

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ

وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ

Allāh exalts those of you who
believe and those who are given
knowledge to high ranks

Holy Qur'ān (58 : 11)

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1. To provide a forum for scholars to make analytical studies of Islamic topics and themes.
2. To advance the cause of better understanding of the Qur'ān and the Ahl al-Bayt's ('a) contribution to Islam.
3. To publish English translations of Arabic and Persian works of Muslim scholars.
4. To endeavour to find Islamic answers to questions relating to the contemporary social, political, and moral problems.

* * * * *

Scholars and writers from all over the world are invited to contribute to this journal.

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SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION OF ARABIC CHARACTERS

CONSONANTS:

ء	'	س	s	ل	l
ب	b	ش	sh	م	m
ت	t	ص	s	ن	n
ث	th	ض	z	هـ	h
ج	j	ط	t	و	w
ح	h	ظ	z	ی	y
خ	kh	ع	'	Persian Letters	
د	d	غ	gh	پ	p
ذ	dh	ف	f	چ	ch
ر	r	ق	q	ژ	zh
ز	z	ک	k	گ	g

VOWELS:

Long:	ا	ā	Short:	ـَ	a	Doubled	ـِـِ	iyy (final from î)	
	و	ū		ـُ	u		ـِـِـِ	uww (final from ū)	
	ی	ī		ـِـِ	i		Diphthongs:	ـِـِـِ	au or aw
				ـِـِ				ـِـِـِ	ay or ai

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Faithless Hearts: A Study of the Qur'ānic Phrase *Qulūbunā Ghulf* Part 1

By Sayyid 'Ali Quli Qarā'i

1. Prelude:

The phrase '*qulūbunā ghulf*' occurs twice in the Holy Qur'ān (2:88 & 4:155). In both cases it is cited as a statement made by the Jews, presumably in reaction to the Prophet's summons. A glance at the disparate renderings of this phrase by the translators of the Qur'ān indicates that there has been a serious problem in determining its precise meaning. As we shall see, the difficulty is not confined only to the translators but has a long history in the works of the commentators. But let us first examine some of the English translations to see how the translators have understood its meaning. The Arabic text of the verses is given below along with some of their English renderings by different translators:

وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ بَلْ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَقَلِيلًا مَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ (بقره/88)

1.1 And they say “*Our hearts are covered.*” Nay! God hath cursed them for their disbelief; so little is that they believe. (Mir Ahmad Ali)

1.2 They say: ‘*Our hearts are sealed.*’ But God has cursed them for their unbelief. They have but little faith. (N. J. Dawood)

1.3 They have said that *their hearts cannot understand* (what you, Muhammad, say). God has condemned them for their denial of the truth. There are a very few of them who have faith. (Shaikh Muhammad Sarwar)

1.4 And they say: ‘*Our hearts are repositories.*’ Nay, Allah has cursed them on account of their unbelief; so little it is that they believe. (Muhammad Ali)

1.5 They say, “Our hearts are the wrappings (which preserve Allah’s Word: we need no more).” Nay Allah’s curse is on them for their blasphemy; little is it they believe. (Abdullah Yousuf Ali)

1.6 But they say, “*Our hearts are already full of knowledge.*” Nay, but God has rejected them because of their refusal to acknowledge the truth: for, few are the things in which they believe. (Muhammad Asad)

1.7 And they say, ‘*Our hearts are uncircumcised.*’ Nay, but God has cursed them for their unbelief; little will they believe. (A. J. Arberry)

1.8 And they say: *Our hearts are hardened.* Nay, but Allah hath cursed them for their unbelief. Little is that which they believe. (M. M. Pickthall)

فِيمَا نَقَضْتُمْ مِيثَاقَهُمْ وَ كُفِّرْتُمْ بآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَ قَتَلْتُمْ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بغيرِ حَقٍّ وَ قَوْلِهِمْ قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ بَلْ طَبَعَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (نساء/155)

2.1 So for their breaking their covenant and their denial of the signs of God, and their slaying the apostles unjustly and their

saying “*Our hearts are covered;*” nay! God hath set a seal upon them for their disbelief, so they believe not but a little. (Mir Ahmad Ali)

2.2 Then for their breaking their covenant and their disbelief in the messages of Allah and their killing the prophets wrongfully and their saying, *Our hearts are covered;* nay, Allah has sealed them owing to their disbelief, so they believe not but a little. (Muhammad Ali)

2.3 However, because of their disbelief, disregard of their covenant, denial of God’s revelations, murdering the prophets without reason and their saying that *their hearts were covered*, We sealed up their hearts. [Only a few of them believe]. (Shaikh Muhammad Sarwar)

2.4 But they broke their covenant, denied the revelations of God, and killed the prophets unjustly. They said: ‘*Our hearts are sealed.*’ It is God who has sealed their hearts, on account of their unbelief. They have no faith, except a few of them. (N. J. Dawood)

2.5 (They have incurred divine displeasure): in that they broke their Covenant; that they rejected the Signs of Allah; that they slew the Messengers in defiance of right; that they said “*Our hearts are the wrappings* (which preserve Allah’s Word; we need no more);” —nay, Allah hath set the seal on their hearts for their blasphemy and little is it they believe. (Abdullah Yousuf Ali)

2.6 And so, [We punished them] for the breaking of their pledge, and their refusal to acknowledge God’s messages, and their slaying of prophets against all right, and their boast, “*Our hearts are already full of knowledge*” —nay, but God has sealed their hearts in result of their denial of the truth, and [now] they believe in but few things. (Muhammad Asad)

2.7 So, for their breaking the compact, and disbelieving in the signs of God, and slaying the Prophets without right, and for their

saying, ‘*Our hearts are uncircumcised*’—nay, but God sealed them for their unbelief, so they believe not, except a few. (Arberry)

2.8 Then because of their breaking of their covenant, and their disbelieving in the revelations of Allah, and their slaying of the Prophets wrongfully, and their saying: *Our hearts are hardened*. Nay, but Allah hath set a seal upon them for their disbelief, so that they believe not save a few. (Pickthall)

Thus we have several different renderings of this phrase:

“Our hearts are covered,”¹

¹ Among translators who have followed this interpretation are:
 Ahmed Ali in translation of both the verses (“Our hearts are enfolded in covers”);
 Abdul Majid Daryabadi in translation of 2:88 (“Our hearts are in a covering”);
 M. M. Shakir in translation of both the verses;
 Sher Ali in translation of both the verses (“Our hearts are wrapped in covers”);
 T. B. Irving (Hajj Ta’lim Ali) in translation of both the verses (“Our hearts are covered over”);
 Sayyid Sa’id Akhtar Rizvi in translation of both the verses;
 Zafarullah Khan in translation of both the verses (“Our hearts are wrapped up in covers”);
 Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar in translation of both the verses (2:88: “Our hearts are enclosed;” 4:155: “Our hearts are sheathed”);
 Muhammad Taqi ud-Din al-Hilali & Muhammad Muhsin Khan in translation of both the verses (2:88: “Our hearts are wrapped (i.e., do not hear or understand Allah’s word),” 4:155: “Our hearts are wrapped (i.e. sealed against reception)”);
 Izzuddin al-Hayek in translation of 4:155 (“Our hearts are wrapped up”);
 Mirza Hairat in translation of 2:88 (“Our hearts are well covered;” in 4:155 he translates the phrase *qulūbunā ghulf* as “Our hearts are secure”);
 Ali Ahmad Khan Julundari in translation of 4:155 (“Our hearts are covered (by thick covering [*sic*]).” In 2:88 he adopts an anatomical meaning which is unique among translators: “Our hearts are in pericardiums [*sic*] (coverings)”);
 Colin Turner in translation of both the verses (“Our hearts are veiled”);
 Ali Muhammad Fazil Chinoiy in translation of both the verses (2:88: “And they said their hearts were masked,” 4:155: “and [for their] saying their hearts were covered”);

“Our hearts are sealed,”²

Faruk Azam Malik in translation of both the verses (“Our hearts are in secure wrappers;” in 4:155 he adds an explanation: “which have preserved Allah’s Word; we need no more,” evidently following Abdullah Yousuf Ali);
 Sayyid Abbas Sadr Āmili in translation of 2:88;
 Abdul Karim Shaikh in translation of 4:155;
 Muhammad Ayyub Khan in translation of both the verses (“Our hearts are wrapped”);
 Fazollah Nikayin in translation of 4:155 (“Hard laminations cover our hearts”);
 Tahereh Saffarzadeh in translation of both the verses (2:88: “Our hearts are covered over,” 4:155: “Our hearts are wrapped with coverings”);
 Syed Abdul Latif in his translation of Abul Kalam Azad’s *Tarjumān al-Qur’ān*, translation of 2:88 (“Our hearts are protected by safe coverings”);
 S. M. Abdul Hamid in translation of 2:88 (“Our hearts are covered [so the Qur’ān cannot move us]”);
 Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi in translation of 2:88 (“Our hearts are covered from all sides by our beliefs and so your call cannot reach our hearts”);
 Zafar Ishaq Ansari in translation of 4:155 (“Our hearts are wrapped in covers”); however, in 2:88 he translates the phrase as follows: “Our hearts are well-protected;”
 Mohammad Hasan Askari & Shamim in translation of 2:88 (“Our hearts are veiled”);
 Akbar Iranpanah in translation of both the verses;
 Muhammad Akbar Muradpuri & Abdul Aziz Kamal in translation of 4:155 (“Our hearts are quite secure under cover”); however, in 2:88 they translate the phrase as follows: “Our hearts are quite secure;”
 Muhammad Ashfaq Ahmad in translation of both the verses (“There is a covering on our hearts”);
 Syed Anwar Ali in translation of both the verses (“Our hearts are wrapped up in covers”).

² Among translators who have followed this interpretation are:

M. M. Khatib in translation of both the verses;
 Majid Fakhri in translation of both the verses;
 Sheikh ‘Izziddin al-Ḥāyek in translation of 2:88: (“Our hearts are sealed up”);
 Ben Shemesh in translation of 4:155;
 Abdul Karim Shaikh in translation of 2:88;
 Fazollah Nikayin in translation of 2:88 (“Our hearts have been securely sealed”);
 Shah Faridul Haque in translation of both the verses (2:88: “Our hearts are wrapped with covers,” 4:155: “There are covers on our hearts”)
 Syed Abdul Latif in translation of 2:88 (“Our minds are closed [to all external influences]”);

“Our hearts cannot understand,”³

“Our hearts are repositories (of knowledge),”⁴

“Our hearts are the wrappings⁵ (which preserve Allah’s Word; we need no more,”

“Our hearts are already full of knowledge,”

“Our hearts are uncircumcised,”⁶

Syed Iqbal Zaheer in translation of 2:88 (“Our hearts are insulated [that is, insulated from outside influence]”);

Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi in translation of 4:155.

³ Among translators who have followed this interpretation are:

Mufasssir Muhammad Ahmad (in 2:88: “Our minds cannot comprehend what you say,” and in 4:155: “We cannot comprehend them,” i.e. the Divine teachings).

⁴ Among translators who have followed this interpretation are:

Mirza Abul Fazl in his translation of both the verses (with the words “of knowledge” in parenthesis in 2:88);

Syed Abdul Latif, in his own translation of the Qur’ān (4:155: “Our hearts are depositories [of Divine knowledge]”) as well as in his translation of Abul Kalam Azad’s *Tarjuman al-Qur’ān*, translation of 4:155 (with the words “of Divine knowledge” in parenthesis)

⁵ Among translators who have adopted this interpretation, presumably following Abdullah Yousuf Ali are:

Ali Ozek, Nureddin & other members of the Turkish team of translators in translation of 2:88 (“Our hearts are wrappings [which are enough to preserve the divine word]”);

Aneesuddin in translation of both the verses (“Our hearts are coverings”);

Syed Vickar Ahmad in translation of 4:155 (“Our hearts are the covers (which preserve Allah’s Word; we need no more); however, in 2:88 he renders the phrase *qulūbunā ghulf* in these words: “Our hearts keep Allah’s Word: we do not want more.”

Rashad Khalifa, perhaps the most unfettered of the translators of the Qur’ān, apparently had this interpretation in view when he translated the phrase as: “Our minds are made up!”

⁶ Among translators who have followed this interpretation are:

George Sale, E. H. Palmer, Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan, Richard Bell, J. M. Rodwell, A. F. Badshah Khan, Lal Muhammad Chawla in their translation of both the verses;

Ben Shemesh in translation of 2:88.

“Our hearts are hardened.”⁷

Most of these renderings, if not all of them, are based on the interpretations of the early exegetes as recorded in such tradition-based commentaries of the Qur’ān as those of Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) and Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938). In that which follows, we will first retrace these interpretations to their origins (sections 2 & 3). As a second step, we will review Qur’ānic commentaries and translations in some languages to study how these interpretations have influenced the commentators’ understanding of the phrase and that of the translators of the Qur’ān in other languages, such as Farsi, Urdu, French, German, Spanish and Italian (sections 4 & 5). Third, we will try to identify the correct interpretation of the phrase *qulūbunā ghulf* on the basis of textual evidence from the Bible and Islamic traditions (sections 6 & 7). Finally we will examine the import of the phrase in the light of the significance of the rite of circumcision in the Abrahamic traditions (section 8).

2. Two Variant Readings:

The commentary of Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī is the oldest encyclopedic collection of the opinions of early commentators, which records their exegetical views systematically in a detailed and comprehensive manner. As such it has been quite influential in forming the views of later commentators. In his comments on verse 2:88, Ṭabarī makes the following remarks concerning the variant readings of this phrase and the interpretations related to each:

The *qārīs* (experts on recitation of the Qur’ān) have differed concerning its reading. A group of them have read the phrase *qulūbunā ghulf* without a vowel immediately following the *lām*, and this is the reading generally followed in all towns and regions.

⁷ Alexander Ross, the first English translator of the Qur’ān, follows du Ryer in translation of both the verses (“Our heart is hardened”).

However, some of them have read it with a *ḍammah* on the *lām*. Those who read it without a following *lām*, interpret the phrase *qulūbunā ghulf* as meaning “Our hearts are in covers, within curtains and wrappings” (*qulūbuna fī akinnatin wa aghṭiyatin wa ghuluf*). According to this reading *ghulf* is plural of *aghlaf*, which is something within a cover (*ghilāf*). Also *aghlaf* means an uncircumcised man, while *ghalfā*’ means an uncircumcised female. A sword placed within a scabbard is called *sayfun aghlaf* and a bow within its case is *qawsun ghalfā*’. Adjectives with *af‘al* and *fa‘lā*’ as their masculine and feminine forms have a plural analogous to *fu‘l*, such as *aḥmar* and *aṣfar*, whose plurals *ḥumr* and *ṣufr* apply to both genders. Pronouncing the middle consonant (*‘ayn al-fi‘l*) with a vowel sound is not permissible except for reasons of rhyme in poetry.⁸

Concerning the second, less-known reading and the interpretation based upon it, Ṭabari says:

As for those who have read the word with a *ḍammah* (i.e. as *ghuluf*)⁹ interpret the phrase to mean “Our hearts are covers of knowledge,” implying that they are receptacles of knowledge. According to this interpretation, *ghuluf* is the plural of *ghilāf*, like *kutub*, *ḥujub* and *shuhub*, which are plurals for *kitāb*, *ḥijāb* and

⁸ *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, ed. Ṣidqī Jamil al-‘Aṭṭār, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1415/1995, vol. 1, pp. 571ff.

⁹ Ṭabari does not mention them by name, but his remarks imply that those who adopted the second interpretation (namely, ‘Aṭīyyah, and Ibn ‘Abbās, according to the tradition of Ḍaḥḥāk, in accordance with the narrations cited by al-Ṭabari) preferred the second reading as well. In other sources this reading has been ascribed, besides Ibn ‘Abbās, to Ibn Muḥaysin, Abū ‘Amr, ‘Aṭā, al-A‘raj, al-Zajjāj and Ibn Hurmuz. See Aḥmad Mukhtār ‘Umar & ‘Abd al-‘Āli Sālim Mukarram, *Mu‘jam al-Qirā‘āt al-Qur‘āniyyah*, Qum: Intishārāt-e Usweh, 1412/1991, vol. 1, p. 85.

Ibn ‘Aṭīyyah al-Andalusi (d. 542/1147) ascribes it to al-A‘mash as well (*al-Muḥarrir al-Wajiz fī Tafsiṛ al-Kitāb al-‘Aziz*, ed. Al-Majlis al-‘Ilmi bi Fās, 1395/1975). Nevertheless, this reading was not credible enough to be able to find a place even among the so-called fourteen reputable readings.

shihāb respectively. According to this reading, the statement made by the Jews means, “Our hearts are enclosures and receptacles for knowledge, et cetera.”¹⁰

Before we examine the different interpretations of the phrase offered by the commentators, it is important to take note of Ṭabari’s remark about the general acceptance enjoyed by the first reading and the inadmissibility of the uncommon reading, the one in which the phrase is read as *qulūbunā ghuluf*, with *ḍammah* on *lām*.¹¹

¹⁰ As is evident from Ṭabari’s remarks, he ascribes each of the interpretations to one of the two readings. The same viewpoint appears to have been held by al-Samarqandī (d. 375/985), Abū al-Muẓaffar al-Sam‘ānī (d. 489/1095) and al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) from their remarks on verse 2:88. A little before Ṭabari, Hūd b. Muḥakkam (d. 280/893) and, a century after him, al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), in *al-Nukat wa al-Uyūn*, mention the two interpretations without mentioning the difference of readings. However, it appears that in later centuries the commentators gradually came to consider both the interpretations as being legitimately attributable to the first reading, on the basis that *ghuluf* was a contracted form of *ghuluf*, the plural of *ghilāf*. Shaykh Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067) is probably the earliest among the commentators to expressly allow such a contraction in his commentary under verse 2:88. Ibn ‘Atīyyah (d. 540/1145), while mentioning both the readings, remarks, “Some say that *ghuluf* is plural of *ghilāf*. Originally *ghuluf*, it has been pronounced with *takhfīf* of the *lām*” (i.e. without a vowel following it). He adds, “Qāḍī Abū Muḥammad, may Allah’s mercy be upon him, has said that such a contraction is rarely used except in poetry.” But Zamakhsharī, commenting on verse 2:88, after giving the first interpretation of the phrase and without even mentioning the second reading, says: “It has been said that *ghuluf* is the contraction (*takhfīf*) of *ghuluf*, plural of *ghilāf*. On this basis the phrase [*qulūbunā ghuluf*] implies, ‘Our hearts are receptacles of knowledge. So we have no need of anything else by virtue of what we possess.’ ” After Zamakhsharī the commentators do not see any difficulty in ascribing both the interpretations to the accepted reading, and Bayḍāwī’s statement «قل: اصله غُلْف بتفخيل الام، فاختف» (“It has been said that it is a contraction of *ghuluf*, plural of *ghilāf*”) appears to have become a cliché often repeated in later commentaries.

¹¹ His remark (*op. cit.*, p. 574) is as follows:

«والقراءه التي لا يجوز غيرها في قوله: «قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ» هي قرائة من قراء «غلف» بتسكين اللام بمعنى ألها في الغشية و أغطية، لإجماع المجمة من القراء و أهل التأويل علي صحتها، و شدوذ من شد عنهم بما حاله من قراءه ذلك بضم اللام.»

3. Three Main Interpretations:

3.1. First Interpretation:

The first interpretation also takes several forms, depending on whether it is set forth in its simple form without any adjunct or interpolation, or whether it is accompanied with an interpolation or adjunct.

First we will take up the simple form pertaining to this interpretation (denoted here by [1]). There are three versions pertaining to [1]. In his commentary on verse 2:88, Ṭabarī cites several traditions from Ibn ‘Abbās (3 years before Hijrah-68/619-687), Mujāhid (21-104/641-722), al-A‘mash (61-148/680-765), Qatādah (61-118/680-736), Suddī (d. 128/745), Abū al-‘Āliyah (d. 93/711), and Zayd b. Aslam (d. 136/753) which give three closely-related interpretations of the phrase based on the first reading.

(a) *Ghulf* is plural of *aghlaf*, an adjective which means something in a cover or sheath, or something covered by a veil or curtain. The phrase *qulūbunā ghulf* is similar in import to another Qur’ānic phrase which occurs in verse 41:5 and is attributed to the idolaters.¹² Hence according to this interpretation what the Jews meant is that they did not understand the Prophet’s preaching or that it did not enter their heads. Now the details concerning this interpretation as given by Ṭabarī.

Ṭabarī cites two traditions from Ibn ‘Abbas, one on the authority of Sa‘īd b. Jubayr (or ‘Ikrimah) and another from

¹² Pickthall translates this verse as follows: “And they say: Our hearts are protected from that unto which thou (O Muhammad) callest us, and in our ears there is a deafness, and between us and thee there is a veil. Act, then. Lo! We also shall be acting.”

An Arabic-English dictionary gives the following meanings for *kann* (pl. *aknān*, or *akinna*): “place where one is sheltered; cover, shelter, retreat, refuge; nest; home, house, hut; harbour, bower.” Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, London: Macdonald & Evans, 1974, reprinted by Librairie du Liban, Beirut, 1980.

Mu‘āwiyah b. Ṣāliḥ from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalḥah al-Hāshimī from Ibn ‘Abbās.¹³ In the first tradition, Ibn ‘Abbās considers *ghulf* to mean *fi akinna* (“in covers,” which provide security and shelter), a phrase which also occurs in the Qur’ān (in verse 41:5) in a statement made by the idolaters in response to the Prophet’s call. In the second tradition, *ghulf* is explained as meaning *fi ghiṭā’* (i.e. hidden or covered by a curtain or veil).

Then Ṭabarī cites two traditions from Mujāhid who explains *ghulf* as meaning *‘alayhā ghishāwah* (i.e. there is over them a cover, or curtain). Also cited is a tradition from A‘mash who interprets *ghulf* to mean *fi ghuluf* (i.e. in covers). Thereafter he cites two traditions from Qatādah on the authority of Ma‘mar wherein Qatādah likens the meaning of *qulūbunā ghulf* to that of the statement of the idolaters mentioned in verse 41:5.

Besides, Ṭabarī cites two traditions, from al-Suddī and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd (who presumably narrates from his father Zayd b. Asalm). Al-Suddī explains the phrase *qulūbunā ghulf* as meaning *‘alayhā ghilāf, wa huwa al-ghiṭā’* (i.e. there is a ‘sheath’ on them, and it is a covering). Zayd explains the statement of the Jews in these words: *qalbī fi ghilāf, falā yakhlūsu ilayhi mimmā taqūlu [shay’]* (My heart is in a cover, and so anything of what you say does not get into it).

(b) *Qulūbunā ghulf* means “a seal has been set on our hearts.” A ‘sealed heart’ in Qur’ānic idiom is a heart closed to understanding.¹⁴ Ṭabarī cites two traditions in this connection from Ibn ‘Abbās and Qatādah. Ibn ‘Abbās, in explaining the phrase

¹³ It has been said that the second chain of transmission is the most reliable among those which transmit the views of Ibn ‘Abbās. See Muḥammad Hādī Ma‘rifat, *al-Taḥfīr wa al-Muḥassirūn*, Mashhad: al-Jāmi‘ah al-Raḍawīyyah li al-‘Ulūm al-Islāmiyyah, 1st ed., 1418, vol. 1, p. 268, cf. al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, vol. 4, pp. 207-209.

