

Some Key Words in the Islamic Concept of Man

by

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Source: *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 10, No. 1. (Winter, 1976). © World Wisdom, Inc.
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The main object of this Congress,¹ it would seem to me, is to further a more accurate understanding of the various religious traditions which have become a major part of human experience over the past three millennia. It is a part of the growing need in a world of instant global communication to discover, within the complex structures of apparently mutually irreconcilable dogmas, those common human experiences of Spirit and Nature which are universal. Over the past century or so there has been an increasing tendency to depart from the exclusive absolutism of particular religious traditions in favor of what is now called the ecumenical approach, prompted largely, one suspects, by the rapid erosion of popular adherence by secular and scientific influences.

Useful as this tendency is as a counter-balance to centuries of religious bigotry and conflict, at least in the Western part of the world, there are nevertheless inherent in such an attitude three great dangers, which, if they remain unrecognized, will render trivial and valueless the great efforts being made by many scholars and men of good faith in this direction.

The first of these dangers is that in trying so hard to see the wood rather than the trees, there is inevitably a great temptation to disregard, or, at least, to belittle the providential validity and necessary legitimacy of each religious tradition in its own right, its individual characteristics, emphases and perspectives. There is now the tendency to ignore the right of each religious tradition to be unique. But in the flight from absolutism into relativism a profound, but fundamental human paradox is being lost sight of. That is, the unavoidable fact of the disturbing persistence of the human individual need for uniqueness, certainty and absoluteness which has survived the demise of religious allegiance in its substitute forms of nationalism and factionalism. In this respect a religious tradition is, unlike a philosophy or ideology, a living organism like the racial group, the family or the individual, where each is part of a whole but where, equally, the whole is incomplete without the unique and special contribution of the part. In a sense a particular religious tradition is the same as any other religion in that they all give expression to a universal human response to the natural and supernatural; but each is inevitably

¹ This talk was given at the International Association for the History of Religions Conference at Lancaster, in August 1975.

different and unique in that it expresses the common human experience in a particular way, on the basis of which it creates for its community of adherents a entire universe affecting every level and aspect of human life. Furthermore, the unique modes of expression which each religion contributes to the totality of human experience cannot be reduced to relativities without doing damage to the human psyche, since its health and harmony depend in large measure upon the balance between the need to share with all men in a common human experience and between the need innate in all men to possess that which is different and unique to himself as a believer.

Secondly, there is the danger, more apparent to the committed than to the uncommitted, that the various religions, which have been and still are, to some extent, of the very fiber of both collective and individual development at every level, and which have inspired all the great cultures of the world, the vestiges of which we are now so busy trying to preserve, that these basic vehicles of our experience should become in their turn merely interesting museum pieces, commodities in the supermarket of ideas or laboratory specimens to be analyzed by experts, viewed with passing curiosity by the public and then kept in the formalin of learned articles and glossy coffee-table books. This danger is already a reality as any visit to the mystic-occult bookshops will show. This is a danger moreover which is particularly inherent in what is rapidly becoming the Comparative Religion Industry where the ancient religious forms are increasingly becoming the property of religious technicians. What is not always realized however is that the religious need and all its attendant responses and reactions has eluded the technicians and is perversely at large among the bewildered, confused and focus-less young, as also the not so young, as they swarm round the pseudo-gurus, hurl themselves at some neo-Orpheus, or plant bombs in cafes for the cause.

