilgrimage comprises performance of certain acts and rituals such as wearing of special dress, walking seven times around the Kaaba, kissing the Black Stone in the corner of Kaaba, running between the hillocks of Safa and Marwa, drinking of water of Zamzam, visit to stay at Mina and Arafat, throwing stones at the Satan and to sacrifice an animal at Mina on 10th of Zilhaj. These acts are performed at the Kaaba and in the valley of Mina and Arafat near Makkah. Pilgrimage is performed during the month of Zilhaj which is the last month of Islamic calendar. Majority of the believers also go to Madinah to visit the tomb of the Prophet and to offer prayers at the Mosque of the Prophet. During the days of the Hajj, the pilgrims devote almost all of their time in reading the Qur'an, in offering the prayers, in visiting holy

places in addition to performance of ceremonies connected with the Hajj.

Both the Qur'an and the Sunnah stress the religious merit of pilgrimage and highlight its excellence in terms of reward. Millions of Muslims perform pilgrimage every year. It is an international congress of the Muslims which gathers brothers-in-faith from all over the world who in pilgrims' garments simultaneously perform ceremonies of the Hajj in alike manner and converse with each other on equal footing without any discriminations. Thus the pilgrimage has become a universal manifestation of Islamic brotherhood and equality. It is indeed an important unifying agent for Islam, serving the cause of unity and strengthening the bonds of fellowship among the Muslims.

No priesthood: There is no organized church or priesthood in Islam, neither is any religious hierarchy even in the ordinary sense. To lead the prayer service or to recite and interpret the Qur'an is not monopoly of any individual or group. Any practicing layman with basic necessary knowledge of Islam can lead the prayers and can approach the Qur'an and Hadith (traditions of the Prophet) for guidance. Like Jews and unlike Christians, the Muslims do not believe in asceticism. Hence there are no monks and nuns.

6 – Islamic Law

Islam has laid down an elaborate system of law which comprises family laws, civil laws and criminal laws. Rules of evidence and judicial procedure have also been laid down in minute details.

2. Islam's personal and family law includes law of marriage, of dower, of divorce, of maintenance, of inheritance, of bequest or will, of gift, etc. Islam treats family as cradle of civilization and marriage as the foundation of family. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have remarked: "Nikah (marriage) is

my Sunnah (tradition) and whosoever rejects my Sunnah is not from me." The Holy Qur'an says: "Marry those among you who are single" (24:32). Life of monasticism and celibacy is discouraged and, unlike some other religions, marriage of widows and divorced women is not only permitted but it is a virtue if a man marries such a woman in order to give her protection. Rights of women are specially safeguarded in a marriage as marriage, according to Islam, is a civil contract and a woman can settle her terms in the contract regarding amount of dower gift, right of divorce and maintenance and protection in case of husband's second marriage. No marriage can be solemnized without consent of a woman and if a minor girl is given in marriage by her father she can exercise her right to repudiate the marriage on attaining puberty. Dower gift, according to husband's financial status, is an essential condition of marriage and husband is bound to give this gift to his wife even if it is somehow not settled at the time of marriage. The divorce is considered as the most hated thing in Islam and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said: "The most detestable of lawful things near God is divorce." However, Islam allows divorce in extreme situations when it is not possible for the husband and wife to pull on together. The rights of the woman can be secured in the marriage contract by reserving right of divorce in her hand. The Qur'an also gives right to wife to seek divorce which is called Khula by returning a part or whole of marriage gift (mahr) to the husband. Otherwise ordinarily Islam gives full right to husband to divorce his wife at his discretion. Husband is bound under Islamic law to adequately provide for maintenance of his wife and children and in case wife is rich and she spends for the family she can claim refund when husband is in easy circumstances. Father is the natural guardian of children but in case of divorce the wife can get guardianship of minors if she likes and the husband is bound to pay for the maintenance of children to her. Islam's law of inheritance elaborately lays down the shares of the spouses, children and parents in the estate left by the deceased. Law of will allows a Muslim to bequest one-third of his property in the

favour of a charity or to any person other than his or her legal heirs. So far as gift is concerned, one is permitted by law to gift any thing belonging to him to any person.

3. The criminal law of Islam (called Hudood law) has been laid down by the Qur'an and the Sunnah in detail. It relates to offences such as murder, adultery, theft drinking, gambling, slander, rebellion, apostasy, etc and it prescribes punishment for each offence. Islam honours human life and the extent to which it holds the human life sacrosanct and sacred can be judged by the verdict of the Qur'an which says: "whosoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whosoever saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind....." (5:32). Killing of human being is not allowed by Islam except in case of retaliation for the offence of murder (although the legal heirs of the slain are encouraged to pardon or accept blood-wit or compensation), adultery, and apostasy (as it is treated as rebellion against God and Islam). Illicit sexual relations outside marriage bond are another great offence. In case of fornication the punishment is one hundred lashes while in case of adultery the punishment is lapidation or stoning to death. Amputation of hand is the punishment for theft, while for drinking wine (or taking any other intoxicant) and gambling the punishment is lashing or beating. For robbery, rebellion and apostasy, capital punishment can be awarded. Punishments prescribed by Islam for various crimes have been criticized as harsh. But these cannot be considered harsh if we keep in mind the fact that Islam creates a society wherein very healthy and helpful environments are created to avoid crime.

4. Detailed rules and regulations have been provided regarding evidence, judicial proceedings, qualifications of witnesses, qualifications and conduct of Judges (Qadies) by Islam. Dispensation of Justice in fair and equitable manner is the first and foremost duty of an Islamic state. God sent prophets and revealed books, says the Qur'an, to establish

justice among mankind. Hence Islam's scholars have regarded administration of justice as an act of devotion and one of the most important duties of man after belief in God.

7 – Socio-Economic and Political Order

No aspect of life of the Muslims has been ignored by Islam. As a practical natural and perfect religion, Islam provides proper guidelines for private as well as public life of its followers. In the domain of economics, politics, law, government, human rights, rights of women, rights of minorities, education, defence, daily life of an individual, conduct, morality, manners, social life, etc. Islam gives enough instructions. For lack of space we may not be able to discuss Islamic teachings in every domain of human activity. However, we would try to give a brief sketch of instructions of Islam in very important fields of human life in the following paras.

Economics: Main objectives of the economic teachings of Islam are: provision of basic human needs for everyone; fair and equitable distribution of wealth; prevention of concentration of wealth in few hands; establishment of social justice; achievement of welfare of individual in this life as well as in the next; achievement of moral and material development of individual and society; and elimination of exploitation of man by man. To achieve these ends, very effective and far-reaching measures have been adopted. Interest or usury has been declared unlawful. According to the Qur'an, to indulge in usury tantamount to declaring war against God and His Prophet. In other words, usury amounts to rebellion against Islam and Islamic state and taking of usury is a punishable offence. A comprehensive system of Zakat (compulsory charity) and voluntary alms – giving has been established in Islamic society which promotes social justice as well as fair distribution. A believer is expected to spend all his wealth which becomes surplus, after meeting his lawful needs, in the way of God and on the welfare of the poor and the needy. Certain means of

earning livelihood and wealth have been declared unlawful such as bribery, gambling and other games of chance, speculative transactions, short weighing and short measuring, other business malpractices, exploitation, fraud, blackmail, black marketing, hoarding, embezzlement of public funds, usurpation of the wealth of orphans, of women and other weaker segments of society, trade in wine and narcotics, prostitution and other immoral businesses, begging, etc. Even spending of lawfully earned wealth on prohibited and immoral things and practices is forbidden such as on wine, narcotics, prostitution, debauchery, pornographic literature and movies, lotteries, gambling, etc. Principle of moderation is recommended to a believer. He is required to be moderate in spending, neither becoming miser nor extravagant. Similarly in earning of wealth, a Muslim is required neither to adopt a policy of a greedy materialist nor to sit idle like a monastic.

Politics: According to Islam, sovereignty in the heavens and the earth and over everything belongs to God Who is the supreme Lord of the Whole cosmos. Man is only viceroy or deputy (Khalifa) in the earth and he is obliged to obey God. This, by implication, means that God's law (as contained in the Holy Qur'an) would be supreme in Islamic state. No emperor, king, head of state, president, prime minister or parliament is sovereign in Islamic state in the Western sense as he or she is subordinate to Divine Law. Since God has made every human being viceroy and equal and since He has also issued direction in the Qur'an (42:38, 3:159) that public affairs should be decided by the believers in mutual consultation, the logical conclusion is democratic form of government. People would elect their rulers who would conduct governmental affairs in consultation with the people. This is the ideal form of government which Islam preaches. Qualifications for rulers and Judges have been laid down and so are their duties and functions. Islam neither stands for theocracy, nor for secularism, nor for dictatorship nor for totalitarian system. Dictators, despots, emperors like pharaohs of Egypt have been

severely condemned by the Qur'an. According to a tradition of the Prophet, the name emperor is the most detestable name near God. Concept of Muslim Ummah or Muslim nation is based on common partnership in Islamic ideology and on Muslim brotherhood and not on narrow concepts of blood, race, colour, language, nationality, or geographical boundaries.

Defence (Jihad): Islam permits war in the path of God in self defence only. It does not permit war with aggressive designs in order to establish colonial empires, to subjugate other people, to promote trade or other material interests or to satisfy the ego of the rulers. When the enemy invades Islam and the Islamic state, it is then the bounden duty of every adult and able-bodied Muslim to pick up arms and stand up to defend the cause of Islam and his motherland. The Qur'an says: "fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not the aggressors." (2:190). At another place the Qur'an says: "Permission to fight has been granted to those against whom war has been waged because they have been treated unjustly, and God is certainly able to help them. These are the people who have been expelled from their homes only for the reason that they said, "our Lord is Allah....." (22:39-40).

Islam means 'peace' and Islam is a religion of humanity and of peace and security. It sanctions war as a last resort and only in defence. Unnecessary bloodshed and aggression is alien to the Islamic vision of peace and security. War is allowed only when it is inevitable in order to defend faith and motherland or to get freedom from oppression and persecution.

Social Order: Moral and spiritual basis of Islamic society are laid on piety, God – consciousness, self – purification, concept of right and wrong, good and evil, reward of Paradise for good and punishment of Hell for evil. The cementing force which keeps unity and solidarity in the society is the common bond of Islamic ideology. Islam promotes brotherhood and

fraternity among its followers. The Qur'an tells the believers that they are naught else than brothers (49:10) and advises them to hold fast to the cable of Allah and do not separate (3:110). The Prophet says: "Muslim is brother to a Muslim, he does neither wrong to him, nor puts him to disgrace, nor he hates him. Every Muslim's blood, property and honour are sacred to another Muslim." According to another saying of the Prophet, "believers are just like one body. When a limb complains, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever." He is again reported to have remarked: "Believers are to one another like a building whose parts support one another."

Another feature of Islamic society is its notion of equality. All Muslims are equal and nothing else but piety can make one superior to another. Islam does not believe in caste system, neither there is any discrimination in Islamic system based on blood, colour, race, language, place of birth. The Qur'an says: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you....." (49:13). The Prophet of Islam said: "You are all the children of Adam and Adam was created from the dust. No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab and no non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab, and no white has any superiority over a black one, and no black one has any superiority over a white one, except on the basis of piety." Thus Islam does not make distinction between man and man on any narrow basis. There is none high or low according to Islam, and all are equal on human footing. This notion of equality preached by Islam has perhaps been the most important factor in the spread of Islam. The day an untouchable or a degraded black one embraces Islam he becomes member of Islamic fraternity and equal to a high caste Brahman or his white master who has previously or who simultaneously enters into Islam. Yet another salient feature of Islamic society is its clear concept of rights

and duties of each individual. One is obliged to be obedient to his parents and elders; to be affectionate to his children, his brothers and sisters, and his juniors; to be kind to his wife; to be helpful to his friends and neighbours; and to be generous to the orphans, to the poor, to his relatives, to the sick and disabled.

Morals and Conduct: Wine, intoxicating beverages, narcotics and gambling are forbidden to a Muslim. Sexual relations out of marriage bonds are prohibited with a heavy penalty. Good moral character is expected of a believer in Islam, because one whose conduct is bad shall not enter Paradise. According to the Prophet, the heaviest thing which will be placed in the balance of a believer on the Day of Judgment will be good conduct and dearest to God among the believers is he who is best of all in conduct. A Muslim is, therefore, obliged to adopt good virtues such as humility, kindness, mercy, modesty, patience, keeping of promise, hospitality, generosity, forgiveness, steadfastness, toleration, austerity, contentment, control of passions control of tongue, and above all truthfulness. These virtues make good character. He is instructed to refrain from evils such as drinking, gambling and adultery and restrain from vices such as backbiting, anger, cursing, deceiving, envy, extravagance, miserliness, greed, hypocrisy, tyranny, pride, suspecting others and above all telling lie. These are the evils and vices which make a bad character. Pattern or model of good character for the believers, according to the Qur'an, is the conduct of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and of Prophet Abraham (PBUH); whereas believing women should additionally follow the example of Mary (the mother of Jesus) in keeping their chastity and the example of the wife of Pharaoh (who brought up Moses) in being steadfast in belief. The Qur'an calls the character of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sublime; while Prophet's wife Aeysha replying a questioner about the conduct of Muhammad (PBUH) said that his conduct was Qur'an. The Qur'an and the Sunnah have laid down a detailed code of manners for the believers regarding

entering houses, sitting in assemblies, eating, drinking, dress, greeting each other, even regarding sleeping and walking.

Fundamental Rights: Islam has been the pioneer in the history of mankind in granting basic human rights and civil liberties not only to its followers but to all people living within its territories. Protection of life, honour and property of each citizen is guaranteed. Each citizen enjoys freedom of person and status of equality before law. Freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, freedom of expression is allowed to every individual. Islamic state is a welfare state based on the concept of social justice and is deeply concerned with the betterment of its citizens. It, therefore, provides basic human needs like food, clothing and shelter to all its citizens. Every citizen is allowed to engage in a business or profession or vacation of his choice provided such business, profession or vacation is not contrary to the injunctions of Islam such as prostitution.

Rights of Non-Muslims: Non-Muslims are given special care in matter of rights. They are called protected people (Dhimis) as Islamic state guarantees protection of their lives, property and honour. They are allowed freedom of religion, freedom to maintain their places of worship and freedom to maintain their culture, language, dress, script, etc. They enjoy social autonomy in applying to themselves their own religious laws and live according to their own customs.

Rights of Women: Islam elevated the status of women from the mere piece of property to the level of a human being. Man and women proceed from the same stock, they are the members of the same species and they are born of the same parents. The Qur'an says: "O mankind! Reverence your Guardian – Lord, who created you from a single soul, created of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women" (4:1). The Qur'an invariably calls men and women as spouses of each other or helpmates and companions. As human beings, man and women

are equal having the same human rights and obligations. The Qur'an highlights this fact when it says: "..... And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in equity" (2: 228). Before Islam, specially in Arabia, birth of a daughter was considered as bad omen and taking her birth as a matter of shame, the infant was disposed of by burying alive. This inhuman practice was abolished by the Qur'an. The Prophet of Islam said: "One who brings up two daughters (or even one) treats them equal to his sons, gives them education, and teaches them good manners, would go to Paradise." In the status of mother, a woman enjoys very high position of honour in a Muslim home. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) enjoined his followers to obey and serve their mothers as Paradise lies under the feet of a mother. He also enjoined good and kind treatment to wives and said: "Best among you is he who is good to his wife."

Islam gives very high status to a woman in her role as a mother, as a wife, as a daughter and as a sister. Islamic Law ensures her rights regarding marriage, dower, divorce and maintenance. It also gives her right of inheritance and ownership of property. Polygamy has been restricted and man's right to contract plural marriages has been subjected to severe conditions like equal treatment of all wives. Woman is allowed to engage in trade, business, profession or employment to earn livelihood. To acquire education is as much obligatory on her as it is on man. She is allowed to participate in socio-political activities. She has right of vote and can contest for public offices.

8 – Daily Life of a Muslim

Birth and Early Life: When a child is born in a Muslim family, the Azan (ritual call to prayer) is pronounced in the right ear of the child and the Iqamah (ritual call to initiate congregational prayer) in the left ear. Thus the first thing a Muslim child, after coming into this world, hears is the

attestation of the belief and call to the worship of the creator. Then the name to the child is given. The name to the male child is generally given after the attributes of God, after the names of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), after the names of other Prophets of God, or after the names of the companions of the Prophet and other heroes of Islamic history; while a female child is named after the names of the mother and wives and daughters of the Prophet of Islam, after the names of the pious Muslim women of the days of the Prophet, or after the names of the famous Muslim women of the history of Islam.

When the hairs of the child are cut for the first time some charity is given to the poor generally equal to the weight of the hairs in silver or in its equivalent in local currency. If the family can afford, a goat or a sheep is also slaughtered to entertain the poor, the kin and the friends. The male child is circumcised at an early age.

When a child attains the age of 4 or 5, his studies commence. As a first lesson the child is made to repeat after the tutor first five verses of chapter 96 of the Holy Qur'an which consist of first revelation to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). A feast is arranged to celebrate the occasion. When the child starts going to school, he is also supposed to start learning the Qur'an.

Normally at the age of seven, the child is taught how to pray and from the age of ten parents are supposed to apply sanctions so that the child gets accustomed to prayer. Fast is obligatory, even as prayer, from the age of puberty. However, the parents make the child familiar with fast gradually, starting with one or two in first year and increasing the number in each year till by the age of maturity the child gets accustomed to bear the strain of fast.

Adult Life: As adult a Muslim is obliged to pay Zakat himself out of his wealth provided it reaches the level which

attracts this levy. He is also obliged to perform Hajj once in his life but if earlier the better.

Marriage is the Sunnah (tradition) of the Prophet and it is obligatory to get married unless there is some valid excuse. So when a child reaches puberty (in case of girls the age is 15 while in case of boys the age is 16 or 18), the parents should arrange for his or her marriage.

As an adult person, a Muslim man and a woman, is expected, rather is duty – bound to fulfill all his or her obligations towards God and towards fellow humans and lead life strictly in accordance with the teachings of Islam.

Death: At the time of death a Muslim is required to pronounce at least the first Kalima (formula of belief): "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is messenger of God". If he fails to remember it, the Muslims sitting around the patient are required to help the patient by repeating it to him. The eyes of the deceased are closed, body is placed straight with face toward heaven and hands on the chest crossed on each other or on sides as if in the service of prayer.

The body of the dead person is washed and cleaned before burial, and if not possible then dry ablution (tayammun) is sufficient. After enshrouding the dead body in three simple sheets of white cloths, a funeral service is convened. The grave is dug parallel to Makkah, if possible, and after lowering the body in the grave, the head of the dead is turned slightly to the right side so that it faces the Kaabah. After burial, certain verses of the Holy Qur'an or certain prayers recommended for the occasion are recited. The graves should be simple as lavish spending on graves is forbidden.

Life – routine: Besides daily prayers, annual fasting and other compulsory religious duties, one must make it his life routine to devote some time daily to learn the Holy Qur'an and

recite it. He should also study Hadith and other Islamic literature to understand Islam and at least its basic teachings. If he does not know Arabic, he should try to learn it. If not possible, then he should try to understand the Qur'an with the help of a good translation and commentary.

Every act or activity in daily life should be commenced by reciting Bismillah (with the name of God) and should be ended with Alhamdulillah (Thank God). The conduct and manners of the Prophet should be followed in eating, drinking, dressing, sleeping, walking, sitting and other daily routines.

Dress: Islam does not prescribe any particular or specific code of dress. It has left the matter to be decided by the individuals and society according to weather conditions, customs, needs and environments. However, certain fundamental rules have been laid down for all times for the guidance of the Muslim. The dress should not be too short or too thin but it should be proper in order to cover private parts from nakedness. Let not the Satan seduce the believers as he seduced Adam and Eve and tore off from them their robe to make them see their shame. The dress should be decent and should not display nudity, obscenity or vulgarity. The dress should be modest and simple. It should not be very expensive so as to give impression of extravagance and pride. The men are discouraged to wear silk or cloths of red colour. Lengthening of trousers beyond ankles was forbidden as it was a custom of the Arabs of the age of Ignorance to give an air of vanity. The dress should be very clean. The Prophet preferred clothes of white colour or of green colour. Perfume was liked by the Prophet and he recommended its use to the believers, men and women. Shoes must be used and if possible socks should also be used. The dress should be such that it should protect one from cold and heat. You should be decently and beautifully dressed when you go to mosques or on religious and other public festivals.

All religions prescribe that fornication and adultery are crimes but Islam goes a little further and takes measures to diminish the temptations. Therefore, women are required to fulfill certain additional responsibilities in matters of dress and adornment (make-up), particularly when they come in the presence of men or when they come out of their homes. The Qur'an says:

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and not to display their adornment except that which appears of itself, and to draw their veils over their bosoms And let them not stamp their feet so as to reveal what they hide of their adornment....." (24:31). The Qur'an further says: "O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks close round them (when they go abroad). That will be better, that so they may be recognized and not annoyed (or molested)....." (33: 59). According to a tradition, when Asma'a (Prophet's sister in law) came with thin clothes on her, the Prophet said to her: "O Asma'a! when a girl attains puberty, it is not proper that any thing on her should remain exposed except her face and hands." Thus these are the instructions which have been issued by the Qur'an and the Prophet to Muslim women regarding their dress and make-up when they come in the public. Briefly speaking, the women should cover their bodies including their heads, bosoms, necks completely except their face and hands (according to orthodox opinion, faces and hands should also be covered) when they come out of their homes or when they come in the presence of men other than their close relatives. They should lower their gaze, be modest, and cover their adornment except that which is not possible to cover. These measures would help them to be recognized as chaste and noble women so that men of doubtful character do not cherish any false hope and do not tease them. Complete seclusion of women (rather their confinement in private quarters) and tent type veil entered Muslim society after the days of the Prophet when the Muslims came in contact with

the conquered people of Persia and Rome and adopted some of their customs.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) discouraged his followers to imitate other people in matter of dress. He also forbade the men to put on dress of women and the women to put on the dress of men. The Prophet grew a beard and recommended the men to have it. To keep moustaches is, however, discouraged as it was a custom of the pagans of pre-Islamic Arabia.