¹⁴ “A heart that has been sealed” or “the placing of a seal on the heart” are notions which recur in the Qur’ān and are more familiar to its readers than “a heart within a cover.” Cf. 2:7, 5:46, 42:24, 45:23.

qulūbunā ghulf, is reported to have said *fa hiya al-qulūb al-maṭbū'* (which means that their hearts are sealed) and Qatādah is said to have remarked: *'alayhā ṭābi'* (there is a seal upon them). Qatādah adds that the statement made by the Jews is similar to that of the idolaters reported in 41:5. A similar interpretation is ascribed to Mujāhid by Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Huwwārī (d. 280/893)¹⁵ and by Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938) to 'Ikrimah.¹⁶

(c) *Qulūbunā ghulf* means "Our hearts do not understand." Ṭabarī narrates two traditions from Qatādah and Abū al-'Āliyah, who are reported to have interpreted *qulūbunā ghulf* as implying that the Jews meant to say that "their hearts do not understand" (*lā tafqahu*).¹⁷

Thus the third interpretation reinterprets the first and second interpretations, still ensconced in metaphorical terms. Nevertheless, all these three interpretations may be said to be equivalent in terms of meaning, for each of them implies a denial of understanding, or the possibility of it, on behalf of the Jews. The covers or curtains that lie over the hearts, or the seals that have been placed upon them, imply impediments to understanding. Hence the first and the second interpretations are equivalent to the third, and hence each of the three may be indicated by [1].

3.1.1 A Variant on the First Interpretation [1a]:

The first of two variants on this interpretation is an interpolation concerning the nature of the 'cover' mentioned in [1]. As a consequence of the nature of exegetical activity, the

¹⁵ *Tafsīr Hūd ibn Muḥakkad al-Huwwārī*, ed. Bilḡaj b. Sa'īd al-Sharīfī, Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1st edition, 1990, commentary on verse 4:155.

¹⁶ *Tafsīr Ibn Abī Ḥātim*, ed. Aḡmad 'Abd Allāh al-'Imārī al-Zahrānī, al-Madinah al-Munawwarah: Maktabah al-Dār, under verse 2:88.

¹⁷ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 1, p. 572-573. This last interpretation makes the statement of the Jews similar to that of the response of the faithless to the call of the Prophet Shu'ayb mentioned in 11:91.

commentators of subsequent centuries have elaborated on the views of their predecessors, often giving new reinterpretations, or introducing interpolations into their opinions and adding adjuncts. What could be the nature of the ‘covers’ or ‘curtains’ that the Jews said lay over their hearts? *Aghlaf*, which meant something within a cover or a sheath, also meant an uncircumcised male. Zamakhshari (d. 528/1133) remarks that the adjective *aghlaf*, in the sense of something covered by a sheath, is originally derived from *aghlaf* in the sense of an uncircumcised male. He is of the view that the Jews claimed that the absence of receptivity in their hearts was something brought about by Providence, decreed by Divine will and design, that it was an original state of nature—akin to the Christian notion of ‘original sin’—for which they were not responsible. He makes the following remark under 2:88:

Ghulf is plural of *aghlaf*. The phrase [*qulūbunā ghulf*] means: “Our hearts have been created in such a manner that there are covers and curtains upon them. Therefore, nothing of Muḥammad’s preaching enters our hearts, which do not comprehend it.” *Ghulf* is derived from *aghlaf*, meaning someone uncircumcised.¹⁸

After Zamakhsharī such an interpretation of the phrase *qulūbunā ghulf* seems to have become quite popular with the commentators, and, apparently, his commentary and that of Bayḍāwī (d. 691/1291) have played an influential role in this regard. Moreover, Zamakhsharī opens a theological debate under this verse with his remarks¹⁹ and after him Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.

¹⁸ *Al-Kashshāf*, Qum: Nashr Adab al-Hawzah, n. d., vol. 1, pp. 163-164. His comments on 2:88 are as follows:

«غلف» جمع اغلف، اي هي خلقلة و جبلة مغطاة بأغطية لا يتوصل اليها ما جاء به محمد (ص) و لا تفقيه، مستعار من الاغلف الذي لم يختر، كقولهم: «قلوبنا في اكفة مما ندعوننا إليه». ثم رد الله أن تكون قلوبهم مخلوقة كذلك لأنها خلقت على الفطرة و التمكن من قبول الحق، بأن الله لعينهم و خذلهم بسبب كفرهم، فهم الذين غلفوا قلوبهم بما أحدثوا من الكفر الزائع عن الفطرة و تسبوا بذلك لنوع الألفاظ التي تكون للمتوقع إيمانهم و للمؤمنين.

¹⁹ Apparently, al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1261) is first among the commentators to have posed a theological issue under verse 2:88 in relation to the statement of

606/1209), and others who have followed him in carrying on such debates, have turned verse 2:88 into an arena for Mu'tazilite-Ash'rite controversy.²⁰

Zamakhshari was a man of letters as well as a philologist. In contrast to the earlier commentators who followed Ṭabarī in considering *aghlaḥ* as meaning something covered or sheathed, Zamakhshari considers it as being *derived* from *aghlaḥ* in the sense of "uncircumcised." But it can be said that on the whole he remains loyal to the interpretation of his forerunners, for he considers the word to be derived (*musta'ār*) from *aghlaḥ* in this sense, not identical with it. Thus he also considers the hearts of the Jews, as claimed by them, to be 'covered,' though they are within a cover which is claimed by them to be natural and congenital, not unlike the prepuce of an uncircumcised male.

3.1.2 A Second Variant on the First Interpretation [1b]:

As we know, a cover or case is a kind of protection which safeguards the covered object against possible damage from external agents. This has led to a new interpretation of the statement of the Jews, an interpretation not found in the commentaries of earlier centuries. Apparently, it is confined to the commentaries of the contemporary era. According to the understanding of these commentators, by making such a statement

the Jews. See *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Qum: Maktabah al-I'lām al-Islāmī, 1st ed., 1409. He remarks under verse 2:88:

«و لي الآية ردّ على الجبره ايضاً، لأنهم قالوا مثل ما يقول اليهود من أن على قلوبهم ما يمنع من الإيمان و يحول بينهم و بينه، فكذبهم الله تعالى في ذلك بان لعنهم و ذمهم. فدل على أنهم كانوا محظنين، كما هم: محظنون...»

²⁰ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī has an elaborate refutation of Zamakhshari's view in *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, under verse 2:88. Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar b. 'Alī b. 'Ādil al-Dimashqī al-Ḥanbalī (d. after 880/1475) assigns a section named "al-faṣl fī kalām al-Mu'tazilah" to this topic in his commentary on 2:88 and cites Rāzī's argument. See *al-Lubāb fī 'Ulūm al-Kitāb*, ed. 'Ādil Aḥmad 'Abd al-Mawjūd and Shaykh 'Alī Mu'awwiḍ, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1410/1998, vol. 2, pp. 270-271.

the Jews wanted to express their staunch loyalty to the Mosaic creed, as if they wanted to say: “Our hearts are in firm coverings which preserve them from any foreign creed that might penetrate them. Therefore, they are secure from any external influence and impervious to any new call or teaching. They are firm in their loyalty to the Mosaic Law.” Sayyid Quṭb, who adopts this interpretation, writes: “They said: ‘Our hearts are closed. A new teaching cannot penetrate them, nor can they hear any new call.’ They would say this in order to disappoint the Prophet Muḥammad (ṣ) and the Muslims.”²¹ This interpretation has been quite popular among the translators and commentators of the Indian subcontinent. Syed Abdul Latif translates Abū al-Kalām Āzād’s comments under 2:88 as follows:

Our hearts are protected by safe coverings. So much so, that no new thing can affect their minds, although such an attitude does not argue either strength of belief or regard for truth. On the other hand, such an attitude is a curse in itself.²²

Mawdūdī’s remarks under the same verse, as translated by Zafar Ishaq Ansari, are as follows:

They said, in effect, that they were so staunch in their beliefs that their convictions would remain unaffected regardless of what was said. Such a claim is the hallmark of those bigots whose minds are seized by irrational prejudice. Nothing can be a matter of greater shame for human beings than the so-called firmness of conviction which they often boast of. What can be more foolish than adherence to inherited beliefs and convictions when their falseness is established by overwhelmingly strong arguments?²³

²¹ *Fī Dīlāl al-Qur’ān*, Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1st edition, 1408/1988, commentary under verse 2:88.

²² *The Tarjumān al-Qur’ān*, n.p., n.d., vol. 2, p. 30.

²³ *Towards Understanding the Qur’ān*, English version of *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān* by Sayyid Abul A’lā Mawdūdī, Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1988/1408, vol.

Abdul Majid Daryabadi follows the same interpretation:

Our hearts are in a covering. That is, secure against that to which thou invitest us, and impervious to any new influence. The Jews in their aggressive self-conceit thought that they were above the advances of Islam and unsusceptible to them. *Ghulf* plural of *aghlaf* literally means ‘uncircumcised;’ when applied to a heart, it means, as though it were covered with a *ghilāf*.²⁴

Syed Anwar Ali’s translation and comments are as follows:

Our hearts are wrapped up in covers. ‘Wrapped up’ stands for *ghulf*, which is plural of *aghlaf*, which literally means ‘uncircumcised,’ when applied to a heart, it means ‘as though it were covered with *ghilāf* so that it does not learn; or covered from learning and accepting the truth’ (*Arabic-English Lexicon*). The reason for refusing the faith in the Holy Prophet and the Holy Qur’ān, advanced by the Jews, as verse 88 tells us, was that their hearts were wrapped up with covers or, in other words, they were filled with knowledge and wisdom and were secure and as such they were impervious to any new influence. Due to these self-conceived thoughts, the Jews were of the view that they were no more in need of Revelation, and this is actually what we see in verse 91. However, according to the learned commentators, another significance of the words *Qutūbunā ghulf* is that they (Jews) did not think the Holy Qur’ān worth consideration at all, and therefore they said that ‘our hearts are wrapped up with

1, pp. 90-91. The following comment is made under verse 4:155: “In fact, like all ignorant worshippers of falsehood, these people also boasted that their faith in the ideas and prejudices, customs and usages of their forefathers was so firm that they could never be made to forsake them.”

²⁴ Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi, *Holy Qur’ān, Translation and Commentary*, 1st edition, Lucknow: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1981, vol. 1, p. 57.

covers” i.e. the Holy Qur’ān does not appeal to our hearts at all.
See *Tadabbur-e Qur’ān*, vol. 1, p. 224.²⁵

Among the Arabic and Persian commentaries referred to,²⁶ this interpretation appears for the first time in the commentary of Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1374/1954) and ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’i’s *al-Mizān* (completed 1375/1955). It is also cited in some other commentaries of recent decades in Arabic and Persian, such as those of Ibn ‘Āshūr Tūnisī (d. 1393/), Sayyid ‘Alī Akbar Qurashī, Muḥammad Ṣādiqī and ‘Abd al-Ḥujjat Balāghī. However, for some still unknown reason, this interpretation has been amazingly popular among the commentators of the Indian subcontinent, among them, Ḥāfiẓ Nadhīr Aḥmad, Thanā’-Allāh Amritsarī (*Tafsīr-e Thanā’ī*), Sayyid ‘Alī Ḥasan Bihārī (*Maṭālib al-Qur’ān*), Abū al-Kalām Āzād (*Tarjumān al-Qur’ān*), Khwājah Ḥasan Nizāmī, Maulānā Shawkat ‘Alī Thānawī, Pir Muḥammad Karamshāh Azharī (*Tafsīr Diyā’ al-Qur’ān*), Maulawī Muḥammad Ḥusayn (*Tafsīr-e Rabbānī*), Abū al-Ā’lā Mawdūdī (*Tafhīm al-Qur’ān*), Muftī Muḥammad Shafī‘, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (*Maṭālib-e Qur’ān*), and Shams Pīrzādā. Besides, several translators of the Qur’ān belonging to the subcontinent have followed this interpretation in their Urdu and English translations.

3.2. Second Interpretation [2]:

A second interpretation of the phrase has existed from the earliest times, though it did not have any authority behind it comparable to the one enjoyed by the first interpretation. Ṭabari

²⁵ Syed Anwar Ali, *Qur’an: The Fundamental Law of Human Life*, Karachi: Hamdard Foundation Press, Pakistan, 2nd impression, 1987. vol. 2, commentary under 2:88. Apparently, there is some confusion here between different interpretations of the phrase.

²⁶ See the table given in section 4, which lists more than a hundred commentaries in Arabic and Persian and the interpretations adopted by each commentator.

cites a tradition from ‘Aṭīyyah al-‘Awfi that he interpreted *qulūbunā ghulf* to mean “Our hearts are receptacles of knowledge” (*aw‘iyah li al-‘ilm*).²⁷ Two other traditions are cited by Ṭabarī from ‘Aṭīyyah, wherein Fuḍāyl reports from ‘Aṭīyyah that he interpreted the phrase to mean, “Our hearts are receptacles of remembrance” (*aw‘iyah li al-dhikr*). Besides these two versions of ‘Aṭīyyah’s interpretation, Ibn Abī Ḥāṭim narrates a third from ‘Aṭīyyah that *qulūbunā ghulf* meant that the Jews claimed their hearts to be “receptacles of profanities (or shocking or abominable things)” (*aw‘iyah li al-munkar*)! It is possible that *‘ilm* and *dhikr*, in the orthographic forms cited by Ṭabarī, and *munkar*, in the one cited by Ibn Abī Ḥāṭim, represent what might have been a single word (*lil-‘ilm*, *lidh-dhikr* or *lil-munkar*). However, no one among nearly 150 commentators consulted has adopted this last interpretation ascribed to ‘Aṭīyyah. In any case, ‘Aṭīyyah’s interpretation merely suggests that the Jews claimed their hearts to be receptacles or repositories of knowledge (or remembrance). We will refer to this interpretation in its simple form as [2]. There are three further variants of it, each of which results from an interpolation or addition.

3.2.1 First Variant on the Second Interpretation [2a]:

In addition to the interpretations narrated from ‘Aṭīyyah, Ṭabarī and Ibn Abī Ḥāṭim cite a tradition transmitted by Ḍaḥḥāk (d. 102/720) from Ibn ‘Abbās that he explained *qulūbunā ghulf* as meaning, “Our hearts are full of knowledge and have no need of Muḥammad or anyone else.”²⁸ Obviously, this variant incorporates an addition to [2].

²⁷ Ibn Abī Ḥāṭim, *op. cit.*, also cites this tradition from ‘Aṭīyyah and adds that a similar statement has been narrated from ‘Aṭā’ al-Khurāsānī.

²⁸ («مملوءة علماً لا تحتاج إلى محمد (ص) ولا غيره») Ṭabarī, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 574, Ibn Abī Ḥāṭim, *op. cit.*, under verse 2:88.

3.2.2 Second Variant on the Second Interpretation [2b]:

There is another variant which appears to be quite old, though neither Ṭabarī nor Ibn Abī Ḥātim have mentioned it in their works. The oldest source which records it is the commentary of Hūd b. Muḥakkam.²⁹ After explaining the meaning of the phrase *qulūbunā ghulf* in accordance with [1], he mentions a second interpretation as follows: “Our hearts are receptacles of knowledge. Therefore, if what you say were true, we would have listened to you.”³⁰ Although this variant of interpretation [2] is also mentioned by Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Māturīdī al-Samarqandī (d. 333/944) and Naṣr b. Muḥammad al-Samarqandī (d. 375/985) in their commentaries, the first to mention a source among printed works accessible to this writer is *al-Nukat wa al-‘Uyūn*, the commentary of al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), who attributes it to al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923). After Māwardī, other writers, such as al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122),³¹ Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372),³² Abū al-Sa‘ūd (d.

²⁹ Before him Muqātil b. Sulaymān (80-150/699-767), who mainly relies on the interpretation [1], incorporates this interpolation («فإن كنت صادقاً فأفهمنا ما تقول») in his commentary on 2:88. It appears that either there is a lacuna in the text or, what is more probable, a confusion between two different interpretations; for this clause, which is properly a part of [2b] is quoted as a part of [1]. The text of Muqātil’s comment is as follows:

و«قالوا» للني (ص) «قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ» يعني في غطاء و يعنون في أكنة، عليها الغطاء، فلا تفهم و لا تفقه ما تقول يا محمد، كراهية لما سمعوا من النبي (ص) من قوله إنكم كذبتم فريقاً من الأنبياء و فريقاً قتلتم فإن كنت صادقاً فأفهمنا ما تقول. . .

Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān, ed. by Dr. Maḥmūd Shaḥātah, al-Hay‘ah al-Miṣriyyah al-‘Āmmah lil-Kitāb, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 121-122, under verse 2:88. A similar confusion was noted in an English commentary by Syed Anwar Ali. For another instance of such a confusion, see ‘Ali b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī al-Nayshābūrī (d. 468/1075), *al-Wasiṭ fi Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1st impression, 1415/1994, vol. 1, p. 172, under 2:88.

³⁰ Hūd b. Muḥakkam, *op. cit.*, under 2:88: (فلو كنت صادقاً سمعنا ما

تقول)

³¹ *Ma‘ālim al-Tanzīl*, Riyāḍ: Dār al-Tayyibah, 4th print, 1417/1997, under 2:88. Baghawī writes:

982/1574), and Qāḍī Thanā' Allāh Pānīpatī (d. 1225/1810) ascribe it to Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī (d. 146/763).³³

3.2.3 Third Variant on the Second Interpretation [2c]:

A third variant of the second interpretation is found in commentaries of recent centuries. Apparently, it does not have any old source. Among the works consulted, it makes its first appearance in the commentary of Nakhjawānī (d. 930/1523). Commenting on verse 4:155 Nakhjawānī explains that *qulūbunā ghulḥf* means that the Jews claimed that their hearts were “repositories full of [divine] truths and teachings, which have been sealed and have no room for what you bring.”³⁴ After Nakhjawānī this interpretation is found in the commentaries of Mullā Faṭḥ-Allāh Kāshānī (d. 977?/1569), Fayḍī (d. 1004/1595), al-Ṭanṭāwī al-Jawhari (d. 1358/1939), and Muḥammad 'Izzah Darūzah (compiled 1380/1960).

Whereas the first variant [2a] is expressive of a claim of religious and spiritual self-sufficiency on behalf of the Jews, the second variant [2b] expresses their denial of the truthfulness of the Prophet's claims, while the third variant [2c] is merely expressive of an excuse for their inability to embrace a new teaching.

3.2.4 A Critique of the Second Interpretation:

The second interpretation—in its simple form [2] along with its three variants [2a, 2b, 2c]—lacks a sound basis. The following

«و قال الكلبي: معناه أوعية لكل علم فلا تسمع حديثنا إلا تعبه إلا حديثك لا تعقله و تعبه و لو كان فيه {خير} لوعته و فهمته.»

³² *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Riyād: Dār Ṭayyibah, 1st print, 1418/1997, under 4:155, ascribes it to Ibn 'Abbās: «رواه الكلبي عن ابي صالح، عن ابن عباس:»

³³ See *Tafsīr Abī al-Sa'ūd*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, vol. 1, p. 153, and *al-Tafsīr al-Maḥzarī*, Quetta: Maktabah Rashidiyyah, under verse 2:88.

³⁴ «قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ: يعني أوعية مملوءة بالحقايق و المعارف محتومة عليها لا يسع فيها ما حتمت به» *Al-Fawātiḥ al-Ilāhiyyah wa al-Mafātiḥ al-Ghaybiyyah*, Cairo: Dār Rikābī li al-Nashr, n.d.

points may be mentioned as grounds for its lack of credibility:

1. As mentioned, from the viewpoint of early commentators, such as Ṭabari, the second interpretation was related to the alternative reading, which did not have any wide acceptance and credibility with the experts of recitation and exegesis.

2. The narrations of ‘Aṭṭīyah and Kalbi were not considered reliable by some experts of *rijāl*, and as we have seen the two of them are the main source of [2].³⁵

3. The semantic validity of the second interpretation [2] has been seriously questioned by some scholars. One of the critics is Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350). After citing the first interpretation with approval, he remarks:

That which some commentators have said—that [the Jews claimed that] their hearts were repositories of wisdom—there is nothing in the phrase to imply such a meaning, nor is there any evidence in the Qur’ān to support it. Such an utterance is not made by anyone commending himself for possession of wisdom and knowledge. Who has ever heard anyone saying, “My heart is a cover” or that the hearts of the faithful are “in covers,” with the implication that the heart is a repository of knowledge?! Moreover, the mere idea of the heart being a cover may imply that it is a receptacle for something which may be good or bad. Therefore, the heart’s being a cover does not necessarily imply that it contains knowledge and wisdom, and this is something obvious.³⁶

³⁵ Although it is true that the negative remarks of Sunni *rijāl* authorities concerning Kalbi and ‘Aṭṭīyah are attributable to the fact that both of them were Shī‘is, nevertheless, there seems to have been a problem with their exegetical narrations. See Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, vol. 7, pp. 200-202 concerning ‘Aṭṭīyah, and concerning Kalbi see *ibid.*, vol. 9, p. 158 and al-Dhahabi, *Mizān al-I’tidāl*, vol. 3, pp. 557-559, from Ibn Qayyim’s own work *Shifā’ al-‘Alīl*.

³⁶ *Badā’i’ al-Taḥfīr al-Jāmi’ li Taḥfīr al-Imām Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah*, compiled by Yusri al-Sayyid Muḥammad, Dammām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1414/1993, 1st impression, vol. 1, pp. 324-325.

A contemporary scholar has made the following remark concerning [2] and the reading on which it is based:

The reading ‘*ghuluf*,’ plural of *ghilāf*, is not appropriate, because the heart’s being a cover is something meaningless. That something is a receptacle (*ghilāf*) does not indicate anything concerning the nature of its contents, whether it is knowledge or sickness, or something else. Moreover, it is not consistent with the excuse of the Jews for not believing, for if the hearts were repositories of knowledge it would be more in order for them to perceive the truth and affirm it.³⁷

4. That which totally eliminates [2] from any consideration whatsoever is that *al-qalb al-aghlaf* (in the sense of an “uncircumcised heart”) is an idiomatic expression with a past history and a well-defined meaning, and to interpret it as “a heart full of knowledge” is something preposterous. This matter will be clear at a later stage in this study.

3.3. Third Interpretation [3]:

There has existed a third interpretation from an early era, but it has been treated with neglect by the early commentaries and almost totally forgotten in later commentaries in Arabic and Persian. Even Ṭabarī with his vast learning and encyclopedic coverage of the exegetical views of commentators of the early generations does not mention it. Among printed works accessed, the first to mention it is the commentary of Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Huwwārī. After having cited [1] and [2b] as the more probable interpretations, he writes:

و ذكروا عن الحسن أنه قال: «غُلف أي قلف لم تخين لقولك يا محمد»

³⁷ Hasan Muṣṭafawī, *al-Taḥqīq fī Kalimāt al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, Tehran: Ministry of Islamic Guidance, vol. 9, p. 253.