The third and last danger, and the one which is most pertinent to my argument today, concerns the vital question, especially so within the context with which we are all here concerned, of the communication of ideas and meaning and, in particular, the medium of that communication, language. In a world in which simultaneous translation has become the *sine qua non* of international communication and in which the *koine* of the press and the radio has become the criterion of acceptable linguistic expression, the whole question of language or languages, as they are used to express ideas and experiences more subtle and more profound than the commonplaces of the daily round, has become exposed to a slow but inevitable process of oversimplification and trivialization, resulting from an increasing pressure to accommodate such expression to the level of comprehension of the man in the street, whoever he may be. Once again, as I mentioned in speaking of the first danger, the tendency to over-emphasize the common or general human experience at the expense of the particular is here also at work. In translating the religious scriptures and writings of one tradition into the language perennially used to express the teachings of another, it is not enough to do so by the same methods or in the same spirit as one might translate an article from the *Times* into Arabic. In such a case a far greater knowledge of the language is required, and not only of the language, but also of its origins, history, background, and the milieu in which it developed, since language, no matter

how internationalized and superficial it has now become, still bears within each of its manifestations, not only the common human experience but also all the nuances and subtleties of each particular group of speakers, each one conveying in its older forms differences, distinctions and perspectives which have now either been lost altogether or are rapidly being lost in the drive towards instant communication. This has not only to do with individual differences, but with the fact that, especially in the case of religious languages, they are, more often than not, used to express ideas which themselves have now become meaningless to many. Since each language used by a religious tradition expresses not only much that is common to human spiritual experience, but in particular those responses and attitudes peculiar to a particular people, their climate, environment, history etc., of which that language is the special medium of expression, it is an extremely difficult and precarious business for anyone of another tradition, however weakened or however uncommitted that person might be to the religion which formed the foundations of his culture, to translate into his own language, conditioned as it is by its own intellectual and cultural associations, the ideas and experiences of another tradition expressed in terms imbued with often quite different associations. Because this problem of the, in a certain sense, untranslatability of one language into another is less and less understood today, it often happens that, unless great care is taken, the result is, for example, not a communication of Islam as it is understood and experienced by Muslims to non-Muslims, but rather a Christianized version of Islam or Islam communicated in words appropriate to a Christian or perhaps a post-Christian outlook, which process, far from promoting mutual understanding between the religions, merely adds to the confusion and lack of comprehension. This means that the translator of the sacred writings of one tradition into the language of another must take great care, not only to reveal what is genuinely common to both but, by choosing his words expertly, to make clear the very real differences of emphasis and association, so that the teachings of the other religious tradition appear not so much as an imperfect and perhaps inconsistent version of his own religion, but rather as a particular and unique expression of man's experience of God and Nature with its own implicit logic and consistency. I have stressed this danger inherent in all religious studies, not merely because it is, of itself, an important consideration, but also having regard to the proliferation of centers of comparative religious studies where almost total reliance is placed upon translated material, with but scant attention paid to the detailed study of the total context in which the religions grew up and, in particular, to the proper study of the original languages of those religious traditions.

What I have said so far has, I hope, served as an introduction to the points to be raised now about Islam in general and its view of Man in particular. Both as a general religious phenomenon and also as a way of considering man, his nature, his function and his destiny, Islam both shares with and is different from not only the two Semitically-based religions, but also the religions of ancient India and further east.

With Judaism, which is, so to speak, the parent tradition of that family of religions which includes Christianity and Islam, Islam most especially shares the notion of Man as community,

not community in the ordinary racial or social sense, but community as a particularly chosen group of human beings enjoying a special relationship with God which has been confirmed by a mutual commitment to a covenant. This notion is expressed in Islam by the word, *Ummah*, and the covenant by which it is established by the word '*Ahd*. "You are the best of communities established for mankind" says the Qur'an (3:110). Islam, however, differs from Judaism in this respect in that it translates the concept of Community and covenant out of the restricted context of blood relationship into the larger context of Mankind as a whole, thus universalizing the relationship between man and God. It is one of the glories of Islam that it set out to sever the tyrannical bond of the blood tie in favor of the bond of collective consciousness or witness. Although Christianity, having its roots in the common Semitic tradition, may also be said to share in these notions in terms of the Church and the Eucharist, symbolic of the New Testament or covenant, its early absorption into Mediterranean patterns of thought and experience profoundly affected the nature of that sharing, since the Church came, in practice, to denote an elite of consecrated men, the laity remaining on the periphery, while the Eucharist indicates a rather more mystical relationship-covenant between the individual soul and its Lord. More of this later.