Food: According to Islam, it is the exclusive prerogative of God to declare an eatable thing or food items as lawful (Halal or permitted) or as unlawful (Haram or forbidden). All pure and wholesome food lawfully earned such as sea food, fruits, vegetables, pulses, corn, meat of permitted (halal) animals slaughtered in the name of God, is permitted (Halal) to a Muslim except the following which have been specially declared as forbidden (Haram) by the Qur'an and the Sunnah:

1. All animals and birds which die of themselves without being slaughtered in the name of Allah. These include animals strangled to death, or beaten to death or killed by a fall or attacked by horns and killed, or torn to death by beasts.

2. Blood

3. Swine – flesh.

4. Food on which Allah's name is not taken or meat of even lawful animal which is not slaughtered in the name of Allah, or which is slaughtered in the name of other than Allah.

5. Everything which is offered to idols.

6. All beasts and birds of prey i.e. all quadrupeds that seize prey with teeth such as lions, tigers, leopards, jackals, etc,

and all birds such as hawks, kites, crows, raven, etc. which attack with claws.

7. All unclean things repugnant to health and morality. These include dogs, cats, mules, horses, asses, lizards.

8. Wine and all other intoxicants.

9. All the food items though lawful but acquired by unlawful means.

Principle of necessity however makes temporarily an unlawful thing lawful. However this principle can be applied only where there is real necessity and not merely an excuse. For example if someone is dying of hunger and he has nothing to save his life except a dead animal or swine-flesh to eat, then he can take it. Similarly a sick person can take alcohol or wine provided a doctor certifies that he would die if he is not instantly given that.

Language: The Qur'an is the word of God and it was revealed in Arabic as language of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was Arabic. Thus Arabic is the language of the Qur'an, Prophet of Islam and the wives of the Prophet, whom the Qur'an calls mothers of the believers.

So Arabic is in a way mother tongue of the believers. The followers of Islam love Arabic as it is the language of their beloved Prophet and also of their spiritual mothers. They, therefore, recite the Holy Qur'an in Arabic and hold their prayer – services in Arabic. Those whose mother tongue is not Arabic, they learn it at least at elementary level to be able to read the Holy Qur'an and to offer their daily prayers.

Conversion to Islam: Conversion to Islam is very easy as Islam is a universal religion and is not reserved for a particular race or country. Islam, however, does not recognize forced

conversion. The conversion should be voluntary, of absolutely free will, in full consciousness of the act. A non-Muslim who intends to embrace Islam is asked to take first a bath in order to purify the body symbolically of the dirt of ignorance and disbelief. Then he is directed to declare, ordinarily in the presence of two witnesses, the following principle of faith, "I testify that there is no God but Allah and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah". If the name of the new convert has any un-Islamic trait, then it is changed to some Islamic name in Arabic. In the case of conversion of a married man to Islam, his marriage with a Jew or Christian woman continues undisturbed even if she does not accept Islam; but if it is with a woman belonging to some other faith, then the marriage would dissolve if the wife does not embrace Islam after giving her reasonable time to do so. In the case of conversion of a married woman, her marriage with non-Muslim belonging to any faith would dissolve if the husband does not embrace Islam despite reasonable time given to him for doing so.

9 – Holidays & Festivals

Eid-ul-Fitr: It is celebrated throughout the Muslim world on the first of Shawal after the end of Ramadan which is the month of fasting. It is a festival of thanksgiving to Almighty God Who made the Muslims to successfully complete fasting. A special prayer known as Prayer of Eid-ul-Fitr is offered two hours or so after the sunrise in a large mosque or in a public place meant for this purpose known as Eidgah. The prayer is a large congregation of the Muslims which is attended not only by almost all male Muslims living in the locality but also by some female Muslims. Before offering this prayer, every well-to-do Muslim pays a compulsory charity to the poor (known as Sadaqat-ul-Fitr) in order to enable the poor to participate in the celebrations. All the Muslims particularly the children wear new clothes. People visit each other, exchange gifts, prepare good

dishes to eat and enjoy. The occasion is a public holiday for the Muslims.

Eid-ul-Azha: It is celebrated on 10th of Zil-Hijjah which is the last month of Muslim Lunar calendar. It is connected with annual pilgrimage but it is celebrated by the Muslims the world over wherever they live although the pilgrimage is performed only at Makkah. All the Muslims put on their best clothes and offer special prayer known as prayer of Eid-ul-Azha in large congregations in big mosques or at places called Eidgah. After the prayer, they return home and offer animal sacrifice (of a sheep, goat, cow, camel) which is obligatory on every Muslim who can financially afford. Then meat is cooked and eaten while a portion of it is distributed among the poor and those friends and relatives who have not offered sacrifice. The occasion is a public holiday for the Muslims.

Eid-I-Milad-un-Nabi: 12th of Rabi-ul-Awwal, the third month of Muslim calendar, is celebrated as birthday of the Prophet of Islam. Although the Prophet himself or his successors never celebrated this day and there is no religious sanction behind this celebration, somehow the custom has taken roots. Special meetings are held in which life – events of the Prophet and his achievements are remembered. Children specially celebrate. Places of worship and public buildings are illuminated.

Shab-I-Miraj: 27th night of Rajab, seventh month of Islamic calendar, is the night of Prophet Muhammad's ascension to heaven. On this night, the Muslims celebrate with good food and offer prayers.

Shab-I-Barat: 14th night of Sha'ban, the month preceding Ramadan, is known as the night when destiny of the mankind is written. The Muslims offer prayer and seek forgiveness of God especially in this night hoping for good fortune. Children play fireworks.

Yaum-I-Ashurah: 10th Day of Muharram, first month of Islamic Calendar, is the day of martyrdom of Hussain, son of Ali and grandson of the Prophet of Islam in 680 A.D. at Karbela, Iraq, by the forces of Ommyid caliph Yazid. Muslims offer prayers as well as hold meetings wherein the martyrdom of Hussain and his deeds are remembered. The Shiite Muslims specially hold processions and show their grief by weeping and beating their breasts.

Muslim Calendar: Islam follows lunar calendar specially for religious purposes like fasting, Hajj and Zakah with the result that the months relating to these rotate from season to season because solar year comprises 365 or 366 days whereas Lunar year is generally of 354 days. The wisdom of the adoption of the Lunar calendar lies in the fact that it provides the believers opportunity to have experience of all seasons to fast or to perform pilgrimage – moderate season as well as extreme winter and summer. Had the fasting and pilgrimage been fixed in the given months of the Solar calendar – say month of May for fasting and month of July for pilgrimage the people living in the Northern hemisphere had suffered long days of heat and those living in the Southern hemisphere would have short days of winter. This discrimination among the faithful has been avoided, by the religion destined for the whole world, by following Lunar calendar which ensures that everyone will taste all seasons turn by turn.

10 – Fiqh and Sects

Fiqh is the Science of Law or Islamic Jurisprudence which the early Muslims developed (in second and third century of Hijrah) in order to discover what the Shariah prescribes in detail. According to the Jurists, there are four roots or sources from which Islamic law is derived and those are: the Qur'an; the Sunnah or tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); the Ijma or the consensus of the community; and Qiyas or analogical reasoning. First two sources are primary and the

other two are secondary. If neither of the primary sources helps, then resort may be had to Ijma and if this too does not help, then the last one i.e. Qiyas can be exercised. The process of finding a rule of law by examining the roots is called Ijtihad which means personal intellectual exertion by a qualified legal expert called mujtahid. Principles known as Istehsan or Juristic Equity, Istislah or doctrine of public good, and Istidlal or reasoning guide in interpretation of law or in deducing rules by resorting to Qiyas.

Sunni Sects: There emerged four schools of thought or school of Jurisprudence, namely: The Hanafi School founded by Abu Hanifa (699 – 767 A.D.) an inhabitant of Kufa, known as the greatest Imam, and promoted by his illustrious disciples Abu Yusuf and Muhammad Ash-Shaybani; the Maliki School, founded by Malik-ibn-Anas (713 – 795 A.D.) who was an inhabitant of Madinah and who wrote a book on traditions of the Prophet known as kitab-al-Mawatta; The Shafii School, found by Muhammad bin Idris ash-Shafi (767 – 820 A.D); and the Hanbali School, founded by Ahmad bin Hanbal (780 – 855 A.D.) resident of Baghdad who wrote a book on traditions called Musnad-e-Ahmad. The principles of these four schools of law are substantially the same and they differ slightly from each other merely in matters relating to minor details. Followers of Abu Hanifa in India, Pakistan, Turkey and central Asia form the largest group; Maliki law is followed in North and West Africa; Sahfi is followed in Indonesia, Egypt, East Africa and Syria, while Hanbali School is followed only in Arabia.

Shia Sects: The above mentioned four schools of law collectively form the Sunni sect of the Muslims which represent 70 to 80 percent of the total Muslim population in the world. The remaining 20 to 30% of the Muslims form another sect or Division known as the Shia. According to the Shias, Imamate descended in the Prophet's line by Divine will. They consider that the first three caliphs – Abu Bakr, Umar and Usman – were usurpers and Ali was the rightful Imam as also the caliph. The

central religious belief of the Shia is that God has chosen a series of Imams for the leadership of the community. The Imams are endowed with special knowledge or light and they are innocent. Imam cannot be elected by the people but is directly appointed by God and he nominates his successor. According to their belief, Islam cannot be practiced without the guidance of the Imam chosen by God. The major differences between the Sunni and the Shia are relating to the institution of Imam and caliph. However, there are some other differences also which relate to some details of law and theology where the Shias have a more rational tendency. There are some sub-sects or some sub-divisions among the Shia and mainly these are three: First is the group of Twelvers who form the largest group and follow twelve Imams, the last of whom disappeared. The second group is that of the Seveners who disagreed with others on the question of successor to the sixth Imam. As they followed Ismail, son of Imam Jaafar Sadiq, they are also called Ismailies. Prince Karim Aga Khan is their present Imam who is the 49th Imam of Ismailis. Another group is called Zaidis who are followers of Zaid, son of 4th Imam Zain-ul-Abidin. They are nearer to the Sunnis in the interpretations of law. The Shia Muslims are fairly widespread in the Muslim world. Mainly they live in Iran, Iraq, South Arabia and countries of Indian sub-continent.

Mysticism: I think this section would remain incomplete if we do not record our brief comments about Mysticism or Sufism. Sufism is neither a sect nor is it a school of Islamic Jurisprudence. A mystic or sufi may follow any school of fiqh or sect, but as a sufi he enjoys a different status.

The word "Sufi" is derived from 'suf', the Arabic word for wool, because the earliest Sufis wore rough garments of wool. The wool robes were a form of ascetic self-mortification (Zuhd) for the Sufis and a visible sign of their protest against the worldliness of Islamic society after the end of the pious caliphate. Hasan Basri (d. 728) and Rabia (d. 801) are known

among the early Sufis. The Sufi theorists of the early movement produced an elaborate psychology describing the stations (maqamat) and states (ahwal) of the mystical process toward union with God. The stations are those levels which a Sufi can achieve through his own disciplined efforts, while the states are graces bestowed by God when the Sufi has reached the end of his own spiritual ability. These culminated in the experience of extinction in the reality of God, (fana) and, beyond that in the still more valuable experience of subsisting in the divine though living in the phenomenal world (baqa)!

From the twelfth century a new factor was added to Sufism with the formation of organized brother-hood or orders of Sufis. A sufi order is known as a tariqa or way to attain union with God. Each order was headed by a sheikh or pir who was the inheritor of spiritual knowledge handed down through a series (silsila) of saints (awliya) before him. The follower of the Sheikh was his disciple (murid), a seeker for initiation into the way of mystic knowledge. Many sufi orders maintained central headquarter, like a monastery, where members lived their regime of discipline and meditation. These places served important social functions for the common people where food, medical care and even financial assistance were often available.

In its later phases, Sufism developed a cult of saints, and this aspect of the movement appeals to ordinary Muslims. Great reverence is paid to Sufi masters who are believed to possess spiritual power (barakah) and the ability to do miracles (karamat). When a saint dies, his tomb becomes a place of pilgrimage for seekers and suppliants, often bringing gifts. For great saints there is an annual festival (Urs), such as that for Data Ganj Baksh in Lahore and many thousands of people visit the saints tomb to pay their respects and offer prayers.

Sufi orders are generally grouped into four, namely: Chishtiyah, Naqshbandiyah, Suhrwardiyah and Qaderiyah. Saints like Ali Hajveri (known as Data Gunj Baksh) of Lahore,

Mueen-ud-Din Chishti of Ajmer, Qutb-ud-Din Bakhtiar Kaki of Delhi, Nizam-ud-Din Awliya of Delhi, Farid Shakar Gunj of Pakpattan and Bhah-ud-Din Zikria of Multan played a great role in conversion of millions of people to Islam in the 10th to 13th century in the Indian sub-continent.

APPENDIX

Extracts From the Qur'an and Hadith

1. In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
 - Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,
 - The Beneficent, the Merciful.
 - Owner of the Day of Judgment,
 - Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help.
 - Show us the straight path,
 - The path of those whom Thou hast favoured;
 - Not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray. —1: Al-Fatihah: 1–7
2. You God is One God; there is no God save Him, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
 - Lo! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of night and day, and the ships which run upon the sea with that which is of use to men, and the water which Allah sendeth down from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after its death, and dispersing all kinds of beasts therein, and (in) the ordinance of the winds, and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth: are signs (of Allah's sovereignty) for people who have sense.

—2: Al-Baqarah: 163–164

3. O ye who believe! Eat of the good things wherewith We have provided you, and render thanks to Allah if it is (indeed) He whom ye worship.
 - He hath forbidden you only carrion, and blood, and swine flesh, and that which hath been immolated to (the name of) any other than Allah. But he who is driven by necessity, neither craving nor transgressing, it is no sin for him. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. —2: Al-Baqarah: 172–173
4. Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors.
 - And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter. And fight not with them at the Inviolable Place of Worship until they first attack you there, but if they attack you (there) then slay them. Such is the reward of disbelievers.
 - But if they desist, then lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.
 - And fight them until persecution is no more, and religion is for Allah. But if they desist, then let there be no hostility except against wrongdoers.

—2: Al-Baqarah: 190–193

5. Allah! There is no God save Him, the Alive, the Eternal. Neither slumber nor sleep overtaketh Him. Unto Him belongeth whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that intercedeth with Him save by His leave? He knoweth that which is in front of them and that which is behind them, while they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He will. His throne

includeth the heavens and the earth, and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Tremendous. —2: Al-Baqarah: 255

6. Allah hath blighted usury and made almsgiving fruitful. Allah loveth not the impious and guilty.
 - Lo! Those who believe and do good works and establish worship and pay the poor-due, their reward is with their Lord and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve.
 - ye who believe! Observe your duty to Allah, and give up what remaineth (due to you) from usury, if ye are (in truth) believers.
 - And if ye do not, then be warned of war (against you) from Allah and His messenger. And if ye repent, then ye have your principal (without interest). Wrong not, and ye shall not be wronged.

—2: Al-Baqarah: 276–279

7. O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward Allah in Whom ye claim (your rights) of one another, and toward the wombs (that bare you). Lo! Allah hath been a Watcher over you.
 - Give unto orphans their wealth. Exchange not the good for the bad (in your management thereof) nor absorb their wealth into your own wealth. Lo! That would be a great sin.
 - And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three

or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only) or the captives) that your right hands possess. Thus it is more likely that ye will not do injustice.

- And give unto the women, (whom ye marry) free gift of their marriage portions; but if they of their own accords remit unto you a part thereof, then ye are welcome to absorb it (in your wealth).

—4: An-Nisa: 1–4

8. And serve Allah. Ascribe no thing as partner unto Him. (Show) kindness unto parents, and unto near kindred, and orphans, and the needy, and unto the neighbour who is of kin (unto you) and the neighbour who is not of kin, and the fellow-traveller and the wayfarer and (the slaves) whom your right hands possess. Lo! Allah loveth not such as are proud and boastful, —4: An-Nisa: 36

9. O ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside in order that ye may succeed.
- Satan seeketh only to cast among you enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and games of chance, and to turn you from remembrance of Allah and from (His) worship. Will ye then have done?
- Obey Allah and obey the messenger and beware! But if ye turn away, then know that the duty of Our messenger is only plain conveyance (of the message).

—5: Al-Maidah: 90–92

10. Set not up with Allah any other god (O man) lest thou sit down reprov'd, forsaken.

- Thy Lord hath decreed, that ye worship none save Him, and (that ye show) kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them to attain old age with thee, say not "Fie" unto them nor repulse them, but speak unto them a gracious word.
- And lower unto them the wing of submission through mercy, and say: My Lord! Have mercy on them both as they did care for me when I was little.
- Your Lord is best aware of what is in your minds. If ye are righteous, then lo! He was ever Forgiving unto those who turn (unto Him).
- Give the kinsman his due, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and squander not (thy wealth) in wantonness.
- Lo! The squanderers were ever brothers of the devils, and the devil was ever an ingrate to his Lord.
- But if thou turn away from them, seeking mercy from thy Lord, for which thou hopest, then speak unto them a reasonable word.
- And let not thy hand be chained to thy neck nor open it with a complete opening, lest thou sit down rebuked, denuded.
- Lo! Thy Lord enlargeth the provision for whom He will, and straiteneth (it for whom He will), Lo, He was ever Knower, Seer of His Slaves.
- Slay not your children, fearing a fall to poverty, We shall provide for them and for you. Lo! The slaying of them is great sin.
- And come not near unto adultery. Lo! It is an abomination and an evil way.
- And slay not the life which Allah hath forbidden save with right. Whoso is slain wrongfully, We have given power

unto his heir, but let him not commit excess in slaying. Lo! He will be helped.

- Come not near the wealth of the orphan save with that which is better till he come to strength; and keep the covenant. Lo! of the covenant it will be asked.
- Fill the measure when ye measure, and weigh with a right balance; that is meet, and better in the end.
- (O man), follow not that whereof thou hast no knowledge. Lo! The hearing and the sight and the heart – of each of these it will be asked.
- And walk not in the earth exultant. Lo! Thou canst not rend the earth, nor canst thou stretch to the height of the hills.
- The evil of all that is hateful in the sight of thy Lord.

—17: Bani-Israel: 22–38

11. Successful indeed are the believers

- Who are humble in their prayers,
- And who shun vain conversation,
- And who are payers of the poor-due;
- And who guard their modesty—
- Save from their wives or the (slaves) that their right hands possess, for then they are not blameworthy,
- But whoso craveth beyond that, such are transgressors—
- And who are shepherds of their pledge and their covenant,
- And who pay heed to their prayers.
- These are the heirs.

- Who will inherit Paradise. There they will abide.

—23: Al-Muminun: 1–11

12. Verily We created man from a product of wet earth;

- Then placed him as a drop (of seed) in a safe lodging;
- Then fashioned We the drop a clot, then fashioned We the clot a little lump, then fashioned We the little lump bones, then clothed the bones with flesh, and then produced it as another creation. So blessed be Allah, the Best of Creators!
- Then lo! after that ye surely die.
- Then lo! on the Day of Resurrection ye are raised (again).

—23: Al-Muminun: 12–16

13. Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as it were a shining star. (This lamp is) kindled from a blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would almost glow forth (of itself) though no fire touched it. Light upon light, Allah guideth unto His light whom He will. And Allah speaketh to mankind in allegories, for Allah is Knower of all things. —24: Al-Noor: 35

14. So glory be to Allah when ye enter the night and when ye enter the morning.

- Unto Him be praise in the heavens and the earth! – and at the sun's decline and in the noonday.
- He bringeth forth the living from the dead, and He bringeth forth the dead from the living, and He reviveth

the earth after her death. And even so will ye be brought forth.

- And of His signs is this: He created you of dust, and behold you human beings, ranging widely!
- And of His signs is this: He created for you helpmeets from yourselves that ye might find rest in them, and He ordained between you love and mercy. Lo, herein indeed are portents for folk who reflect.
- And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colours. Lo! Herein indeed are portents for men of knowledge.
- And of His signs is your slumber by night and by day, and your seeking of His bounty. Lo! Herein indeed are portents for folk who heed.
- And of His signs is this: He showeth you the lightning for a fear and for a hope, and sendeth down water from the sky, and thereby quickeneth the earth after her death. Lo! Herein indeed are portents for folk who understand.
- And of His signs is this: The heavens and the earth stand fast by His command, and afterward, when He calleth you, lo! From the earth ye will emerge.
- Unto Him belongeth whosoever is in the heavens and in the earth. All are obedient unto Him.
- He it is who produceth creation, then reproduceth it, and it is easier for Him. His is the Sublime Similitude in the heavens and in the earth. He is the Mighty, the Wise.

—30: Ar-Rum: 17–22

15. The believers are naught else than brothers. Therefore make peace between your brethren and observe your duty to Allah that haply ye may obtain mercy.