Al-Ḥasan has been reported to have said: “*Ghulf* means *qulf*; that is, ‘Our hearts are uncircumcised to your preaching, O Muḥammad.’”³⁸

After Hūd b. Muḥakkam, Ibn Abī Ḥātim cites the interpretation given by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (22-110/642-728) in a tradition narrated by Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Arzamī, from his father, from his grandfather, from Qatādah, from Ḥasan Baṣrī. From Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938) until Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372) there is no visible mention of Ḥasan Baṣrī’s viewpoint in the commentaries. After citing the tradition narrated by Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Kathīr remarks: “The meaning of this statement corresponds to what has been mentioned earlier concerning the impure character of their hearts and their being removed from all good.”³⁹

The mention of the first and the second interpretations with their different variants abounds in the remarks of the commentators of latter times, but it seems that Ḥasan’s comment was totally forsaken by the commentators after Ibn Kathīr. Besides its strangeness to the minds of Muslim commentators, who generally had no first-hand acquaintance with Judaic-Christian scriptures and had little interest in the what was generally considered a corrupted and heretical religious legacy, the low credibility of its narrators, that is, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-‘Arzamī and his father and grandfather, also played a role in its being abandoned.⁴⁰ Among the commentaries consulted by this writer, the only exegete who has come anywhere near Ḥasan’s viewpoint is Ibrāhīm b. ‘Umar al-Biqā‘ī al-Shāmī (d. 885/1480). Without mentioning Ḥasan Baṣrī’s comment or the tradition cited by Ibn Abī Ḥātim

³⁸ *Tafsīr Hūd b. Muḥakkam al-Huwwārī*, under 2:88 and 4:155.

³⁹ «هذا القول يرجع معناه الى ما تقدم من عدم الطهارة قلوبهم و أنها بعيدة من الخير» Ibn Kathīr, *op. cit.*, under verse 2:88.

⁴⁰ See for instance the footnote given by Zahrānī, the editor, under the commentary on 2:88 in *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Riyāḍ: Dār Ṭayyibah, 1418/1997.

which reports it, he writes in his comments on 2:88: “*Ghulf* is plural of *aghlaf*, which means someone whose member is covered with prepuce (*qulfah*),⁴¹ implying as if the two aspects of a human being were covered by a *qulfah*, his flesh and his heart, so that God may, through circumcision and faith, bring His word to fulfillment in both the aspects.”⁴² However, the commentary he gives in explaining the statement of the Jews under this verse, as well as under 4:155, is not much different from that of Zamakhshari, Bayḍāwi and others.

4. *Qulūbunā ghulf* in Qur’ānic Commentaries:

A survey of the published works indicates that most of the commentators of the Qur’ān, from the 2nd/8th century to the present era, have adopted [1] as the select interpretation of the phrase in their commentaries on 2:88 and 4:155. Many of them, especially in the works of the last century, do not mention any other interpretation. [1a], a variant of [1] which occurs for the first time in Zamakhshari’s work, gradually gains popularity among commentators and, with several commentators, takes the place of [1] as the prime interpretation of the phrase.

⁴¹ Other synonyms for *aghlaf* in Arabic are *aqlaf*, *aghral*, and *arghal*. Similarly, synonyms for *qulfah* (prepuce), are *ghulfah*, *ghurlah* and *rughlah*. See *Lisān al-‘Arab*, the entries under *gh.l.f.*, *q.l.f.*, *gh.r.l.*, and *r.gh.l.* The nearest Arabic for the Hebrew *‘orlah* is *ghurlah*, and for the Hebrew *‘arel* the closest Arabic is *aghral*. A Hebrew-English dictionary gives the following meanings for *‘orlah* and *‘arel*:
 lre[’ `arel {aw-rale’} (from lre[’ `arel {aw-rale’} , a primitive root) uncircumcised, uncircumcised person; 1) uncircumcised, having foreskin.
 hl’r>[’ `orlah {or-law’} } (from lre[’ `arel {aw-rale’}) foreskin, uncircumcised.
 lre[’ `arel {aw-rale’} a primitive root; count as uncircumcised, foreskin be uncovered; 1) to remain uncircumcised, count uncircumcised, count as foreskin 1a) (Qal) 1a1) to regard as uncircumcised 1a2) to remain unharvested (fig.) 1b) (Niphal) to be counted as uncircumcised .

⁴² «غلف» جمع أغلف و هو المعشي الذكر بالقلفة التي هي جلدة، كأن الغلقة في طرفي المرء: ذكره و قلبه، حتى يتم الله كلمته
 «بالختان و الإيمان (Nazm al-Durar, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmī, 1413/1992, reprint of the original published by Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif, Hyderabad, under verses 2:88 and 4:155.)

The second interpretation in its simple form [2] is mentioned very rarely by the commentators. In fact it is cited mainly by the tradition-based commentaries, as those of Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Suyūṭī. Most often it is found in one of its variant forms, [2a] or [2b], both of which are mentioned in the commentaries from the second half of the 3rd/9th century onwards. Few commentators have mentioned it as the first interpretation of the phrase, and most often it is mentioned, in one or more of its variant forms, only after mentioning [1] or its variant. Another point worthy of notice is that several authors who mention [1] under 2:88 as the first, or the only, interpretation, first cite a variant of [2] as the appropriate interpretation under 4:155. The variant [2c] is of late occurrence in commentaries, occurring for the first time in the work of Nakhjawānī (d. 930/1523). Perhaps because of its rather irrational import, it does not seem to have gained any popularity with the exegetes. [1b], a variant of [1], is the most recent of interpretations, and, for reasons still not clear to us, quite popular among the commentators of the Indian subcontinent.

As for [3], only three writers among nearly 150 commentaries consulted mention it: Hūd b. Muḥakkam, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn Kathīr.

A few writers have expressly rejected [2] and approved [1] as the right interpretation. Among them are Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (in his work *Shifā' al-'Alīl*), Muḥammad Sayyid al-Ṭanṭāwī (*al-Tafsīr al-Wasīṭ*), and Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Ṭayyib (*Aṭyab al-Bayān*). Some of the commentators, apparently unwary of the contradictory character of [1] and [2], have been led into a confusion, such as Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) and al-Wāḥidi al-Nayshābūrī (d. 468/1075) among commentators of the former times, and Balāghī (*Ḥujjat al-Tafāṣīr*, under 4:155) and Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ḥamzah and co-authors (*Ghāyat al-Bayān*, under 2:88) among writers of recent decades. The confusion mainly consists of combining with [1] an interpolation logically pertaining to [2].

Table 1: Interpretations of the Phrase *Qulūbunā ghulf* Cited by Commentators under 2:88 & 4:155

No.	Commentator	Under 2:88	Under 4:155
1	Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767)	1	1
2	'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'āni (d. 211/826)	1	-
3	<i>Tafsīr Imām al-Ḥasan al-'Askari</i> (d. 256/869), attributed.	2b, 1	-
4	Hūd b. Muḥakkam (d. 280/893)	1, 2b, 3	1, 3
5	Ṭabari (d. 310/922)	1, 2, 2a	1
6	Ibn Abi Ḥātim (d. 327/938)	2a, 1, 3	2, 1, 3
7	Māturidi Samarqandi (d. 333/944)	1, 2	-
8	Naṣr b. Muḥammad Samarqandi (d. 375/985)	1, 2b	1, 2
9	Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayri (d. 434/1042)	1	-
10	Māwardi (d. 450/1058)	1, 2	1, 2b
11	Shaykh Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067)	1, 2b	1, 2b
12	Wāḥidi Nayshābūri (468/1075)	mix-up of 1 & 2	-
13	Abū al-Muẓaffar al-Sam'āni (d. 489/1095)	1, 2b	-
14	Ḥusayn b. Mas'ūd al-Baghawī (d. 510/1116)	1, 2a, 2b	-
15	Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudi (d. 520/1126)	1, 2a, 2b	-
16	Zamakhshari (d. 528/1133)	1a, 2a	1a
17	Ibn 'Aṭīyyah al-Andalusī (d. 542/1147)	1, 2a, 2b	1
18	Tabrisī (d. 547/1152), <i>Majma' al-Bayān</i>	1, 2b	-
19	—, <i>Jawāmi' al-Jāmi'</i>	1a, 2b	-
20	Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzi (d. 552/1157)	1, 2a, 2b	1, 2
21	Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1200)	1, 2b	-
22	Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209)	1, 2a, 2b	2a, 1
23	Muḥammad b. Hasan Shaybāni (fl. 7th/14th), <i>Nahj al-Bayān</i>	2b, 1	-

24	Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), <i>Ijāz al-Bayān</i>	1a, 2b	-
25	‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Salām al-Sullamī (d. 660/1261)	1	-
26	Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272)	1, 2a, 2b	2a, 1
27	Bayḍāwī (d. 691/1291)	1a, 2b, 2a	2, 1
28	Dirīnī (d. 697/1297), <i>al-Taysīr fi al-Tafsīr</i>	1	-
29	‘Abd Allāh al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310)	1, 2a, 2b	1
30	Ḥasan b. Muḥammad Qummi Naysābūrī (d. 728/1327)	1, 2a	2, 1
31	Al-Khāzin (d. 741/1340)	1, 2a, 2b	1, 2a
32	Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī (d. 741/1340)	1	-
33	Ibn Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344)	1	-
34	Ibn Qayyim Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350), <i>al-Ḍaw’ al-Munīr ‘Alā al-Tafsīr</i>	Affirms 1 and rejects 2	-
35	Al-Samin al-Ḥalabī (d. 756/1355)	1, 2b	-
36	Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1372)	1, 3, 2a	1, 2
37	Al-Tha‘alibī (d. 875/1470)	1	-
38	Ibn ‘Adīl al-Dimashqī (d. after 880/1475), <i>al-Lubāb</i>	1a, 2a, 2b	2a, 1
39	Ibrāhīm b. ‘Umar al-Biqā‘ī (d. 885/1480), <i>al-Durar Naẓm</i>	1a	1a
40	Jurjānī (d. end of 9 th /16 th century), <i>Tafsīr-e Gāzor</i>	1, 2b	1, 2b
41	Ḥusayn Wā‘iz Kāshifī (d. 910/1504), <i>Tafsīr-e Ḥusaynī</i>	1	2a, 1
42	Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), <i>al-Durr al-Manthūr</i>	2, 2a, 1	1
43	—, <i>Tafsīr al-Jalālayn</i>	1	1
44	Nakhjawānī (d. 930/1523), <i>al-Fawātiḥ al-Ilāhiyyah</i>	1	2c
45	Shaykh-Zādah (d. 951/1544), <i>Hāshiyah</i> (gloss) on Bayḍāwī’s commentary	1, 2b, 2a	1a
46	Faṭḥ-Allāh Kāshānī (d. 977?/1569)	1a, 2c, 2a, 2b	2a, 1
47	Abū al-Sa‘ūd (d. 982/1574)	1a, 2a, 2b	1a, 2a, 2b
48	Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Naqī al-Shaybānī (d. before 994/1585)	2b, 1	1

49	Fayḍi (d. 1004/1595), <i>Sawāḡi' al-Ilhām</i>	2c	2c
50	Khafāji (d. 1069/1658), <i>Hāshiyat al-Shihāb</i>	1a, 2b, 2a	1a, 2a
51	Sharif Lāhiji (d. 1088/1677)	2b, 1a	1
52	Fayḍ Kāshāni (d. 1091/1680), <i>Tafsīr al-Şāfi</i>	2b, 1	2, 1
53	Muḡammad Qummi Mashhadi, <i>Kanz al-Fawā'id</i> (1094-1131/1682-1718)	1a, 2b, 2a	2, 1
54	Muḡammad b. Murtaḡā Kāshāni (d. after 1115/1703), <i>Tafsīr al-Mu'in</i>	2b, 1	1
55	'Ali b. al-Ḥusayn al-'Āmili (d. 1135/1722), <i>al-Wajiz</i>	1a	1
56	Ismā'il Ḥaqqi Barsawī (d. 1137/1724), <i>Rūḡ al-Bayān</i>	1a	-
57	Al-'Ajili (d. 1204/1789), <i>al-Futūḡāt al-Ilāhiyyah</i>	1a	1
58	Aḡmad b. Muḡammad 'Ajibah (d. 1224/1809)	1, 2a	1
59	Qaḡi Thanā'-Allāh (d. 1225/1810), <i>Tafsīr al-Maḡhari</i>	1a, 2b	2, 1
60	Al-Shawkāni (d. 1232/1816)	2, 2a, 1	1, 2a
61	Al-Şawī (d. 1241/1825), <i>Hāshih</i>	1	1
62	Sayyid 'Abd Allāh Shubbar (d. 1242/1826), <i>al-Jawhar al-Thamin</i>	2b, 1a	1
63	—, <i>Tafsīr al-Qur'an</i>	2b	1
64	Al-Ālusi (d. 1263/1846)	1	1
65	Şiddiq Ḥasan Khān Khannawji (d. 1289/1872), <i>Faḡ al-Bayān</i>	1, 2b, 2a	1, 2a
66	Al-Nawawī al-Jāwī (d. 1316/1898)	1, 2b	2a, 1a
67	Al-Qāsimi (d. 1322/1904)	1	1a
68	Sultān Muḡammad Janābudhī (d. 1327/1909), <i>Bayān al-Sa'ādah</i>	1, 2a	2, 1
69	Mirzā Ḥasan Şafi 'Ali Shāh (d. 1329/1911)	1	2a
70	Mir Sayyid 'Ali Ḥā'iri Tehrāni (d. 1340/1921)	1a, 2b	-
71	Muḡammad Rashid Riḡā (d. 1354/1935)	1	1, 2a

72	Mullā Ḥuwaysh, <i>Bayān al-Ma'ānī</i> (1355/1936)	1	1
73	Al-Ṭanṭāwī al-Jawharī (d. 1358/1939)	1a, 2b, 2a, 2c	2a, 2b, 1a
74	Marāghī (d. 1361/1942)	1a	1
75	Fayṣal Āl-i Mubārak (d. 1366/1946), <i>Tawfiq al-Raḥmān</i>	1	1
76	Mirzā Thaqaḥī Tehrānī, <i>Rawān-e Jāwid</i> (pub. 1370?/1950)	1, 2b	1
77	Muḥammad Maḥmūd Hījāzī (d. 1370/1950)	1	1, 2a
78	Muḥammad Maḥmūd Ḥamzah, Ḥasan 'Alwān, Muḥammad Aḥmad Barāniq, (ccompiled 1373/1953)	mix-up of 1 & 2	1
79	Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1374/1954)	1b	1a
80	Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mun'im al- Jammāl, <i>Tafsīr al-Farīd</i> (compiled 1374/1954)	1	1a, 2a
81	Ṭabāṭabā'i, <i>al-Mizān</i> (compiled 1375/1956)	1	1, 1a, 1b
82	Sayyid Ibrāhīm Burūjerdī, <i>Tafsīr-e Jāmi'</i> (pub. 1375/1956)	2b, 1	1
83	Sa'dī (d. 1376/1956), <i>Taysīr al-Karīm al-Mannān</i>	1	1
84	Muḥammad 'Izzat Durūzah, <i>al-Tafsīr al-Ḥadīth</i> (comp. 1380/1960)	1, 2c	-
85	Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Hamadānī, <i>Anwār-e Darakhshān</i> (pub. 1380/1960)	1, 2b	1
86	Shāh 'Abd al-'Azīmī (d. 1384/1964), <i>Tafsīr-e Ithnā 'Asharī</i>	1a	2a, 1
87	Balāghī, <i>Hujjat al-Tafsīr</i> (pub. 1344 Sh./1961)	1	mix-up of 1 & 2
88	'Abd al-Karīm al-Khaṭīb, <i>al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ānī</i> (compiled 1386/1966)	1	1
89	Khusrawānī (d. 1386/1966), <i>Tafsīr-e Khusrawī</i>	1a, 2b	2a, 1
90	Rashīd al-Khaṭīb al-Mawṣilī, (pub.	1	1

	1392/1972)		
91	Muḥammad Sayyid al-Ṭantāwī, <i>al-Tafsīr al-Wasiṭ</i> (compiled 1393/1973)	1a, 2a	1a, 2a; prefers 1 over 2
92	Ibn ‘Āshūr al-Tūnisi (d. 1393/1973)	1b, 2b	-
93	<i>Tafsīr-e Namūnah</i> (pub. 1353-1366 Sh./1974-87)	1	1
94	Muḥammad Ṣādiqī, <i>al-Furqān</i> (compiled 1397/1976)	1a, 1b	-
95	Muḥammad ‘Alawī Ḥusaynī, <i>Kashf al-Ḥaq’iq</i> (pub. 1397/1976)	1a	1
96	Sa‘id Ḥawwī, <i>al-Asās fī al-Tafsīr</i> (compiled 1398/1977)	1a, 2a, 2b	1
97	Muḥammad Ḥ. Faḳl Allāh, <i>Min Wahy al-Qur’ān</i> (pub. 1399/1978)	1	1a
98	Ṭāliqānī (d. 1358 Sh./1979), <i>Partawī az Qur’ān</i>	1, 2	-
99	Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Shirāzī, <i>Taqrīb al-Qur’ān</i> (pub. 1400/1979)	1	1
100	Muḥammad Jawād Maghniyyah (d. 1400/1979), <i>al-Kāshif</i>	1	1a
101	Al-Ṣabūnī, <i>Ṣafwat al-Tafāsīr</i> (compiled 1400/1979)	1	1
102	Muḥammad ‘Alī Khālidi, <i>Ṣafwat al-‘Irfān</i> (pub. 14??/197?)	1	1
103	Muḥammad Karamī, <i>al-Tafsīr li Kitāb-Allāh al-Munīr</i> (pub. 1402/1981)	1	1
104	Muḥammad ‘Alī ṬāHā Durrah, (pub. 1402/1981)	1a	-
105	Khāqānī, <i>al-‘Aql al-Basharī fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān</i> (pub. 1403/1982)	1	-
106	‘Abd al-Qādir b. Shaybah al-Ḥamd, (compiled 1402/1981)	1a	-
107	Muḥammad Jawād Najafī, <i>Tafsīr-e Āsān</i> (pub. 1362-4 Sh./1983-1985)	1	1
108	‘Abd al-Karīm Mudarris, <i>Mawāhib al-Raḥmān</i> (1404/1983)	1a	2a, 1
109	Bānū-e Iṣfahānī (d. 1404/1983), <i>Makhzan al-‘Irfān</i>	1	1

110	Ibrāhīm 'Āmili, <i>Tafsīr-e 'Āmili</i> (pub. 1364 Sh./1985)	2b, 1	1
111	Sayyid Muḥammad Taqī Mudarrisi, <i>Tafsīr-e Hidāyat</i> (pub. 1377 Sh./1998)	1	1a
112	<i>Min Hudā al-Qur'ān</i> (pub. 1406/1985)	1a	1
113	Al-Jazā'iri, <i>Aysar al-Tafsīr</i> (pub. 1406/1985)	1, 2a	1
114	Sayyid 'Alī Akbar Qarashi, <i>Aḥsan al-Ḥadīth</i> (pub. 1366 Sh./1987)	1, 1b	1
115	'Abd al-Ḥamid Kashk, <i>Fī Riḥāb al-Tafsīr</i> (pub. 1987?)	1	2a, 2b
116	Jamil Ghāzi, 'Alwān, Ghāwujī, <i>Min Nasimāt al-Qur'ān</i> (pub. 1407/1986)	1	1
117	Al-Sha'rāwī (pub. 1409/1988)	2a, 1	1
118	Muḥammad Sabzawāri Najafī (d. 1410/1989), <i>al-Jadīd</i>	1a	1a, 2a
119	Sayyid 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Ṭayyib (d. 1411/1990), <i>Atyab al-Bayān</i>	1, 1a, 2a; pre-fers 1	1
120	Wahbah al-Zuhayli, <i>Tafsīr al-Wajīz</i> (pub. 1417/1996)	1	1
121	Hāshimī Rafsanjāni, <i>Tafsīr-e Rāhnamā</i> (pub. 1373 Sh./1994)	2, 1	1, 2a
122	Sayyid 'Abd al-A'lā Mūsawī Sabzawāri (d. 1414/1993), <i>Mawāhib al-Rahmān</i>	1, 2a	2a, 1
123	Muḥsin Qarā'iti, <i>Tafsīr-e Nūr</i> (pub. 1374 Sh./1995)	1	1
124	Abū al-Faḍl Dāwarpanāh, <i>Anwār al-'Irḥān</i> (pub. 1375 Sh./1996)	1a	1, 2a
125	Ya'qūb Ja'fari, <i>Tafsīr-e Kawthar</i> (pub. 1376 Sh./1997)	1	1
126	'Abd al-Mun'im Tu'aylab (pub. 1416/1995)	1	2, 1
127	Muḥammad Ṣādiq Tehrāni, <i>al-Balāgh fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān</i> (pub. 1419/1998)	1	1

A Glance at the Sources on the Tragedy of ‘Āshūrā

By: Rasūl Ja‘fariyān

The tragic episode of ‘Āshūrā was undoubtedly an extremely shocking and painful incident for all Muslims, and was the greatest of all the tragedies that took place in the early centuries of Islam, and it has, in fact, been recognized as the most important event since the dawn of Islam.¹ It is for this reason that a serious attention has been paid to this incident and to the documentation of its history, as compared to other historical incidents, and numerous history books have been written about ‘Āshūrā. However, unfortunately, many of these history books have perished or have been lost. Nevertheless, one can still remain hopeful, since among all the existing works, not only an overall reference of the incident but even many of its details – right from Imam Husayn’s (‘a) departure for Medina to his martyrdom and that of his companions in Karbalā – can be found on record. As can be naturally expected, there are occasional discrepancies between these history books regarding the details of the happenings, the locations, the names of people, and their words; and such differences call for further investigation.

However, at the very outset, it is important to answer one fundamental question, and that is: “Who were the authors of these history books and what were their religious inclinations?”