Closely related to the Judeo-Islamic notion of Community is the concept, also shared in common, of an all-embracing Divine Law, to the execution of which both human consensus and wisdom contribute. This idea that all aspects of life, collective as well as individual, mundane as well as heavenly come within the scope and blessing of the Divine Law is something which both religions share together, but again not with Christianity which, with its rather ambiguous and mostly negative approach to the mundane and collective, has left the governing of terrestrial and political Man to secular laws and institutions. Perhaps because of its dual sources of inspiration, namely the Semitic and Indo-European worlds, Christianity has seemed always to have suffered a tension within its soul between God and Mammon. It may be that the modern secular world in which we are now living is a manifestation of the resolution of the tension in favor of Mammon. Neither Judaic nor Islamic Man have experienced such a sense of crisis vis-à-vis the world and perhaps this is why, generally speaking, neither the synagogue nor the mosque suggests the heavenward soaring urgency and anguish of the Gothic cathedral.

From what has been said it will be clear that the factor which most unites Islam to its Judaic ancestor is its essentially Semitic character, since, although Islam embraced and was touched by the aspirations and experiences of many non-Semitic peoples and is therefore inclusive and universal rather than ethnically exclusive, its main themes, as has been suggested, are predominantly Semitic, and it may thus be said to have universalized the Semitic tradition. As someone else has said, Islam ensured the survival of the Biblical world.

This characteristic is no more convincingly demonstrated than in the concept, of crucial importance to the understanding of both Islam and Judaism, of the Divine Word, the Divine Sound or utterance, in its secondary form the sacred text, the Qur'an or the Torah. This fundamental perspective has given both traditions a distinctly aural and literal bias from which

Indo-European Islamic peoples to some extent eventually broke away, notably the Persians, whose most profound contribution to the total culture and life of Islam has been their compensatory insistence upon the visual and the formal. I have often thought that Shî'ism is perhaps really the main manifestation of this insistence. This emphasis on the uttered or written word in Islam and Judaism has on the one hand, spiritually produced an atmosphere of calm clear certainty, while on the other hand, at lower levels, it has so often deteriorated into a dry, gnat swallowing literalism. Christianity while retaining, especially in its Protestant forms, this verbal characteristic, is marked more obviously by its early move northwestwards, in that its ritual and iconography has a strong dramatic and visual flavor, more characteristic of its pagan hosts.

Although Islam is, as I have suggested, predominantly Semitic in its fundamental themes and perspectives it has, perhaps because of its inclusion of many non-Semitic peoples, developed those themes and elicited from them important perspectives which play a relatively minor role in the Judaic scheme of things, but which bring Islam to a closer sharing with Christianity than might seem possible at first sight, since Islam or the Muslim Community has been called the Middle Nation (2:143) and does in a very real sense form a link between the almost completely Semitic tradition of Judaism and Mediterranean-European based Christianity.

What Islam shares with Christianity is not so much the communal or legal aspects of Man, but rather a profound awareness of Man as the individual soul in its special relationship with the Divine, not as God, the Pantocrator, but as Lord of the servant. In more general terms, then, the two religions share in common a deep concern with the inner rather than the outer life of Man as individual, and both include within their experience a strong mystical element. This common emphasis is strongly suggested in the way in which both religions see the process of revelation. In both the task of receiving and uttering the Divine word is given to a particular human being who, while remaining human, nevertheless assumes the role of the perfect or perfected human archetype whose special relationship with God attracts the wonder, love and pious emulation of the faithful. In the case of Islam this human vehicle is Muhammad, the Prophet, in the case of Christianity, Mary, the Virgin Mother. Thus just as Islam in its sharing with Judaism may be said to have a Mosaic perspective, so in its sharing with Christianity it may be said to have a Marian perspective. It is regrettable that the Semitic-Judaic characteristics of Islam, so important for the understanding of its social and communal aspects, have so often obscured this more implicit, but equally important feature. The person of Mary and her genius is by no means obvious in Islam, despite her frequent mention in the Qur'an, but in a proper understanding of the very close parallels between the roles of Mary and Muhammad lies a way to understanding the mystically oriented personal life of devotion and self-denial in Islam. Here also Islam links the two other traditions in that its view of the Prophet shares both in the Old Testament notion of prophecy and in the Christian notion of Incarnation. In an Islamic context one might call it rather "Inverbation".