- ye who believe! Let not a folk deride a folk who may be better than they (are), nor let women (deride) women who may be better than they are; neither defame one another, nor insult one another by nicknames. Bad is the name of lewdness after faith. And whoso turneth not in repentance, such are evil-doers.
- ye who believe! Shun much suspicion; for lo! some suspicion is a crime. And spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Ye abhor that (so abhor the other)! And keep your duty (to Allah). Lo! Allah is Relenting, Merciful.
- O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware. —
—49: Al-Hujurat: 10–13

16. Islam's conception of life is beautifully reflected from the following saying of the Prophet Muhammad(PBUH): Ali asked the Prophet one day about the principles governing his general behaviour, and he replied: knowledge is my capital, reason is the basis of my religion, love is my foundation, desire is my mount for riding, remembrance of God is my comrade, confidence is my treasure, anxiety is my companion, science is my arm, patience is my mantle, contentment is my booty, modesty is my pride, renunciation of pleasure is my profession, certitude is my food, truth is my intercessor, obedience is my sufficiency, struggle is my habitude and the delight of my heart is in the service of worship.

—quoted by Dr. Hamidullah in "Introduction to Islam"

17. During his farewell pilgrimage Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) delivered his famous address on 9th of Zilhajj 10 A.H. to a multitude of believers, exceeding one

lac according to some estimates. This address is known as Farewell Address and is regarded not only by the Muslims but also by non-Muslim impartial scholars and historians as gist of Islamic teachings. This address is fairly comprehensive and contains in itself, apart from Islamic teachings on devotional acts, a charter of human rights which can be favourably compared with Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued by United Nations in 1948 A.D., some fourteen centuries later. It would be most appropriate if we conclude this paper with some of the extracts from the said historical address of the Prophet of Islam.

- "Ye people! Listen to my words: I will deliver a message to you, for I know not whether, after this year, I shall ever be amongst you here again. O people! Verily your blood, your property and your honour are sacred and inviolable until you appear before your Lord, as this day and this month is sacred for all. Verily you will meet your Lord and you will be held answerable for your actions. Have I not conveyed the message? O Allah! Be my witnesses."
- "He who has any trust with him he should restore it to the person who deposited it with him."
- "Beware, no one committing a crime is responsible for it but he himself. Neither the son is responsible for the crime of his father nor the father is responsible for the crime of his son."
- "O people! Listen to my words and understand them. You must know that a Muslim is the brother of a Muslim and they form one brotherhood. Nothing of his brother is lawful for a Muslim except what he himself allows willingly. So you should not oppress one another. O Allah! Have I not conveyed the message?"
- "Behold! All practices of paganism and ignorance are now under my feet. The blood-revenges of the days of

Ignorance are remitted. The first claim on blood I abolish is that of Ibn Rabi'ah Ibn Harith who was nursed in the tribe of Sa'd and whom the Hudhayl killed."

- "Usury is forbidden, but you will be entitled to recover your principal. Wrong not and you would not be wronged. Allah has decreed that there should be no usury and I make a beginning by remitting the amount of interest which 'Abbas b. Abd al-Muttalib has to receive. Verily it is remitted entirely."
- "O people! Fear Allah concerning women. Verily you have taken them on the security of Allah and have made their persons lawful unto you by word of Allah! Verily you have got certain rights over your women and your women have certain rights over you. It is incumbent upon them to honour your conjugal rights and not to commit acts of impropriety which, if they do, you have authority to chastise them, yet not severely. If your wives refrain from impropriety and are faithful to you, clothe and feed them suitably. Behold! Lay injunctions upon women but kindly."
- "O people! Listen and obey though a mangled Abyssinian slave is your amir if he executes (the ordinances of) the Book of Allah among you."
- "O people! Verily Allah has ordained to every man the share of his inheritance. The child belongs to the marriage-bed and the violator of wedlock shall be stoned. He who attributes his ancestry to other than his father or claims his clientship to other than his master, the curse of Allah, that of the Angels, and of the people, be upon him. Allah will accept from him neither repentance nor righteousness."
- "And your slaves! See that you feed them with such food as you eat yourselves; and clothe them with the clothes that you yourselves wear. And if they commit a fault which

you are not inclined to forgive, then part with them for they are the servants of Allah and are not to be chastised."

- "O people! Verily your Lord is one and your father is one. All of you belong to one ancestry of Adam and Adam was created out of clay. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab and for a non-Arab over an Arab; nor for white over the black nor for the black over the white except in piety. 'Verily the noblest among you is he who is the most pious.' (Al-Qur'an 49:13)"

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CHAPTER 4

HINDUISM

1 – Introduction

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest living religions, as old as Judaism if not more. It is also one of the world's great religions claiming highest numbers of adherents after Christianity and Islam. It is professed by more than 800 million people called Hindus worldwide, vast majority of which live only in one country of the world, India. There are also numerically considerable Hindu communities living in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Kenya, South Africa and Trinidad. Hindu beliefs originated in the Indus Valley civilization established by the dark skinned Dravidians who invaded India between 3250 and 2750 B.C. But much of the tradition that is now associated with what is Hinduism stems from the ritual and religion of the Aryans, a light skinned Nordic people who invaded India from Asia Minor and Iran between 2500 and 1500 B.C and subdued the Dravidians. The language of these Aryan people was Vedic, parent of Sanskrit, in which their religious literature, the Vedas, came to be written after many centuries of oral transmission!¹ Hinduism in its various manifestations is poly-theistic but has a concept of the supreme spirit, the Brahman. Although Hinduism is a religion but it is much more. It includes not only theology but also social institutions, a legal tradition, a vast body of literature and art, some science and a great and varied mass of philosophy.²

Unlike most of the other religions such as Christianity, Buddhism and Confucianism, Hinduism cannot name its founder nor it has any fixed scriptural canon, nor it has any formalized creeds or standardized forms of worship. It developed gradually over thousands of years, and many cultures, races and religions helped shape it.

Hinduism encompasses a broad variety of beliefs and practices, not all of which are shared by all Hindus, and many of which actually contradict each other. It is probably unique among the religions of the world in its tolerance of diversity. It is a completely decentralized religion, with no hierarchy of clergy and no supreme authority. As Hinduism developed, it continually absorbed and reinterpreted the beliefs and practices of the different peoples with whom it came into contact. This process of assimilation occurred differently in different parts of India; as a result, Hinduism also displays a great regional heterogeneity.³

2 – Sacred Writings

Hinduism has no single book, such as the Bible or the Qur'an, that serves as the source of its doctrines. Hinduism in fact, has many sacred writings, all of which have contributed to its fundamental beliefs. There are two main categories of Hindu scriptures, *sruti*, or divinely revealed works, and *smriti*, traditional works of acknowledged human authorship. All of the *Sruti* literature is in Sanskrit, the language of ancient India; the *smriti* literature uses both Sanskrit and regional vernacular languages.⁴

The major *sruti* works are the Vedas, the Brahmanas, and the Upanishads; whereas the major *smriti* works are Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad-Gita and the Manu Smriti.

The Vedas are the oldest Hindu scriptures. The teachings of Vedas existed for centuries before they were finally written down. The Vedas belonged to Indo-Aryans comprising of hymns and prayers who gave voice to the religious conceptions of those people. The Vedas (meaning knowledge) are four in number: the Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda and Atharva Veda. The Rig-Veda is oldest of them and seems to have been reduced to writing by around 1000 B.C. It contains over a thousand hymns which are prayers addressed to nature deities,

prominent of them being Indira (the god of rain), the Rudra (the most feared mountain god) and Varuna (the sky god). The Yajur Veda preserves the prose formulas used in early rituals; Sama Veda deals with the chants belonging to it, and the Atharva Veda provides for private and household religion. The Vedas are held as uncreated and eternal.

Some writers treat Brahmanas and Upanishads parts of Vedas, but mostly they are treated as independent. The Brahmanas are a voluminous body of literature comprising directions for the conduct of sacrifices and rituals, written around 700 B.C. The Upanishads are appendages of the Brahmanas and are difficult treatises in the form of dialogues.

The Puranas (ancient stories) alongwith Tantras are long verse stories that contain many important Hindu myths. The Puranas include stories about Hindu gods and goddesses and the lives of great Hindu heroes. They also describe the Hindu beliefs about how the world began and how it periodically ends and is reborn.⁵

The Ramayana is an epic poem which tells the story of Rama Chandra who is regarded seventh incarnate (Avatar) of Hindu god Vishnu. Hanuman, the monkey god, helped Rama rescue Sita – Rama's wife – whom the demon king Ravana had abducted to Ceylon. The Mahabharata tells about the war between Kuru princes and the Pandavas. It includes religious Lyric Bhagavad-Gita (the song of the blessed lord) whose hero and speaker is Krishna, eighth incarnate (Avatar) of god Vishnu. Krishna's wife, the milkmaid, Radha and Krishna's friend Arjan are also mentioned in this book. The Gita has been more admired and more used for devotional and intellectual needs than other Hindu sacred writings. Its historical significance lies in its endorsement of Bhagti as a true way of nirvana (salvation).

The Manu Smriti or Code of Manu is a basic source of Hindu religious and social law. It was composed as a collection of rules of life by Hindu priests around 200 B.C. The code prescribes a long list of rites to be observed by each individual covering each significant event of life. It sanctions custom of Sutee (the wife would burn herself alive on the death of her husband on the same funeral pyre) and sets fourth the basis of caste system.

3 – Concept of God

Hinduism is a polytheistic religion and the Hindus worship many Gods.

The Aryans of the Vedic era worshipped nature deities chief of them being Indira (god of rain and storm). Agni (god of fire), and Surya (the sun) were also worshipped. Their religion contained no idolatry but became contaminated by the beliefs of the conquered Dravidians who were polytheists. The old Vedic gods thereafter remained no longer worshipped.

Gradually, some Hindus came to believe that, though divinities appear in separate forms, these forms are part of one universal spirit called Brahman. These Hindus believe that many divinities make up Brahman. The most important ones are Brahma, the creator of the universe; Vishnu, its preserver; and Shiva, its destroyer.⁶

These three divinities form together Trimurti or Hindu Trinity. Of the divine Trinity, Brahma, the creator is the least widely worshipped. The other two gods are perhaps equally worshipped claiming vast majority of adherents and thousands of temples are devoted to their worship.

Vishnu, in Vedic mythology, is a solar deity. He comes to earth in the form of avatars or incarnations and is most popular particularly in such forms. At the end of each cycle or age in

creation, Shiva destroys the old world and then Brahma creates a new world. When, during the cycle, men face a problem they cannot solve alone, Vishnu comes in the form of a human being or in any other form, with special powers to give the necessary aid.

Vishnu is generally represented in art as dark blue in color, bearing in his four hands his symbols: the conch, the discus, the mace, and the lotus. Sometimes he is resting on the coils of a many-headed snake, Ananda, with his wife, Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, sitting at his feet and the Brahma-bearing lotus growing from his navel.⁷

Vishnu's most loved and worshipped incarnations in the forms of human being so far are Rama (the hero of Ramayana) and Krishna (the warrior hero of Mahabharata). The incarnations or Avatars of Vishnu have been traditionally set at ten. Nine Avatars are said to have already appeared – he came in the form of dwarf, a fish, a tortoise, a boar, a man – lion, Rama, Krishna, a Brahman warrior – hero and Gautama Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. The inclusion of Buddha among Vishnu's avatars is typical of Hinduism's tendency to assimilate all faiths; some Hindus add Christ to the list as yet another avatar.

The avatars of Vishnu most widely worshiped, especially in northern India, are Rama and Krishna. Rama, the princely hero of the epic Ramayana, is the perfect ruler, and his wife Sita is the ideal of Hindu womanhood. Because of the devotion of this couple to each other, young married couples are often called Sita-Ram. Krishna, the most frequent object of Bhakti, is worshiped as a powerful but mischievous child, as a dark-skinned erotic youth who plays his flute and sports with the milkmaids, especially with Radha, his favorite, and as the adult hero of the Mahabharata epic and preacher of the Bhagavad-Gita.⁸

Tenth time he is yet to come as a 'Kalki', a messiah with a sword of flame riding on a white horse to save the righteous and destroy the wicked at the end of the Kali (the fourth and the depraved world period)! Vishnu's mistress or wife is Lakshmi, the lovely goddess of fortune and beauty who is honored and worshipped as goddess of prosperity.

Siva, the Destroyer has many aspects. His devotees, the Shaivites, hold' that destruction necessarily precedes creation and that Siva is, therefore, also the god of creation and change. Siva is portrayed in many different ways. Sometimes he is seen as an ash-white ascetic in a state of perpetual meditation, seated on a tiger skin high in the Himalayas. Cobras coil his neck and arms. The crescent moon is fixed to his matted topknot of hair, from which springs the sacred River Ganges. Sometimes he is Nataraja, who whirls about gracefully, maintaining the cosmos by his unending dance. Siva is often accompanied by his wife Parvati and his bull, Nandi, which serves as his mount. He is most frequently worshiped as a simple rounded post, usually of stone. This post is the lingam, or phallic emblem, of Siva and may indicate his origin as a fertility god.⁹

His character is most complex. The sex-energy which is identified with him is represented by symbols like linga (male organ) and yoni (female organ) whom worshippers of Shiva approach in their temples for devout worship. Shiva is also regarded to represent life-energy in all its aspects. His spouse is many persons in one: As Parvati and Uma, she is kind and loving mother. As Durga and Kali, she is help but may be terrible at once. Shiva's sons-Skanda, god of war, and Ganesha, the elephant headed god who removes obstacles, are also popular deities. Worship of the female generative principle, personified as Shakti (power) is known as Shaktism.

Besides the above discussed divine trinity, common Hindus of India honour or worship anything which is of benefit

or harm. They can be limitlessly polytheistic holding sacred or worshipping trees and stones ancestral spirits; number of vegetation; fertility god lings; divinities of disease or misfortunes; the sun and the moon; animals such as monkeys, the peacock, the Cobra, the cow, the tiger, the horse; rivers such as the Ganges and the Jamna; Mountains such as the Himalaya and the Vindhya ranges, etc. Some conservative estimates place number of Hindu deities at 330 million. We can safely say that there are as many Hindu deities as number of Hindus worldwide.

Cow is held in highest veneration in India. Monier – Williams has written what is often quoted as the Classic summary of Hindu cow – worship. He says: "The cow is of all animals the most sacred. Every part of its body is inhabited by some deity or other. Every hair on its body is inviolable. All its excreta are hallowed. Not a particle ought to be thrown away as impure. On the contrary, the water it ejects ought to be preserved as the best of all holy waters – a sin-destroying liquid which sanctifies everything it touches, while nothing purifies like cow-dung. Any spot which a cow has condescended to honour with the sacred deposit of her excrement is for ever afterwards consecrated ground, and the filthiest place plastered with it is at once cleansed and freed from pollution, while its ashes, when sprinkled over a sinner, immediately convert him into a saint."¹⁰

Mahatma Gandhi justified cow-protection, which to him was central fact of Hinduism, as follows: "Cow-protection is to me one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means-the entire subhuman world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. She is the mother to millions of Indian mankind."¹¹

The authors of "Great Religions By which Men Live" highlight Hindu concept of God as follows:

"The Hindus use THAT to refer to the supreme One, Brahman. They use the neuter pronoun in order to avoid any idea of a manlike God or Creator or First Principle. They believe that Brahman is the ultimate reality behind and beyond all the things that men find to be "real" from experiencing them through the senses."

"This is a different idea about God from that of most Christians and Jews. Many use the term "God" to mean a personalized God – that is, a God who has characteristics like a person. For example, we are familiar with expressions like, "God loves," "God is merciful," "the face of God," "the hand of God." Hindus say that such personal descriptions are qualities people admire in other people, and since they believe that God is infinitely good, people surmise that God has unlimited amounts of these admirable qualities. But, say the Hindus, God—if we use that term to mean the reality and the true nature of the universe—is beyond such human representation. And that is what they mean by Brahman, or THAT."

"In the Hindu religion, there are personal gods to be worshiped by those persons who so desire. Often it is these gods about which we are told most in writings on Hinduism. According to Hindu myths, the gods have wives (who are also worshipped), and they live almost like human beings. Out of a large number of gods, three are worshiped most by present-day Hindus. The three together form a Hindu trinity: Brahma, the creator, Vishnu, the savior; Shiva, the destroyer and restorer."

4 – Creation of Universe

About the Hindu view regarding origin, composition and course of Universe, the colliers Encyclopedia writes:

"The Hindu scriptures contain several different descriptions of the origin and composition of the universe. One

theory postulates that in the beginning the creator god Brahma formed the world from primeval matter. Another holds that the world emerged complete from a golden embryo. A third theory maintains that everything in the world was formed from the essence of the universal spirit, Brahman. Physically, the universe is shaped like an egg. It is divided into 21 zones, of which the earth is the seventh from the top. The course of the universe through time is cyclical. Every event has occurred before and will occur again. This theory applies not only to the life of the individual in his course of rebirths but also to the history of society, the lives of the gods, and the evolution of the entire cosmos."

"The smallest units in the Hindu cosmic cycle are yugas, or world ages. There are four of these, and each is progressively shorter and represents a diminution in the total dharma, or moral order, of the universe. The krita yuga, which is the era of perfection, is 1,728,000 years in duration; the treta yuga, in which dharma is reduced by one quarter, is three quarters as long, 1,296,000 years; in the dvapara yuga dharma is reduced to one half, and its length is only 864,000 years; the final era, the kali yuga, in which dharma is reduced to one quarter, lasts for only 432,000 years. The present era is a kali yuga; it began on Friday, Feb. 18, 3102 B.C. The kali yuga, when it draws to a close, will be characterized by the breakdown of social classes, the end of worship, and disrespect for scripture, sages, and moral standards. When these degradations have become overwhelming, the yuga will end with flood, fire, and war. Then the entire cycle of four yugas, known as the mahayuga, or great yuga, will begin again, to unfold for another 4,320,000,000 years."

"One thousand mahayugas—4,320,000,000 years—constitute a kalpa, a single day in the life of the god Brahma. At the end of each such day all matter in the universe is reabsorbed into the universal spirit, and during the night of Brahma, also one kalpa in length, matter persists only as a

potential for reappearance. At each dawn, Brahma reemerges from a lotus, which grows from the navel of the god Vishnu, and matter is formed again. The present age is the first day of the 51st year of Brahma. The year is made up of 360 such days and nights. Brahma lives for 100 years. Then a total dissolution of the universe occurs and all spheres of being become totally without existence and remain in that state for another Brahma century. Finally, Brahma is reborn, and the immense cycle lasting for 311,040,000,000,000 years begins anew."

"In the continually evolving, ever-recurring Hindu cosmos, only one stable entity, Brahman, the universal spirit, fills all space and time. All other entities, such as matter and mind, are emanations of brahman and are therefore maya, or illusion. Brahman is the absolute—indivisible, unchangeable, impersonal, neuter, and beyond any conceptions of good or evil. Because of Brahman's comprehensive and all pervading nature, atman, the individual self, or soul, is identified inseparably with Brahman. Even more, Brahman is atman. Only the veil of Maya, the illusory world of the senses, keeps man from genuinely understanding this identity, but this identity is the foundation of all existence."

Encyclopedia Americana highlights the Hindu idea of the nature of universe as follows:

"To some Hindus all phenomenal existence is only relatively real—these are adherents to pure monism. Others may accept much simpler concepts. Probably the greatest number of those who recognize authority in the Hindu scriptures accept in some form, though often with considerable modification, the theory of the Puranas concerning the recurring dissolution (pralaya) of the universe and its recreation (pratisarga). The elements of the universe are matter (prakrti), which has three qualities (guna): goodness (sattva), passion (rajas), and darkness (tamas). Against matter is contrasted spirit (purusa). From these, under impulse from the self-existent masculine

Brahma, who is sometimes equated with matter or spirit or with both, evolve all the gods, all other animate creatures, the earth, the heavens, and the hells.”

“The Rig Veda presents the universe as being in two main parts. One is that which men and gods inhabit; it contains light, heat, and moisture and itself has three parts, namely, the surface of the earth, the atmosphere, and the vault of heaven. This is called the sat (“existent”). The other main part is a place of darkness and horror called the sat (“nonexistent”), where demons lurk by day and whence they emerge by night. The central theme of Vedic mythology is the conflict between Indra, the champion of the gods and their king, and Vritra (Vrtra, “the encloser”), personification of the hard covering within which were originally contained the elements needed for creation of the sat. Vritra is usually described as a serpent, the malevolent leader of the demons. Indra slew him with his weapon (vajra) or, as is frequently said, burst open his belly. Out flowed the waters (apas), often described complementarily as cows, to fill the celestial ocean. Marvelously they were pregnant with the sun. The universe now had moisture, light, and warmth, and creation could take place. Order (rta) was established and put under the administration of Varuna, and in due time man was created. Every creature—man or god—had a personal function to fulfill as part of order. When he fulfilled it, he was living in accord with the sat and so achieving his highest good.”

5 – Beliefs

Besides believing in many gods including Trinity (of gods comprising Brahma, Siva and Vishnu) and in sacred books (which we have already discussed in preceding sections), the Hindus also believe in reincarnation or transmigration of souls (Samsara), in law of Karma (actions or deeds), principle of Dharma, and in Moksha (release from the cycle of rebirths). In this section we will discuss these beliefs briefly.