Today, the Salafis, who are highly prejudiced Sunnis, are of the belief that it is the Shi‘ites who have compiled the early sources of the history of Islam. This belief was also held among the bigoted Sunnis of the 3rd and the 4th centuries AH who believed that many of the renowned historians of the first two centuries were Shi‘ites. What can be said as regards this belief is that, basically, the employment of the term “Shi‘ite” in reference to these historians can be due to various reasons. The followers of ‘Uthmān, who have been known for their unduly rigid sectarian approach, branded anyone who showed a strong inclination towards Imam ‘Alī (‘a) as a “Shī‘ah”. In their view, if any person even showed a preference towards Imam ‘Alī (‘a) over Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān, notwithstanding the fact that he did not by any means reject Abū Bakr and the rest, he was labeled as a “Shī‘ah Ghāli” or even a “Rāfizi”. So naturally, the crime of the one who would not grant legitimacy to the very basis of the rule of the first three caliphs would be considered much greater! These prejudiced people who, from the 2nd to the 4th centuries AH, compiled the books of *Rijāl*² for the purpose of verifying the authenticity of the various *ahādīth*, generally referred to many of the Iraqī narrators as “Shī‘ah” and by claiming that these narrators operated on the basis of hearsay and religious innovations, condemned them. It was for this reason that the Iraqī historians who had adopted a more open approach to evaluating the situation in Iraq and who, probably from an Iraqī viewpoint, detested the developments in Syria and the effects of the Umayyid rule were accused of Tashayyū‘. The fact of the matter was that the followers of ‘Uthmān favoured only those historians who did not in any way object to the companions (*sahābahs*) of the Prophet (S) and who praised Mu‘āwiyah, referring to him as a companion of the Prophet (S) and the “Uncle of the Believers”

(*Khāl al-Mu'minīn*, since Umm Habibah the daughter of Abū Sufyān was one of the wives of the Prophet [S]). Moreover, they expected that these historians refrain from narrating the virtues of Imam ‘Alī (‘a) and particularly those merits that proved the superiority of the Imam (‘a) over the caliphs, failing which, such persons would be “accused” of being “Shi‘ah”. Only the narration of a single *hadīth* in criticism of a *sahābī* was sufficient for him to be accused of being a Rāfizi.

From this short introduction, it can be clearly perceived as to why the old and the new Salafī writers accused the early Muslim historians who had adopted an open approach to the developments in Iraq during the ‘Umayyid rule, as being “Shi‘ah”.

On the other hand, it is an extremely difficult task to be able to reach any conclusion about the actual sectarian inclinations of the historians, irrespective of the allegations in the *Rijāl* works of the Ahl al-Hadīth. If we were to speak of the religious inclinations of these historians by using the usual frames of reference and the known definitions about Tashayyu‘, Tasannun, or of any other religious inclination, the first problem we would encounter is the reality that most of these frames of reference and definitions have developed over an extensive stretch of time and trying to place any particular time period or a specific person into these frames can be a very difficult task. The second problem is that the mentioned indications that apparently led the Salafī writers into categorizing the religious inclinations of the historians are sometimes so vague that it would be a very difficult task for us, today, to reach any certainty as regards the beliefs of any particular person. Moreover, what rouses the third problem is the fact that “love for the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a)” is a common factor among the followers of the various Islamic schools and the mere expression of such love and affection in the works of a historian cannot form the criteria for either the Shi‘ah to claim that such a writer was from the Shi‘ite school, nor can the biased Sunnis brand this historian as “Shi‘ah” and therefore

reject the validity of his works. Whatever the case may be, it is very difficult to reach any definite conclusion as regards this matter. We shall however attempt to reach some decisive conclusions regarding the religious inclinations of these historians by briefly reviewing their biographies as well as their works on Imam Husayn (‘a). There are obviously some historians, the authenticity of whose works can be confirmed, beyond any doubt.

We must mention here that the narrators of *ahādīth* who gave importance to the validity of the documents of a *hadīth* did not consider the historians whom they named as “akhbārī” as very reliable. This was because they had witnessed that these “akhbārīs” were only concerned about narrating whatever was available to them, irrespective of its authenticity, only in order to make their books more voluminous and to apparently provide more details. Such a methodology, that had more or less become the rule of the day, was unacceptable to a narrator of *ahādīth* who laid great emphasis on the availability of the proof of the authenticity of a *hadīth*. Ibn Ishāq, Abū Mikhnaf, Madā’inī, and Wāqidī were all subjected to this view of the narrators of the *hadīth*. However, occasionally, historians like Ibn Sa’d who shared a common ideology with the Ahl al-Hadith would be approved of by them.

Among the original works on *maqātil* (pl. of *maqṭal* or place of death / martyrdom and hence used for books narrating the incident of Karbalā), the ones that could be relied upon for reviewing the Karbalā happenings, are five in number. All these five *maqṭals* belong to the period between the 2nd century AH and the early 4th century AH. Whatever was written in the centuries that followed, except for the matter that was derived from these five sources which also need to be reviewed, could hardly be considered as firsthand sources and references. These five sources are the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a) of Abū Mikhnaf, the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a) of Ibn Sa’d, the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a) of Balādhurī, the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a) of Dinawarī, and the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a) of Ibn

A‘tham. The narrations that have appeared in the works of Tabari as well as the ones that can be found in the *al-Irshād* of Shaykh al-Mufid and in the *Maqātil al-Tālibiyyīn* of Abū al-Faraj Isfahānī have more or less been extracted from the book of Abū Mikhnaf. Similarly, whatever Khātīb al-Khwārazmī has written in his book *Maqtal al-Husayn* (‘a) is basically taken from *al-Futūh* of Ibn A‘tham.

Before we begin our discussion on the existing *maqtals*, we must mention that there were many other old *maqtals* that are not extant today. One of them was the *Maqtal al-Husayn* (‘a) of Muhammad bin ‘Amr Wāqidi” (d. 207 or 209 AH), a mention of which book has been made by Ibn Nadīm and Yāqūt al-Hamawī.³ Another example was the book under the name *Maqtal al-Husayn* (‘a) that was written by Abu ‘Ubaydah Mu‘mmar bin Muthannā (d. 209 AH) and which was in the possession of Ibn Tāwūs (d. 664 AH).⁴ Yet another example was the book *Maqtal al-Husayn* (‘a) written by Nasr bin Muzāham Manqari (d. 212 AH), who is also the author of the book, *Waqa‘h Siffīn*. This *maqtal* has been mentioned in the works of Ibn Nadīm and al-Najāshī.⁵ Abū ‘Ubayd Qāsim bin Salīm Hirawī (d. 224 AH), too, had written a book under the name, *Maqtal al-Husayn* (‘a).⁶ Abū al-Hasan ‘Alī bin Muhammad Madā‘inī (d. 224/225 AH) had also written a book called *Maqtal al-Husayn* (‘a), a mention of which has been made by Ibn Shahr Āshūb.⁷ ‘Abdullāh bin Muhammad, known by his epithet of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā (d. 281 AH), the author of many works like the *Maqtal ‘Alī bin Abī Tālib* (‘a) that has been published, had also written a *Maqtal al-Husayn* (‘a).⁸ Even Ya‘qūbī who has made a brief reference to ‘Ashūrā in his book *Tārīkh* had also written a separate book under the name *Maqtal al-Husayn* (‘a).⁹ Abū ‘Abdullāh Muhammad bin Zakariyyā al-Ghalābī (d. 298 AH), whose book *Kitāb al-Jamal* was rediscovered recently and published had also written a book under the title *Maqtal al-Husayn* (‘a).¹⁰ Abū ‘Abdullāh bin Muhammad bin Shāhanshāh Baghawī

Baghdādi (d. 317 AH) had also written a book called *Maḡtal al-Husayn* (‘a).¹¹

Abū Mikhnaf and the *Maḡtal al-Husayn* (‘a)

The oldest writer on Karbalā was Abū Mikhnaf Lūt bin Yahyā (d. 157 AH) whose exclusive work is titled *Maḡtal al-Husayn* (‘a). He belonged to an Iraqi family (his grandfather was Mikhnaf bin Salim who was one of the companions of Imam ‘Ali [‘a]) and followed the Kufic form of Tashayyu‘, which was also followed by many of the narrators of *ahādīth* of the Kūfah of those times, like A‘mash as well as by many other Iraqis. Abū Mikhnaf has not been held in very high esteem by the Sunni scholars in the field of *Rijāl* and Ibn ‘Uday (d. 365 AH) has called him a Shi‘ah extremist.

A glance at the narrations of Abū Mikhnaf in the book of Tabarī as well in other books indicates that he did not harbour a strong stance against the caliphs. It could however be possible to assume that he did indeed hold a rather strong stance against the caliphs but that Tabarī had refrained from quoting any remarks that would reveal that stand. But then we must keep in mind that various Shi‘ah scholars have also quoted from his works widely, and that if his narrations had indeed contained any remarks against the caliphs, they would have at least been mentioned by the Shi‘ah scholars. Nevertheless, it can be accepted that he did have a Shi‘ah leaning to the extent that was customary in Kūfah, where they held a neutral stance as regards the first two caliphs, strongly criticized the third caliph and did not accept Mu‘āwiyah by any standards. This inclination is also reflected by a quotation from Burayr bin Huzayr in Karbalā. Abū Mikhnaf quotes Yūsuf bin Yazīd who had quoted ‘Afīf bin Zuhayr who was present in Karbalā as saying: “Yazīd bin Ma‘qal emerged from the army of the enemy and addressing Burayr who was a companion of Imam Husayn (‘a), said: O Burayr! How do you see Allah’s work with you?, to which

Burayr answered: Allah’s work with me has been excellent but you have created evil. Yazid replied: You are lying, although before this day you were never a liar! Do you recall the time we were strolling among the Banī Lūdhān? And you were saying that ‘Uthmān has been rather extravagant with himself while Mu‘āwiyah has gone astray and is misleading others and that ‘Alī bin Abī Tālib (‘a) is indeed the Imam of guidance and Truth?”¹² These three points of view as regards ‘Uthmān, Mu‘āwiyah, and Imam ‘Alī (‘a) were enough criteria for being labeled as the followers of “Tashayyu” for the Iraqis in general, and for the people of Kūfah in particular.

In our times, too, the approach of the Ahl al-Hadīth is once again reigning in Saudi Arabia and a lot of sensitivity is being shown towards *Abī Mikhnaf’s* book and similar works, and many books and treatises are being written in criticism of it. One example is the book, *Marwīyyāt Abī Mikhnaf fi Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, written by Yahyā bin Ibrāhīm bin ‘Alī al-Yahyā that has been published in Riyādh in the recent years, which was actually the post-graduation thesis of the author. A study of the criticism that the writer has leveled against the narrations of Abū Mikhnaf, however, makes one doubt his proficiency in the Arabic language! For example, while criticizing a narration by Abū Mikhnaf in which he has quoted Abū Bakr’s speech at Saqīfah addressing the Ansār, the author writes: “Abū Bakr could not have uttered those words since all the wives of the Prophet (S) were from among the Quraysh and it has been proved through reliable sources that the Prophet (S) never married a woman from the Ansār; therefore, how could Abū Bakr have said at Saqīfah that most of the Prophet’s (S) wives were from the Ansār”.¹³ Unfortunately, this Saudi Arabian writer has failed to correctly grasp the meaning of even a simple Arabic passage which reads: *wa antum ya ma’shar al-Ansār man la yunkiru fazlakum fi al-dīn wa lā sābiqatakum al-‘azīmah fi al-Islām, raziyakum-Allahu Ansāran li dinih wa Rasūlih wa ja’ala ilaykum hijratah wa fikum jullatu Azwājih wa*

Ansārih, falaysa ba'd al-Muhājirīn al-awwalīn 'indanā ahadun bi-manzilatikum."

A look at the passage clearly indicates that the words of Abū Bakr did not imply that the Prophet (S) had "taken" a wife or wives from the Ansār; rather what he meant was that the Prophet's (S) wives and his supporters all "lived" among the Ansārs in Medina. Of course, it could be possible that some of the criticism that this Saudi Arabian writer or the others have levied against Abū Mikhnaf is valid, however, the writer's verdict against Abū Mikhnaf and his inclination towards Tashayyu' is rather harsh. The truth of the matter is that if Abū Mikhnaf was indeed an extremist Shi'ah or a so-called "Rāfizi", he would not have employed this particular style and manner of narration in his book. However, keeping in view that Abū Mikhnaf was born around the year 80 AH or even a little before that, he is the earliest writer to have written about the incident of Karbalā whose work is still available to us today. Moreover, on the basis of a research conducted by Yūsufī Gharawī under the title, *Waq'ah al-Taff*, on the sources of Abū Mikhnaf that are mentioned in the introduction to the *Maqtal Abī Mikhnaf* as extracted from al-Tabarī's *Tārikh*, most of what Abū Mikhnaf has quoted in his book has come directly from the people that were present in Karbalā or were at least living during the period of that incident.

For instance, Abū Mikhnaf quotes a narration from the wife of Zuhayr bin Qayn, saying: *fa haddathanī Dilham bint 'Amr imrah Zuhayr bin Qayn*.¹⁴ In many other cases, too, he has narrated the Karbalā events in the words that came from either first hand experience or with one or a maximum of two intermediate links. It can be seen that he has narrated from Tirmāh bin 'Adī bin Hātam al-Tā'i which was through a single intermediate link. Or from 'Uqbah bin Sam'an who was beside Imam Husayn ('a) on the eve of 'Ashūrā and was injured on the day of 'Āshūrā, and thus

survived, whose narration was again through a single intermediate.¹⁵

It is, however, worth mentioning that despite the fact that Abū Mikhnaf’s report on Karbalā is the closest from the period of that historical incident, it is by no means a comprehensive account. It is also likely that some of its details have been omitted or summarized by Tabarī, however, by reading the text it appears that certain narrations have rather been recorded incomplete. And in comparison, it can be found that the versions that have been narrated by Balādhuri, Dīnawarī, and Ibn Sa’d in their works *Ansāb*, *Akhbār al-Tuwāl*, and *Tabaqāt*, respectively, are more complete than Abī Mikhnaf’s *Maqtal*.

From among the Shī‘ah scholars, Shaykh Mufid (d. 413 AH) has referred most to the *Maqtal Abī Mikhnaf* in his book, *al-Irshād*; and the similarities between his narrations and those that have been recorded in *Tārīkh al-Tabarī* bear evidence to this fact. Nevertheless, certain disparities can also be seen between the two works which could be due to the possibility that Shaykh Mufid had made use of the original text of the *Maqtal Abī Mikhnaf* and not the version from Tabarī. It is also likely that by accessing some other sources, Shaykh Mufid had added certain passages to the texts quoted from Abū Mikhnaf’s book. Yet another account of the incident of Karbalā has also been attributed to Abū Mikhnaf, the authenticity of which is held in serious question by researchers, since it contains many errors.¹⁶ The preface of the book, *Waq‘ah al-Taff*, contains some explanations that highlight the disparities between the above mentioned account and the original *maqtal* of Abū Mikhnaf, which Tabarī has included in his book. When compared with the original text of Abū Mikhnaf, it can be found that this account, which seems to be rather exaggerated, has been written by a certain writer in the form of a story, probably meant to be used in the mourning sessions – commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (‘a).

The book, *Maqātil al-Tālibiyyīn*, written by Abū al-Faraj Isfahānī (284-356 AH) is a classic work on the struggles of the ‘Alawiyyīn against the usurper Umayyid and ‘Abbāsīd governments. This book is a unique work that may have had some parallels in its own day that have been lost through time. A section of this book (pp. 84-121) has been dedicated to the incident of Karbalā, in which, most of the narrations have been taken from the *Maqatal Abī Mikhnaf*. It also contains some narrations from other sources, including some from Imam Muhammad al-Bāqir (‘a) and Imam al-Sādiq (‘a), which are not found in any other sources, thereby, making this book invaluable.

Muhammad bin Sa‘d and the *Maqatal al-Husayn* (‘a)

At the outset of our discussion, we pointed briefly to the criticisms that the Ahl al-Hadith levied against historians, all of whom they rejected one by one, without exception, on the allegations of unreliability. These historians included people like Ibn Ishāq, Wāqidī, Abū Mikhnaf, Hishām Kalbī and his father Muhammad bin Sā‘ib, as well as some others. But in spite of their initial rejection by the Ahl al-Hadith, some of these historians were exonerated in later times by Dhahabī and Ibn Hajar. The reason for this vindication was the fact that both Dhahabī and Ibn Hajar were historians themselves and thus, knew that such an outright rejection of historians would deal a severe blow to the future of Muslim historiography. Moreover, they did not wish to portray the voluminous records of the history of Islam as fallacious by criticizing these historians. However, they paid greater attention to those historians who were more sympathetic and who held the same line of thought as the Ahl al-Hadith. We have Muhammad bin Sa‘d (d. 230 AH), famous as *Kātib al-Wāqidī* (he was the scribe of the historian al-Wāqidī), for instance; and it can be found that in spite of the fact that a narration of his was referred to by Yahyā bin Mu‘in as a “lie”, one of the earliest Sunni *Rijāl* scholars, Abū

Hātam Rāzī, called him “*sadūq*” (truthful) and he was later on also defended by Shams al-Dīn Dhahabī.¹⁷ In any case, there is no doubt that Ibn Sa‘d was indeed a Sunni and from the Ahl al-Hadīth school.

Muhammad bin Sa‘d has included an important narration on the incident of Karbalā in the biography of Imam Husayn (‘a) in his book, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, which from the historical point of view is a rich and informative piece of work, in spite of the fact that some of its sections could be subjected to objection through different angles. Since the first published version of *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā*, which was printed in Europe was based on an incomplete manuscript, a large portion of the biographies were omitted and only in the recent decades were the omitted sections of the book, published in three independent volumes, including the biographies of the Prophet’s grandsons, Imam Hasan (‘a) and Imam Husayn (‘a). This section was initially published by the late Sayyid ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Tabātabā‘ī on the basis of a 7th century manuscript that had been preserved in Turkey. Later on, as a result of a research conducted by Muhammad bin Sāmīl al-Sulāmī, the omitted sections including the biographies of Imam Hasan (‘a) and Imam Husayn (‘a) were published in two parts under the title, *al-Tabaqāt al-Kubrā, al-Tabaqah al-Khāmisah min al-Sahābah* (Tā‘if, Maktabah al-Sadiq, 1414AH). The biography of Imam Husayn (‘a) and his *Maqal* are included at the end of the first volume.

This biography appears in two parts. The first part comprises the general information about his lineage, his birth, his characteristics, his virtues, and his merits while the second part contains the *Maqal al-Husayn* (‘a). The methodology of Ibn Sa‘d is in the form of the narration of history in the style of *hadīth*, which he presents in parts along with the necessary substantiation, thereby augmenting the scientific value of his work. The first part of his work includes some ninety narrations but, unfortunately, the *Maqal* section happens to contain only a few *asnād* or chains of

authority, since in most cases, the *asnād* of the incidents have been totally lost. However, the *Maqtal* section does contain some fifty documented narrations, but as mentioned earlier, a large section of the *maqtal* relies only upon the few *asnād* that have been provided in the initial portion of the work.

In the section pertaining to the *asnād*, Ibn Sa‘d has referred to a few chains of authority copied from the book of his teacher al-Wāqidi. Ibn Sa‘d has also used the references of Abū Mikhnaf Lūt bin Yahyā and a few others.¹⁸

The importance that Ibn Sa‘d has given to the documentation of the *Maqtal al-Husayn* (‘a) is rather interesting. This level of attention has not been rendered in his writing of the biographies of others, such as to include the important historical developments of their lifetimes, as is evident from a study of the style of writing of the *Tabaqāt*. However, the magnitude of the incident of Karbalā had compelled him to pay a special attention to its narration in his book. Moreover, Ibn Sa‘d has also included a large number of other narrations in his book, irrespective of their authenticity, and it appears that his main objective in doing so was merely the compilation of all the available versions, which modern researchers do need to verify. For instance, a lot of emphasis has been laid on those narrations that were inclined to vindicate Yazīd’s role in the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (‘a), thereby, shifting the blame on to Ibn Ziyād.¹⁹ There could be two possible reasons for this stance on the part of Ibn Sa‘d. It was either a political move by Yazīd, to deceive people, since there is no evidence of him ever pulling up Ibn Ziyād, who continued to rule over Iraq and was even advised by him to add to the grants of the people of Kūfah, or it could be possible that the Umayyid historians had forged the narrations to portray Yazīd as sympathetic towards the survivors of Karbalā, thereby misleading popular belief.

Moreover, Ibn Sa‘d has also recorded numerous narrations indicating that many unnatural phenomena took place on earth and

in the skies at the time of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (‘a), one being that blood could be found oozing under every stone that was lifted. Or that following the incident of ‘Āshūrā, the ruddy glew first appeared on the skies. References have also been made to the many unnatural happenings that were inflicted upon some of the soldiers of the army of ‘Umar bin Sa‘d.²⁰ The recording of such narrations by Ibn Sa‘d, who was himself one of the scholars of Ahl al-Hadith in Iraq in the first half of the 3rd century AH, is rather amazing.

Balādhurī and the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a)

Ahmad bin Yahyā Balādhurī (d. 279 AH), a prominent historian, writer, and genealogist, who lived from the reign of Ma‘mūn to the times of Musta‘in, has written the history of Islam in the form of the biographies of prominent Arab families in his book entitled, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*. He has recorded great details regarding Imam ‘Alī (‘a) and his family, in the section on Abī Tālib and his descendents, including a detailed chapter on Imam Husayn (‘a) and his *maqṭal*. The Tālibiyyīn section of this book, which deals with the line of Abī Tālib, was published in two volumes by the eminent Iranian research scholar, Muhammad Bāqir Mahmūdī, in Beirut in 1397 AH. A complete version of the book that has recently been published under the title, *Jumal Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, also contains the above-mentioned section. Of the two volumes that have been dedicated to the Tālibiyyīn, the pages 142-228 of the second volume (referred to as Volume 3 in the book, *Irjā‘āt*; since prior to these two volumes, a separate volume was published pertaining to the *sirah* of the Prophet – S) have been dedicated to the Karbalā episode. Keeping in view the period in which the book was written it is evident that the author had made use of some earlier texts, although he had also availed of certain other independent *asnād*. After presenting a few *ahādith* on Imam Husayn (‘a), his birth, and his children, he narrates the incident of

Karbalā, beginning with the first contact between the Kūfan Shi‘ites and Imam Husayn (‘a) that had taken place at the time of Imam Hasan’s (‘a) peace treaty; in most cases, without mentioning any sources and only sufficing by beginning his narrations with the phrase *qālū* (They have said). However, in some cases, Balādhuri has also made reference to the works of other historians like Abū Mikhnaf,²¹ Haytham bin ‘Adī,²² Hishām Kalbi,²³ and ‘Awānah bin al-Hakam²⁴. One also encounters cases in which he begins his quotations with phrases like *qāla al-‘Utbī*²⁵ (al-‘Utbī said), or “*haddathanī ba‘zu al-Tālibiyyīn*”²⁶ (some of the Tālibiyyīn said to me). There are also some cases in which the author has quoted from the works of ‘Umar bin Shubbah,²⁷ the renowned historian and the author of the book, *Tārīkh al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah*, indicating that ‘Umar bin Shubbah, too, had written on the episode of Karbalā.

There are some differences between the narrations of Balādhuri and those of the other historians, which prove that he has availed of a variety of sources. A comparison between his narrations and what has been recorded in other sources can throw light on some minute details of the Karbalā episode. An example is the following interesting narration which has also been recorded in *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*:

Hasin said:²⁸ Sa‘d bin ‘Ubaydah said to me, “Many of our Shaykhs from Kūfah were standing on a hill-top, crying and praying: ‘O, Allah descend Your victory on him (Husayn [‘a]).’ I told them: O enemies of Allah! Why do you not go down and help him?”²⁹

In any case, the *Ansāb* of Balādhuri is an important source relating the episode of Karbalā in a manner that is in conformity with the works of Abū Mikhnaf, Ibn Sa‘d and Dīnawarī, and despite certain differences seen between them, they seem to validate each other.