As was indicated earlier, Islam shares things in common, not only with its two closely related traditions of Judaism and Christianity, but also, in a wider sense, with the more Eastern religions, especially Hinduism. Here again Islam became in a very real sense the link between the Western and Eastern worlds in that Islam was the only one of the three main Western religions to become physically involved in the lands of Hinduism and Buddhism. In this case also, elements of Islamic teaching lent themselves to an expression of ideas and experiences which forged a very real spiritual connection with Hindu India. This connection is entirely a mystical one in that the great emphasis laid in Islam upon the supremacy and utter transcendence of God led, especially in the great theosophical mystics like Ibn 'Arabi and Rumi, to metaphysical formulations closely resembling the teachings of Vedanta and, in certain cases even of Tantra. On the more practical level strong mutual relationships have existed for many centuries between Sufis and Hindu mystics.

In the foregoing paragraphs I have endeavored to set out the main themes of Islamic teaching on the subject of Man with a view to showing what Islam has in common in this respect with other religions, in the course of which two fundamental themes have emerged. the Judaic one of Man as Community and of God as Law, and the Christian one of the individual soul and of God as personal Lord, the one essentially world-affirming and concerned primarily with man within the structure of Creation, the other, essentially world renouncing and concerned with man's role *in aeternis*, the one cosmological, the other eschatological.

It now remains for me to return to the main argument of this paper which is that Islam, despite its obvious sharing with other religious traditions in its expression of the basic human experience of God and the cosmos, has something peculiarly its own to say and contribute on this question. Also, that any proper understanding of this particular view depends upon a proper translation and interpretation of certain key words in the Qur'an concerned with the nature of Man and his function. In general, existing translations of the Qur'an into English render these key terms by words which suggest merely a Christian equivalent of the ideas expressed. This, as I have already indicated, tends to represent Islam in Christian terms and fails to convey the exact meaning intended in the Qur'an.

A good example of this, and a useful introduction to what I understand by the peculiarly Islamic view of Man, is the translation and consequent understanding of the Qur'anic terms *kafara* and *âmana*, or *kâfir* and *mu'min*. These two words, perhaps the most frequently used verbal roots in the Qur'an, and thus of crucial importance, are usually translated as to disbelieve and to believe, as unbeliever or believer. Sometimes, in older translations, they are rendered infidel and the faithful, which although closer to the Arabic meaning, are not now used because of their somewhat archaic connotations. However, the English words unbeliever and believer do not accurately translate *kâfir* and *mu'min* except as Christian equivalents, being linguistically the translations of the Arabic *musaddiq* and *mukadhdhib*, in other words one who denies or accepts the honesty, veracity or truth of a statement. The Arabic roots *kafara* and *âmana* convey something far more radical than this. It is for this reason that the evil of the one and the good of

the other are so insistently reiterated in the Qur'an to the exasperation of the uninitiated reader. They denote something as essential to the Islamic view of Man as the words Love and rejection denote in Christianity.