Reincarnation: Behind the ever-changing physical world is one universal, unchanging, everlasting spirit, known as Brahman. The soul, or atman, of every being in the universe, including the gods, is part of this spirit. At death the soul does not perish but passes, or transmigrates, to another body, where it is reincarnated as a new life.¹²

Karma: The fortunes of the soul in each rebirth are determined by its behavior in former lives. This law of Karma (literally "action") states that no sin ever goes unpunished and no virtue remains unrewarded; if a man does not receive punishment or reward in this life, he will in some succeeding life. By his behavior a man determines whether his rebirth will be in a higher station or lower, whether he will be reborn as a man, as a god, or as the lowest insect.¹³

Dharma: Proper conduct, or morality, which governs a man's rebirths, is known as dharma. Hinduism lays down very specific rules of dharma, including special behavior appropriate to the members of each caste. In addition to morality and right conduct, it also signifies quality and duty. Dharma is eternal and immutable. It is also specific. All things, animate and inanimate, were assigned dharma at creation. The dharma of gold is yellow color and brightness; the dharma of a tiger is ferocity and eating other animals. Man's dharma, man-ava-dharma, encompasses essential human qualities and characteristics as well as the conduct proper for every man. It includes respect for priests and scriptures, speaking the truth, abstaining from taking life, performance of meritorious acts, and worship of gods. A man must also follow other dharmas, depending on his position in life. He must follow the ordained norms of his nation, of his tribe or caste, of his clan, and of his family.¹⁴

Faithful fulfillment of dharma is, in popular belief, the best way to improve one's condition in future lives. Thus, for most Hindus, especially the uneducated, dharma is the major goal of life. Since dharma is generally synonymous with custom, the

result has been a powerful adherence to tradition, especially to that of caste.¹⁵

Moksha: Escape from the cycle of existence is called release or extinction (nirvana "blowing out") of sorrow, and is the theoretical goal of every being. However, the means of achieving release are so arduous that only the most iron willed can pursue it; most Hindus hope only to win some improvement in the next existence.¹⁶

Philosophic Hinduism has recognized at different periods in history a number of techniques for achieving moksha. Although all of these are equally valid paths (margas) to salvation, three have achieved particular acceptance and sanction in the scriptures.¹⁷

The Path of Action (karma-marga) is the simplest path and the closest to the doctrine of dharma. Salvation by the karma-marga calls for a life of deeds and actions appropriate to one's station in life. But all actions must be performed selflessly, that is, without regard to gratification of personal desire. Such a life leads to detachment from the self and to union with brahman.¹⁸

The Path of Devotion (bhakti-marga) brings salvation through uncompromising devotion and faith to a personal god. Very often the object of devotion is the god Vishnu, or Krishna, one of his incarnations. Such devotion draws the believer closer to brahman (of which the god is a manifestation) and can generate the insight of the unity of all existence in brahman.¹⁹

The Path of Knowledge (jnana-marga) is the most sophisticated and difficult path to salvation. It calls for direct insight into the ultimate truth of the universe: the unity of brahman and atman. Such insight generally follows a long period of spiritual and physical discipline, which involves the

renunciation of all worldly attachments and a rigorous course of ascetic and mystical practices.²⁰

One of the most important such courses used by the follower of jnana-marga consists of a number of techniques known collectively by the name yoga. Yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning union or discipline; it is cognate with the English word "yoke." The goal of the practitioner, called a yogi or yogin, is achievement of a state of samadhi, or dissolution of the personality, as a means of knowing brahman. The rigorous course of training followed by a yogi is nearly always directed by a guru, or spiritual teacher. It includes strict adherence to prescribed moral virtues, such as truthfulness, nonviolence, and chastity, training in control of the body and obliteration of the sense perceptions, extreme mental concentration, and meditation.²¹

6 – Worship and Rituals

Worship in Temple: Places of worship range from the most primitive of wayside shrines, consisting of a stone set under a sacred tree and daubed with paint, symbolizing some form of divinity, to the most elaborate complex of structures constituting an enormous temple.²²

Hinduism considers temples as buildings dedicated to divinities. Its followers worship as individuals, not as congregations. Most Hindu temples have many shrines, each of which is devoted to a divinity. Each temple also has one principal shrine devoted to a single important god or goddess.²³

The shrines portray the divinities in sculptured images. Hindus treat these images as living human beings. Every day, for example, priests wash and dress the images and bring them food. Hindus do not consider this custom idol worship. They believe the divinities are actually present in the images.²⁴

In the temples, ritual may be elaborate, involving the use of Sanskrit verses recited by scholarly priests, but many village priests know no Sanskrit and confine themselves to the use of vernaculars.²⁵

Worship at home: Although temple worship does occur, Hinduism is not basically a congregational religion. Most Hindu religious activity centers in the home, involving only an individual, or perhaps a few friends or relatives.²⁶

The most common type of religious rite is the puja, or worship service. In nearly every Hindu home there are sacred pictures or images of favored gods before which the puja prayers are chanted, hymns sung, and offerings made. In the simplest homes puja is a modest ceremony. The mother of the household recites prayers at dawn and rings a small bell before several bazaar-bought colored pictures of the gods in one corner of her room. In the richer house-holds puja may involve elaborate offerings of food, flowers and incense in a family shrine room containing decorated altars, icons of one or more gods and goddesses, and a sacred perpetual fire. In such homes a family priest, or purohit, may be called in on special occasions to aid in the puja. Such devotional services are performed particularly among adherents of the bhakti stream of Hinduism.²⁷

Many observances of Hinduism take place in the home. Most homes have a shrine devoted to a divinity chosen by the family. The homes of some wealthy Hindus have a room used only for worship. In most homes, the husband or wife conducts the daily family worship. A number of important religious ceremonies are performed at home, including the one in which boys officially become members of the Hindu community. Others include marriage ceremonies and rituals connected with pregnancy and childbirth.²⁸

Worship may consist of offerings of flowers, fruit, grain, ghee (Hindi ghi, clarified butter), money, and, in some connections, animal sacrifice. A worshiper may appeal to the deity directly or through the agency of a priest. Worship is usually individual; an exception is the chanting of religious lyrics by a group under the stress of devotional emotion. To indicate their cult affiliation the worshipers often have colored marks painted on their foreheads and occasionally on their bodies. Shaivites typically mark themselves with three horizontal white lines, while Vaishnavas use a white V bisected by a vertical red line.²⁹

Religious authority vests in the Brahmins (brahmana) who besides being custodians of the sacred learning constitute the priesthood. They officiate at religious ceremonies in homes or temples and are other men's vicars in dealing with the deities. As astrologers they cast horoscopes and then interpret them throughout a person's life to determine auspicious and inauspicious moments and conditions for specific undertakings.³⁰

Daily Life: Many family rites center on the important transitions of life. The family priest, generally a Brahmin for the higher castes, officiates at these rites, reciting from the sacred scriptures and directing the offerings to the gods. The birth ceremony takes place before the umbilical cord is cut, and about 10 days later there is a naming rite. Among the highest castes, the upanayana rite is performed when a boy reaches puberty. At that time he is invested with a sacred thread, which he wears across one shoulder for the rest of his life. The lengthy and complex Hindu marriage ceremony requires the couple to walk around a sacred fire with their garments knotted together. The couple recites vows of an eternal bond. In most parts of India widows may not remarry, and formerly many high-caste Hindu widows burned themselves on their husband's funeral pyres. Most Hindus dispose of the dead by cremation. The corpse is burned shortly after death and the ashes are thrown into the

Ganges or another sacred river. For about 12 days after the cremation, members of the family give daily offerings of rice balls and milk to the deceased to prevent his ghost from doing harm. Among the orthodox of the highest castes this shraddha rite is performed periodically by descendants of the deceased for several generations.³¹

For the higher castes Hinduism prescribes a life ordered in four stages. The first stage begins at puberty when a boy becomes a student, studying the scriptures under a guru. In the second stage he marries and becomes a householder, supporting his family and producing sons. At about the time he has grandchildren, the householder enters a new stage, becoming a forest hermit, withdrawn from society to study and meditate. Finally he becomes a sannyasi, or wandering religious mendicant, free from all ties of the world. Few Hindus actually observe these stages, but there is a widespread awareness of them. Occasionally, wealthy men retire in middle age and spend the rest of their lives in quiet meditation and good works.³²

Festivals: Communal and temple ceremonies are more elaborate than domestic worship. Congregants gather to sing hymns and to read responsively with the priests from the Ramayana epic and other traditional literature. Festivals devoted to the temple gods are attended by pilgrims from a large area. In the temple a procession of temple servants with flutes, drums, and torches may ceremoniously escort the god to the shrine of his goddess to spend the night. There is often singing, dancing, and recitation from the epics. The largest temple festivals, such as the Jagannatha festival in Puri, Orissa, draw pilgrims from all over India. A huge image of Jagannatha, horselike form of Vishnu (and the source of the English word "juggernaut"), is placed on a wooden cart and pulled by devotees through the streets of the city.³³

Pilgrimage is an important feature of Hindu religious life. There are hundreds of sacred places in India where the faithful

can go to participate in temple festivals and religious fairs and to bathe in sacred rivers. The most important sacred places are Banaras (Varanasi), Hardwar, Mathura, and Allahabad in northern India; and Madura, Kancheepuram, and Ujjain in central and southern India.³⁴

The calendar of festivals varies from one part of India to another. Perhaps the most widely celebrated festival is Divali, held in late October or early November. It is primarily a New Year festival but has other special significance in different regions. During Divali, ceremonial clay lamps are lit, presents are exchanged, and prayers are typically addressed to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and good fortune. Holi, a spring festival, is marked by street dancing and processions, bonfires, and generally unrestrained festivities. Celebrants throw colored powders at each other and squirt each other with colored water. Other popular festivals include Dashara, celebrated by north Indian Vaishnavas; the Ganapati Festival of Maharashtra; the Dolayatra, or Swing Festival, of Orissa; and Pongal, the Rice-Boiling Festival, of southern India.³⁵

7 – Caste System

Indian term for caste is Varna or Jati. Hinduism has developed a hereditary caste system as its social structure. The caste system began about 1500 B.C. when Aryan invaders from central Asia entered India. They developed the caste system to limit contact between themselves and the native Indian people. Later, the system gained ground and came to stay.

Religious Sanction: This caste system has a powerful religious sanction. In a late hymn of the Rig-Veda, one of Hinduism's most sacred scriptures, there is described the emergence of four social classes (varnas) from the sacrifice of a primeval man at the time of creation. From his head appeared the priests and teachers (Brahmins); from his arms, the warriors (Kshatriyas); from his trunk, the merchants, artisans, and

farmers (Vaishyas); and from his feet, the menial laborers (Sudras). Just as the scriptures state that one's varna is determined by Karma, so the majority of Hindus feel that one's position in the hierarchy of castes is a direct result of one's behavior in previous lives. If a man performs the duties of his caste (jati-dharma) diligently, he may improve his caste position in a future rebirth.³⁶

Thus there are four main castes mentioned in the Hindu writings. In descending order of social worth they are: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. They are briefly described as under:

Brahmins: At the top is the class of Brahmins, in whom lies the religious leadership. They constitute not more than 7% of the Hindu community but they constitute the highly privileged group. They are traditionally regarded as the codifiers and formulators of the philosophy sanctioning the system and directors of the mechanism to enforce its rules. The Brahmins are a scholarly and learned class who are the custodians and interpreters of the scriptures. They form the priesthood, lead the worship and officiate at religious ceremonies.

The 'Code of Manu' placed the Brahmin in the position of "the lord of this whole creation," whose birth is "an eternal incarnation of the sacred law." As priest or as guru (teacher), or in any occupation, the Brahmin is "the highest on earth"; and "whatever exists in the world is his property"; on account of the excellence of his origin, he is entitled to all. A Brahmin, be he ignorant or learned, is a great divinity. During Hindu festivals in India, the "holy men" (sadhus, sannyasis and yogis—all Brahmins) march along naked, hundreds strong, and after they have passed, the people run to scoop up the dust made sacred by their foot-prints, that they may rub it on themselves.³⁷

Kshatriyas: Second in importance is the caste of Kshatriyas which comprises nobles, rulers, kings, rajas, warriors, generals, feudals.

Vaishyas: In the third group is the caste of Vaishyas who are the Commoners. They comprise peasants, farmers, merchants, traders, artisans and professionals.

Shudras: At the lowest ladder of the caste hierarchy lies the class of Shudras. It constitutes a vast majority of the people who are servants, menial labourers, daily wage-earners.

These four castes are subdivided into hundreds of sub-castes and thus more than two thousand levels of castes have appeared in Hindu society.

Outcastes: Outside this caste system are the 'outcastes' (sometimes also considered fifth class) which are a vast body of people, estimated at 20% of the Hindu community. These people are regarded untouchable and are held to pollute the higher castes through mere proximity and hence required to live in separate townships or villages. They are frequently denied access to wells, roads, schools and temples used by the higher castes and are forbidden by religious law to read or hear the recitation of the scriptures. Gandhi called them Harijans (people of god) and tried to restore them to caste status. Lately Indian parliament has abolished the social taboos and restrictions against this class by law.

The class of so-called "untouchables" or "out-castes" (recently abolished by Indian law) was composed of people who had originally belonged to different sub-groups of the fourth caste, the masses. Through various social and economic conditions, they "lost caste," or lost their place in society.³⁸

Caste is hereditary, and it is not possible to transfer from the caste in which one is born to another. Neither can a non-

Hindu individual ordinarily become a member of a Hindu caste, though under certain conditions a group can slowly enter the system as a new caste. The caste system prescribes strict regulations concerning marriage, which must usually be within the caste but outside the immediate family or clan and eating, which is subject to taboos and complicated rules respecting the acceptance of food and drink from members of other castes; and many other phases of human relationship.³⁹

8 – Philosophy

The six orthodox schools or systems of Hindu philosophy appeared during 500 B.C. to 500 A.D. In subsequent period they underwent many changes to improve. In the traditional order their names are: Nyaya; Vaisheska; Sankhya; Yoga; Purva-Mimamsa, and Vedanta. These are briefly described as under:

1. Nyaya system deals with logic and is based upon a text ascribed to some Gautama.
2. Vaisheska system concerns the nature of universe.
3. Sankhya System: It is atheistic in nature and is believed to have influenced teachings of Buddhism and Jainism. It was founded by Kapila who was born at Kapilavastu where Gautama Buddha was born almost a century later.
4. Yoga system: It is a set of mental and physical exercises designed to free the soul from reliance on the body so that it can unite with Brahman. It was greatly developed by Patanjali, a yogi who lived in second century A.D.
5. Purva Mimamsa rationalizes Vedic fundamentalism. It defines literal meaning and applications of the Vedas. The school regards the Vedas as authorless, self revealed and eternal. Its founder was Jaimini.

According to the Purva Mimamsa the world exists throughout eternity and is not subject to recurrent dissolution and re-creation. The system accepts the reality of both the soul and the material world. There are two kinds of acts. The first consists of those ordained by the Vedas. These are the Vedic sacrifices; by doing them one obtains heaven. The other consists of prohibited acts. By doing them and abstaining from ordained acts, one suffers a future life in misery.⁴⁰

6. Vedanta System: More than any other, this system is the lineal descendant of the philosophic speculations of the late Rig Veda and the Upanishads. Its basic textbook, by Badarayana, composed possibly around the beginning of the Christian era, is called Brahmasutra ("treatise on Brahma") Vedantasutra, Uttarami-mamsasutra, or sarirakasutra and consists of aphorisms in themselves unintelligible and meant to be accompanied by a commentary, The celebrated Shankara, whose dates are uncertain but who was living around 800 A.D., was the author of the earliest surviving commentary on the Brahmasutra. He taught unqualified monism.⁴¹

9 – Miscellaneous

Ahimsa: Hinduism has taken over principle of Ahimsa i.e. non-injury to livings from Jainism. Hindus who strictly adhere to this principle abandon meat-eating and become vegetarian. Mahatma Gandhi evolved his philosophy of non-violence from principle of Ahimsa. The doctrine of Ahimsa applies not only to mankind but also to the animal world specially demanding protection of bovines which hold a position of peculiar sanctity in Hinduism. Acts violating this principle constitute offence against religion but may be absolved by paying penalties or by performing certain expiatory rituals.

Atman: Atman is your soul or your spirit or inner self; whereas atman or heart of the universe is Brahman. A person can know Brahman only by knowing himself or his Atman. A

Hindu saying is: "He who knows himself shall know God." One of the sacred writings describes it in this way:

"The spirit within me is smaller than a mustard seed. The spirit within me is greater than this earth and sky and the heaven and all these united. It is Brahman."

Brahman expresses itself through many ways in man, through the Atman. When a man truly knows the Atman, then he may know Brahman. When he knows both, he sees that Atman and Brahman are united. And man realizes the supreme knowledge, gains the supreme happiness. All the creatures and creations of the earth are the same, bound up in inclusive Brahman. There is no diversity, no real difference in any part of reality. All are the same. All are one. "It is Brahman."⁴²

The universal desire to be reunited with the absolute (the Atman or Brahma) can be satisfied by following the path of knowledge. Life is a cycle of lives (samsara) in which man's destiny is determined by his deeds (karma) from which he may seek release (moksa) through ascetic practices or the discipline of Yoga (q.v.). Failure to achieve release means reincarnation—migration to a higher or lower form of life after death—until the ultimate goal of absorption in the absolute is reached.⁴³

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CHAPTER 5

BUDDHISM

1 – Introduction

Buddhism is one of the world's major religions which claims more than 300 million adherents. It is based on the teachings of Gautama Buddha and sprang as a heresy from Hinduism in North India in the 6th century B.C. Buddhism spread rapidly over whole of North East and North West of India in the beginning but it could not stand the assaults of Brahmanism and lost its influence in a few centuries in its country of birth unlike other heresy, the Jainism, which still survives in India.

Buddhism literally means religion of those seeking to be awakened. Today it is practiced throughout most of East and South Asia in countries like China, Japan, Korea, Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, Burma, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Bhutan, Vietnam and Taiwan.

2 – Buddha

The founder of Buddhism is believed to be Hindu Prince Siddhartha (563 B.C. – 483 B.C.) whose clan or family name was Gautama and title is Buddha meaning the "Enlightened One". The life of Buddha is little known from history and more known through the traditions of his followers. The most famous of these traditions are from the Jataka Tales, a compilation written in second century B.C. in the Pali language.

Siddhartha Gautama was born in Kapilavastu in what is now southern Nepal near the foothills of Himalayas about 563 B.C. His father's name was Shuddhodana and mother's name was Maya. His father belonged to warrior Hindu caste of Kshatriya and was a wealthy ruler of the important Shakya tribe. According to a tradition, it was predicted at Siddhartha's birth

that he would be either a great universal teacher or a great universal emperor, and that four signs would show him which course he should follow. His father was determined that Siddhartha should succeed him and become a universal emperor, so he took great care that his son should not see the four signs which would show him the misery of the world and become a teacher. Siddhartha was, therefore, brought up in luxury in the palace. He married his cousin Yasodhara, at the age of 20, whom he won in a mighty contest of skill and strength against many strong young men. From her he had a son Rahula.

At the age of 29, in spite of his father's efforts, he finally had a series of four visions which were to decide his future course of life. In the first vision, he saw an old man. In the second, he saw a sick man, and in the third, a corpse. In the fourth vision, he met a wandering holy man. The first three visions convinced Gautama that life involves aging, sickness, and death. The vision of the holy man convinced Gautama that he should leave his wife and newborn son, Rahula, and seek religious enlightenment. Such enlightenment would free him from life's suffering.

One night when all were sleeping he slipped out of the palace and rode off on his faithful horse Kanthaka, whose hooves were cushioned by the gods to prevent any noise. When far from the city, he took off his fine clothing and donned the habit of a monk. Setting out alone he began his great search for enlightenment and the solution to the problem of escaping from the universal impermanence and sorrow of the world. This search, known in Buddhist tradition as The Noble Quest, began with a period of wandering, but before long Siddhartha settled in the forest as a hermit. There he learned the techniques of meditation and self-discipline. But these gave him no satisfaction, and he soon joined a band of five ascetics in the hope that extreme self-mortification might bring insight and peace. He practiced extreme forms of self-denial and self

torture. He lived in filth and many days ate only a grain of rice. After six years of incredible austerities, having still failed to find the object of his quest, he departed from the ascetics and began a more natural way of living.¹

One day Siddhartha Gautama, now thirty-five years old, (528 B.C) seated himself beneath a large bo tree or Bodhi tree (a kind of pipal tree) on the outskirts of the town of Gaya in eastern India and vowed that he would not leave his place until the riddle of suffering was solved. For forty-nine days he sat beneath the tree. The friendly gods and spirits surrounding him fled when the tempter Mara, the Buddhist devil, approached. For days the bodhisattva (future Buddha) Siddhartha withstood temptations and attacks of all kinds. Mara called his demon hosts and attacked the meditating Gautama with whirlwind, flood, and earthquake. He had his daughters Desire, Pleasure, and Passion dance seductively before Gautama but Gautama was not moved. When Mara called on him to produce evidence of his goodness and benevolence, the bodhisattva touched the ground with his hand, and with a voice like thunder the earth intoned, "I am his witness." At last Mara and his demons fled, and on the morning of the forty-ninth day Siddhartha Gautama knew the truth. He had solved the riddle of suffering and knew what man had to do to overcome it. Fully enlightened, he was now a Buddha. He had achieved nirvana, the ultimate detachment from the world that brings an end to suffering.²

After meditating beneath the tree for forty-nine days more, he at last arose and traveled to the Deer Park near Banaras, where he found the five ascetics with whom he had lived. To them he preached his first sermon, or, in Buddhist terminology, "set in motion the Wheel of the Law." The Buddha soon gained many disciples. His favorite beings his cousin Ananda. From among these he organized his monastic community, the sangha, which consisted of an order of monks (bhikkus, literally "beggars"). Later a lesser order of nuns was also established although in the beginning Buddha had refused

to receive women into the community. He observed however, that a religion of men would last 1000 years while one which includes women would last 500 years only. To his ordained disciples he taught the full discipline for understanding the release from suffering and for achieving nirvana. To lay adherents of his faith he gave instruction in ethical living. He traveled widely throughout the Ganges Plain preaching the new doctrine, returning home briefly to convert his family and much of the royal court. In time he came to be known as Bhagava ("Lord"), Tathagatha ("he who has come"), and Shakyamuni ("Sage of the Shakya tribe").³

For the most part the Buddha and his followers were not persecuted. One story, however, tells that the Buddha's cousin Devadatta was jealous and tried to kill the Buddha by letting a mad elephant loose in his path. The Buddha stopped the elephant with his gentleness, and the beast knelt before him.⁴

As Buddha's fame increased, stories spread among his followers that dramatically described his magic powers, religious insight, and compassion. His followers believed that Buddha had lived many lives before he was born as Gautama. A number of stories describe events that occurred during these lives. The stories, called Jatakas, became popular and helped people understand Buddha's message.⁵

At the age of about 80 (in the year 483 B.C.) Buddha became ill after eating contaminated pork served to him by a lay disciple and died. His disciples gave him an elaborate funeral, burned his body, and distributed his bones as sacred relics. Many Buddhists believe his power is still present in these relics and in the many images of Buddha.⁶

3 – Teachings

The teachings of Buddhism consist of the "Four Noble Truths" which are: the fact of existence of suffering; that

suffering has a cause (which is desire): that it can be ended; and that it can be ended by following the Noble Eightfold Path. The steps or rules of the Noble Eightfold Path are: right views; right desires; right speech; right conduct, including abstinence from immorality as well as from taking life; right livelihood, harming no one; right effort; right awareness, and right contemplation or meditation. We would discuss these teachings in detail in the following paragraphs:

The Four Noble Truths: 1. The First Noble Truth is in the fact of suffering.