Dīnawarī and the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a)

‘Abū Hanīfah Ahmad bin Dāwūd Dīnawarī (d. 282 AH) was a botanist and a historian who has left behind two important works by the names, *Kitāb al-Anwā’* and *Akḥbār al-Tuwāl*. Despite being a Muslim he had Iranian inclinations and his works in the field of history were more focused on the study of the history of Iran rather than Islamic history. His book begins with the pre-Islamic history of Iran and goes on to discussing the advent of Islam in Iran although it does not deal with the *sīrah* of the Prophet (S) and the rule of the first two caliphs. He then enters into a study on the intertwined histories of Iran and Iraq up to the 3rd decade of the 3rd century AH. The most important section of the book pertains to the conquest of Iran and the events up to the year 227 AH, which includes the developments in Iraq in minute details. Dīnawarī’s book contains four hundred pages of which pages 229 to 262 have been dedicated to the life of Imam Husayn (‘a) and ‘Āshūrā. This book does not reveal any kind of religious preferences and it seems that the author was a Sunnī Muslim without any religious prejudice.

Dīnawarī’s book is a general book on history like that of Yā‘qūbī’s and, therefore, contrary to the works of Tabarī, Wāqidi, and Ibn Sa’d it does not narrate the incidents in the form of *ahādīth*. Instead, in every section, he begins with the phrase, *qālū* (they have said) and then goes on to the description of events. However, the book does contain one narration from Humayd bin Muslim – one of the important sources of information on the incident of Karbalā who has also been quoted by Abū Mikhnaf – which reveals the remorse of ‘Umar bin Sa’d on his return from Karbalā. Humayd bin Muslim says: “ ‘Umar bin Sa’d was a friend of mine. When he returned from the battle with Husayn (‘a), I enquired his condition. He replied: “Do not ask my condition. Indeed a traveler has not returned to his home with the evil that has

returned with me. I have severed the ties of kinship and committed a grievous act.”³⁰

Sections of this book sometimes contain fresh narrations that are not found in any of the other sources. A comparison between his narrations and what has been recorded in the earlier sources reveals that despite a lot of similarity between the texts of the narrations, the details recorded in Dinawari’s book cannot be found in the other sources. This unique feature makes Dinawari’s book one of the prime sources on the history of ‘Āshūrā. The special sentiments that Dinawari held towards the incident of ‘Āshūrā and his regret over the short time-lag between the passing away of the Prophet (S) and this incident can be fathomed from the fact that after mentioning Ibn Sa’d’s instructions to seat the women, sisters, daughters, slave-girls and servants of (Imam) Husayn (‘a) in canopied litters on camels, he writes: “There was only a gap of fifty years between the passing away of the Prophet of Allah (S) and the killing of Imam Husayn (‘a).”³¹ While explaining the incident leading to the discovery of the place of refuge of Muslim bin ‘Aqil in Kūfah through Muslim bin ‘Awsajah who was deceived by a slave of Ibn Ziyād, the author highlights a certain religious characteristic that the Shi‘ites were identified with. According to him, on witnessing Muslim bin ‘Awsajah “praying almost continuously” the slave said to himself *hāulā’ al-Shi‘ah yukthirūn al-salāt* (It is these Shi‘ites who pray a lot). He thus falsely introduced himself to Muslim bin ‘Awsajah as a Shi‘ite and extracted the information on the place where Muslim bin ‘Aqil had taken refuge.³²

Tabari and the History of ‘Āshūrā

The *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, a voluminous work of Muhammad bin Jarīr Tabarī (d. 310 AH), although not the most accurate of the books written on the history of Islam, is undoubtedly the greatest one. This book contains a comprehensive account of the

developments in the history of Islam in the first three centuries of the Hijra (besides providing the histories of the prophets (‘a) as well as the history of pre-Islamic Iran) and also contains a compilation of *ahādīth* from various sources. The aim of Tabarī was to gather and record the *ahādīth* for the benefit of the future generations and for the purpose of research and analysis.

While narrating the incidents pertaining to the years 60 and 61 AH, Tabarī has also recorded the incidents that led to the ‘Ashūrā episode; and for this purpose, he has availed of many important sources and has saved many a valuable *hādīth* from obliteration. There is not the slightest doubt that Tabarī was a Sunnī, but this does not contradict the fact that he has written a book on the event of *Ghadīr*,³³ and this act of his, enraged the followers of the Ahl al-Hadīth school enough to label him as a Shi‘ah. Dhahabī has very plainly declared and written that it was for the writing of this book that Tabarī has been “accused” of being a Shi‘ah.³⁴ The most important section of the *Maqṭal* included in the *Tārīkh al-Tabarī* is that part which has been extracted from the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a)” of Abū Mikhnaf that Tabarī has quoted through Hishām bin Muhammad bin Sā‘ib Kalbī, from whose *Maqṭal*, too, he has benefited greatly. In fact, Hishām’s book was a compilation of the book of Abū Mikhnaf along with some other details on his own *asnād*. Tabarī has used this book extensively and has quoted the narrations by resorting to such phrases as: “*qāla Hishām bin Muhammad ‘an Abī Mikhnaf* (Hishām bin Muhammad has quoted from Abī Mikhnaf) or “*haddathu ‘an Hishām ‘an Abī Mikhnaf*”³⁵ (narrated through Hishām as quoted by Abī Mikhnaf) while in some cases, he quotes from Hishām bin Muhammad without referring to Abū Mikhnaf³⁶. Tabarī has also made use of the works of Wāqidi by using such phrases as: *qāla Muhammad bin ‘Umar haddathanī Sharhabīl bin Abī ‘Aun ‘an abīh* (Muhammad bin ‘Umar has said that Sharhabīl bin Abī ‘Aun has narrated from his father).³⁷ Nevertheless, it would not be very accurate to say that

the bulk of the *Maḡtal* recorded in Tabarī's book has been taken from Abū Mikhnaf. The quoted narrations from Abū Mikhnaf's *Maḡtal al-Husayn* ('a) in the *Tārīkh al-Tabarī* comprise the surviving portion of the *maḡtal*, and in all probability, the main text of the book also contained other narrations that have been lost and are not available to us today. The section on Karbalā from the *Tārīkh al-Tabarī* has been published through the efforts of al-Sayyid al-Jamīlī under the title *Istishhād al-Husayn* as part of our appendix to the treatise by Ibn Taymiyyah entitled, *Ra's al-Husayn* ('a).³⁸ The Persian translation of Tabarī's *Maḡtal* by Bal'amī from a 6th century copy, has also been published.³⁹ We must mention at this point that not all the material included in the *Maḡtal* section of Tabarī's book has been taken exclusively from Abū Mikhnaf; rather, that he has also quoted certain important narrations from Imam Bāqir ('a) through 'Ammār Duhnī, the extracted sources of which are not very clear for the writer of this article. Some of his narrations are presented in this manner and then, as explained by himself, the detailed versions are quoted from Abū Mikhnaf.⁴⁰

Ahmad bin A'tham al-Kūfī and the *Maḡtal al-Husayn* ('a)

Besides Ya'qūbī, Mas'ūdi, Tabarī, Dīnawarī, and Balādhurī, one of the most prominent historians who has recorded many of the developments of the early days of Islam in his book, *al-Futūh*, which, like the works of many other historians, is full of such narrations that need investigation and research, is Ahmad bin A'tham al-Kūfī (d. c. 314 AH). In his book, Ibn A'tham has compiled the history of Islam, following the passing away of the noble Prophet of Allah (S) up to the reign of the 'Abbāsīd caliph, Musta'in, in the first half of the 3rd century AH, while he has dedicated a sizable portion (one-ninth) of his book to Imam Husayn's ('a) movement and the incident of Karbalā. We have elaborated on the sources of Ibn A'tham's book in another work.⁴¹ We do need to keep in mind that like some other historians, Ibn

A‘tham, too, has not recorded the evidences of each and every narration and has only provided a short general list of the sources that he has referred to, for the purpose of this book.

The Karbalā section of the book, *al-Futūh*, contains detailed and accurate narrations, in spite of the fact that the structure of the narrations, in some cases, is in the form of a story, thereby, reducing the overall value of the book, in comparison with other books of this kind. Nevertheless, since most of the narrations that appear in this book have also been recorded in the works of other historians, it is possible to prove the authenticity of the narrations of Ibn A‘tham by comparing them with the others, and thus, there is no reason to question the credibility of the material of this book. Most of the sermons and letters of Imam Husayn (‘a) that have been recorded in *al-Futūh* can also be found in other sources, albeit with slight disparity.

No other source beyond this book provides us any information as regards the religious leaning of Ibn A‘tham or reveals whether he was inclined towards Tasannun or Tashayyu‘. In fact, what can be discovered about the author, on the basis of this book, is a rather unique stance that does not fit into the usual formal frameworks of either the Sunni or the Shi‘ah schools. Although a glance at the first few sections of the book, dealing with the *Riddah* wars, reflects that the style of narrating in the book is different from the general methodology of *Riddah* history-writing of the Sunnis, it however does not follow the critical style of the Shi‘ite school either. The narrations pertaining to the reigns of the first two caliphs are in conformity with the other history texts but this approach to history-writing is not commensurate with what can be found in the Shi‘ah sources. From this background, we could conclude that by no means can Ibn A‘tham be considered to have been a Shi‘ah, unless of course, it is granted that he had Shi‘ite leanings of the Kūfan kind that we have discussed earlier on, similar to that of Abū Hanifah, A‘mash, and some others.

Nevertheless, Ibn A‘tham has undoubtedly preserved some novel information about Karbalā that has not appeared in any other source, including the works of Abū Mikhnaf and the others. And notwithstanding the fact that his narrations do call for a careful scrutiny, they could, however, provide us with valuable links to complete our investigation on this subject.

One of the most important narrations that appear in the book, *al-Futūh*, is Imam Husayn’s (‘a) will, addressed to Muhammad bin Hanafiyyah, written in Medina. Ibn A‘tham has recorded the complete text of this will, including Imam Husayn’s (‘a) famous statement which says: “*Innī lam akhruj ashiran wa lā batiran wa lā mufsidan wa lā zālīman, wa innamā kharajtu li-talabi al-islāh fi ummati jaddī, urīdu an-amura bi’l-ma’rūf wa anhā ‘an al-munkar wa asīr bi-sīrati jaddī wa sīrati abī ‘Alī bin Abī Tālib*”. Based on the results of the investigations thus far, this matter does not seem to have been recorded in any other source besides *al-Futūh*. However, Ibn Shahr Āshūb has recorded the above-mentioned statement, although not as part of the Imam’s (‘a) will, but as a part of the Imam’s (‘a) conversation with Ibn ‘Abbās.⁴² Thus, the only source in which this famous statement has been recorded as a will is *al-Futūh*, and even the version that appears in the *Bihār al-Anwār*, albeit without any mention of the source, seems to have been extracted from this very book.⁴³ In numerous cases, *al-Futūh* has recorded the texts of letters and reports in a more complete form than what can be found in the other sources, in which only the concise accounts appear. One of the significant points regarding the *Maqatal* of Ibn A‘tham is that it has recorded a number of narrations indicating that Imam Husayn (‘a) had been informed about his impending martyrdom either through dreams or through an invisible messenger (*hātif*) and has even recorded some *ahādīth* from the Prophet of Allah (S) on the incident of Karbalā. Although these narrations can be found in some other *hadīth* books, but in all the other history books from among those referred to earlier, only a

brief mention has been made of them. One example of such a *hadith* is regarding the dream of Imam Husayn (‘a), the night before his departure from Medina, in which he saw the noble Prophet of Allah (S) who said to him: “O my son! O Husayn! Soon I will see you killed and slaughtered on the land of calamity and affliction by my *Ummah*, and you would be in the state of thirst.”⁴⁴

An example of a narration presented in a story form in this book is the description of the incidents that prompted Imam Husayn (‘a) to leave Medina for Mecca. Contrary to other narrations, according to Ibn A‘tham, Imam Husayn (‘a) was first invited to bid allegiance (*bay‘at*) to Yazid, to which proposal the Imam declined, following which, the governor of Medina, Walid bin ‘Utbah, sent a message to Syria and on receiving Yazid’s reply, had a heated interaction with Imam Husayn (‘a), after which, the Imam (‘a) departed from Medina.⁴⁵ The other sources have reported this account with a difference. According to them, Imam Husayn (‘a) visited the palace of the governor of Medina on the first night and left Medina for Mecca on the following night. There are similar cases which contain detailed narrations that appear to be precise and noteworthy and which cannot be found in any other source. For example, the manner in which this book has recorded the martyrdom of ‘Alī Akbar is different from the narrations that are found in the other books and is closer to the versions that are focused upon in the ‘Āshūrā mourning sessions. According to this book, “‘Alī Akbar fought so fiercely that the people of Syria were left wailing and lamenting.”⁴⁶, although as per what is commonly believed, the Kūfan army did not contain any soldiers from Syria. Other sections of the book, *al-Futūh*, also formed the basis for the narrations that came to be used later on in the Shi‘ite elegies and mourning gatherings. For example, almost all the ancient sources have made mention of the son of Imam Husayn (‘a), by the name ‘Abdullāh bin Husayn (‘a), who was martyred by an arrow from Harmalah, while in the Imam’s (‘a) lap. However, only Ibn A‘tham

and Ya'qūbi have narrated the story of an infant son of Imam Husayn ('a), by the name of 'Alī Asghar, who was martyred by an arrow that pierced his tender neck, while the Imam ('a) was bidding him farewell beside his tent, following which, Imam Husayn ('a) dug a grave with the tip of his sword and buried him and then recited an elegy containing seventeen verses.⁴⁷ Moreover, from among the ancient sources, the only one to have recorded the sermons of some of the ladies present in Karbalā like Hazrat Zaynab ('a), is Ibn A'tham's book,⁴⁸ through which it then passed on to the other sources. The matter that has been recorded in the *Manāqib* Ibn Shahr Āshūb (d. 588 AH) about the Karbalā episode is an assortment of information collected from the works of Tabarī, Ibn A'tham, and other sources. The narration that Imam Husayn ('a) killed one thousand and nine hundred⁴⁹ of the enemies before being martyred could have been influenced by some of the sources that have been presented in a story form.

Khwārazmī and the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* ('a)

Abū al-Mu'ayyad Muwaffaq bin Ahmad al-Makkī al-Khwārazmī (d. 568 AH) has compiled a detailed and valuable piece of work on the Āshūrā episode. He is famous as "Akhtab Khwārazm" and "Khalifah of al-Zamakhsharī", since he was a student of Zamakhsharī, and like him, belonged to the Hanafī school and was a Mu'tazilite. He has also written a book under the title *Manāqib Abī Hanīfah* that has been published in India in two volumes.

Since Khwārazmī possessed a Shi'ah leaning, he had written several works about the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), including a book on the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* ('a). Some of his other works are: *Kitāb Qazāyā Amīr al-Mu'minīn* ('a), *Kitāb Radd al-Shams 'Alī Amīr al-Mu'minīn* ('a), *Manāqib Amīr al-Mu'minīn* ('a), *al-Arba'in fī Manāqib al-Nabī al-Amīn* (S), and *Wasiyyah Amīr al-Mu'minīn* ('a). In his book, *Maqṭal al-Husayn* ('a),⁵⁰ following a short

introduction, he has written fifteen chapters dedicated to the virtues and the history of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). The first seven chapters contain the virtues of the Prophet (S), Imam ‘Alī (‘a), Fātimah Zahrā (‘a), and Hasanayn (‘a) while the rest of the chapters comprise the *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S) regarding Imam Husayn (‘a) followed by a narration of the incidents of Karbalā, including the uprising of Mukhtār.

The first section of the *Maqṭal*, which has been dedicated to the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), is based on *ahādīth* and also includes their sources that Khwārazmī has quoted along with the names of his guides (*mashāyikh*). Right from the beginning of the narration on the incident of Karbalā, Khwārazmī has mainly resorted to Ibn A‘tham’s book, *al-Futūh*, and begins his quotations with the phrase, “*dhakara al-Imām Ahmad bin A‘tham al-Kūfī*”⁵¹ (Imam Ahmad bin A‘tham Kūfī narrated). Following the quotations from, *al-Futūh*, which the author has summarized and edited, he has sometimes added a *hadīth* or a narration and has then continued quoting from *al-Futūh*.⁵² In some cases, after quoting from Ibn A‘tham, Khwārazmī has added an explanation before continuing further, by employing the phrase, “*raja‘nā ilā hadīth Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī*”⁵³ (We have come back to the narration of Ibn A‘tham al-Kūfī). The added explanations are generally *asnad* that the author has quoted through his *mashāyikh*. In some cases, he has also made a comparison between the narrations of Ibn A‘tham and those from other sources.⁵⁴ In the sections related to the uprising of Mukhtār bin Abi ‘Ubaydah al-Thaqafī to avenge the blood of Imam Husayn (‘a), the author has included matters from the book, *al-Ma‘ārif* of Ibn Qutaybah as well as from Abū Mikhnaf.⁵⁵ The *Maqṭal* also includes some passages from the book, *Tārīkh ‘Abd al-Karīm bin Hamdān* which are rather ambiguous.⁵⁶ It is quite likely that Khwārazmī had access to a more complete version of *al-Futūh*, which is not available to us today.

Imam Tabarānī and the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a)

Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān bin Ahmad Shāmi al-Tabarānī (260-360 AH) is one of the greatest narrators of the *ahādīth* (*muhaddithān*) of the 4th century AH who has left behind two excellent works entitled, *Mu‘jam al-Awsat* and *Mu‘jam al-Kabīr*, containing a great collection of *ahādīth*. His book *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a)”, which has been edited and published by Muhammad Shujā‘ Sayfullāh,⁵⁷ comprises hundred and forty-eight narrations, each relating to a certain aspect of the life of Imam Husayn (‘a), including his virtues as well as the incidents of Karbalā. Prior to Sayfullāh, the late Sayyid ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Tabātabā’i had published the *Maqṭal al-Husayn* (‘a) of Tabarānī as a part of his own book entitled, *al-Husayn* (‘a) *wa al-Sunnah*.^{58 & 59} This book is not like the other *Maqṭals* although its narrations can throw light on some aspects of the issues pertaining to ‘Āshūrā. Most of the narrations in this work are related to the unnatural phenomena that followed the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (‘a). Since Tabarānī is a renowned Sunni narrator of *ahādīth*, naturally, his narrations are mainly from the Sunni sources.

Other Works from the 3rd and 4th Centuries AH

Considering the fact that Ya‘qūbī was a Shi‘ah, it would only be natural for one to have expected his book, *Tārīkh al-Ya‘qūbī*, to contain much more than the limited information it provides on the incident of Karbalā (vol. II, pp. 243-245). The book, *al-Imāmah wa al-Sīyāsah*, that was written in the 3rd or the early 4th century, too, contains only a few pages on this subject. However, the narrations regarding the arrival of survivors of the Karbalā Tragedy as captives in Damascus and their encounter with Yazīd are quite remarkable.⁶⁰

The book, *al-Mīhan*, written by Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Tamīm al-Tamīmī (d. 333 AH) also contains a few pages (pp. 142-155) on the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (‘a). However, its account

on Karbalā contains some very palpable errors. For example, the name of Shimr bin Dhī al-Jawshan has been written as Shahr bin Hawsh⁶¹. Notwithstanding its occasional slips, the book does contain some valuable information, particularly on the unnatural phenomena of Karbalā, similar to what has been recorded in the *al-Tabaqāt* of Ibn Sa‘d, examples of which are the redness of the skies and the blood found under stones.⁶² The book, *al-Bid‘ah wa al-Tārīkh*, written by Mutahhar bin Tāhir Maqdisī around 355 AH, also contains some pages on the incident of Karbalā (pp. 8-13) recording Yazīd’s demand for a *bay‘at*, Muslim’s trip to Kūfah, a brief account on the Karbalā incident, and the verses that Yazīd recited while striking the lips of Imam Husayn (‘a) (beheaded) with his stick.

A book called *Tārīkh al-Khulafā’* written in the 5th century AH – writer unknown – has survived the vagaries of time, and a photographed version of it was published in Moscow in the year 1968. This book has recorded the incident of Karbalā in minute detail, but unfortunately, the names of the writer and the sources of the book are not known. It is, however, quite clear that the book is one of the oldest of its kind and its narrations are in conformity with the other reliable sources. Only in one instance in this book, mention has been made of “Humayd bin Muslim”⁶³ who is one of the reference sources of Abū Mikhnaf. At the end of the section on the *Maqtal* of Imam Husayn (‘a) the author has written: “We have extensively discussed Imam Husayn (‘a) and his *maqtal* in spite of the fact that it is quite limited in comparison with the works of the others. Our reason for this elaboration is the fact that such an incident has never occurred before or after the advent of Islam and we guess, that none of the other religions, too, have witnessed such an incident or even anything close to it.” The author then adds: “O Allah renew Your curse on him (Yazīd) and on those who are miserly in cursing him, and avenge the blood of the Household of Your Prophet, with Your Munificence and Your Mercy”.⁶⁴

Further Sources (Stories – Literature – Elegies)

What we have dealt with thus far in our discussion has been the introduction of the important historical sources on the Karbalā incident, which also includes in some cases, the story versions of the same. These sources can serve as the basis for research work on the historical incident. Some other works came to be written later on which also basically availed of the above-mentioned sources. We must mention at this point that the period following the 5th century AH witnessed a decline in the quality of historiography pertaining to the early years of Islam, although this deterioration did not apply to the recording of current developments. The two basic reasons for this deterioration were that there was either a gradual distancing from the original sources or there was a deliberate destruction of these sources by some fanatic Sunni groups, thereby creating impediments in the way of writing authentic research works. As a result, people began dealing with the incident of ‘Āshūrā on the basis of their religious, literary, and social inclinations, thereby, paving the way for the creation of such works, which although not historically very authentic, were however, valuable from different aspects.

The important point is that it is not very clear as to when a number of books on the history of Karbalā, which did not pay much attention to the real historical aspect of the incident, came to be written. Rather these books have portrayed this incident as a unique phenomenon in the forms of stories, literature and elegies. One probability that should be kept in mind is that a story writer by the name of Abū al-Hasan Bakrī who has written important sections of the history of Islam in the story form in the 5th century, could be an important link for tracing the trend of relating the ‘Āshūrā episode in a story form. This author is also the writer of a book called *Maqatal Amir al-Mu’minin* (‘a), a copy of which is available in the library of Āyatullāh Mar’ashī in Qum. He has also written a *Maqatal al-Husayn* (‘a), the copy of which is a part of the

collection No. 575/3 (pp. 77-86) of the University of Qirwiyin in Morocco. Although this copy seems to be very concise, it appears that it has succeeded in introducing a unique style of literature to the genre of *maqtal*-writing".⁶⁵ Moreover, it could be said that part of this style has emerged in the 'Āshūrā mourning sessions of the Shi'ite communities in which, keeping in mind the decline in the quality of historiography and a lack of access to earlier sources, it has succeeded in producing a unique trend that has had an energetic and effective impact on the masses. The outstanding examples of this trend are the *Luhūf* of Sayyid bin Tāwūs and the *Muthīr al-Ahzān* of Ibn Namā Hilli which have always been popular in these kinds of gatherings, serving the purpose for which they were basically invented.