Kafara does not mean what is meant by the English word disbelieve. Disbelief and belief are notions which imply the possibility of truth or error and also the absence or non-presence of their object. They have to do with assertion, claim, statement and the hearing of the same. As has been mentioned, these two ideas are represented in Arabic by the words *saddaqa* and *kadhhaba*. *Kafara* on the other hand means to cover, to conceal and hence to deny or ignore, not an absent, but a present reality, the inevitable, inescapable reality of God. Similarly *âmana*, usually translated as believe, denotes rather security and safety, to be secure or to render secure. Thus in relation to the reality or presence of God one might translate this word as meaning to be secure in or to keep secure the awareness of that reality and presence. I lay stress upon the idea of a present Reality rather than that of an intangible, absent reality whose reported existence is believed in, because of the insistence of the Qur'an upon the idea that man's reality, both outwardly, as an observable phenomenon, and inwardly as a focus of self-consciousness, is real only in terms of God's unique and overwhelming reality. Although great emphasis is laid in Islam upon the transcendence of God, and although many looking at Islam from the outside have regarded the God of Islam as being a remote and distant one, the idea of God as being implicitly and inescapably present at the very heart of things is a very strong one, and it is coupled with the notion that man remains real only so long as he is aware of or remembers, knows or is certain of that reality. The center or focus of this awareness of Divine Reality, and therefore of reality as such, which may be ignored or kept safe, is called in the Qur'an *al-fitrah* (30:30) that primordial essence in man which signifies his unique ability to share in the reality of God's being and consciousness, that token of the primordial covenant in which man commits himself irrevocably to remember by Whose Reality he is real. "Am I not your Lord? Yes, indeed." (7:172). Thus God has, with respect to His special creation, Man, the last word, the irrefutable argument, *al-hujjat al-bâlighah* as the Qur'an calls it (6:150). "God is nearer to you than the vein in your neck." (50:16).

It is to this crucial question of reality or nothingness that the Qur'an alludes when it uses the words *âmana* and *kafara* and on whose importance it insists so often. Looked at in this way, *âmana* means to be true to, to keep faith with, to be securely real in the awareness of that primordial token of Divine Truth which is both innately present at one's innermost center, *fî anfusikum* (41:53), and explicitly manifested in the universe, *fî al-âfâq* (41:53), to those with the awareness to see it. Similarly, *kafara*, in this context means to deliberately conceal or ignore a truth which one innately and originally knows to be true, to reject or deny the source of one's own reality and to refuse to recognize God's incontestable claim to the corroboration to which Man has committed himself *ab initio*. *Kafara* thus denotes in effect a perverse insistence on separate reality and on the separate right to invest phenomena with one's own reality, which is none other than the greatest sin in Islam, namely, *shirk*, or the positing of truths or realities other

than the Divine Truth. Thus the *mu'min* is one who is true to and who is secure in his reality in God, the reward of whose surrender (*Islam*) to and extinction (*fanâ'*) in God is secure enjoyment of the riches of God's Reality and the confirmation of his part in it (*baqâ'*). The *Kâfir* is one who has set himself up as a separate reality in defiance of Reality and whose punishment is to suffer the horror of his own inevitable nothingness and the inexorable otherness and unattainability of what he seeks to possess for himself. It is suggested therefore that the words *mu'min* and *kâfir* might be more satisfactorily translated by "the faithful" or "the true" in the first case, and "the rejecters" or "the deniers" in the second.

This notion of Man as committed to and sharing with the Divine Reality and consciousness from the beginning and *in aeternis*, his choice between illusion and reality and his salvation by awareness or the realization of his situation is, I believe, an important contribution by Islam to our understanding of the nature of Man. Thus, for Islam, Man is, with his free-will, potentially true or false, good or evil depending upon his readiness to be aware of and true to his primordial situation vis-à-vis God. "Surely, We have made him of the very best; then we reduced him to the lowest of the low." (95:4-5). Man is not, in Islam, a fallen being, a perverted will, who needs a Divine sacrifice to redeem him, nor yet an insolent and wayward progeny, constantly in need of Divine punishment, but rather a theomorphic being provided with the intelligence and the evidence to choose or reject the right way. As in Judaism and Christianity, the possibility for man to choose the wrong path is demonstrated in the story of Adam and Eve and the Tree in Paradise. In the Qur'an, however, this fall is counterbalanced by Man's, Adam's pre-eminence in Heaven, by the prostration of the angels to his knowledge of the names. For Islam the fall represents one of the alternatives inherent in his nature. There are two important differences between the story as told in the Bible and the story as told in the Qur'an. In the Qur'an Adam is forgiven and appointed the first prophet. Also in the Qur'an, both Adam and Eve share together in the blame for being seduced by Satan.