Birth is suffering; decay is suffering; illness is suffering; death, ... presence of objects we hate, ... separation from objects we love, ... not to obtain what we desire is suffering ... clinging to existence is suffering.

Birth is uncomfortable, both to the mother and to the child, although the child does not consciously remember it. The birth of a new idea, of a new "self" or personality, can also be quite painful; for old habits and old ideas are difficult to discard. Decay also is painful, whether it is decay of a tooth or decay of one's morale and confidence. Illness is uncomfortable, both mentally and physically. Both death and the fear of death, for ourselves and for others, constitute suffering. Either the presence of objects we hate or the absence of objects we love is a painful experience. Gautama believed that this suffering was felt by a man who was out of harmony with life. "If I am not living harmoniously, it is because I have not learned to accept the world as it is. Perhaps I am expecting from the world things that I have no right to expect. Perhaps I am clinging too strongly to one part of my world thus losing touch with the total picture.⁷

2. The second Noble Truth is the cause of suffering. Buddha is reported to have said:

Now this is the Noble Truth as to origin of suffering. It is the craving thirst that causes the renewal of becomings. This craving thirst is accompanied by sensual delights and seeks satisfaction, now here, now there. It takes the form of craving for the gratification of the senses, or the craving for prosperity.⁸

This craving is actually excessive desires and aspirations (trishna). The craving leads on to rebirth, is accompanied by delights and passion, rejoicing at finding delight here and there. It is the craving for lust, for existence, for non-existence. It may be a craving for food, for popularity, for success. Desire is self-defeating. For it can never be completely satisfied and always involves frustration. We can never really possess what is not our self, something external to us. Thus, these first two truths set the pessimistic tone that life is suffering and that the cause of suffering is desire or the appetites that nourish desire.

The third and forth Noble Truth are, however, more optimistic in tone, for they offer a solution to the problem of suffering and its cause.

3. Third is the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering. This is the cessation of craving by forsaking and relinquishing it so that one is freed from it. Craving or desire can be suppressed, and since it is the cause of suffering, with the disappearance of desire, suffering will end.

4. The Fourth Noble Truth constitutes the process by which one can achieve this end of suffering. It is known as the Noble or Holy Eightfold Path which makes the essence of Buddhist discipline. The steps of this Eightfold path are: Right views; right thought or aspirations; right speech; right conduct; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness; right contemplation.

The Noble Eightfold Path: 1. The first step toward happiness, Gautama said, is the right view point on

unhappiness. Before a person can make any progress, he must look at his problem for what it is. When he sees that it is his ignoring of the true facts of his life that causes his trouble, and when he has accepted his responsibility for that trouble, then he has entered upon the Path. Gautama did not claim to have found an original way to happiness. He described it as being very ancient. But he felt that most people were not aware of it.⁹

Gautama said that so long as we see life from the wrong viewpoint we will go on craving things as though the things would make us happy. This is a way of deceiving ourselves. We must learn to see for ourselves why it is a delusion. Then we are ready to take the second step, which Gautama called right aspiration.¹⁰

2. Everyone aspires after something. The trouble is that most of us, in our confused mental and emotional condition, have aspired after the wrong things. We have not focused our desires and efforts on worth-while objectives. But when we renounce false values that lead us into unhappiness, we are in a position to choose the true values. The Buddha pointed to kindness and love as being true values. Such values can be attained only when a person has gone beyond the point where his primary concern is "I," "me," and "mine." It is after self-centeredness ceases that true kindness and love are shown in a free and spontaneous way.¹¹

3. The third step is right speech. A person following the Buddha's Path can no longer take delight in gossip, slander, and abusive or idle talk. His speech will be controlled, considerate, and thoughtful, because it stems from kind attitudes toward others. Some people commit worse crimes through what they say than hardened criminals do. Gautama recognized, just as modern psychologists do, that this is a stumbling block to real maturity.¹²

4. The next step in the Buddha's Path is the important step of right behavior. Gautama did not describe fully the scope of this step. But his followers gradually drew up lists of the things one was not supposed to do. One typical list says that a person must not kill, steal, be impure, lie, or drink intoxicants. However, such negative commandments are incidental to the importance of what Gautama said about behavior. He knew that it was much more important to encourage people to do certain things than to order them not to do others.¹³

To Gautama, right behavior meant love. Gautama taught that "all that we are is the result of what we have thought." Therefore, we should not harbor feelings of resentment or hatred. Feelings and thoughts wreck chances for happiness, as truly as do actions. "He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me' - in those who harbor such thoughts, hatred will never cease," warned Gautama. For he had discovered that "hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love." And he said at another time, "Let a man overcome anger by love, let him overcome evil by good."¹⁴

5. To a man who was really earnest about finding the true happiness, the fifth step was the next logical one. It is right livelihood. There were certain occupations a man could not engage in without damaging himself and other seriously, Gautama felt. Any business that involved injuring life in any form was not to be followed. This included, for Buddhists, the trade of the butcher, of the vendor of poisons (dopes, drugs, and the like), of the slave trader or the slave owner. One must not engage in making or distributing liquors. Neither must one be a soldier.¹⁵

6. The sixth step is a move beyond the level of conduct. It is right effort, and to the Buddha those words had a special meaning. Right effort means that one must find for himself his own proper rate of speed on the Holy Eight-Fold Path to true happiness. A religious seeker must not move too slowly or too

quickly. And there is no happiness to be gained in trying to keep pace with someone else. You are yourself, with your own needs and your own tempo. One task in learning to know our true selves is to learn to travel at our own best pace.¹⁶

7. Gautama's seventh emphasis was right mindfulness. He declared that it is the mind that leads man into most of his disharmonious living. Physical desires might be distracting, the Buddha admitted, but usually that is because the vivid imagination creates too many desires. The desire to eat in itself does not make one unhappy. Unhappiness develops from excessive eating or excessive desire to eat. Part of right mindfulness meant learning to see physical desires and everything else for what they actually were, not as the imagination had made them appear.¹⁷

The Buddha's aim was to teach people that objects that appeal to the senses have power to make us unhappy because they may lead to excessive desires. He was aware that the average man had a habit of "idealizing" woman. He urged his followers to overcome this habit of enslavement to a pretty face. The story is told of a traveler who once asked a Buddhist monk, "Tell me, have you seen a woman walking along this way?" The monk replied, "I cannot say whether it is a woman or a man that passed this way. This I know, that a set of bones is traveling this road." This is Buddhist right mindfulness carried to the extreme.¹⁸

8. The final step in the Path is called right contemplation. Gautama had a great appreciation for some of the prevailing Yoga practices of his day. Although he had not found in Yoga the full answer to his questions about unhappiness, he had been helped by such practices to "silence" his mind. Therefore, he told his followers of its values.¹⁹

The Yoga discipline was taught individually. It involved learning how to quiet the irrelevant thoughts of the mind, until

the person could come directly to knowledge of his own true needs. This contemplation that Gautama recommended was not a process of reasoning or logic. It was a different way of knowing – by insight or intuition. Because Gautama recognized that people vary greatly in temperament, he suggested several dozen modes of training the mind for right contemplation. These ways were developed by his followers into the Yoga practices that are still important to many zealous Buddhists.²⁰

4 – Dharma and Nirvana

Buddhists, like Hindus, believe in doctrine of incarnation and law of karma. Buddha preached that existence was a continuing cycle of death and rebirth. Each person's position and well-being in life was determined by his or her behavior in previous lives. For example, good deeds may lead to rebirth as a wise and wealthy person or as a being in heaven. A person's evil deeds may lead to rebirth as a poor and sickly person or even to rebirth in hell.

Buddhism, however, added an important qualification to karma—that of intention. In order for Karma to be generated there must be intention, which Buddhism considers even more important than the act itself. Indeed, an unintentional deed produces no Karma at all, whereas if there is intention, karma is generated even though no act is performed. Thus, according to Buddhism, karma embraces both the intention and the actual act that follows on it.

Buddha also taught that as long as individuals remain within the cycle of death and rebirth, they can never be completely free from pain and suffering. Buddha said people could break out of the cycle by eliminating any attachment to worldly things. By ridding themselves of such attachment, people would gain a kind of perfect peace and happiness. Buddha called this state of peace and happiness nirvana. According to Buddha, those who are willing and able to follow

the Middle way and the Noble Eightfold Path will conquer their attachment to worldly things and thus achieve nirvana.²¹

About Noble Eightfold Path we have already studied, let us study what is the middle way.

The Middle Way: At the Deer Park in the sermon he gave, Buddha said: "There are two extremes, O Alms-men, which he who has given up the world, ought to avoid – a life given to pleasure, and a life given to mortifications. By avoiding these two extremes, the truth-finder (the Tathagata Buddha's designation for himself) has gained the knowledge of the Middle Path, which leads to Enlightenment, to Nirvana."

The path that Gautama had found was one he was to describe as the "Middle Path" between extremes. The extremes to be avoided were the life of sensual indulgence on the one hand and the life of drastic asceticism on the other. Both led to out-of-balance living. Neither led to the true goal of release from suffering. Gautama discovered that neither extreme was wise, for neither brings happiness. Over-indulgence has the same final effect on a person as has the release of all tension on the strings of a violin. Extreme self-denial, on the other hand, has the same general effect as tightening the strings on a violin until they are at the breaking point. In neither case is there the right attunement. Harmony is lacking because there is either too little tension or too much. It was this lack of attunement or harmony that Gautama considered to be man's suffering. It was to help men find harmony within themselves and with the universe that he began to teach.²²

Nirvana: Let us now explain what the Buddhists understand from Nirvana. The minimum meaning of Nirvana is the extinction of all craving, resentment, and covetousness. As we have seen, to the Buddha such extinction of craving and other improper attitudes was true happiness. Nirvana has another meaning, which is just as important to most Buddhists.

That is the release from all future reincarnations, escape from the "Round of Becoming."

Nirvana is not a place. It is a condition of the mind. Nirvana is reached after earnest thoughtfulness and vigorous effort. Thoughtfulness is one of the chief virtues of Buddhists. Thoughtlessness is deplored. Buddhists have compared a thoughtless man to a monkey feverishly searching for food in a forest.²³

Nirvana does not mean the loss of personal consciousness that comes with death, for Gautama achieved it and then spent many years trying to help others realize it. However, Buddhists soon found it necessary to talk about ultimate Nirvana. This could be achieved after one had died. They called it Parinirvana.²⁴

A truly happy person is the one who has given the thought and effort necessary to realize Nirvana. The Buddha did not respect titles or castes – even the highest castes in India. He said that a man did not reach happiness by the status of the family into which he was born. Had not he himself been born a prince and yet been for a time among the unhappiest of the unhappy? Not by birth, not by wealth, does one discover how to overcome suffering. By seeking to overcome unwholesome desires, by keeping to the practical Eight-Fold Path, by self-knowledge – by these one attains lasting happiness.²⁵

No-Self: In Hinduism it was believed that an individual had a permanent self (atman) that merged at death with a universal self i.e., Brahman. This merging constituted a salvation, a freeing from the transmigratory cycle.

In Buddhism, however, this idea is considered erroneous, and rather than constituting salvation, is a deterrent to it. The Buddha maintained that self could only lead to attachment and craving and suffering.²⁶

The Buddha put forth the theory of “no – self” (anatman), whereby he maintained that all things were made up of parts, that at any one time a thing was the sum of these parts, or “aggregates” (skandha), as they are known. The Five Aggregates are: (1) material body (rupa), that is, the four elements – earth, water, fire, and wind – and matter derived from them; (2) sensation (vedana), from contacts with the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind; (3) perception (samjna), notions of colors, sounds, odors, tastes, tangible things and mental images; (4) predisposition (samskara), or volitions, concerning colors, sounds, odors, tastes, tangible things, and objects of thought; and (5) consciousness (vijnana), that is, knowledge established by the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. As a group they represent the whole of matter (material body) and mental energies.²⁷

5 – Sangha

When Buddha started preaching and gained many conversions, he organized his monastic community the Sangha, which consisted of an order of monks (bhikhus, literally “beggars”). The Sangha was governed by simple rules. The wearing of the yellow robes, the adoption of the shaven head, the carrying of the begging bowl, the habit of daily meditation were the basic rules which were followed by Sangha. The Vow prescribed for the monks was: “I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Sangha; I take refuge in the Dharma.” They also undertook to live by the following ten precepts:²⁸

1. Refrain from destroying life.
2. Do not take what is not given.
3. Abstain from unchastity.
4. Do not lie or deceive.

5. Abstain from intoxicants.
6. Eat moderately and not after noon.
7. Do not look on at dancing, singing, or dramatic spectacles.
8. Do not affect the use of garlands, scents or ornaments.
9. Do not use high or broad beds.
10. Do not accept gold or silver.

The Sangha, however, became the official term for the Buddhist community sometime between the 4th and 2nd Century B.C. The early community was formed of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. There was a strong emphasis on monasticism. Requirements for entering in the community were in the beginning very simple such as leaving home, receiving instruction for a time and then taking vows.

The order of monks has always had a special role within the sangha. It has played an important part in preserving and spreading Buddhism. In many Buddhist groups, the discipline of monastic life is considered essential to those who seriously seek nirvana. In most Buddhist countries, monks are expected to live a life of poverty, meditation, and study. Monks are also expected to avoid sexual activity. Some Buddhists become monks for life, but others serve in the Sangha for only short periods of time. The monks wear special robes and are a common sight in all Buddhist countries.²⁹

The laity also has an important role in the life of the sangha. Members are expected to honor Buddha, to follow basic moral rules, and to support the monks. They are also expected

to pay special honor to images of Buddha and to objects that are associated with him.³⁰

Many of the laity have influenced the history of Buddhism. During the 200s B.C., Asoka, and Indian emperor, made Buddhism a kind of state religion. He established a tradition that has led to close relations between religion and government in many Buddhist countries. In 1956, B.R. Ambedkar, an Indian layman, led a mass conversion that brought more than 1 million former Hindus in India into the sangha.³¹

6 – Concept of God

In Buddhism, a universal God plays no part, and hence in many Buddhist nations no word exists for God who was neither affirmed nor denied by Buddha himself but simply ignored. Nor did Buddha claim to be other than a man. For early Buddhists, the Buddha was the same as other ascetics except for the fact that he was a teacher and was the founder of the way. Later on, however, Buddha was portrayed by his followers as divine, much superstition entered the religion, prayers were addressed to Buddha, rituals were developed, sacred relics were preserved in stupas and the belief in a succession of Buddhas was introduced.

About the concept of God in Buddhism, the Encyclopedia Americana writes:

"Buddhism was born in the womb of Hinduism but moved in a quite different direction on the question of God. Gautama Buddha (Siddhartha) taught a discipline of release from suffering through renunciation of craving. The path to "enlightenment" was a way of self-reliance with no expectation of divine aid. Thus the question of God became irrelevant. It is sometimes held that Gautama's teaching was atheistic. In any case, it seems that the issue of God was irrelevant to his doctrine. However, soon after his death Gautama's followers

virtually deified him. Theravada Buddhism – the Buddhism of southern Asia, which claims to be faithful to the original Buddhist tradition – extols many Buddhas.”

“As Buddhism moved northward into China and Japan, it developed a quite new form: Mahayana Buddhism, distinguished by its doctrine of the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva is the person who has completed the path of enlightenment and is entitled to break the painful cycle of reincarnation and enter into Buddhahood. But in an act of compassion he chooses to rejoin men in their historical existence in order to help them. Believers may pray to the merciful bodhisattvas. Mahayana Buddhism is sometimes as luxuriant in its metaphysical speculation as the earliest form of Buddhism was spare. The most celebrated of the bodhisattvas is Amida, who frequently surpasses Gautama Buddha in importance to believers. The faith in him as a gracious divine saviour has been compared with the Christian faith in Christ.”

7 – Sacred Writings

The sacred writings or Holy Scripture of Buddhism is known as Tripitaka or “Three Baskets”. This tripartite compendium was produced by the followers of Buddha after his death at three councils – the first was held immediately after the death of Buddha and last was held at the order of King Asoka in 244 B.C. Buddha himself wrote nothing. The traditions which had developed around the Dharma were collected and compiled in the Tripitaka or Three Baskets which consist of Vinaya Pitaka, Sutra Pitaka and Abhidharma Pitaka. They are respectively for the laymen, for monks and for philosophers.

The first part Vinaya – Pitaka (The Basket of Discipline) is considered to be the oldest. It deal with the rules for regulating the order of Buddhist monks. It is a good source for studying the early life and basic doctrines of the community.

The Sutra – Pitaka or the Basket of Discourses consists of dialogues between the Buddha and his disciples. It concerns the Dharma as it is revealed by the Buddha in answers to various questions put to him by his devotees. It is believed to have been arranged as far back as the 3d century. B.C. It is divided into sections and further into sub-sections.

Third is the Abhidharma – Pitaka or the Basket of Scholastic elaboration. It contains later and more systematic discussions of Dharma. It was compiled after the split of Buddhism in Theravada and Sarvastivada schools.

8 – Rituals and Holidays

The Buddhist clergy consists of monks and nuns. The temple is governed by an abbot or senior monk. The temple arranges lectures for the local population. In china and Japan, it also organizes schools and dispensaries and engages in social work. In Southeast Asia, monks give the laity sermons for right living. They are present at the tonsure ceremony of the child when he reaches puberty, at the entry of a young man into the order, and at funeral where they chant sutras and offer prayers. In Japan, Zen Temples are popular as retreats for meditation.

Ritual differs according to sect. Shingon ritual includes prayers, intoned by the priest and followed by the congregation; hymns; the worship of a variety of holy images; and the chanting by the priests, of sutras. Amidists worship statues of Amitabha (Amida) and less frequently those of the historical Buddha. The Zen sect, while concentrating on meditation, also include sutra readings in its ritual.

In Buddhism there is no international church comparable to Vatican in case of Roman Catholic sect of Christianity. However, the Chinese Buddhist Association, organized in 1953, is an effort, in China, to bring all clergy and laymen into one organization for the purpose of government supervision. In

Burma there is a council made up of leading Buddhists and laymen. In Thailand a "ruler of the Community" (sangharaja) is chosen by the heads of the main monastic groups, approved by the ministry of education, and appointed by the king.³²

Holy Days: There are no regular days of worship corresponding to the Christian Sunday. However, there are frequent lectures, festivals, and holy days.³³

Principal holy days are (1) the Buddha's birthday, celebrated, in China and Japan, usually on the 8th day of the 4th month. The day is marked by processions in which a statue of the Buddha is borne. The statue is bathed by ladling water or tea over it, a practice stemming from the legend that the historical Buddha was bathed at birth by heavenly beings. Paper flowers are scattered, and incense is burned. In Southeast Asia, Wesak, usually in May, commemorates the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death. (2) In Japan and China, the Feast of the Dead usually takes place on the 15th day of the 7th month. The spirits of the dead are taken from the tombs, returned to the temples for three days (Japan), where they are worshipped, and then once more returned to their tombs, (3) Vegetarian feasts (China and Japan) are usually held at midday on such occasions as the Buddha's birthday in honor of deceased patriarchs or eminent monks, deliverance from calamity, and prayers for one or another boon. Both laymen and clergy take part in these feasts. (4) In the countries of Southeast Asia, the New year's festival with its many colorful amusements, processions, and dances, and the offering of robes and alms to monks at the end of the rainy season, are important event in the Buddhist religious calendar.³⁴

9 – Schools or Divisions

Buddhism is not practiced in same way as it was in the era of the great Buddha. Different area (which are under its sway) show different adjustments, both to indigenous religions

and to local ideas. The main division in Buddhism are Theravada or Hinayana (Lesser vehicle) which prevails in the countries of South East Asia, and Mahayana (Greater vehicle) which dominates in North Asia. Lamaism in Tibet and Zen in Japan are the sects of the latter.