As a result of the keen interest that the Sunni-Shi'ah community in the different parts of Iran shared as regards the holding of the 'Āshūrā mourning sessions, it was from the 6th century AH onwards, that fresh works on the Karbalā episode appeared in Persian literature, both in the fields of poetry as well as prose. The last book of this kind is the *Rawzah al-Shuhadā'* of Mullā Husayn Kāshifī, which was written in Herat in the early 10th century AH. This book has presented the story of Karbalā in a very beautiful style of literature, and apart from the authenticity or the inauthenticity of the narrations, has portrayed the Karbalā incident in the most exciting manner possible. For this purpose, the author has employed his own beautiful style of prose writing, his own poems as well as the poems of others and has created a great change in the trend of the existing *maqtal-khānī* (narration of the *maqtal*). We have dealt with the *Rawzah al-Shuhadā'* in a separate article in our book, *Ta'ammulī dar Nahzat 'Āshūrā*.

With the advent of the Safavid reign in Iran, the 'Āshūrā mourning sessions came to occupy a more formal status and fresh *Maqtal* books came to be written, although the *Rawzah al-Shuhadā'* retained its popular position. During this period *rawzah-*

khānī simply meant the recitation of the narrations of such books while a *wāqi'ah-khān* was someone who recited from the texts related to the Karbalā episode in the 'Āshūrā mourning gatherings. This trend continued up to the Qājār period and beyond, and every year fresh books came to be added to the existing heritage, both in the fields of prose and poetry.

One of the books written towards the end of the Safavid period was *al-Muntakhab*⁶⁶ of Fakhr al-Dīn Turayhī (d. 1085 AH) that contains a text which has been written to serve the interests of the 'Āshūrā mourning sessions conducted in the Arabic language, and despite the fact that it has retained an important section of the Arabic mourning literature, it lacks the necessary historical accuracy in its narrations.

In any case, from this period onwards, not much attention has been paid to historical accuracy and as mentioned earlier, the authentic sources have not been consulted in the writing of new works. A noteworthy fact is that during this period, the existing trend in the writing of *Maqtals* was focused on highlighting the angles of grief, sorrow, tragedy etc. and prior to taking into consideration the writing of an accurate historical text, the purpose was to write a poignant piece of work for the *rawzah-khānī* sessions. Most of these works were written for the 'Āshūrā mourning sessions with the prime objective of arousing sympathy and tears. Some of the examples of such books that were written from the Safavid period onwards, and particularly during the Qājār period are as follows:

Ibtīlā' al-Auliyā', *Ibsār al-Abkār li-Intisār Sayyid al-Abrār*, *Izālah al-Awhām fī al-Bukā'*, *Iksīr al-'Ibādah fī Asrār al-Shahādah*, *Amwāj al-Bukā'*, *Bahr al-Bukā' fī Masā'ib al-Ma'sūmīn*, *Bahr al-Huzn*, *Bahr al-Dumū'*, *Bahr-i Ghamm*, *Bustān-i Mātam*, *Bukā' al-'Ayn*, *Balā' wa Ibtīlā' dar Rūydād Karbalā*, *Bayt al-Ahzān*, *Khulāsah al-Masā'ib*, *Dāstān-i Ghamm*, *Dam' al-'Ayn 'alā Khsā'is al-Husayn ('a)*, *al-Dam'ah al-Sākibah fī al-Musibah*

al-Rātibah, Rīyāz al-Bukā', Rawzah Husayniyyah, Rawzah al-Khawāss, Rawzah al-Shuhadā' Yazdī, Rīyāz al-Ahzān, Rīyāz al-Kunayn fī Masā'ib al-Husayn ('a). Rawzah al-Shuhadā' fī Dhikr Masā'ib al-Sādah, Sirr al-Asrār fī Musībah Abī al-A'imma al-Athār, Tariq al-Bukā', Tūfān al-Bukā', 'Ummān al-Bukā', 'Ayn al-Bukā', 'Ayn al-Dumū', Fayz al-Dumū', Qabasāt al-Ahzān, Kanz al-Bākīn, Kanz al-Mīhan, Kanz al-Masā'ib, Lubb 'Ayn al-Bukā', Lisān al-Dhākirin, Mātamkadih, Mubkī al-'Uyūn, Majālis al-Mufji'ah, Mujrī al-Bukā', Majma' al-Masā'ib fī Nawā'ib al-Atā'ib, Majma' al-Masā'ib of Māzandarānī, Muharriq al-Qulūb, Muḥit al-'Azā', Makhāzin al-Ahzān fī Masā'ib Sayyid Shabāb Ahl al-Janān, Makhzan al-Bukā', Ma'din al-Bukā' fī Maqtal Sayyid al-Shuhadā', Miftāh al-Bukā' fī Musībah Khāmis Āl 'Abā, Miftāh al-Bukā', Manāhil al-Bukā', Manba' al-Bukā', Muhayyij al-Ahzān, Najāt al-'Āsīn, Nūr al-'Ayn fī Jawāz al-Bukā', Wasīlah al-Bukā', Wasīlah al-Najāt, Yanbū' al-Dumū', Hamm wa Ghamm fī Shahr al-Muharram, Nawhah al-Ahzān wa Sayhah al-Ashjān of Muhammad Yūsuf Dihkhārḡānī,

A glance at the names of these books reveals that a few key words like *Bukā'*, *Huzn*, *Ibtīlā'*, *Ashk*, and *Musībah* are present in all of them. The Karbalā episode has been viewed from the angle of such concepts and as said earlier, the intention was not to concentrate on its historical aspects.

The other important point about these works is that the shock at the martyrdom of Imam Husayn ('a) has caused an escalation in the number of the casualties of the enemy. A glance at the *Asrār al-Shahādah* of Mullā Āqā Darbandī and even the *Tazkirah al-Shuhadā'* of Mullā Habibullāh Kāshānī reveals the extent of exaggeration in presenting astronomical statistics which cannot be verified historically. These kinds of works were so distanced from reality that they compelled Mirzā Husayn Nūri, who was an Akhbārī scholar and had compiled the major portion of the weak narrations in his book *Mustadrak al-Wasā'il*, to wage a war against

the *Maqtal* writers and the raconteurs of *Maqtals* by writing his book, *Lu'lu' wa Marjān*.

In the contemporary era, *maqtal*-writing has adopted a new form, with a slight alteration on the earlier trends. This new form has emerged as a result of the events that followed the Constitutional Revolution of Iran that had somehow fostered a politicization of the religion of Islam. The works that have been written in this field in the last hundred years, particularly the ones written by the members of the modern religious forums, are different from the earlier works. This calls for a special research on the new trend, including a study of the book *Shahīd-i Jāwīd* and other similar works.

Notes:

¹ Abū Rayhān Bīrūnī is of the belief that an incident of such a magnitude has no precedent even in the history of all nations. See *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah*”, edited by Adhkā’i, Parviz, Tehran, 2001, p. 420

² Some of these ancient books are: *Kitāb al-Kāmil fī al-Zu’afā’* by Ibn ‘Adī (d. 365 AH), *al-Jarh wa al-Ta’dīl* by Rāzī (d. 327 AH), *al-Tārikh al-Kabīr* by Bukhārī, *al-Zu’afā’* by ‘Aqīlī, *Tārikh Ibn Mu’in*, *Tārikh Abī Zur’ah Demashqī*, *Ahwāl al-Rijāl* by Juzjānī (d. 259 AH), *al-Majrūhin* by Ibn Habān (d. 354 AH), various works of Dāraqutnī (d. 385 AH) like *al-Mu’talaf* and *al-Mukhtalaf*, and also the various works of Khatib Baghdādī (d. 463) like the *Tārikh Baghdād*.

³ Ibn Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, p. 111; *Mu’jam al-Udabā’*, Yāqūt Hamawī, Bairut: Dār al-Fikr, 1400, vol. 7, p. 58; Sayyid ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Tabātabā’i, *Ahl al-Bayt fī al-Maktabah al-‘Arabiyyah*, Oum: Mu’assasah Al al-Bayt, 1417, No. 691, p. 532.

⁴ *Ahl al-Bayt fī al-Maktabah al-‘Arabiyyah*, No. 692, p. 533.

⁵ *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, No. 1148; *al-Fihrist*, p. 106; *Ahl al-Bayt fī al-Maktabah al-‘Arabiyyah*, No. 693, p. 534.

⁶ Shams al-Dīn Dhahabī, *Siyar A’lām al-Nubalā’*, vol. 19, p. 306, *Ahl al-Bayt fī al-Maktabah al-‘Arabiyyah*, No. 694, p. 535.

⁷ *Ma'ālim al-'Ulamā'*, No. 486, *Ahl al-Bayt fī al-Maktabah al-'Arabiyyah*, No. 695, p. 535

⁸ *Siyar A'lām al-Nubalā'*, vol. 13, p. 403, *Ahl al-Bayt fī al-Maktabah al-'Arabiyyah*, No. 696, p. 536.

⁹ *Ahl al-Bayt fī al-Maktabah al-'Arabiyyah*, No. 697, p. 537.

¹⁰ *Al-Fihrist*, p. 121; *Rijāl al-Najāshī*, No. 936; *Ahl al-Bayt fī al-Maktabah al-'Arabiyyah*, No. 698, p. 538.

¹¹ Hājī Khalīfah, *Kashf al-Zunūn*, vol. 2, p. 1794; *Ahl al-Bayt fī al-Maktabah al-'Arabiyyah*, No. 699, p. 538; the late 'Allāmah Tabātabā'i has also mentioned a few other sources.

¹² Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, vol. 5, p. 431.

¹³ Yahyā bin Ibrāhīm bin 'Alī, *Marwīyyāt Abī Mikhnaf fī al-Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, Riyadh: Dār al-'Āsimah, 1410, pp. 107-124.

¹⁴ *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, vol. 5, p. 396.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 406, 407, and 413.

¹⁶ Shaykh 'Abbās Qummī, in order to make it clear that he is quoting the original *Maqṭal Abī Mikhnaf* and not the unreliable version, says in his introduction to *Nafas al-Mahmūm*: I am quoting Abī Mikhnaf's *Maqṭal* on the basis of *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, by using the name Azdī (Abī Mikhnaf's epithet) so that the reader will not confuse it with the questionable *Maqṭal Abī Mikhnaf* that has been included in volume 10 *Bihār al-Anwār*. For me there is no doubt that this *Maqṭal* (*Bihār*'s version) is not the work of Abū Mikhnaf or any reliable author and whatever is found in this *Maqṭal* which has not been corroborated by any other scholar, is not authentic.

¹⁷ Shams al-Dīn Dhahabī, *Mizān al-'Itidāl*, Bairut: Dār al-Ma'rīfah, 1982, vol. 4, p. 560.

¹⁸ Muhammad bin Sa'd, *Tabaqāt al-Kubrā: Tarjamah al-Imām al-Husayn ('a)*, p. 53.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-91.

²¹ Ahmad bin Yahyā Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, ed. Muhammad Baqir Mahmūdi, Bairut, 1397, vol. 3, pp. 156, 207.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 213.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 209, 211, 217, 227.

²⁸ It refers to Hasin bin ‘Abd al-Rahmān who has also been quoted by Tabarī through Sa’d bin ‘Ubaydah as well as others. See *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, vol. 5, pp. 391-393.

²⁹ *Al-Ansāb*, vol. 3, p. 225; *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, vol. 5, pp. 392.

³⁰ Ibn Qutaybah Dīnawarī, *Akhbār al-Tuwāl*, p. 260.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 235-236.

³³ The surviving part of this book has been edited by the author under the title *Kitāb Fazā’il ‘Alī bin Abī Tālib wa Kitāb al-Wilāyah* and published by Dalil Publications in Qum in the year 2000.

³⁴ Shams al-Din Dhahabi, *Risālah Turuq Hadīth Man Kuntu...*, ed. Sayyid ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Tabātabā’i, Qum: Dalil Publication, 1420, vol. 61 p. 62.

³⁵ *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, vol. 5, p. 400.

³⁶ See *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, vol. 5, p. 386.

³⁷ *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, vol. 5, p. 344.

³⁸ Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, Beirut, 1417 AH.

³⁹ *The Uprising of Sayyid al-Shuhadā’ Husayn bin ‘Alī (‘a) and Mukhtār’s Revenge*, compiled by Muhammad Sarwar Mawlā’i, Pazhuheshgāh ‘Ulūm-e Insāni, Tehran, 1999.

⁴⁰ *Tārīkh al-Tabarī*, vol. 5, p. 347.

⁴¹ Rasūl Jav‘fariyān, *Manābi’ Tārīkh Islām*, Qum: Ansariyan, 1376, pp. 167-168.

⁴² *Manāqib Ibn Shahr Ashūb*, vol. 4, p. 89.

⁴³ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 44, p. 329. (No particular book has been mentioned).

⁴⁴ Ahmad bin A'tham Kūfī, *al-Futūh*, Bairut: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah, vol. 5, p. 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-212. Ya'qūbī's narration (vol. 2, p. 245) is short and does not refer to the name of "Ali Asghar".

⁴⁸ See *al-Futūh*, vol. 5, pp. 222-223.

⁴⁹ *Manāqib Ibn Shahr Āshūb*, vol. 4, p. 110.

⁵⁰ See *Ahl al-Bayt fi al-Maktabah al-'Arabīyyah*, pp. 541-546.

⁵¹ Muwaffaq bin Ahmad al-Khwārazmī, *Maqatal al-Husayn* ('a), Qum: Manshūrāt Anwār al-Hudā, vol. 1, p.254.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.263.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.270.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p.263.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p.199, 204.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p.200, 210, 254, 292, 293.

⁵⁷ Dār al-Awrād, Kuwait, 1992.

⁵⁸ Chihil Sutūn School, Tehran, 1397 AH.

⁵⁹ See *Ahl al-Bayt fi al-Maktabah al-'Arabīyyah*, No. 701 and 702, pp. 539-540.

⁶⁰ 'Abdullah Ibn Qutaybah Dinawari, *al-Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah*, Qum: Manshurāt al-Sharif al-Razi, 1413, vol. 2, p. 12.

⁶¹ *Al-Mihan*, p. 147.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

⁶³ *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*, Sheet No. 86a.

⁶⁴ *Tārīkh al-Khulafā'*, Sheet No. 87a.

⁶⁵ Differences of opinion exist as regards Abū al-Hasan Bakrī, some of which have been recorded in a brief discussion in the bibliography of the Library of Āyatullāh Mar'ashī, vol. 29, pp. 128-133.

⁶⁶ Published under the title *al-Muntakhab lil-Tārikh fī Jam' al-Marāthī wa al-Khutab al-Mushtahir bi al-Fakhrī* by the Manshūrāt al-Sharīf al-Razī Publications, Qum, 1420 AH.

The Science of Religion in the Islamic World and Civilization

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Today the study of religion is considered as the study of that element of human culture related to the trend of human thought through the ages and connected with man's interpretation of the world and nature. From this perspective, if we intend to know "man" it would be vital for us to also study his culture and religion in order to grasp the numerous dimensions of his inner and intellectual functioning through a comparative study between the various cultures and religions; to evaluate the levels of his intellectual and spiritual growth as well as his ethical values; and to examine his movement in the desirable direction, and the rate of success in the attainment of his higher goals.

In the field of humanities, anthropology is considered as one of the most advanced areas of human learning that the modern man has grasped. Within religious cultures, discussions pertaining to anthropology or the study of man and his creation as well as his characteristics can be found in the various verses of the Glorious

Qur'ān and the Torah which should, however, more appropriately be referred to as discussions on "religious anthropology", in the same reference as "philosophical anthropology". At times, the fields of these three subjects tend to overlap and even share a common terminology.

However, the experimental study of human culture presents man as a rational being who has always raised his levels of knowing with the use of his intelligence, who has traveled on the path of progress, and who has attempted to evaluate the world and nature with the help of his thinking and intellect.

Thus, we find that anthropology of two kinds has emerged through the course of human culture:

1. The study of man from the viewpoint of the religious scriptures as mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān and the Torah.
2. The study of man as reflected through the mirror of human culture and a comparative study of the various cultures and religions.

The first view of man shows him as an entity caught up between the dualities of reality and illusion, purity and impurity, pain and deliverance, and salvation and damnation; who, by exercising his free will can attain liberation and salvation by choosing the Right Path.

Although the account of creation considers man, too, as a creation among the rest of creation, it does not project him in the same light as the other creatures, because man is the ultimate act of the Divine Will. He is the focal point of creation, enjoying a direct connection with his Creator. Therefore, such issues as salvation, damnation, sin, and success only concern man; and it is because of this extraordinary potential that he is considered as a being, capable of transcending the limitations of nature. It is only man who will enter the realm of eternity after completing his worldly life.¹

According to the second viewpoint, man is considered to be a cultural and a "culture-generating" being, and if he intends to really

know “himself”, he would need to study the other cultures as well. And a comparison between cultures should enable him to project a general image of humanity in the mirror of culture, failing which he would only be caught up in a misconception, falsely believing himself to be the quintessence of society and the only perfect being.

Cultural anthropology only aims at defining the experimental method of the numerous subjectively discernable systems within their various times and locations. Thus, it appears to project man as the captive of a stagnant culture, imprisoned by the collective spirit and the worldview of his times, with the possible danger of anthropological thought being reverted to historical relativism. In other words, it is the definition of certain cultures possessing various characteristic features; each one of which culture has closed itself off from the rest, such that it seems to be completely different in its kind. The sociology of learning predicts that every existing individual is a prisoner of the cultural atmosphere in which he has grown; and that his views, habits, and behavioural patterns - based on social pressure - take shape according to the prevalent ideals of his time and living environment.²

Thus, the modern man desires to open his windows to the other cultures of the world and to study and analyze himself in the light of comparison with these other cultures. As a consequence, a series of specialized comparative sciences like comparative law, comparative linguistics, comparative philosophy, and comparative religion have emerged and found place in the various universities all over the world.

Objectivity in the Study of Religions

The study of cultures and religions can never thrive in an atmosphere of prejudice and bias. If a researcher were to evaluate any religion solely on the basis of his personal criteria he would never succeed in reaching a true and deep understanding of that

religion nor would he be able to measure the spiritual growth and development offered to man by that religion.

It is for this reason that a neutral base is adopted in the field of the study of comparative religion, which however, does not take upon itself the onus of evaluating the rights and the wrongs of religions in the scope of its study.

Dr. S. Rādhākriṣṇan, a contemporary scholar in the study of religions, says: One of the achievements in the field of comparative religion is that a general distinction among religions and of dividing them into the categories of 'true' and 'false' is not held of any importance. The dissimilarity that exists between the Revealed Religions and the natural religions, although not quite like the dissimilarity between Truth and falsehood, denotes the second concept. Revealed religions hold an exalted position and revelation and inspiration are general blessings and are not the prerogative of a chosen few. Today, we understand more clearly than did our ancestors that God has introduced Himself to man through different ways.³

What is important is the discovery of Truth and the understanding of the mind and the soul of man and his perception of the world and nature; his interpretation of the relationship between the world, nature, man, and God; his way of relating with his Creator; and his forms of prayer and other acts of worship. According to Rādhākriṣṇan: Veiled behind the different names like Brahma, Jehovah, Ahurā Mazdā, and Allah are One aim, One effort, and One faith. All religions have emerged from the sacred realm of the Divine Sanctuary and they all spring from One soul and One life. The various religious practices are all temporary means and are trials in the way of the single spiritual reality. The study of comparative religion is in search for the reason behind the similarity between religions with the emphasis that the human soul has been drawn towards a single spiritual Truth and that a man's actions are somehow influenced by that Truth. Keeping this in

mind, we can see the reason why, although the study of comparative religion may not support religious prejudice, at the same time, it could never be considered as a haven for disbelief.⁴

The many religious cultures that are spread over the face of the earth in different forms, oblige the foresighted researcher to study the various human cultures and religions with a soul in love with rational truth and to conduct studies in an unprejudiced manner, free from any kind of prejudgements, for finding solutions for issues like disbelief and nihilism – the curse of the Machine Age – in order to usher in hope, joy, and love for the human society and to invite various societies to work towards cooperation, understanding, and coordination.

The Characteristics and Qualities of an Ideal Researcher

Joachim Wach, a religious scholar, has written a valuable treatise on the characteristics and qualities of an ideal researcher and has enumerated four basic prerequisites that should be present in a researcher while conducting a comparative study of religions. According to him, they are:

1. A good command of the language of the people of his study group as well as an acquaintance with their local terminology and phraseology, directly and without the use of an interpreter.
2. The presence of an emotional affinity on the part of the researcher.
3. Enthusiasm and volition for an understanding of the psychological characteristics of the study group, rather than mere curiosity or for winning arguments and debates.
4. The presence of religious experience, failing which it would not be possible for the researcher to understand or perceive that experience in others.⁵

The book, *The City of God*, written by St. Augustine in the early 5th century CE as well as many other books written in the Islamic world like the *al-Bid'ah wa al-Tahrif* are indicative of the

fact that, unfortunately, and contrary to the direct teachings of the Divine Religions, many “religious” people have considered the followers of the other religions as enemies and aliens. It is most unfortunate that such discordant attitudes are more common among the followers of the various sects of the same religion, notwithstanding the fact that they all share common religious principles.

In his book *Siyar al-Mulūk (Siyāsatnāmah)*, Nizām al-Mulk, the learned Seljuq minister who belonged to the Shāfi‘ī sect, has not left any stone unturned in insulting, degrading, and cursing the followers of the other sects and has used the worst possible abusive language against them. In his own words:

If in any way through some celestial accident any misfortune should befall this victorious empire, these dogs will emerge from their hiding places and will revolt against this empire. They claim to be Shi’ites and most of their strength and reinforcement comes from the Ra’fidis and Khurram-dins and as far as they can they will leave nothing undone in the pursuit of vice, mischief, murder and heresy. In their speech they claim to be Muslims... The religion of Muhammad (s) has no worse enemy than them.⁶

The Comparative Study of Religions in the Islamic Civilization

One could say that perhaps the first book that critically evaluated different religions in a comparative manner was none other than the Glorious Qur’ān. The Qur’ān has made mention of the religious beliefs of the Jews, the Christians, the Sabeans, and the others in its various chapters and has then critically evaluated them by resorting to various rationales and clear monotheistic reasoning. The account of Prophet Abraham (‘a) and the reasoning behind his criticism of the Sabeian beliefs, the verses of the *Sūrahs Marium* and *al-Mā’idah* on the religious beliefs of the Christians, and the verses of the *Sūrah al-Baqarah* criticizing the beliefs of the

Jews, all provide evidence that the Qur'an was the pioneer in the field of comparative debates on religions.