While faithfulness and awareness are of primary importance for man's salvation in the Qur'an, action and deeds are considered hardly less so. Here also translation of terms is problematic. More often than not, in the Qur'an, the phrase, "those who believe (or are faithful)" is directly linked with the phrase, *wa 'amilû al-sâlihât.*" This last phrase is usually rendered "and those who do good deeds" or "who act rightly or righteously." None of these translations accurately conveys the meaning of the term *sâlihât.* This word is from the root *saluha* which means to be fitting, suitable, and appropriate. It should be translated "and those who do the appropriate things, or act appropriately," that is to say who act in a way appropriate to their faithfulness to their true *fitrah* or primordial nature, or those whose actions are in keeping with or are consonant with their awareness of their existential situation. Similarly the acts of one who has rejected or concealed his *fitrah* are inappropriate, and all such acts are described in the Qur'an by words conveying the notion of insolence, perversion and arrogance. Perhaps the strongest of these words is *zulm* which is best translated by the Greek word *hubris*, carrying overtones of injustice, oppression and arbitrariness.

The prime example of this in the Qur'an is Pharaoh, who in effect, of all the characters in the Qur'an, epitomizes the *Kâfir*, the one who, in setting himself up as a demigod, deliberately suppresses and denies the primordial commitment in himself. As indicated above, this *hubris* or rejection impairs not the Divine Reality, but the reality of the individual rejecter, "they only wrong themselves." (2:57).

Another key word in the Islamic view of Man which is often mistranslated is the word '*abd*'. This is often rendered as "servant" a word which, within a Christian or Jewish context, carries certain specific connotations peculiar to Christian and Jewish perspectives concerning the Divine-human relationship. For this reason it is misleading for the non-Muslim reader who is trying to understand the Islamic perspective. For the Christian the word servant denotes a Divine-human relationship in which love and its attendant feelings predominate, while for the Jew it carries overtones of tribal allegiance and conformity with the Law.

The more accurate word in English is "slave," but this is avoided, largely I suspect, for sentimental reasons as being too harsh and extreme, too remote from expressed or latent Christian feelings about man. The word, however, conveys more accurately than most one of the two main aspects of the Islamic view of Man. Considered in himself, as distinct from and separate from God, as creature and phenomenon, Man is the slave of God, a non-entity, utterly and completely dependent upon God for its existence, life and significance. "Does not man remember a time when he was nothing worth mentioning?" (76:1). "Surely God utterly overwhelms His slaves," (6:18). Part of the awareness or faithfulness is precisely the recognition of man's utter servitude, that "everything perishes except His Face," (28:88) This expression of the extreme logic which characterizes the Islamic teaching on Man is more often than not repugnant to non-Muslims and one they do not readily understand. It is, however, better to use the word which conveys the Islamic view as accurately as possible.

On the other side of the coin Islam views Man, not as slave, but as *khalîfah* (2:30), a concept which is in its particular features peculiar to Islam. In this role man as *mu'min* is the keeper of a trust, less a representative of creation, more a representative of God to creation. This word is usually translated "vicegerent," or regent, and denotes Man as a sharer with God in the ordering and governing of creation. In this role Man's faithfulness to his commitment is crucial just as the danger of his betrayal is most to be feared, since it is precisely in this aspect that man shines as a reflection of the Divine light. This office of *khilâfah* and the trusteeship which goes with it is referred to in the Qur'an as the *amânah*, the Trust, which was offered to other parts of creation, but declined by them. It was man who accepted the charge, the onus of Divine responsibility. The Qur'an ends the verse in question with the ominous words, "and man was ever arrogant, ignorant (33:72). It need hardly be pointed out that the term *amânah* is of the same root as *âmana* which, in relation to *amânah* means exactly to be trustworthy.