The Theravada or Hinyana: The word Theravada means way of the Elders. The Theravada school is the only one of the early Buddhist schools that has survived. Today, it is the dominant religious tradition in Burma, Kampuchea, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. The Theravadans emphasize the importance of Buddha as a historical figure, the virtues of the monastic life, and the authority of the Tripitaka.³⁵

Theravada Buddhism essentially is a discipline of salvation in which the individual is responsible for his own progress. It applies only to those who join the Community of monks and nuns. The monks and nuns concentrate on accumulating good karma by performing good acts. This karma is nontransferable and applies only to the one who performs the acts. The ideal toward which the practitioner strives is to become an arhat, or perfect saint, who practices the religious life for himself, not for others. The follower of Mahayana (Great Vehicle) applied the name Hinayana, or "Lesser Vehicle," to Theravada, which they considered to be an inferior means to salvation.³⁶

Mahayana: In contrast to Hinayana, Mahayana offers salvation to all, not to the few. Fundamental is the doctrine that all have the potential of enlightenment. The emphasis is on faith and belief in the Buddha, and this contrasts with the emphasis on discipline that characterizes Hinayana. Individual striving of Hinayana is replaced by a broad love of man manifest in the fundamental virtues of Mahayana-compassion, charity, and altruism.³⁷

The ideal being of the Mahayana is the bodhisattva, the "being destined for enlightenment," in contrast with the

Hinayana arhat who follows his lonely religious discipline. The bodhisattva is qualified for nirvana by virtue of the merit of his past good deeds, but he postpones his entry into this state in order to help all sentient beings toward enlightenment. There is a belief that the bodhisattva can transfer some of his merit to those needing it, and he is willing thus to sacrifice himself. He is the ideal of universal compassion (karuna) through self-sacrifice. The bodhisattva is thought to represent one or another trait of the Buddha – compassion, wisdom, virtue – and since these traits are numerous there are many bodhisattvas.³⁸

As for the Buddha himself, Theravada had conceived of him as a human teacher. He was an actual, if heroic, man, subject to the laws of life and death. Mahayana conceives of him as an eternal being, an embodiment of absolute truth and not subject to life and death. He may, however, manifest himself in time and in human form, as he did in the case of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. He does this to save humanity. He has appeared on numerous occasions before Shakyamuni and he will do so again in the future.³⁹

Most Mahayanists accept the Tripitaka, but they believe that their own scriptures reveal a higher level of truth. The Mahayanists teach various ways in which the laity, as well as monks, can achieve nirvana.

Zen: Zen is practiced chiefly in Japan. It originated in China, where it is called Chan. Zen accepts most Mahayan doctrines and emphasizes a close relationship between a master and his disciples. However, Zen has developed distinctive practices that are designed to lead to a state of spiritual enlightenment called satori. Many followers of Zen believe that satori comes in a sudden flash of insight. Others believe that satori must be achieved gradually through a long process of self-discipline, meditation, and instruction.⁴⁰

Lamaism: The form that Buddhism has assumed in Tibet and Mongolia is known as Lamaism. It is close to Mahayana school of Buddhism. Lama means "One who is superior". This is usually applied by the westerners to all members of the Tibetan clergy whereas the Tibetan people reserve this title for their ruler, Dalai Lama, for abbots of monasteries and for high – ranking teachers famous for learning. Lamaism is a vital force in Tibet where considerable population lives in Lamaseries which are religious establishments as well as seats of political influence and learning.

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CHAPTER 6

CONFUCIANISM

1 – Introduction

Confucianism is a way of life founded by Confucius (551 – 479 BC) who was a Chinese sage and wise man. It has traditionally been the substance of learning, the source of values, and the social code of Chinese as well as a religion and philosophy. Along with Buddhism and Taoism, Confucianism occupied prominent place in Chinese society as one of the great religions. For centuries, China's neighbours such as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam also accepted its influence.

Within 300 years of death of Confucius, his teachings were adopted officially by the Chinese state, and remained so until 1912. Thus for more than 2000 years Chinese political government, social organization and individual conduct was shaped by Confucian principles. In 1912, Confucian philosophy, as a basis of Government was dropped by the state. Until that the emperor of China was regarded as father of his people, appointed by heaven to rule, the superior man was ideal human and filial piety was the chief virtue accompanied by ancestor worship.

Although as an official creed or state cult, Confucianism has passed from the scene in modern China, yet its principles and paradigms remain embedded in Chinese culture, influencing even interpretations of Marxist and other philosophical perspectives. No accurate statistical data is available about the number of its followers today. However, on the basis of a fair estimate it can be said that number of its adherents may be approximately 15 millions.

2 – Confucius

Confucius (551 – 479 B.C.), the founder of Confucianism was the most famous teacher, philosopher and political scientist of ancient China. In the course of China's long history Confucius stands out as the most prominent figure. Without any claim to divinity or reference to supernatural, the teachings of Confucius have exercised such a molding influence that if the Chinese way of life were to be characterized in one word it would be "Confucian". He is revered among the Chinese as their supreme sage and foremost teacher. His temple is found in everyone of China's 2000 counties and few civilizations of the world can cite a comparable historical figure.

Confucius was born in 551 B.C. in the state of Lu, in today's Shandong province of china. Born into an impoverished noble family known as Kung, he was given name Chiu, meaning a hill, because there was a noticeable protuberance on his head. His literary name was Chung-ni. However, he is better known to the world by his surname Kung Fu-tzu meaning Kung the Grand Master. Confucius is the Latinized form of Kung Fu-tzu.

His father died when Confucius was 3 year old, and the little kid was left to the care of his young mother who was his father's second wife. Confucius grew up in great poverty. At the age of 15 he developed his interest in learning. He grew to unusual height by Chinese standards and people called him 'long fellow'. Married at the age of 19, he worked as a minor official but soon after left the job. Legends say that during young age Confucius called upon Lao-Tzu, the great Taoist philosopher, who was then serving as the keeper of imperial archives and had exchange of views.

In his fiftieth year, he was invited to take public office, and after one year as a magistrate, he was elevated to the highest position in the state open to a commoner. There he distinguished himself, but clashed with the ruling powers by his policy of strengthening the legitimate authority of the duke of Lu at the expense of the nobility. As a consequence of this,

Confucius was forced into exile for 13 years, during which, as he traveled among the central Chinese states, he continued teaching.¹

The number of disciples and pupils grew with Confucius' reputation as the sage-teacher of the day. Tradition speaks of 3000 pupils of whom 72 had mastered the 6 arts – rituals, music, archery, charioteering, literature, and mathematics. A number of his disciples obtained responsible positions in government on Confucius' recommendation. At 67, Confucius was welcomed back to Lu by the reigning prince at the suggestion of a minister who was a disciple of Confucius. He spent his remaining years editing the classical texts and continuing his teaching. In 479 B.C. Confucius died at 72 and was buried in Ch'ufu with great pomp. His grave has remained a center of pilgrimage ever since.²

Reflecting on his intellectual and spiritual progress, Confucius, late in life, said: "At 15, I set my heart on learning. At 30, I was firmly established. At 40, I had no more doubts. At 50, I knew the will of Heaven. At 60, I was ready to listen to it. At 70, I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing what was right" (Analects of Confucius, chap2 section 4).³

Confucius is revered as the Foremost Teacher of China, because basically he had a deep conviction in the native integrity and dignity as well as the equality and educability of all men. The well-known Confucian saying, "In education there are no class distinctions" (Analects of Confucius, chap. 15, section 38) follows naturally from the penetrating observation, "By nature all men are pretty much alike; it is by custom and habit that they are set apart" (Analects of Confucius, chap. 17, section 2). Confucius kept an open-door school, and young men were admitted on the sole consideration of their eagerness to learn. He saw abundant potential in each of the students, and in each he sought to develop the total man. The objective was

to help each student to develop his virtue and talent to the full, and to provide society and government with leaders.⁴

Confucius' method of instruction was personal and informal. Conversation with individual student or small groups seemed to be the favorite practice. Sometimes the same question was given different answers when different pupils asked it. When his students disagreed with him, he was not affronted and, sometimes, acknowledged that they could be right. In spite of his open-minded approach, however, he did insist on intellectual honesty and alertness. Confucius said: "Yu, shall I teach you what knowledge is? When you know a thing, say that you know it; when you do not know a thing, admit that you do not know it. That is knowledge" (*Analects of Confucius*, chap. 2 section 17). Confucius did not try to provide all the answers, even if he had them. Occasionally he merely raised the questions and required the students to find the answers. He said, "If I hold up one corner of a square and the student cannot work out the other three for himself, I won't go any further" (*analects of Confucius* chap. 7, section 8).⁵

Confucius readily won the affection and respects of his students, and an inner circle of disciples stood by him through good and bad fortune. Evidently tuition was collected from each student according to his financial circumstance. As it happened, the master's favorite disciple was Yen Hui, who was so poverty-stricken that he had "a single bamboo bowl of millet to eat, a gourdful of water to drink, living in a back alley" (*Analects of Confucius*, chap. 6, section 9). Yen Hui died before Confucius. When the news was broken to Confucius, he burst forth, as he rarely did, "Heaven has bereaved me, Heaven has bereaved me!" Upon Confucius own death, his disciples mourned him as they mourned the death of their parents. This teacher-student rapport and intimacy became a general pattern in China. When a teacher's day was instituted in modern China a few decades ago, September 28, Confucius legendary birthday, was chosen as the day.⁶

3 – Teachings

Unlike religious founders, Confucius was conservative and his duty, as he saw it, was to compile and transmit to posterity the old customs and manners of Chinese society. He claimed himself to be “a transmitter and not an innovator” (Analects chapter 7. section 1). However to consider him merely a transmitter would be a simplistic approach. It is the humility of the great philosopher to consider himself a transmitter. Actually he did not merely adopt certain ideas and ideals from antiquity, but made very original contribution to Chinese thought. His teachings have come down to later generation through the Analects (Conversations compiled by his disciples)

Concept of Jen: Central point or pivot of Confucian thought is humanity or Jen in Chinese. Believing in the perfectibility of all persons, Confucius focused his teachings on his concept of Jen – variously translated as “love,” “human heartedness,” and “virtue”. In the most complete sense, jen signified supreme moral achievement and excellence in character in accord with li (ritual norms) and the principles of chung (loyalty to one’s true nature). Shu (reciprocity), ye (righteousness), and hsiao (filial piety).

“Jen is to love man, Confucius said (Analects of Confucius, chap. 12, section 22). Jen might also be translated as benevolence, love, manhood, or human-heartedness. To Confucius, jen is the essence of humanity, that element in man which makes a man man and which distinguishes him from an animal. Jen is endowed by nature but should be cultivated by man, and the greatness of man is measured by the extent of the development of jen in him. Jen is so essential to man that the preservation of one’s jen is considered more important than the preservation of one’s life, and it is so central in the teaching of Confucius that the system might be said to be the philosophy of jen.⁷

The virtue of filial piety and those of loyalty and reciprocity were also stressed by Confucius, and they might be regarded as expressions of jen within the family and in social relations respectively. The Confucian golden rule has become well known – “Do not do to others what one does not wish to be done unto” (Analects of Confucius, chap. 12, section 2), and Confucius also said, “Wishing to be established oneself he assists others to be established; wishing to be successful oneself he assists others to be successful” (Analects of Confucius, chap. 6, section 28). The teachings of Confucius underline the kinship of all men and advocate the expression of the spontaneous goodwill toward one another. “Jen is to love men joyously and from the innermost of one’s heart, runs an ancient commentary on the Analects. The famous saying, “Within the four seas, all men are brothers,” (Analects of Confucius, chap. 12, section 5) comes from a disciple of Confucius.⁸

Coupled with the basic concept of jen and the several related virtues was Confucius’ emphasis on the cultivation of decorum and music – a twofold emphasis representing the master’s dual feeling for the moral and the aesthetic. The cultivation of decorum and music would afford an element of grace in the individual and civility in society. The proper cultivation and combination of jen and decorum were the requisites to the perfection of the individual and the restoration of order out of chaos, according to Confucius.⁹

Concept of Superior Man: The paragon of Confucian virtues is the Confucian concept of Chun-tzu or the ‘Superior Man’ or a noble or a princely man. Such a person may not necessarily be of noble birth, but he is definitely a person who conducts himself nobly.

Confucius clarified some of the qualities of the superior man by contrasting them with those of the inferior man. He said: “The superior man is always calm and at ease; the inferior man is always worried and full of distress” (Analects of

Confucius, chap. 7, section 36). "The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what is profitable" (Analects of Confucius chap. 4, Section 16). "The superior man makes demands on himself; the inferior man makes demand on others" (Analects of Confucius, chap. 15, section 20).¹⁰

The Superior Man comes into existence when he has developed in himself Five Constant Virtues, namely: right attitude, right procedure, right knowledge, right moral courage, and right persistence.

1. The right attitude is revealed through conduct. This helps the superior man to be in harmony with other men as it consists of co-operation and accommodation. This virtuous attitude is sometimes thought of as an inner law of self-control.

2. Right procedure comprises rules of conduct, etiquettes, and manners. The superior man knows how to sit, how to stand, how to talk, how to walk and how to control his facial expressions.

3. Right knowledge is the third constant virtue which the Superior Man inculcates in his personality. A person must be educated in order to respond in the exact way. The subjects that teach a man correct moral habits are the history, literature, and the civics that make up the Chinese classics. The Confucian goal is to grow gradually from memorized rules to habits.

4. Right moral courage is the fourth such virtue. The superior man should develop the moral courage necessary to remain loyal to himself and charitable toward his neighbors. His character is such that everything he does makes a worth-while contribution to society. Through his every deed, human relationships are improved.

5. Right persistence is the fifth constant virtue. Superior man has achieved the other four virtues, and he persists in his

achievement. He is unfailingly kind and helpful. He knows how to do that duty. Because he has developed the seeds of virtue within his nature, he is in harmony with everything in the universe. Because he has harmony within himself, he is part of cosmic harmony. That is why he is able to do the right thing at the right time always.¹¹

Concept of Native Goodness: Confucianists often speak of “perfect humanity.” It can be achieved by a person because of something the Confucianists believe to be present within each person, even at birth. This is a native goodness or kindly love that can be developed through feelings of helpfulness toward others. It was Mencius, the best-known Confucianist of a later period, who emphasized the native goodness of men. When he and Confucius spoke of man’s goodness, they meant that he was fit to live with other people – in the long run. There was quite a course of preparation first, as we have seen. Behavior, habits, thought patterns, and judgments had to be improved.¹²

As part of their effort to make right living easy for everyone, Confucianists have stressed five important personal relationships that require kindness and tact. These were once taught to every schoolboy, but that system of education was discontinued early in this century. Still, many Confucianists think that if everyone used the Five Constant Virtues in these five relationships, a true golden age would begin. If happiness or harmony is to exist, the ten people involved in these contacts must use virtuous attitudes and conduct toward each other:¹³

- (a) Husband and wife.
- (b) Father and Son
- (c) Elder brother and younger brother
- (d) Ruler and subject
- (e) Friend and friend

4 – Theory of Government

Confucian theory of government is simple: if the ruler is upright, the people will imitate him as the grass bends before the breeze, and people from neighboring tyrannous states will move into a righteously governed country, so that it will become powerful and dominate the land. This teaching was his substitute for the earlier doctrine of rebellion against an unrighteous ruler. Confucius accepted a personal government, not relying upon laws alone, for unrighteous men pervert any code of laws; and he maintained that reform must begin from above, that if a righteous ruler appoints capable subordinates, there will be good government, that taxation should be light and taxes should be remitted in times of poor harvests, that military matters are the least important feature of a state, and that war is rarely a benevolent activity.¹⁴

The Encyclopedia Americana summarises views of Confucius on governance as follows:

"Confucius' thoughts on government are grounded on his assumption of the inviolable sanctity of the individual. He believed that "The commander of a great army may be carried off, but the will of a common man cannot be taken from him" (Analects of Confucius chap. 9, section 25). Governments are formed not for the comfort and enjoyment of the ruler or even for the maintenance of law and order in the state, but for the happiness and enlightenment of the people. Thus government becomes inseparable from education, and the state may be compared with a schoolhouse, and the ruler with a schoolmaster. And the most effective type of instruction comes from the personal example on the part of the ruler."

"When a high minister asked about government, Confucius, employing a pointed pun, said, "To govern (cheng) is to set things right (cheng). If you begin by setting yourself right who will dare to deviate from the right?" (Analects of Confucius, chap. 12, section 17). Confucius was convinced that self-rectification on the part of the ruler is the key to good

government. With it all will go well; without it no matter what orders are given they will not be obeyed. Therefore, the first duty of a nobleman is "to cultivate himself so as to give peace and comfort to all the people" (Analects of Confucius, chap. 14 section 45), a kind of noblesse oblige. The Confucian political ideal might be called government by virtue. In practical terms, hereditary rulers should delegate all administrative power to ministers selected for their talent and virtue."

5 – Is Confucianism a religion?

Is Confucianism a religion? The World Book Encyclopedia answers the questions in the negative. It writes:

"Many people consider Confucianism a religion. But Confucianism has no clergy and does not teach the worship of a God or gods or the existence of a life after death. Confucianism can more accurately be considered a guide to morality and good government."

However, the views of Encyclopedia Americana are a little different. It writes:

"Although Confucianism has sometimes been called a religion, Confucius was not a founder of religion in the usual sense. He possessed a keen sense of a universal moral force, which he spoke of as heaven and the will of heaven, but talked very little about traditional religion. When a student asked about the worship of ghosts and spirits, Confucius said, "We don't know yet how to serve men, how can we know about serving the spirits?" In reply to the next question about death, Confucius said, "We don't know yet about life, how can we know about death?" (Analects of Confucius, Ch. 11, sect. 2)."

"Because of this note of avoidance, Confucius has been marked as a skeptic or an agnostic by some, and upheld as a thoroughgoing humanist by others. It is true that Confucius

regarded much of formal religion as superstition, and showed an eagerness to steer clear from the prevalent practices of witchcraft and occultism. But he had a profound feeling and appreciation for the genuine religious sentiment and spirit in life, just as he also found much aesthetic enjoyment in religious ritual."

"Even though Confucius never wanted to pose as prophet or messenger of God, it was to a heavenly mission that he dedicated his life. In times of frustration he placed his reliance on heaven; in times of grief he cried out to heaven, as he did when he heard of the death of Yen Hui. Confucius did not discourse on God in anthropomorphic terms and had little to do with organized religion, but he was himself what might be called a God-filled man. His reticence regarding religious matters might at least be partly explained by his saying, ' Look at Heaven there. Does it speak? The four seasons run their course and all things are produced. Does Heaven speak?' (Analects of Confucius, Ch.17, sect. 19)."

The authors of "Great Religions By Which Men Live" focus on this issue as under:

"Confucius did not seek to change or even to say much about the religious beliefs and practices of his day. He simply accepted them as they were-in so far as they served society. However, Confucius encouraged ancestor reverence or worship because he believed that it helped a person to develop proper attitudes and conduct. When a person offers gifts before a plaque in memory of a departed ancestor, he remembers his origin and his love. This experience draws from him feelings of respect and loyalty. For a person to carry filial piety beyond death shows an even greater degree of devotion than simply to honor living parents."

"Many Confucianists offered gifts and sacrifices in honor of the dead without ever believing that the spirits of the dead

were present. Confucianists found it worth-while because it helped them to build good habits of respect for others. At the same time, this adds strength to society. For these two reasons, Confucianism includes ancestor reverence among the important aspects of human behavior."

6 – Concept of God

The authors of the book, "The Great Religions By which men live", highlight the attitude of Confucius and his followers about concept of God as under:

"Confucius was not concerned with ideas about God and other problems in theology. But he had a real devotion to the ancient religious ceremonies, because he believed that they helped to build the habits and attitudes necessary to proper conduct. His personal religion was limited to reverence of ancestors, the moral life of the Five Constant Virtues, and recognition and reverence of a just Heaven above. For the most part, Confucius passed on the ancient Chinese religion, which was a blend of reverence for nature gods and ancestors."

"Large numbers of the Chinese people worship Heaven as a supreme god or as one of many gods, with interpretations as varied as those given to any other god. The worship of the Heaven-god has been an imperial worship, administered throughout Chinese history by the Emperor with seasonal ceremonies. Very few Confucianists, along with other educated Chinese, actively joined in worshipping Heaven. However, they tended to support the imperial ceremonies as being worth-while because they might help people to remember their origin."

"Many people have asked: Is Confucianism a religion? Confucius himself did not claim that what he was teaching was religion. He did not expect a revelation from Heaven as authority for what he taught. He told his followers that it was good to be in awe of Heaven because it was an intelligent,

creating force that moved in a perfectly natural way, through the Tao. Heaven was impartial and just. Later Confucianists added the belief that Heaven was a personal god, but one who exerted no influence on men or on the world he created. Still the major focus of Confucianism has always been on humanity. Mencius described the will of Heaven in terms of what it means to men by saying that being true to its nature is Heaven's way. Trying to be true to his nature should also be the way of men."

The Encyclopedia Americana enlightens us about the view-point of Confucius regarding religion and God as under:

"Confucius the great sage of China, taught a humanistic wisdom, a morality of ordered relationship, and a political ethic. Whether Confucianism is a religion or has a conception of God can be debated. Certainly the sayings of Confucius indicate a deference to Heaven which sometimes seems to be an equivalent of God. But Confucius is somewhat agnostic on metaphysical questions. Popular Confucianism has included worship of Heaven, of ancestors, and even of Confucius – as a sage, not usually as a god.