In the Islamic civilization, besides the arguments and treatises ascribed to Imām Sādiq ('a) and Imām Rizā ('a) on the views of the Jews and the Christians⁷, the presence of various books on the study of comparative religion written in the early centuries of Islam are further evidence of the old trend of the existence of such debates among the Muslims.

One of the prominent religious scholars who has written books critically evaluating the views of the rivals, especially on the issue of Imamate, was Hishām ibn Hakam (d. 179 AH). Some of his books that have been mentioned in Ibn al-Nadīm's, *al-Fihrist* are *al-Imāmah*, *al-Raddu 'alā al-Zanādiqah*, and *al-Raddu 'alā Man Qāla bi-Imāmah al-Mafzūl*. Mention should also be made of Mu'min al-Tāq and Abū Ja'far Muhammad bin Ahwāl who wrote the books *al-Imāmah* and *al-Raddu 'alā al-Mu'tazilah*, as also Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Qibah Rāzī who wrote the book, *al-Insāf* on the issue of Imamate. Abū Sahl Nawbakhti, too, wrote the book, *al-Istifā'*, and his nephew, Abū Muhammad Hasan bin Musā Nawbakhti, wrote the books, *al-Ārā' wa al-Diyānah al-Raddu 'alā Ashāb al-Tanāsukh* and *al-Imāmah*.⁸

A Scientific Study of Religion

In earlier times, the study of religion was unscientific and was based mainly on dialectics, often presented in the form of written objections (*Raddiyeh Newisi*). The advantage of our times is that today the science of religion is systematic, unbiased, and empirical. Dr. Rādhākriṣhnan has rightly observed: "We have all heard Goethe's famous and rather strange saying 'The one who knows only one language knows nothing'. A poet has said: 'We cannot understand our own religion well unless we evaluate it in the light of one or more other religions.' It is only through a rational and respectful study of other religions that we can arrive at

a new understanding of the traditions of other religions as well as that of our own religion.”⁹

The presence of the faculty of comparative religion in the various universities all over the world, the organization of international conferences on dialogue among religious personalities and scholars, the presentation of great encyclopedias in the field of comparative religion like *The Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics* by Mircea Eliade, and the publication of specialized journals on an international level, all make the study of this field of human knowledge a means of mutual intellectual understanding and promoting a proximity among religions.

Islamic Writers

One of the greatest Islamic scholars who has succeeded in the application of the scientific method in the study of religions and has conducted an unbiased study in this field is the famous historian and geographer, ‘Alī bin al-Husayn Mas‘ūdī (d. 334 AH).

In his books, *al-Ārā’ wa Diyānah* and *al-Ibānah ‘an Usūl al-Diyānah*, he has discussed the various religions of the world and their different sects. Similarly, in the first volume of another of his works entitled, *Murūj al-Zahab*, he has discussed the principles of the beliefs, the customs, and the traditions of the Indians.¹⁰

In spite of taking note of the opinion of Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī¹¹, according to whom the writings of Mas‘ūdī are not very reliable, it is rather unfortunate that most of Mas‘ūdī’s books are not available any more, the only substantial surviving work that throws light on his views being *Murūj al-Zahab*.

Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī (362 – 440 AH)

The only scholar who succeeded most authoritatively in taking a scholarly step in the scientific study of religion was Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī, the famous Iranian Islamic scholar. He was an objective scholar and laid the foundations of the principles of

anthropology through the method of observation and induction and had studied the conditions of the other peoples.

Not only did Birūnī learn about the culture and religion of the Indians by living among them and by learning their language and by acquainting himself with their local terms and phrases, but he also showed the path of the scientific study of religions to other researchers.

Centuries before the science of religion recognized the 'religiousness' of man as a general issue, and considered the manifestation of Truth as being all-pervasive and at all times (as against the belief of it being present only at a particular time and for an exclusive group) as a possibility, and before it set out to identify and lay common rules for understanding the religious life of the people of the world, and centuries before people like Rudolph Otto, Joachim Wach, and Mircea Eliade resorted to comparative studies in the area of religious phenomenology and outlined an impersonal perception and a non-judgemental attitude as the pre-requisites for the understanding of the purpose and the meanings of religious affairs in the different epochs of human history, Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī, with his innate intelligence had recognized the value of these basic points and in his research on religions had adopted a method, which, if we were to overlook its limitations that were due to the restrictions of his time and age, conform with the basic principles and rules of the modern methods.¹²

The most important achievement of al-Bīrūnī was that he did not limit himself to mere lip service but instead, while researching on the beliefs of alien cultures, he first learned their language and acquainted himself with their local cultural terminology and closely observed their customs, traditions, beliefs, and thoughts. In his own words:

My teacher encouraged me to put on record whatever I had learned about the religion of the Hindus in a book such that it could serve those who intended to hold debates and arguments with them and so that it could prove to be a resource for those who intended to interact and mingle with them (the Hindus). This is what my master bid me to do and I wrote this book (*Tahqīqu Mā lil-Hind*), ensuring that I did so without allowing false and baseless remarks to enter into the observations. And I did not refrain from using the direct quotations (of the Hindus).¹³

And this is not a book of debates and arguments so as to contain in it the arguments of the rivals and to reject or falsify their claims; rather our intention is to record the beliefs of the Hindus, exactly as they are; and to draw out and present their similarities with the Greek beliefs and views wherever needed.¹⁴

For this reason he has named his book *Fī Tahqīqi Mā lil-Hind min Maqūlatin Maqbūlatin fī al-‘Aql aw Mardhūlah*. Interestingly, contrary to the common notion, Abū Rayhān considers the beliefs of the Hindu elite and scholars as stemming from pure monotheism (*Tawhīd*).

The main cause of difference between the views of the elite and the common folk in all nations is that the minds of the elite are always preoccupied with rational thoughts and they are eager to gain intellectual realities whereas the common man suffices himself with sensorial experiences. As per the belief of the elite Hindus, the God Almighty, Whom they refer to as “*Iswara*” is the Self-Sufficient, Generous One Who only “gives” and never “takes”. This is because they have recognized His Oneness as being Absolute whereas, all other than His Oneness, is considered by them as being unreal.¹⁵

Although Abū Rayhān’s book was about the Hindu beliefs and did not deal with all religions, however, it is the most excellent

and empirical research of its kind in the field of the science of religion.

The third personality to have written books in the field of the various world religions and whose methodology and school of thought has impacted the evolution of the science of religion is Abū al-Fath ‘Abd al-Karīm Shahrīstānī (467-548 AH). According to his own claims, Shahrīstānī has recorded the religions of other peoples in an unbiased manner leaving any evaluation, comparison, and judgement to the discretion of the reader. He says:

I vowed to myself to quote the views and beliefs of other religions without any bias or prejudice and without showing any disrespect to them, and without attempting to distinguish the right beliefs from the false ones or rejecting them. Nevertheless, for the fertile thinking mind, the indications of Truth and falsehood can become most obvious through intellectual reasoning.¹⁶

In his book, Shahrīstānī has written about all kinds of philosophical schools of thought, man-made religions, Revealed Religions, as well as their branches and sects, trying to stay as unbiased as possible. However, it appears that he has deviated from his claim to neutrality and has passed rather unjust judgements on Shi‘ites. To mention an example, he has falsely accused Hishām bin Hakam of attributing Imam ‘Alī (‘a) with a Divine status and of regarding him as a Divine Incarnation.¹⁷

Notwithstanding this error, Shahrīstānī’s book contains interesting points on the epistemology of religions. Thus, from a scientific point of view, his book has been an important and influential one in the evolution of the science of comparative religions.

A German scholar says: “Through Shahrīstānī’s book, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, we Europeans can bridge in the gap existing between the history of the ancient and modern philosophy.”¹⁸

Eric Sharpe in his *History of Comparative Religions* says: “Shahrīstānī’s outstanding and extraordinary work is so valuable

that no Christian writer of his times has succeeded in producing such a scientific piece of work.”¹⁹

Cultural Deterioration

The scientific studying of religions did not endure much after Abū Rayhān and the later Islamic writers merely confined themselves to quoting from the works of their predecessors and occupied themselves mainly with proving their own beliefs and rejecting the views of the other sects. As a matter of fact, the practice of *Raddiyeh Newisi* (writings that were aimed at rejecting opposing views), became the wide-spread methodology of research and discussion in the field of the science of religion and/or the history of religions. It should also be noted here that, until recent times, the prevalent trend among the other nations of the world, too, was not much different from that of the Muslims.

In his scholarly foreword to Dr. Muhammad Jawād Mashkūr’s book, *Farhang-e Firaq-e Islāmī* (The Culture of the Islamic Sects), Professor Kāzim Mudīr Shānehchī, presents a comprehensive list of the books under the title of *Milal wa Nihal* or “*Firaq-e Islāmī*”, that have been written on the Islamic sects with the primary intention of proving their own beliefs and rejecting the views of the other sects. At the end of the above-mentioned foreword, Shānehchī mentions the name of some university professors like the late Rashīd Yāsami, ‘Alī Asghar Hikmat, Muhammad Jawād Mashkūr, and Hāshim Razī all of whom have written or translated books on world religions. It should be noted here that Professor ‘Allāmah Yahyā Nūrī’s book, *Islām wa Jāhiliyyat*, is practically an introduction to the science of religions.

Although in today’s times, many European and American universities have set up departments and faculties in the field of the science of religion in which this subject is taught up to the PhD level and through which many doctoral theses are being written, unfortunately, this field of study has not flourished in the

theological schools of the Islamic world and has rather vanished into oblivion. The fact of the matter is that there is a complete dearth of this branch of study in the Islamic theological schools. Recently, ‘Abdullāh Muballighī has written three volumes on *The Religions of the World* which is a significant achievement. Ayatullah Ja‘far Subhānī’s book, *Buhūth fī al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, too, can be considered as a unique piece of work in this field.

Ayatullah Subhānī has also compiled an encyclopaedia comprising the views and teachings of the various Islamic sects entitled, *Mawsū‘ah al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyah*, the outstanding features of which are as follows:

1. Such a comprehensive piece of work on Islamic sects had not thus far been undertaken by any of the Islamic scholars from among the Sunnis and the Shi‘ah in the Islamic theological schools. This encyclopaedia is the first research work of its kind containing the views, beliefs, and the principles of the most renowned personalities from the various Islamic schools of thought, compiled from the reliable sources of these very schools.

2. This book is completely unbiased and unprejudiced while discussing and evaluating various religious issues. In this regard, Ayatullah Subhānī says: “Our method in teaching, discussing, and evaluating the Islamic sects is based on two principles: a) Objectivity, respect towards the writers of these sects, and quoting from their reliable sources; b) An analytical evaluation of their views and beliefs. This is more so, since many historians have written about the beliefs and views of the various Islamic sects without any evaluation and analysis. It is as though they only consider it their mission to narrate historical events concerning these sects and schools of thought without involving themselves in any evaluation and analysis based on intellectual criteria.”²⁰

3. It is a comprehensive and objective discussion on the *hadīth* of the splitting of Islam into seventy-three sects.

Most Muslim historians like Ibn Hazm al-Andalusī, the author of, *al-Fasl*, ‘Abd al-Karīm Shahrīstānī, the author of *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, and Baghdādī, the author of *al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq* have taken this *hadīth* as verified, which in turn, has inspired them to write books on it. There have, however, also been some Islamic scholars who have argued about the authenticity of this *hadīth* and the veracity of its documentations and have thus interpreted it differently from the other Muslim scholars. For example, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH), was the first person to doubt the authenticity of this *hadīth* in his exegesis of the verse 93 of the Qur’ānic *Sūrah al-Anbiyā’*, in his book, *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*.²¹

Ghazzālī (d. 505 AH), too, is from among those scholars who have quoted this *hadīth* as an evidence. However, in his book, *Faysal al-Tafriqah Bayn al-Islām wa al-Zandaqah*, while interpreting this *hadīth* about the salvation of the Islamic sects, has mentioned the sentence, “*Kullihā fī al-Jannah Illā al-Zanādiqah*”. (All of them would be in paradise except the atheists)²²

In his *Tafsīr al-Manār* (volume 8; pp. 221-222), Muhammad ‘Abduh, has written, “It is very fortunate that there is another *hadīth* that says, *Kulluhum fī al-Jannah Illā al-Wāhidah*.” (All would be in paradise except one).

In spite of all the above-mentioned arguments, Ayatullah Subhānī has questioned the authenticity and the veracity of the documentation of this *hadīth* and has scientifically proved that it is baseless and has been forged. A brief version of his argument is as follows:

- i. This *hadīth* lacks veracity from the point of its documentation and is, thus, not very reliable. For example, Ibne Hazm (*al-Fasl*, vol. I, p. 24), Muhammad Muhyiddīn, the annotator of the book, “*al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq*” (pp. 7-8), and Hākīm Nayshābūrī have all commented on the weakness of the documentation of this *hadīth*.

ii. The text of the *hadith* has been narrated in such varying degrees that it is rendered questionable.

iii. There is a dispute as regards which particular Islamic sect is actually guaranteed salvation.

4. A question arising here is whether the figure denoted as “seventy-three”, can actually be implied with reference to the Islamic sects, which in any case are and have been much fewer in number.

On the other hand, the efforts to justify that the figure seventy-three actually implies “multiplicity” does not solve any problem because in some Qur’ānic verses, it is the figure ‘seventy’ that has been employed to denote “many”. For example, “...*Even if you ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them...*” (9:80). Thus, the addition of three to the figure of seventy does not evidently imply anything particular. Moreover, even if we take into consideration the view that the Zoroastrians, the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims have been divided into seventy, seventy-one, seventy-two, and seventy-three sects respectively; the figure in question would still be actual and could not be taken to be metaphorical or as a hyperbole.

If we were to argue that the difference in the religious practices of the various sects is the criterion for their division, in that case the number of sects in Islam would be over 500; whereas, such an interpretation does not fall in alignment with the text of the *hadith*.²³

Ayatullah Subhānī continues his argument by quoting the following views of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, which weakens the authenticity of this *hadith* still further: “Every sect has added a sentence of its own choice at the end of the *hadith*, thereby presuming their own sect to be the one to attain salvation. Moreover, the division of the Islamic sects has not been confined to a certain time period in the past, and the likelihood is that new sects

have emerged, which have not been taken into consideration by those who have presented their views on Islamic sects.”²⁴

In any case, this *hadith* does not bear any decisive meaning and is, thus, subject to various doubts.

The ‘Science of Religion’ is a new branch of knowledge that has been established today in the field of theology and humanities. Although, this science is rooted in the study of sects and denominations and the history of religion, it is an independent field of study in itself.

Today, this particular study like the other specialized fields of religious studies, is not taught at the *hawzah*. It is hoped that scholars and intellectuals, in view of the needs of the modern age, would remove this shortcoming and establish a chair and a department for teaching the science of religion by availing the services of related professors.

Notes:

1. Dr. ‘Ali Asghar Halabi, *Insān dar Islām wa Makātib-i Gharbī* (Man According to Islam and the Western Schools of Thought), Asātir Publications, Second Edition, 1995, p. 115.

2. *Ibid*, pp. 133-134.

3. Dr. S. Rādhākṛishnan, *Religion in East and West*, Translated into Persian by Fereydun Gorgāni, p. 36.

4. *Ibid*, p. 19.

5. Wach, Joachim, *The Comparative Study of Religion*, New York, 1953, pp. 11-15.

6. Khwājah Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, p. 188, translated by Hubert Darke, Persian Heritage Series, Routledge & Keagan Paul, London, 1978.

7. The late Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Kāshif al-Ghitā’ has compiled the debates of Imām Rizā (‘a) with the followers of Judaism and Christianity in a treatise entitled, *al-Tawzīh fī Mā Huwa al-Injīl wa*

Man Huwa al-Masīh, which has been translated into Persian by Sayyid Hādi KhosrowShāhi under the title of *Injīl Chīst wa Masīh Kīst*.

8. The introduction of Kāzim Mudīr Shānehchī on Dr. Jawad Mashkūr's book, *Farhang-e Firaq-e Islāmi*, Āstān Quds e Razawi Publications, Mashhad, 1989, p. 16.

9. Dr. S. Rādhākriṣṭhnan, op cite, p. 37.

10. 'Alī bin al-Husayn al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Zahab*, Egypt, 1998, vol. I, p. 79.

11. Abū Rayhān al-Birūnī, *Tahqīqu Mā lil-Hind*, p. 3.

12. Dr. Fathullah Muḡtabā'i, *Barrasihā-yi dar Bāreh-ye Bīrūnī* (Researches on Birūnī), Birūnī Yādnāmeḡ, p. 264.

13. Abū Rayhān al-Birūnī, *Tahqīqu Mā lil-Hind*, Translated into Persian by Akbar Dārāseresht, Tehran, 1973, p. 24.

14. *Ibid*, p. 24.

15. *Ibid*, p. 28.

16. 'Abd al-Karīm Sahrīstānī, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, p. 24.

17. *Ibid*, vol. I, p. 185.

18. Foreword to "*al-Milal wa al-Nihal*", p. 3.

19. Eric Sharpe, *A History of Comparative Religions*, Charles & Sons Co., New York.

20. Ja'far Subhānī, *Buhūth fī al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, vol. I, pp. 15-16.

21. Fakhr Rāzī, *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*, vol. IV, p. 193, published in Istanbul, quoted from the foreword written by Dr. Mashkūr to Mahmūd Tāhīr Ghazzālī's (Nizām) book *Haftād wa Seh Millat* (The Seventy-Three Nations), 'Atā'i Publications, Tehran, 1962, p. 7.

22. Muhammad Ghazzālī, *Faysal al-Tafriqah Bayn al-Islām wa al-Zandaqah*, p. 15.

23. Ja'far Subhānī, *Buhūth fī al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, vol. I, p. 37.

24. 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, *Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyīn*, vol. I, p. 34.

Why I Am Not a Traditionalist?

Dr. Hājj Muhammad Legenhausen

Abstract

After presenting some background information on the historical climate that gave rise to the traditionalism of Guenon, Coomaraswamy and their followers, I discuss the major tenets of this school of thought and offer some criticisms. Although I find much in the traditionalist critique of modernism to be insightful, and the reverence of authentic tradition to be inspiring, in the final analysis, traditionalism seems to be too reactionary and too nostalgic to offer a workable way to move through and beyond modernity. Its positive theses about perennial philosophy romanticize the occult aspects of the world's religious traditions and are backed by unsupported assumptions, tenuous comparisons based on a prejudiced selection of materials, and rather wild speculations. In conclusion, I humbly offer a few suggestions for a more balanced view of religion and modernity.

Introduction

In an interview in 1989, the Yale historian of Christianity Jaroslav Pelikan said: "*Tradition* is the living faith of the dead; *traditionalism* is the



dead faith of the living. *Tradition* lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are and that it is we who have to decide. *Traditionalism* supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition.”¹

Traditionalism is a modern European reaction against modernism. It has appeared in a variety of religious movements: Jewish, Catholic, Protestant and Islamic. In what follows, I am particularly concerned to address a specifically Islamic form of traditionalism that traces itself to the writings of Rene Guenon and Ananda Coomaraswamy, but it is useful first to take a brief look at Catholic traditionalism in order to gain a better understanding of the historical roots of traditionalism generally.



Traditionalism is a paradoxically modern reaction against modernism whose roots are to be found in 19th century Europe, especially France. There, Catholic opponents of secularism and modernism defended a traditionalism based on the authority of the Pope. While there was a liberal wing of this *ultramontanist* movement, Pius IX (1846-1878) became decisively hostile to all liberalism in political and intellectual life after he temporarily lost the Papal States after the revolution of 1848. Pius’ *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) proclaimed that the pope “cannot and should not be reconciled and come to terms with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization.”² The movement to reaffirm papal authority culminated in the doctrine of papal infallibility in 1870, although in that same year the First Vatican Council in its *Dei filius* sought to appear moderate by condemning both traditionalism (defined as a denial of the ability of natural reason to achieve certainty on any religious truth) and modern forms of rationalism. Despite the wording, Catholicism explicitly opposed modernism in favor of its own traditions and the authority of the

pope. Catholic opposition to modernism was much diminished after Vatican Council II (1962-65), but prior to that the Church saw itself as a defender of tradition against the political and intellectual currents that had swept over Europe. In 19th century England, the Catholic lead in defending tradition became a controversial issue among Anglicans, with liberals in the Church of England accusing traditionalists of moving too close to Roman Catholicism. Catholic sympathy was aroused in England by French clerics who sought refuge in England after the revolution. Before mid-century, the leader of the traditionalist Oxford movement, John Henry Newman (1801-1890), converted to Roman Catholicism, became a priest and was eventually appointed cardinal.

The reaction against modernism in 19th century Europe took various forms, only one of which is found in the stance taken by the Roman Catholic Church. Fundamentalist Protestants also began to make use of anti-modernist rhetoric, especially in the United States. The religiously conservative stance against modernism also found expression in literature, of which the best examples are to be found in the poetry of T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) and in his enormously influential essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent."³ Eliot moved from America to England, converted to the Church of England and supported religious traditionalism within Anglicanism.

French Catholicism in the 19th century supported both tradition and monarchy. In the latter half of the 19th century, French liberals gained the upper hand over monarchists, and imposed a number of anti-clerical laws. The movement for such anti-clerical laws was instigated by Leon Gambetta (1838-1882) in his speech at Romans, 18 September, 1878, containing the famous catchword "*Le clericalisme, c'est l'ennem*". Catholics alleged that such anti-clericalism was due to the influence of the Masonic lodges.⁴

The Masons provided an alternative to Catholic traditionalism based on alleged ancient occult sciences, and in

French society they tended to attract free thinkers and anti-clerics, as well as those interested in occult speculations.

Nineteenth century France also exhibited a fascination with the Orient in its art, as is witnessed in the number of French painters who took up oriental themes, such as Jean-Leon Gerôme (1824-1904), Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (1803-1860), Jean Dominique Ingres (1780-1867), Charles Bargue (1825/26–1883), Leon Bonnat (1833–1922), Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant (1845–1902), Eugène Fromentin (1820–1876), Charles-Theodore Frère (1814–1888), to mention only a few. [The painting to the right is by Gerôme, oil on canvas, 35 x 29 1/2 inches (88.9 x 74.9 cm), Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. This painting was based on sketches Gerôme made at a mosque during his travels in Egypt and the Near East in 1876.]



The fascination with the Orient, and the occult and ancient also helped attract members to the Theosophical Society founded by Madame Blavatsky, Colonel Henry S. Olcott, and W. Q. Judge in 1876 in New York City. In turn, the Theosophical Society published a number of translations from non-Western religious traditions, including a French translation of the *Gita* in 1890, and other works on Buddhism and Hinduism. In 1879, Olcott and Blavatsky moved to India, where they propagated their faith among Europeans and Indians. In 1882, they bought property at Adyar, near Madras, and the international headquarters of the society is still located there. Various national headquarters were also established in the US and European countries. While in India, Olcott became a Buddhist and traveled throughout Sri Lanka, where he led a movement to revive Buddhism. Olcott and the Theosophical Society founded Ananda College and several other Buddhist schools, and, for this, Olcott is still revered in Sri Lanka.