The idea of *khilâfah* or the vicegerency of Man is closely related to the idea of *risâlah* or Messengership in which one individual man symbolizes in his person at a particular time the divine function inherent in all men.

In connection with the dangers implicit in this role, it is not without interest and significance that the root *khalafa* has as one of its derived meanings to disagree, disobey, be different, contrary. That is to say Man the *khalîfah* must never forget that he is also slave *'abd*, lest he arrogate the crown to himself, and abuse his trust, nor must Man the slave forget his *khilâfah*, lest he fail his trust. The two faces of man are complimentary and necessary to the human state and if either is neglected, man as Man forfeits his human reality. "They forgot God, so He caused them to forget themselves" (59:19). Thus for Islam the notion of Vicegerency is not restricted as it often is in Christianity to the priesthood, or as it is in Judaism to the people of Israel, but is attributed to Man as such, that superb and yet pathetic being whose unique predicament is to be of God and of the world, to be, in effect, at the junction of Heaven and earth.

As will be noted from the above account of the Islamic view of Man, the constant theme is one of awareness and its opposite ignorance or forgetfulness. It would be no exaggeration to say that for Islam, all expectations of man vis-à-vis God may be summed up in one word, *dhikr* or remembrance, awareness, attention, while all man's failings may be summed up in another single word, *ghaflah*, or heedlessness, forgetfulness, inattention. Indeed one might rightly call Islam the religion of awareness and certainty, just as one might call Christianity a religion of love and sacrifice and Judaism a religion of reverence and law. It is this fundamental and all-pervading theme of awareness or recognition which distinguishes the Islamic view of the problem of Man from any other. For Islam the whole universe is a panorama of evidence, clues, hints, signs of which man himself is the synthesis or focus as well as the witness, the aware, the observer. By virtue of the primordial consciousness (*fitrah*) within him he sees and interprets what he sees as proof of the truth and reality of God. Over and over again the Qur'an appeals, not to man's feelings, or love, nor to his sense of duty or obligation, but his intelligence and perceptiveness. "Will you not consider," "Do you not see." Constantly, true men are referred to as seeing, knowing, intelligent, perspicacious and the faithless as not knowing, uncertain, blind.

Everything in the universe and within man serves as a reminder, *dhikr*, the greatest reminder being the Qur'an itself, *al-dhikr al-hakîm*, to maintain in man a state of *dhikr* or attentiveness. To remember, to be aware, to mention, to invoke God is the best of activities for man, described by the Qur'an as better even than prayer which is itself the best of the rites. In this respect the rite which makes a man a Muslim, the *Shahâdah*, or act of witness, is simply a formal act of attention or recognition, a form of *dhikr*. It is this basic theme of awareness or remembrance which underlies and pervades the whole of the Islamic view concerning the nature of Man and his relationship with God. The thoroughly Islamic character of Sufism or Islamic mysticism is clearly demonstrated by the fact that its expressions, whether doctrinal or liturgical, are dominated by this notion of cognition, awareness and remembrance, since *dhikr* is the principal rite of the Sufis, and *ma'rifah*, or cognition of God is their aim. In this respect Sufism has focused and concentrated on what is most essential to Islam.

In conclusion I would simply repeat what I said earlier, that a proper understanding of Islam's own particular perspective demands that any study of Islam through the highly

problematic medium of translated material be supported and reinforced by adequate expertise in its original language, Arabic.

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

*An hour of meditation is worth more than the good works accomplished
by the two species of ponderable beings (men and jinn).*

Muhammad.