The Collier's Encyclopedia highlights Confucian concept of God as follows:

"In Confucian philosophy the terms Heaven and God are synonymous, implying a supreme spiritual being or state. Confucius was no metaphysician, and he said as little about his own religious beliefs as did Socrates. He seems to have had a deep trust in a supreme God Heaven, who, he believed, had commissioned him to teach his people and who would protect him in danger. His attitude towards the ancestral spirits and minor gods is not clear. Either he did not believe they existed or he considered them mere angels of Heaven. He accepted ancestor worship and the state religious cult because they had been ordained by the sages, but did not place any superstitious trust in them. He did maintain that requests for special favors

from these divinities are useless and that Heaven's will cannot be altered by human prayers. He refused to discuss the question of life after death."

Although Confucius never spoke clearly about concept of God and never worshipped any God, however he himself came to be worshipped after his death. The authors of "Great Religions by Which Men Live" write:

"Immediately following his death, Confucius was worshiped as an ancestor by members of his family. Others joined in the reverence, because in China a great teacher is given the same respect as a parent. It was always his teachings that interested his admirers, never any magical deeds or superhuman qualities. Confucius has been worshiped as a god, but this was the worship of the unschooled people, who believe that the important thing is to worship plentifully, not thoughtfully. Perhaps this kind of worship could be described as a special hero worship."

7 – The Sacred Writings

Beliefs and practices of Confucianism are based on ancient Chinese texts known as Wu Ching or Five Classics and Shih Shu or Four books compiled by disciples of Confucius. Five Classics are – Book of History, Book of Poetry, Book of Rites, Book of Changes, and Annals of Spring and Autumn. The first four of these classics are stated to have been edited by Confucius while the last one is believed to have been written by him.

The Four Books which were compiled by the disciples of Confucius after his death are: Analects of Confucius, the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean and the Book of Mencius. The Doctrine of the Mean is attributed to Tzu Ssu, the grandson of Confucius. The book of Mencius is a collection of the writings

and sayings of Mencius the most original thinker of the earlier Confucian philosophers and dates from the third century B.C.

The Analects (Conversations) is the most important source of material on Confucius and Confucianism. It comprises of sayings of Confucius and of some of his disciples.

The Four books and the Five Classics are the Confucian texts and have for centuries served as the syllabus for education in China – the Four books at the primary level and the Five Classics at the secondary level.

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CHAPTER 7

ZOROASTRIANISM

1 – Introduction

Zoroastrianism is the religion of ancient Persia founded by Zoroaster in Seventh century before Christ. Its sacred book is Avesta, also called Zend – Avesta. Today it does not claim more than 200,000 adherents, some 25,000 Gabars in Iran and around 150,000 Parsis in Bombay, India, who are steadily decreasing day by day since conversion is generally considered impossible.

If the religion founded by Zoroaster has little authority today, it had a very considerable influence in the past. Its philosophy and doctrines are said to have penetrated into Judaism during the Exile and, through Gnosticism, Christianity. Encyclopedia Americana identifies numerous and important resemblances between Zoroastrianism and Judaism. For example, figure of Satan in Judaism resembles Ahriman of Zoroastrianism, figure of Messiah (saviour) is similar to Zoroastrian Saoshyant, and the entities that came to surround Yahweh (God of Jews) such as His wisdom and His spirit are comparable to the archangels escorting Ahura Mazda. Other points of comparison between the two faiths include the doctrine of millennia; the last Judgment; the heavenly book in which human actions are recorded; the Resurrection; the Paradise; the Hell, etc. The Encyclopedia also compares Christianity and Zoroastrianism and holds that the former owes many features to the latter in addition to what the former inherited through Judaism. Among others are probably the belief in guardian angels, in resurrection, and in the heavenly journey of the soul.

2 – Zoroaster

Zoroaster is the founder of the ancient religion of Iran, known after his name as Zoroastrianism. He is also the author of Gathas, 17 religious poems embedded in the Avesta, the Holy Scripture of Zoroastrianism. The Greeks came to hear of Zoroaster from the magi, the priests of western Iran, around 400 B.C. The name Zoroaster is the Greek corruption of the Persian word Zartusht' (which means he of the Golden Light) or 'Zarathushtra' (Camel Driver).

The exact dates of Zoroaster's birth and death are not known. But the generally taken date of birth is 630 B.C. and date of death is 553 B.C. Zoroaster was born in Media or in Bactria and the name of his father was Pourushaspa.

At the age of 20 he left his family to wandering with a view to seek truth. According to a source, he lived in a cave and kept silent for seven years. At the age of 30 he is reported to have received a revelation through Archangel Vohu Manah (good thought) who bade him to mount to the presence of Ahura Mazda the 'Wise Lord' and supreme being. Ahura Mazda then instructed Zoroaster, called now to be a Prophet, in the doctrines and duties of the true religion. Thus the obscure reference in the Avesta to "the mountain and the tree of the two who discuss holy matters" alludes, according to the middle Persian Zoroastrian commentaries, seven revelations that Zoroaster received from his God between 30th and 40th year of his life.

Zoroaster's initial preachings were without success. However the turning point of his career occurred at the age of 42 when he succeeded in converting Vishtaspa, an Aryan king, to his faith. The conversion of King, Vishtaspa proved a blessing as the King put all his power behind the newly introduced religion. Zoroaster died, at the age of 77, in a holy war against the invading Turanians.

Under the Achaemenidac (550 – 330 B.C) Zoroastrianism was the state religion of Persia. Alexander's conquest in 331 B.C. brought disruption but the religion flourished again under the Sassanid dynasty (226 – 640 A.D.). With the conquest of Iran by the Muslims in 7th century A.D. Zoroastrianism finally gave way to Islam. Some of its followers remained in Iran, notably in Fars, and are known as Gabars; while many fled to India and settled in Bombay who were named Parsis after the name of their country of origin.

"The Chief features of Zoroaster's vision," says the Encyclopedia of Americana, "are his incisive solution of the problem of evil, of which he absolves God without detracting from his omnipotence; the pivotal significance of Truth in his system; the dignity he confers on man as a free and responsible agent; and the belief in a saviour and a resurrection into a state of eternal perfection."

3 – Teachings

The religion, which Zoroaster taught, was a unique ethical monotheism. He called the supreme God of his faith Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord) and claimed that he had been set to his prophetic mission by Ahura Mazda himself. His religion, according to him was perfect and final religion. Although Zoroaster gave all his devotion to one god, Ahura Mazda, who was supreme deity in his view, but conceded that Ahura Mazda is not unopposed. According to him, Ahura Mazda is opposed strongly by Ahirman (Angra Mainyu or the bad spirit).¹

A central feature of Zoroastrianism is its doctrine of dualism which personifies the opposing principles of good and evil and recognizes age-long war between good and evil. The powers of good are led by Ahura Mazda with bands of angels and archangels; whereas powers of evil are led by Ahriman with companies of demons and archfiends. Ultimately the powers of good would prevail.

For the first time in a world-religion, eschatology, the conception of "last thing", or the end of the world, comes into prominence. According to Zoroaster's teachings, a general resurrection will take place at the end of the present world order. The good and evil will then be subjected to an ordeal of fire and molten metal. Again, according to the teaching of Zoroaster, individual judgment follows shortly after death, and the state of the soul remains fixed thereafter until the general resurrection at the end of the world.²

Good and evil are not clearly defined, although Gathas (which are devotional hymns) provide us some indication of the practical difference between right and wrong. In creating man, Ahura Mazda gave him freedom to determine his own actions and hence the power to choose between right and wrong.

Zoroastrian doctrine of millennia is explained as follows by the Encyclopedia Americana:

"According to Zoroastrianism, the world's history is a contest between good and evil, or light and darkness, which will endure for 12,000 years, divided into four equal periods. The first period is one of spiritual existence. Conscious that Ahriman lives, Ahura Mazda makes the world as a spiritual creation before it assumes material form. When Ahriman discovers his enemy at work, he arouses to life his army of demons and fiends. In the second epoch Ahura Mazda creates the material world, which is invaded by Ahriman and his cohorts. The third period marks the contest for mastery between the rivals and the battle for the human soul until Zoroaster is born. The fourth and last epoch then begins. The prophet and his three sons, to be born in ages to come, the last being the Saoshyant, or Savior, preside over the final eon. As the world enters the stage of regeneration, with the resurrection and final judgment, Ahriman will form his hosts for a final battle. They will be defeated, and good will reign forever."

The maintenance of life and the struggle against evil form two basic principles of Zoroastrian code of ethics. In order to maintain life, one must marry and raise children; asceticism and celibacy to be condemned. To fight evil is to combat the demons and all beings (either human or animal).³

4 – Rituals & Practices

1- Yasna or sacrifice is the chief ceremony of Zoroastrianism. It is an offering of haoma, the sacred liquor together with water and milk in the presence of a fire in the honour of Ahura Mazda for the benefit of the dead or living. In the course of this ceremony, the main part of the Avesta is recited, including Zoroaster's Gathas!⁴

2- The Fire is an object of special reverence in Zoroastrian faith. It is kept burning in the temple and fed at fixed intervals, and embers from all the fires of the community are brought to it periodically for regeneration. Fire was thought to be all pervading as a kind of life fluid, coming down from heaven in the lightening.⁵

The matter of purifying the fire in their fire-temples is distinctive of Zoroastrians and is of more than ordinary interest. The more holy fire has to be compounded of sixteen different fires, all purified after a long and complicated ritual. One such fire is obtained from the cremation of a corpse.⁶

3- Dakhma: Another very important feature of Zoroastrian faith, apart from fire ritual, is the practice of disposing of the dead by exposing them to birds of prey in so-called towers of silence (dakhma) to avoid defiling the earth, fire or water.

A dakhma is, in essence, a stone floor with a circular brick or stone wall around it. The floor is built with a pit in the center, and is in three sections – the highest section for men, the next for women, and the lowest for children. The corpse is brought

to the dakhma by six bearers, followed by the mourners, all in white. After a final viewing of the remains by the funeral procession, the body is taken inside the Tower, laid in a shallow pit on its proper level, and partially uncovered by a thorough slitting of its clothes with scissors. Then vultures attack and eat away the flesh leaving the bones dry. The bones are then cast into the central well where they crumble away!⁷

4- Priesthood: The ceremonial life of the Parsis is regulated by the priesthood, which is hereditary and traces its descent to the ancient tribe of magi. Their high priests are called dasturs, and many of them are highly educated; yet the ceremonies in the fire temples are not performed by them, but by a specially-trained class of priests, called mobeds, whose ritual of initiation is very exacting and who keep themselves constantly purified by cleansing rites. These priests memorize fully half of the Avesta, without, as a rule, understanding a word of it, since it is composed in what is now a dead language.⁸

5 – The Holy Scripture

The sacred book of the Zoroastrian faith, the Avesta, is more or less a miscellany, without cohesion; indeed, it is but the remnant of a far larger body of literature, a great part of which has perished. The portion of the Avesta, most important for us, is the Yasna, because it contains the Gathas (17 religious poems) or 'Hymns of Zoroaster,' written in an ancient dialect (Zend) and containing our only really trustworthy information on his life and thought. The other portions of the Avesta – the Vispered, the Vendidad, the Yashts or 'songs of praise' and the Kordah Avesta or 'little Avesta' are less reliable, because of their latter date and change in emphasis and world-view.⁹

6 – Concept of God

In theory, Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion. According to the official creed of the Avesta, Ahura Mazda (or

Ormuzd, as he came to be called) was always adored as a supreme deity, Omni potent, transcendent having no equal. He was held to be too great and spiritual to have images made of him. But very soon, the old Aryan nature worship, which Zoroaster had condemned, crept back into the faith. Even Zoroaster himself was raised to the status of the deity and a highly worshipful attitude came to be taken toward him. To the adoring eyes of his later followers, that very human man, "the shepherd of the poor," who appears in the Gathas, became a Godlike personage, whose whole existence was attended by supernatural manifestations. Heaven and hell were thrown in commotion by him. His coming was known and foretold 3000 years before by the mythical primeval bull!¹⁰

Although Zoroaster gave all his devotion to one god, Ahura Mazda, who was supreme deity in his view, but he conceded that Ahura Mazda was not unopposed. According to him, Ahura (wise lord) is strongly opposed by Ahriman (Angra Mainyu, the Evil Spirit). This led to the concept of dualism or two gods in Zoroastrianism – god of good and god of evil. This doctrine of dualism has been beautifully elaborated by Encyclopedia Americana as under:

"A central feature of Zoroastrianism is its doctrine of dualism, which personifies the opposing principles of good and evil and recognizes the universal sway of these hostile forces. The power of good are led by Ahura Mazda (the Wise Lord); those of evil by Ahriman (Angra Mainyu; the Evil Spirit). Each has an array of warriors. On one side are bands of angels and archangels; on the other, companies of demons and archfiends. Under the general name of Amesha Spentas (Immortal Holy Ones) are grouped the six archangels who personify fundamental virtues and abstract ideas, and whose names, represent Good Mind, Excellent Truth, Wished for Kingdom, Devotion, Wholesomeness, and Non-Death. In addition there are a number of angles and lesser divinities called Worshipful Ones. In the opposing army a crowd of lesser fiends and

demons (including the daeva Aeshma) accompany the six archfiends.”

During Sassanid period, another school of thought developed a unique principle, Zurvan or Infinite time. In fact, although the Avesta has little trace of it, Zurvan was the supreme god in Iran at the time of Mani (d. 276 A.D.), for the Manichaens never called their god Ahura Mazda but, sometimes, Zurvan. Ahura Mazda was in Manichaeism the name of the primal man.¹¹

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CHAPTER 8

TAOSIM

1 – Introduction

“Tao” means “the way” and “Taoism” means “the way of life”. It is a philosophy as well as a religion of China which is stated to have been founded by Lao Tse in sixth century B.C. a little earlier than Confucianism. In importance, however, Taoism has been second to Confucianism.

As a philosophy its influence has been tremendous. It has supplemented and enriched Confucianism and contributed to the growth of Buddhism. It has provided spiritual inspiration and moral standards for the Chinese, while imbuing Chinese poetry, landscape painting, and other art forms with its love of nature and sense of serenity. As both a philosophy and a religion Taoism has supplied strength and refuge to the old, the poor, and the oppressed, and also to rebels and secret societies.¹

Comparing Taoism with Confucianism, the world Book Encyclopedia says: “According to Confucianism, people can live a good life only in a well-disciplined society that stresses attention to ceremony, duty, and public service. The Taoist ideal, on the other hand, is a person who avoids conventional social obligations and leads a simple, spontaneous, and meditative life close to nature.”

The Authors of “Great Religions By which Men Live” compare the founders of Taoism and Confucianism as follows:

“Both Lao tse and Confucius were concerned with the social and moral weaknesses of their generation. Lao-tse met the challenge of life with the radical view that the institutions and customs of his day were unnatural and thus to be avoided. Confucius, a true conservative, taught that the best from the

past should be kept and properly improved. In the past lay the key to the present and the future. He did not seek to start either a new religion or a new system of ethics."

"For one thing, their personalities were very different. In all the problems they faced, the dissimilarity of their outlooks determined the differences in the solutions they gave. While Lao-tse tended to be an "individualist," Confucius believed that man's entire responsibility was social. Man was not man apart from his fellows. Harmony for man, therefore, meant harmony with other men. Lao-tse believed that man's responsibility was to understand himself and to get himself directly in harmony with the Tao. But Confucius believed that man's responsibility was to cooperate with others and to perform the duties society expected of him. Such co-operation was rooted, of course, in the Tao, but the human level of experience was the medium through which human beings expressed their belonging to the universe. When a person developed his capacity for harmony with his fellow human beings, then he could understand universal harmony."

2 – Founder

The alleged founder of Taoism, Lao-tse or Lao Tzu, is said to have been born in Honan, a province of China, about 604 B.C. who served at the important post of curator of the imperial archives at Lohyang, the capital city. Stories tell us that he was visited by Confucius and that the two great philosophers of the day conversed together. Tradition attributes to Lao Tzu the authorship of 'Tao Te Ching' a 5000 word fascinating little book which forms the bible of Taoism. Another philosopher Chuang Tzu, in 4th and 3rd century B.C., raised Taoism to new heights with his ideas and philosophy.

3 – Teachings

1- 'Tao' means simply 'way' or 'way to go'. It has also been translated as 'nature' or 'the way of nature'. It is the way the universe moves and has its being. Tao is all-inclusive, everlasting and good, but indescribable. It is not a thing but creative process. A person who grasps the meaning of Tao follows the doctrine of Wu-Wei (doing nothing) which urges non-interference with nature. Man is happy and free when he preserves his own nature by avoiding anxiety about life and death and living a simple and spontaneous life. It is through gentleness, humility and non-struggle that a man gains nobility of soul, serenity of mind, harmony of emotions and freedom of spirit. Lao Tse is reported to have said:

"You seek wisdom, goodness, and contentment. In the ways you are trying to attain them, you are blind and foolish. Can you not see that wisdom is trust, goodness is acceptance, and contentment is simplicity? This is the way of the world."2

2- According to Taoists, if Tao were allowed freely to operate within men, then everything would be at its best, for the Tao is the way of perfection: perfect balance, perfect harmony. It is the way – there is no other.3

The Tao is the source of all created things. It is responsible for bringing all things into existence, even the Chinese gods. The Tao itself has never been considered as a god. The Tao is reality. It existed before there was any universe. It created all existence and continues to keep it in operation through the release of its energy. Rise and fall, flow and ebb, existence and decay – through such an alternation of the Tao's energy, existence began and will continue. Even so, the Tao never forces a person to act in a certain way. The Tao simply operates. That is all.

3- Taoism was so named because Lao-tse and his followers were insistent upon the Tao as the way of life. "Getting back to nature" was their goal – "nature" being

understood to mean the natural and proper way of all things. So completely did the early Taoists follow this line of belief that they went about China calling for the end of human ceremonies and customs and even civilization itself, because these were the result of interfering with nature.⁴

4- The early Taoists frequently referred to a past Golden Age," when men had lived in peace and harmony because they were natural, free from artificiality, simple – in short, men of Tao. The good things that all men seek had been lost when that age had passed. Men would find them only when they returned to the simplicity and utter naturalness that had characterized the Golden Age.⁵

"Nature" is the key to all the Taoists' answers to the questions life makes us ask. A person's highest good and his sincere happiness are to be found through conforming with the way of all nature, the Tao. When one is natural, he is relaxed within and able to accept what life offers. When one is ambitious or aggressive, he contradicts his true nature. In the ensuing civil war within himself, he strikes his possible happiness a fatal blow.⁶

5- According to the Taoists, there are three things – three treasures they called them – that are the supreme guides of man to Tao, which are love, moderation and humility. Being loving, one can be brave; being moderate, one be ample; not venturing to go ahead of the world, one can be the chief of all officials."⁷

6- Lao-tse is stated to have defined the man of Tao as under:

He is cautious, like one who crosses a stream in winter;

He is hesitating, like one who fears his neighbors;

He is modest, like one who is a guest;

He is yielding, like ice that is going to melt.⁸

7- Chuang-tse was fishing one day when some high officials of the government of his province came to visit him. As he continued to fish, they flattered him by speaking of his wisdom and offered him a high governmental post, which would bring him recognition and respect from many people. Without interrupting his fishing, Chuang-tse asked the gentlemen if they knew of the sacred tortoise, dead over three thousand years, which the prince kept safely enclosed in a chest on the altar of his ancestors. Then he asked them, "Do you think this tortoise would rather be dead and have its remains revered, or be alive and wagging its tail in the mud of its pond?"

"It would rather be alive," they replied, "wagging its tail in the mud."

"You may be on your way," said Chuang-tse. "I prefer to wag my tail in the mud in my own pond".⁹

8- Chuang-tse once told a story about a man who struck out on his own, instead of yielding in confidence to the Tao. This man was so afraid of his shadow and he so disliked his own footsteps that he determined to get away from them. However, the more he moved, the more footsteps he made. And despite his fast running, he never left his shadow behind. So he decided that he was going too slowly. He ran his fastest, without pausing for rest. As a result, he weakened and finally died. He did not know that he could have lost his shadow in the shade and put an end to his footsteps by keeping still. Foolish indeed was he. Woe to the reformers and the moralists who come preaching of purity and goodness, says Chuang-tse – they run from their own shadows.¹⁰

9- The man who lives by Tao will not use force, for force defeats his higher aims. The man who tries to shape the world into what he wants it to be damages himself and others in the attempt. He who insists or strives for something gets involved in his own efforts and merely loses the value of the thing he seeks. Thus he damages his ideal, defeats his purpose, and fails miserably.¹¹

10- Man should learn from a pond of muddy water. No amount of stirring can clear it. But when it is left alone, it becomes clear by itself. So it is with men and with nations. Rulers particularly must understand this. Lao-tse once said that one should govern people as he would cook a small fish – gently. Too much cooking, too much handling make it fall to pieces or destroy its flavor. As for the people who presume to teach others, they must also grasp this idea.

He who thinks he knows a lot about others may think he is wise. But only he who knows himself has hold upon the true and the important. The person who is truly wise is the one who does not know that he is wise. Thinking that we know, when actually we do not, is a special sickness to which all men are prone. Only when we become sick of such conceit and fraud can we cure ourselves of the sickness.¹²

4 – Religious Organisation and Practices

Taoism has a hereditary priesthood. The priests conduct public rituals, during which they submit the people's prayers to the gods of folk religion. The chief priest, who is in a trance, prays to divinities on behalf of the worshipers. These divinities are not former human beings but represent aspects of the Tao.¹³

The members of some Taoist groups have sought to attain immortality through magic, meditation, special diets, breath control, or the recitation of scriptures. The Taoist search for

knowledge of nature has led many believers to pursue various sciences, such as alchemy, astronomy, and medicine.¹⁴

5 – Concept of God

Taoists do not believe in God. According to them, there is no personal God and such gods as men imagine are mere emanations of Tao which gives life to all things. Tao is being. However, Taoism could not maintain its purity when it came into contact with the world especially when from 4th century rivalry between Taoists and Buddhists started in China. Later Lao Tse became a divinity and indeed one of a Trinity (Jade Emperor and Ling Pao being other two members) each worshipped in the form of idols. Soon there was worship of the forces of nature: the stars, the sun, the moon and a thousand other deities among whom Confucius was also one.

The universe is believed to be kept in balance by the opposing forces of yin and yang that operate in dynamic tension between themselves. Yin is female and watery: the force in the moon and rain which reaches its peak in the winter; yang is masculine and solid: the force in the sun and earth which reaches its peak in the summer. The interaction of yin and yang is believed to shape all life.¹⁵

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CHAPTER 9

JAINISM

1 – Introduction

Jainism is an ancient Indian religion which arose as heresy or revolt against the ritualism of Hinduism. Mahavirah is stated to be its founder. It won adherents only in India and survived every assault directed against it by the Brahmins. It has continued to exist till today and its adherents are mainly found in India. Number of its followers is not more than 10 million although some conservative estimates place it at 6 million. Jain derives its name from ancient prophets known as Jinas meaning “those who overcome”. Such prophets or great masters called Tirthankaras of Jainism are 24 in number among whom Mahavira is the last in line.

Early in the history of the faith, the Jains divided on the question of wearing clothes. The Shvetamharas, or “the white-clad” were the liberals, who took their stand on wearing, at least one garment, while the stricter and more conservative Digambaras got their name from their insistence on going about “clad in atmosphere”. Still another Jain sect, the Sthanakvasis, tolerates no idols and have no temples. They worship “everywhere”, mainly through meditation and introspection. The Jains form an almost closed circle of believes, no longer growing in number.¹

A broom and bowl are important symbols of Jainism, and a Jain monk always carries both with him. The broom represents the Jain belief that all life is sacred. A monk uses it to sweep aside insects so he will not step on them. He carries the bowl to collect food for himself.²

2 – Mahavira

Mahavira is believed to be the founder of Jainism. His real name was Nataputta Vardhamana While Mahavira is his title of honour which means the "great hero".

He was the 24th and last known of the line of teachers called Jains, or "conquerors" (of the woes of existence), who are founders of the Jain (Jaina) religion. Mahavira is believed to be a historical person, whereas the Jinas who preceded him probably are legendary.³

Mahavira was born in 599 B.C. at Kaundinyapura near modern Patna in the house of a Raja who belonged to Kshatriya caste of Hindu nobility. Mahavira married and had a daughter. At the age of 30 he formally enunciated his princely life and became ascetic. He plucked out his hairs and thereafter wandered naked, subjected his body to all kinds of discomforts even tortures. In order to avoid killing he allowed vermin to inhabit his body. He wandered for 12 long years in the villages, forests and plains of central India in quest of release from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (the Hindu doctrine of transmigration of soul). His two fundamental beliefs were: that practicing ahimsa is essential for purification of one's own soul, and that practicing the rigorous asceticism is essential for keeping one's soul away from evil. At last, after a long wandering and undergoing a severe discipline of self-torture, he achieved enlightenment at the age of 42 while in meditation. He thus entered into the spiritually emancipated state of 'Kaivalya' which means absolute aloneness. After achieving Nirvana or Moksha (deliverance), he became a Tirthankara - title meaning 'ford-maker' (over the ocean of existence). Hence forth he reorganized the Jain monastic community and started teaching and preaching his religion.

Conversions to his way of life followed. And, after thirty years of successful teaching and organizing, at the age of seventy – two, he "cut asunder the ties of birth, old age, and death," and was "finally liberated, freed from all pains." He is

now, according to all the Jain sects, enjoying supreme bliss in a place of reward, called "Isatpragbhara", in a state no longer subject to rebirth.⁴

3 – Teachings and Beliefs

Jainism rejects the authority of early Hindu Vedas and does away with many of the Hindu deities whose place is taken by 24 Immortal saints or Tirthankaras. It despises caste distinctions and modifies two great Hindu doctrines of Karma and transmigration. Jain philosophy is based on ahimsa or non-injury to living – beings. Jains believe in sacredness of all life and refuse to kill even the smallest insect. In their view, non-injury to any or all living creatures is the highest religion. Vegetarianism is its corollary in diet. The avoidance of taking life was and is so strictly adhered to by advanced Jain ascetics that they eventually succumb from starvation. It was perhaps in reaction to such extremes that the Buddha, who was alleged at one time to have been a Jain monk, advocated a less ascetic way of life.

Its code of ethics is based on sympathy and compassion for all forms of life. Of all the Indian religions, rather of all the world religions, Jainism practices the most extreme form of non-violence. It influenced the philosophy of great Indian leader Mahatma Gandhi who was a great preacher of non-violence.

Jains also believe that every living thing consists of an eternal soul called the Jiva and a temporary physical body. The eternal Jiva is imprisoned in the body as a result of involvement in worldly activities. To free the Jiva, one must avoid such activities as much as possible. Each Jiva is reincarnated in many bodies before it is finally freed. After being freed, it exists eternally in a state of perfect knowledge and bliss.⁵

4 – Religious Organisation

Jain monks and nuns represent the ideal of Jainism. These men and women try to separate themselves from the everyday world. They are not allowed to kill any living creature. They carry brooms to sweep all surfaces to avoid crushing insects accidentally. Monks may not own any property except a broom, simple robes, bowls for food, and walking sticks. They may not live in buildings except for brief periods, and they must beg for all their food. The highest goal for a monk or nun is to cease all bodily activity and die of starvation, but this rarely happens.⁶

There are “Five great vows” prescribed for monks which include: ahimsa or non-injury to any living being; speaking truth; renunciation of taking of anything not given; renunciation of all sexual pleasure, and final one is the renunciation of all attachments to all things living or non-living, small or great.

Other followers of Jainism are the laity (people who are not monks or nuns). The laity support the monks and nuns and obey less strict rules of conduct. Most of the laity engage in business activities because such occupations do not directly involve killing any living thing. They look forward to becoming monks or nuns themselves in a future life.⁷

5 – Concept of God

Mahavira taught a completely materialist view of reality. Soul-matter and nonliving matter must be separated for liberation (Kaivalya) of the soul to occur. Conquering through austerities, the “emancipated” Jina is able to serve as a guide to monks, nuns, and laity in their struggle for a similar absolute freedom. For the followers of Mahavira there is no acceptance of a supreme being in its commonly accepted meaning. “Atheism” such as this brought criticism from the orthodox Hindus of both Mahavira’s period and of later eras.⁸

Although Mahavira did not teach of any deity, yet after his demise legends raised him to the status of a deity. Stories

developed about his divine origin and attributes. His birth was regarded as supernatural. He descended from heaven to enter the womb of a woman. He grew up sinless and was omniscient. However, with passage of time these legends evaporated and Mahavira was declared to be the last among 24 prophets or great masters called Tirthankaras.

Thus we can safely say that the Jains do not believe in any Supreme Deity or universal God not even in any deity. They honour the 24 teachers or Tirthankaras as holy persons but do not believe that they are gods.

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CHAPTER 10

SHINTOISM

1 – Introduction

It is the native religion of Japan which combines an emphatic oneness with natural forces and loyalty to the reigning dynasty as descendants of the sun-goddess, Amaterasu-Omikami. Traditional Shinto followers stressed obedience and devotion to the emperor and aggressive patriotism. About four million people practice traditional Shinto according to an estimate.

Shinto means the “ways of gods” it is Chinese word ‘Shin Tao’ which is transliteration of Japanese Kami-no-Michi. Shinto ceremonies appeal to the Kami (superior beings) the mysterious forces of nature who manifest in topographical features such as mountains, trees, stones, springs and caves. Shinto focuses on purity, devotion and sincerity. This religion or the way of the gods has basically three elements: Kinship with nature, the importance of purity, and devotion to Japan. It does not have an elaborate philosophy, and unlike other religions, it does not stress life after death.

2 – Origin and History

It is reported in the classical myths which have been recorded in the Kojiki (712 A.D.) and Nihongi (720 A.D.) how the Sun goddess, Amaterasu, sent her grandson to be the first ruler of the islands. This is what she told him: “I think that this land will undoubtedly be suitable for the extension of the heavenly task, so that its glory should fill the universe. It is, doubtless, the center of the world.” Therefore, the Japanese have a high estimate of islands of Japan which have divine origin and the emperors of Japan who are direct descendants of the Sun-Goddess, and so also the Japanese people. This explains why they are so devoted to their emperor, their country and their

countrymen. Each Japanese is interested in all Japanese and wishes for others what he wishes for himself. Loyalty and faithfulness to their country and the emperor is the greatest virtue of the Japanese. Japan is regarded as full of gods and polytheism is unlimited.

In the sixth century A.D. Buddhism came to Japan from China Via Korea alongwith Chinese culture and it started influencing Japanese way of life. With the adoption of Chinese writing, the myths and lore, which were previously transmitted orally, were recorded in two books: Kojiki (712 A.D.) and Nihongi (720 A.D). As the oldest surviving histories these became the chief documents of Shinto. The word Shinto was coined to distinguish the traditional religion from Buddhism. The colloquial term, kami-no-michi, means "divine-power-way." A political attempt was made to settle the conflict between Buddhism and Shinto by combining the two under the name Ryobu Shinto (Two-aspect Shinto). Shinto deities were declared to be avatars of various Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Shinto shrines were then merged with Buddhist temples, and priests performed rites of both religions. With the passage of time this political expedient" collapsed. In the 17th century scholars rediscovered the Kojiki, Nihongi, and other early documents, revived Shinto, and exalted the emperor as the descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu. Kamo Mabuchi, Motoori Norinaga, and Hirata Atsutane laid the foundations of modern Shinto.¹

In the Meiji era (1868-1912), Shinto was divided into State Shinto—defined as patriotic ritual incumbent on all Japanese—and Sect or Religious Shinto. Any government employee might be called on to officiate at some ritual of State Shinto, and all schoolchildren were compelled to participate regularly, regardless of their religious affiliation. At the end of World War II, State Shinto was abolished and Emperor Hirohito disavowed his divinity in 1946. Sect Shinto has expanded enormously. Popular cults include Tenrikyo, a faith-healing sect, Konkokyo, Kurozumikyo, Odoru Shukyo, Mioshie, and Seicho-no-ie. The

former national shrines are now maintained as historical monuments.²

3 – Beliefs and Worship

Shintoists have never been concerned with an idea of an afterlife. There are no teachings about a life beyond the grave, and Shintoists do not pray for a future bliss. They pray for much more specific things such as food, happiness the welfare of the nation, and to express thanks.

Shintoists worship many deities, which are called kami. According to Shinto, kami are the basic force in mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, and other parts of nature. Shinto also considers kami the basic force in such processes as creativity, disease, growth, and healing. Many worship at small shrines in their homes. Roadside shrines dedicated to certain kami are also common. Some public shrines consists of several buildings and gardens. Individual worshipers recite prayers and offer gifts of cakes and flowers to the Kami.³

On certain occasions, Shinto priests lead ceremonies called matsuri. One of the most important Shinto rituals is the Great Purification Ceremony. It consists of a confession of sins committed by individuals and by the nation as a whole, followed by a request that the kami remove the impure conditions caused by these sins. Other ceremonies deal with such basic goals as long life, peace, abundant harvests, and good health.⁴

Shintoists use, not images of their gods, but symbols of them. On their god shelves are tablets or slips of paper on which are written the names of the gods they wish to honor. A light burns there, and the family places flowers and a bit of wine or rice cake there daily, if possible. Loyal Shintoists try to hold brief prayer ceremonies before the god shelf each day.⁵

Shinto priests, who may live just as other men do, lead official services on important religious days. They do not preach at regular services each week. They are responsible for protecting the sacred objects in the shrines. Frequently they have another occupation besides the priesthood.⁶

Shinto shrines have a special gateway, called a torii. No one knows exactly how this attractive structure came to be a part of the shrines; its real origin is lost in antiquity. Probably it was used years ago for hanging the birds that were offered as a sacrifice to the Sun Goddess. Although it no longer serves that purpose, yet a torii stands at the entrance to every Shinto shrine. Sometimes there is a row of them. The torii is a distinctive symbol of the Shinto religion.⁷

4 – Concept of God

Most Shintoists speak of “the gods.” For the majority of Shintoists, there are many gods and goddesses, who represent all human interests and all phases of nature. Thoughtful Shintoists may speak of the divine. To them, there is a divinity in all natural things – for there is nothing supernatural. This quality of the divine is in man as well, although he does not understand how it can be so. The reverence paid to many gods and to the spirits of heroes and famous men is simply a recognition of the divinity that is present in all life. The more thoughtful persons in modern Japan have come to believe in one God. Or, they might explain it as a belief in one source for the divine quality of all life. But Shinto has largely thrived on the belief in many gods.⁸

The Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, is the center of Shinto worship. Her brother, the Storm God, is widely honored, and so is the Food Goddess. All the gods are descendants of the original divine pair, who gave birth to the islands of Japan, as well as to the hosts of other deities. They are called Izanagi, the Sky Father, and Izanami, the Earth Mother. Japanese

mythology fills in the details of the story of creation, including the account of how Izanagi ordered Amaterasu to rule over the Plain of High Heaven. For many years, Amaterasu has been the symbol of everything most precious in the development of the Japanese people.⁹

At the time when Amaterasu dispatched her grandson to rule over Japan, she gave him the three most sacred objects in the Shinto religion. The imperial jewels, which are kept in the Tokyo palace, are symbols of obedience and gentleness. The sword, kept in the shrine at Owari, represents wisdom and justice. And the mirror, housed in the Ise shrine, symbolizes righteousness and purity. Shintoists have believed that the myths and objects serve to remind them of the divine mandate by which their emperors rule.¹⁰

The Encyclopedia Americana explains Japanese concept of God as under:

"In Japan the native religion involved belief in literally thousands of gods, who represented forces of nature and spirits of emperors and heroes. The indigenous Shinto (literally "Way of the Gods") mingled with Buddhism to form a great variety of sects. Gods or spirits were called kami ("superior beings"), and they were too numerous to be organized into a pantheon or hierarchy. But most important of the kami was Amaterasu, the goddess of the sun, from whom the imperial family claimed descent."

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CHAPTER 11

SIKHISM

1 – Introduction

Sikhism is the religion professed by approximately 20 million Indians called Sikhs who live mainly in the East Punjab (India). The word "Sikh" is a Hindi word which means "disciple". The Sikhs believe in One God who is the creator of the universe and who has never been incarnate in any form. They also believe in the equality of all human beings and are strongly opposed to caste system. The Holy Book of the Sikhism is the Guru Granth Sahib and founder of Sikhism is Guru Nanak. It is perhaps the youngest religion of the world which came into existence in the 16th century A.D. Some people regard it as a sect or branch of Hinduism.

The Sikhs have no country of their own. When British India was partitioned in 1947 A.D. into Hindu Bharat and Muslim Pakistan, Sikhs opted to live with Hindus in Bharat. The Sikhs soon realized their mistake when they were persecuted, terrified and maltreated by Hindu majority. So they started an active movement for independence of Punjab from India. However, their movement was ruthlessly crushed by the Indian army which entered into their Golden Temple at Amritsar. After murder of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh security Guards, there was an outburst against the Sikh community in India in which Hindu fanatics killed thousands of Sikhs. Presently the Sikh movement for independence is not active.

2 – Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikhism and its first guru (teacher) was born in 1469 A.D. at the village of Talwandi about 30 miles from Lahore in the West Punjab (Pakistan) and died in 1538. His parents were Hindus who belonged to Hindu caste of

Khatti (ancient Kashatriya caste) of fairly high social rank. He was married in young age and had two children. He was employed in a granary by the government of Muslim rulers of the Punjab and served at Sultanpur. He had an associate and friend of his young days Mardana, a Muslim of Talwandi, who was to play an important role in the future career of Nanak.¹

Nanak from the very young age was given to meditation and religious speculation. In his thirties he left his family and job to become wandering preacher. He set out on a long tour of northern and west India in company of Mardana. Legend says that late in life, Nanak along with Mardana also visited Makkah and entered into Holy Kaaba in the traditional dress of Muslim pilgrims. Later they visited Madinah and then went to Baghdad. From this journey Nanak is reported to have received a great spiritual and religious experience which was destined to influence his teachings as a religious preceptor.²

From about 1520 A.D. to 1538 A.D. till his death Nanak settled in Punjab village of Kartarpur, surrounded by his disciples teaching his newly discovered beliefs. One of his disciples was Angad whom Nanak named as his spiritual successor after his death. Many legends concerning Nanak's life and deeds which grew up after his death were collected in anthologies.

Nanak had studied both Hinduism and Islam and was influenced by Hindu reformers particularly by Sant Kabir. Guru Nanak emphasized fundamental truth of all religions and his mission was to put an end to religious conflict. He condemned the formalism both of Hinduism and Islam and believed in the unity of Godhead. He designated the one God, in whom he believed, as Satnam (the true name) who had created all men equal. He denounced caste differences and insisted upon the dignity of labour. He reacted against rituals and placed individual conduct before them. The core of his beliefs was Hindu but he was also greatly influenced by Islam. This mixture

of faith is evident throughout Sikhism, although it contains some strikingly original elements also. Nanak retained Hindu doctrine of the transmigration of souls, together with its usual corollary, the law of Karma. He believed in and preached the sovereignty of the One God, the creator. Guru Nanak called his God Satnam (the true Name) and taught that the True Name is manifest in manifold ways and in manifold places and is known by manifold names; but He is eternally One – the Sovereign and Omnipotent God. If any name is to be used, let it be Hari (the kindly). In this article of Nanak's creed, a strong Islamic element is evident. He is said to have summarized his religious view – point in the statement: "I have appeared in this age to indicate the way unto men. I reject all sects, and know only One God Whom I recognise in the earth, the heavens and in all directions."³

Nanak is regarded first Guru of Sikh religion who was succeeded by nine gurus as official heads of the Sikh religion, namely: Angad (1538 – 1552), Amardas (1552 – 1574), Ramdas (1574 – 1581), Arjan Mal (1581 – 1606), Har Gobind (1606 – 1645), Har Rai (1645 – 1661), Har Kishan (1661 – 1664), Teg Bahadar (1664 – 1675) and Gobind Singh (1675 – 1708). The fifth Guru Arjan Mal or Arjan completed the artificial lake of Amritsar and the Golden Temple on its island. He also completed the Adi Granth, the holy scripture of the Sikhs, which contains devotional hymns and sayings of Guru Nanak, and sayings of Kabir and other saints. The last Guru Gobind Singh abolished class distinction and transformed the Sikhs into a military organization by instituting the ceremony of the Khanda – di – Pahul" (Baptism of Sword). Now the Sikhs formed the militant group of the Khalsa (or Pure), bore the name of singh and swore to bear the five ks'. The Guru was assassinated in 1708 and since then the Guru Granth Sahib has taken the place of a Sikh Guru.⁴

3 – Beliefs and Practices

As mentioned earlier, Nanak tried to unite Hinduism and Islam by adopting beliefs from both these great religions although he was a born Hindu. Therefore, the religion founded by him combines in itself some outstanding features of Islam and Hinduism. For example, Sikhism includes the Islamic belief in one God and, like Islam, forbids the worship of idols and images. Like Islam it also believes in equality of human beings and rejects Hindu caste system and class distinctions. However, like Hinduism, it believes in doctrine of reincarnation and doctrine of Karma. Doctrine of Reincarnation says that after the body dies, the soul is reborn in the body of an animal or of another human being; whereas doctrine of Karma prescribes that a person's actions determine what kind of animal or human being the soul will enter in the next life.⁵

The daily prayer is important in Sikhism and Gurdwara is religious as well as social center of its followers. The Khalsa (community of the, 'pure') wear the five k's: the Kes (long hair on head and chin); the Kangha (comb); the Kachcha (short trousers); the Kara (steel bracelet) and the Kirpan (Sword or dagger). Sikh men generally like to take the last name "Singh" (lion) and women "Kaur" (princess). The Sikhs avoid stimulants especially alcoholic liquors and tobacco. They eat meat and their main devotion is service to family, to Sikhism, to mankind and finally to God through martyrdom. God is worshipped as cause of causes and relation to him is mystical and highly personal. Daily prayers are generally offered in private and service takes place of both ritual sacrifice and ritual purity. The Akali (Sikh holy man) is an itinerant fighter and the ideal man is the saint – warrior.⁶

The holiest Sikh shrine is the Golden Temple at sacred city of Amritsar, India. Ramdas the fourth Sikh Guru founded the city in 1577 while the fifth Guru, Arjan, completed the lake and the Golden Temple. The symbol of Sikhism consists of two carved swords, a double edged dagger, and discus. The symbol stand for bravery and spiritual power.⁷ Town of Nanak

(Nankana), the birthplace of Guru Nanak, and Panja Sahib in Hasanabdal, another sacred place of Sikhs are situated in Pakistan, and therefore, Sikh pilgrims come in thousands to Pakistan from all over the world particularly from India to visit these places.

4 – Religious Scripture

The Granth or the Adi Granth is the religious scripture of Sikhism. It is also called Guru Granth Sahib as it has taken the place of a Sikh Guru after assassination of Guru Govind Singh, the last Sikh Guru, who told his followers to regard the Granth as their Guru as there was no need of other leadership than that of teachings of the Granth.

The Granth contains devotional hymns and traditions of Guru Nanak and sayings of Kabir and other saints.

The Granth receives the honours of a divine at the Golden Temple in Amritsar.

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