It is in the context of this cultural atmosphere that an esoteric form of traditionalism was developed in the writings of two fascinating and erudite authors, Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) and Rene Guenon (1886-1951).

Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy was born in Ceylon, raised in England at his mother's home after the death of his Tamil father when he was two, and studied at London University where he was awarded a doctorate in geology. Between 1906 and 1917 he made frequent trips to India and Ceylon, and became president of the Ceylon Reform Society, dedicated to the revitalization of Sinhalese culture, an aim that was also supported to the Theosophical Society in Ceylon since 1880. He joined the Theosophical Society in 1907. In 1917, as a conscientious objector to British conscription, he emigrated to the US where he became curator of the Indian and Asian sections of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Although he published various works in journals and presses of the Theosophical Society, he was critical of the movement, especially with regard to the understanding of the doctrine of reincarnation. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that his introduction to metaphysical thought and the idea of an essential unity underlying the mystical traditions of the world came to him through the Theosophical Society. From 1932 until his death, he concentrated his energies on writing about what he called the *philosophia perennis*. His works on Indian art continue to be highly respected by scholars.



Rene Guenon came from a devout Catholic family and his early education was in Jesuit schools. He had a delicate personality, and when he felt that his teachers were persecuting him,



his father had him transferred to the College Augustan-Thiery, where he completed baccalaureates in mathematics and philosophy. He was a brilliant student and won prizes in physics and Latin. He enrolled in the College Rollin in Paris, in 1904 to study mathematics, but withdrew after two years. In 1906 he became a protege of Gerard Encausse, known as “Papus,” who was a co-founder of the Theosophical Society in France. Papus had split off from the Theosophical Society to form the *Faculte des Science Hermetique*, and Guenon later disassociated himself from both. He vigorously condemned Theosophy in several of his writings, in which he claimed that it was based on a corruption of perennial first principles. Nevertheless, like Coomaraswamy, important ideas about metaphysics and the esoteric unity of religious traditions were introduced to him through Theosophy.⁵ While in Paris, Guenon also joined other occultist groups and became a Freemason. Although Guenon never renounced Freemasonry as he did Theosophy and continued throughout his life to write on Masonic themes and symbolism, although after leaving Paris, he did not participate in Masonic activities, and his continued interest seems to have been purely intellectual. In 1912 he embraced Islam, and through ‘Abd al-Hādi, a Swedish initiate, he joined the Sufi order of the Egyptian master Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rahmān ‘Illaysh al-Kabir. After a short stint as instructor of philosophy in Algeria, Guenon entered the doctoral program in Sanskrit at the Sorbonne where he studied with Stanislav Levi. Although he did not complete his doctorate, apparently because he refused to provide the required references and notes for his thesis, the dissertation was published to general scholarly acclaim as *Introduction Generale ā L’etude des Doctrines Hindoues* (1921). After the death of his French wife, he moved to Cairo in 1930 where he remarried, had four children, became an Egyptian citizen known as Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wāhid Yahyā and remained for the rest of his life. He is the

author of twenty-nine books and roughly five hundred articles and reviews.

Coomaraswamy and Guenon corresponded and attracted a number of followers, a number of which became influential authors and promoters of traditionalism, including Fritjof Schuon, Titus Burkhardt, Marco Pallis, Martin Lings, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Huston Smith, and others. These writers defend a number of common doctrines:



Tradition is the continuity of Revelation: an uninterrupted transmission, through innumerable generations, of the spiritual and cosmological principles, sciences and laws resulting from a revealed religion: nothing is neglected, from the establishment of social orders and codes of conduct to the canons regulating the arts and architecture, ornamentation and dress; it includes the mathematical, physical, medical and psychological sciences, encompassing moreover those deriving from celestial movements. What contrasts it totally with our modern learning, which is a closed system materially, is its reference to all things back to superior planes of being, and eventually to ultimate Principles: considerations entirely unknown to modern man.⁶

Traditionalism or Modernism?

In order to evaluate the claims of Traditionalism as expounded by Coomaraswamy, Guenon and their followers, we need a more complete account of that claims made by Traditionalism than the statement by Whitehall Perry given above. Since the main thrust of my criticism of Traditionalism aims at its rejection of modernity, it is important to make it clear at the outset that in criticizing Traditionalism, I am not endorsing modernism. The basic point is that nothing should be accepted or rejected

merely because it is modern and likewise, nothing should be accepted or rejected merely because it is traditional. There is much that is good in modernity, and much that is good in traditional societies. There is much that is bad in modernity, and much that is bad in traditional societies. These obvious facts seem to be ignored by Traditionalists and modernists, and so, both Traditionalism and modernism should be rejected. Every claim and every practice must be subject to critical evaluation according to the criteria of religion and reason.

Modernity, Modernism and Modernization

Modernity is first of all a period of European history stretching from the aftermath of the Reformation through the twentieth century. Secondly, it is a cultural condition. During the modern period European society acquired a number of striking interrelated characteristics: economically, there was a shift from an agrarian to an industrial economy; politically, the institution of the nation-state began to displace monarchical rule, liberalism and secularism gained ground against the allied powers of the nobility and the Church; socially, individualism and social mobility began to take precedence over family and community and technology came to play an ever more important role in the private and public spheres that emerged; philosophically, Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism became dominant; in science, new methods of exact measurement and applied mathematics were developed; in the arts, there was a shift from iconic art to naturalism and then expressivism; and in theology, historical method and an emphasis on religious experience became prominent. Virtually every aspect of human life changed in ways that previously would not have been imaginable. When conditions such as these come to characterize a society, whether European or not, the society is said to have become modernized. In Europe and elsewhere, modernization has been met with enthusiastic support as well as resistance. The

optimistic advocacy of modernization is modernism. There are other more specialized meanings that have been given to the terms *modernity*, *modernization* and *modernism*, but they are not immediately relevant to our discussion.

Traditions, Tradition and Traditionalism

The term *traditional* is perhaps even more vague than *modern*. It is generally understood in contrast to *modern*. Whatever was deeply ingrained in society prior to modernization is *traditional*. Indirectly, the traditional is understood in terms of European history, since the traditional is defined in contrast to the modern, which in turn can only be understood with reference to European culture. To call a non-Western society traditional is therefore to claim that it is similar in important ways to Europe before the Reformation. In contrast to *modernism*, *traditionalism* could be used to designate any movement of resistance to modernization, or the view that pre-modern societies are superior to modernized societies. In this sense, one speaks not of traditionalism per se, but of Catholic traditionalism, Russian traditionalism, etc.

Since it would be extremely implausible to advocate an absolute traditionalism, i.e., the thesis that modernity is always worse than whatever it replaces, Coomaraswamy and Guenon introduced the notion of *authentic traditions* as those rooted in divine revelation. They claimed that there were common features to be found across pre-modern societies, whether aboriginal, Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Taoist or Buddhist.⁷ It is the common features of these societies that are called *tradition*, and the advocacy of these features over those of modern societies is *Traditionalism*. Thus, traditionalism includes a thesis of a specific form of religious pluralism, that all the authentic religious traditions are divinely inspired and are at the innermost core the same, as well as a cultural thesis that asserts that the cultural institutions of societies dominated by authentic tradition are

justified as reflections of Tradition. Both of these theses are dubious. I have made a case against Traditionalist religious pluralism elsewhere,⁸ so here I will only touch on the main points.

Problems with Esoteric Pluralism

The sort of religious pluralism advocated by Traditionalists is one that it takes over from Theosophy. Even if Guenon decisively rejected the Theosophical Society, the key ideas of the Traditionalists regarding the unity of religions: (1) that all the major religions have a divine source; (2) that esoterically they are the same but exoterically different; and (3) that traces of the original perennial wisdom are to be found in the religions, are clearly stated by Madame Blavatsky in the introduction to *The Secret Doctrine*:

The true philosopher, the student of the Esoteric Wisdom, entirely loses sight of personalities, dogmatic beliefs and special religions. Moreover, Esoteric philosophy reconciles all religions, strips every one of its outward, human garments, and shows the root of each to be identical with that of every other great religion.⁹

The main differences between Blavatsky and the Traditionalists are: (1) she rejects the concept of a personal God found in the monotheistic religions as exoterically interpreted in favour of a more pantheistic view; (2) she considers Christianity to have deviated from the original doctrine, especially after Constantine, and in general, she holds that the forms of religion now found in the world are all to a greater or lesser extent deviations from the original doctrine she claims to have uncovered.

Like the Traditionalists, Blavatsky holds that the esoteric teachings of the religions constitute a perennial wisdom:

The now *Secret* Wisdom was once the one fountain head, the ever-flowing perennial source, at which were fed all its streamlets - the later religions of all nations -- from the first down to the last.¹⁰

Guenon came to the conclusion that Madame Blavatsky was a charlatan. However, the form of religious pluralism she espoused was retained by him and further elaborated in his writings and those of other Traditionalists. This is not the place to evaluate Blavatsky's credentials, and even if there is much in her writings that cannot stand up to scholarly scrutiny, that by itself does not prove that there is anything wrong with the type of pluralism she advocated, let alone the subtly different form of pluralism found in Traditionalist writings.

What's wrong with the sort of pluralism advocated by Blavatsky and the Traditionalists is that it depends on a rather questionable reading of the texts of the world's religions. It requires that one hold that certain similarities in doctrine, especially esoteric doctrine, constitute the core of the religions, and that differences be dismissed as deviations. Blavatsky supported this interpretation with the dubious claim that she had discovered the original secret teachings. The Traditionalists, on the other hand, claim that through intellectual intuition they are able to discern the common essence. The method used is implausible. It is assumed at the outset that the religions have a common esoteric essence, and the texts are interpreted so as to accord with this principle. This is question begging.

The second major flaw common to most forms of religious pluralism is that the teachings of the religions seem to be inconsistent with one another, and with pluralism, regardless whether we examine their esoteric or exoteric doctrines. Pluralists are forced to claim that these contradictions are either due to corruptions in the religious traditions, or are due to inessential factors, such as culture. This sort of claim is not supported by an examination of the texts, but only by an *a priori* conviction of the truth of pluralism.

These objections to pluralism are made by appeal to standards of good scholarship in religious studies. More

importantly, however, there are theological grounds within Islamic teachings to reject the religious pluralism of the Traditionalists. The problem is not merely that Islam forbids idol worship, while idol worship is intrinsic to the non-monotheistic traditions. The problem is where the criterion for religious truth is to be found. According to Islam that criterion is given in God's final revelation to man, while according to Traditionalism it is something to be abstracted by intellectual intuition through a comparative interpretation of the world's esoteric religious teachings.

This theological criticism is not merely theoretical. It has practical consequences, as well. For example, Islam presents a relatively egalitarian social ideal in which no distinctions in religious duty are made on the basis of social standing, occupation, color or race. There is no priesthood in Islam. Hinduism, on the other hand, not only has a priesthood, but it is enshrined in the caste system. Traditionalists such as Martin Lings continue to defend the Hindu caste system as being a part of authentic tradition, rather than condemning it on the basis of Islamic teachings.

But thanks to the caste system with the Brahmins as safeguarders of religion we have today a Hinduism which is still living and which down to this century has produced flowers of sanctity.¹¹

What is essential here is to see what criterion is being used for evaluative religious and moral judgements. Instead of making their evaluations from within the framework of Islam, Traditionalists base their evaluations on the conceit that they can view all of the religions from some higher transcendent perspective.

The flaws of esoteric religious pluralism may be summed up by listing the following points.

■ Intellectual intuition, even if accepted as a valid way of obtaining knowledge, does not support esoteric pluralism.

■ Esoteric differences among the religious differences are proportionate to their exoteric differences. Common features among religious traditions may be found by abstracting and generalizing from their exoteric features no less than from their esoteric features.

■ Religious pluralists use a question-begging methodology in their reading of religious texts.

■ Pluralists gloss over important differences in order to eliminate contradictions.

■ Pluralism conflicts with Islamic teaching, because Islam presents itself as the final and definitive religion for mankind and not as culture bound, while pluralism sees the differences between Islam and other traditions to be due to cultural accidents.

■ Islam offers a basically egalitarian social vision, while Traditionalists view social differences, such as are found in the caste system as manifestations of the hierarchical nature of being.

■ Traditionalists use tradition and the intellectual intuition of the principles of *sophia perennis* as their criteria of evaluation instead of the principles of Islam.

The Traditionalist Critique of Modernism

Problems with the Traditionalist cultural thesis are best understood in terms of their critique of modernism. According to this thesis, the characteristics of traditional societies are manifestations of the divine principles on which they are based, and thus, the characteristics of modern societies, insofar as they deviate from tradition, are to be rejected.

Many critics of modernity have drawn attention to points upon which traditionalists focus their critique, e.g., scientism, atomistic individualism, lack of spirituality. They are important points. Guenon, Coomaraswamy and other traditionalists are to be

credited with seeing through the illusions of modernism at a time when its allure was at a peak. Martin Lings describes the mood after the First World War as follows:

I myself remember that world in which and for which Guenon wrote his earliest books, in the first decade after the First World War, a monstrous world made impenetrable by euphoria: the First World War had been the war to end war. Now there would never be another war; and science had proved that man was descended from the ape, that is, he had progressed from apehood, and now this progress would continue with nothing to impede it; everything would get better and better and better....I remember a politician proclaiming, as who would dare to do today, "We are now in the glorious morning of the world." And at this same time, Guenon wrote of this wonderful world, "It is as if an organism with its head cut off were to go on living a life which was both intense and disordered." (from *East and West* first published in 1924).¹²

As we have seen, Coomaraswamy and Guenon did not invent dissatisfaction with modernity. A long line of poets and thinkers who found much in modern culture appalling preceded them. Since the very inception of the industrial revolution, there has been no lack of voices proclaiming that society and culture had taken a wrong turn, that something valuable was being lost and destroyed. Among the voices of dissent may be found Romantic poets, like Blake and Wordsworth, Catholic ultramontanists, philosophers from Nietzsche to Heidegger, and, not surprisingly, Blavatsky and Olcott.

So, what is distinctive about the traditionalist critique of modernity? It is not unprecedented, so the distinctive feature is not historical originality. Some critics of modernity focused on the social problems of modern life, while others have been more theoretical. Usually, however, the two are combined, and it is held that the social problems of modernity are a result of neglect of some important truths. For the Catholics, modern woes are due to

neglect of the teachings of the Church. For the Romantics, the neglected truth is one that can only be grasped through the heart, or some sort of feeling or experience. For Heidegger, the problems of modern society are the result of a long progressive neglect of the question of Being stretching back to antiquity. For Blavatsky, Olcott, Guenon and Coomaraswamy, the problems of modernity arise from neglect of the perennial wisdom found in the esoteric teachings of the great religions, although it must be admitted that Guenon and Coomaraswamy went way beyond what was implicit in the writings of the Theosophists.

In all of these groups there is a common implausible causal claim, that the neglect of some truths is what causes the problems associated with modernity. As far as I know, none of the members of any of the groups mentioned does anything to substantiate this claim. It is taken to be obvious that since moderns have neglected the Truth and have various social problems, the neglect is the cause of the social problems. Consider the following statement by Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr:

But the opposition of tradition to modernism, which is total and complete as far as principles are concerned, does not derive from the observation of facts and phenomena or the diagnosis of the symptoms of the malady. It is based upon a study of the causes which have brought about the illness. Tradition is opposed to modernism because it considers the premises upon which modernism is based to be wrong and false in principle.¹³

This is a gross oversimplification. The relation between modern thought and the characteristics of modern societies is a complex one in which social changes influence thought and vice versa. In order to understand the problems of modernity, more observation of facts and phenomena is needed than metaphysics. European modernization took place as European societies became increasingly industrialized. The changes wrought by

industrialization led to shifts in political power and authority, and these shifts are reflected in modern political philosophies, including Marxism, liberalism and the various forms of traditionalism, for the reactions against the changes that accompanied industrialization are no less modern than the positivistic euphoria assailed by Guenon and Lings.

Another dubious feature of the Traditionalist critique of modernity that stems from the idea that social forms are products of dominant beliefs is that there is a tendency among Traditionalists to glorify pre-modern social structures because they are seen as products of true Traditional beliefs. Guenon writes:

What we call normal civilization is a civilization which is based on principles, in the true sense of the term, and where everything is ordained and hierarchically arranged in conformity with these principles, so that everything there is seen as the application and extension of a doctrine purely intellectual or metaphysical in its essence; this is what we mean also when we speak of a “traditional” civilization.¹⁴

In this way, the evils of feudalism are to be excused because feudalism is seen as an institution that was produced by a society dominated by Traditional beliefs and values and in turn the system protected those beliefs and values. The social pressures that made the feudal system intolerable and led to its overthrow are ignored, and the shift is glossed as having been brought about by a neglect of the perennial wisdom on which feudal society was based!

In place of the modernist faith in unlimited progress in which technology and “enlightened” thinking are supposed to lead to a continual improvement in the human condition, Traditionalists posit that modernization is a process of unmitigated decline, explained by Guenon in terms of the grand cycles of Hindu cosmology. While modernists seem blind to the spiritual crisis of modern man, the rape of the environment, the evils of colonialism

and neo-colonialism, the weakening of the family, etc., Traditionalists seem blind to the benefits brought by modernization, the vast increase in literacy and availability of education, public health and sanitation, more humane treatment of prisoners and the insane, etc. The benefits of modernization cannot be ignored any more than its failings, even when judged not by the standards of modernity itself, but in accordance with traditional values. It is pointless to attempt any overall evaluation by which to justify the claim that modernity is better than what preceded it or worse. In some respects it is better, and in other respects worse.

While Traditionalists devote much of their attention to the evil aspects of modernity, there is relatively little analysis of the major themes of modern writers, such as inwardness, the importance of ordinary life, the moral resources within the self, the ideal of authenticity, liberal political ideals, naturalism, or autonomy, to mention a few of the most important.¹⁵ For a meaningful criticism of modernity to take place without falling into reactionary posturing, an examination of the development of such themes in modern writing is required as well as a review of how such themes have gradually come to be reflected in modern culture and society generally.¹⁶ Simply to pit the evils of modernity against sacred Tradition provides little help with understanding either modernity or traditional societies, or how they interact.

According to Catholic traditionalists, the traditions of the Church are sacred because the Holy Spirit guides the Church through history. This doctrine means that practices and beliefs that have no other justification than that they have been around as long as anyone can remember are given an aura of holiness. It also makes any deviation from accepted practices and beliefs seem demonic. Something like this doctrine may be found among Traditionalists, as well. There are several differences. First, they do not limit themselves to a particular religion, as do the Catholics. Second, they do not base the attribution of sacredness on the

guidance of the Holy Spirit, but on the guidance of “true principles,” *sophia perennis* and intellectual intuition. Nevertheless, both Catholic and Guenonian traditionalists see traditions as sacred because they are in some way manifestations or elaborations of divine revelation. Revelation becomes manifest in tradition. This sort of veneration of tradition results in a very extreme sort of conservatism, one that is open to moral criticism according to the very tenets and values of the traditions the Traditionalist pretends to defend.

Traditionalism is an ideology, in the general sense that it offers a system of ideas on the basis of which it recommends a social or political program. Of course, Traditionalism differs from many other ideologies in that while they concentrate on political action, Traditionalism is focused on metaphysics, and takes a political position only derivatively. Nevertheless, and more specifically, it is an ideology in the sense that it: (1) contains a more or less comprehensive theory about the world and the place of man in it; (2) sets out a general program of social and political direction; (3) it foresees itself as surviving through onslaughts against it; (4) it seeks not merely to persuade but to recruit loyal adherents, demanding what is sometimes called commitment; (5) it addresses a wide public but tends to confer some special role of leadership on intellectuals.¹⁷ It is yet another “ism”, another *maktab*, that has emerged out of the European experience of modernity. This is ironic, because Traditionalists condemn ideology generally as a product of modernity.¹⁸ So, Traditionalism is self-defeating, in the sense that its condemnation of everything modern is so general that it implicitly condemns itself, since Traditionalism itself is a modern ideology founded by Coomaraswamy and Guenon prior to World War II.

As for the political program of Traditionalism, it is perhaps most clearly stated by Dr. Nasr:

In the political domain, the traditional perspective always insists upon realism based upon Islamic norms. In the Sunni world, it accepts the classical caliphate and, in its absence, the other political institutions, such as the sultanate, which developed over the centuries in the light of the teachings of the *Shari'ah* and the needs of the community. Under no condition, however, does it seek to destroy what remains of traditional Islamic political institutions.... As for the Shi'ite world, the traditional perspective continues to insist that final authority belongs to the Twelfth Imam, in whose absence no form of government can be perfect. In both worlds, the traditional perspective remains always aware of the fall of the community from its original perfection, the danger of destroying traditional Islamic institutions and substituting those of modern, Western, origin....¹⁹

As I understand Islam, many Sunni and Shi'ah Muslims are in agreement that at least after the first four caliphs, the caliphate has been a complete disaster in which lust for power, empire building and personal extravagance dominated the institution even as it claimed to rule in the name of Islam. The martyrdom of Imam Husayn ('a) rescued Islam from its association with such decadence by testifying that the caliphate had become in fact a force opposed to everything genuine Islam stands for. This sort of understanding of Islamic history seems unavailable to Traditionalists who laud governments based on the sovereignty of sultans and so-called caliphs as *traditional*, while playing down the corruptions and excesses of such governments as *imperfections* that should be tolerated to prevent the danger that some Western model of government might come to power. This is reactionary politics at its worst.

In sum, although there is much insight into modernity's flaws in Traditionalist writings, the Traditionalist critique of modernity suffers from the following defects:

■ First, there is the dubious idea that explicit or implicit belief in various principles causes a society to have the characteristics it exhibits, so that the ills of modernity are simplistically attributed to deviations in beliefs.

■ Second, Traditionalists contrast the evils of modernity with a romanticized picture of traditional societies.

■ Third, the Traditionalist analysis of pre-modern societies fails to do justice to the essential differences among them because it is motivated by the *a priori* assumption that they are all based on shared principles.

■ Fourth, Traditionalists view modernization as unmitigated decline because they take adherence to Tradition as their evaluative standard rather than the standards inherent to the traditions themselves. This criticism may be presented as a logical one, revealing a contradiction inherent in the Traditionalist position, or as a theological criticism, that Traditionalism exalts Tradition in a manner not sanctioned by Islamic teachings.

■ Fifth, the Traditionalist critique of modernity is based on intuitions about the deviant principles that dominate modern society rather than on historical analysis.

■ Sixth, deviation from Tradition is condemned without regard to any evaluation of whether change could be merited, because change is seen as opposition to the sacred as it has become manifest in tradition. While it presents itself as inheritor of the sapiential legacy of the traditional cultures of the world, in fact it impedes the exercise of wisdom to critically examine the conditions of what are considered to be authentic traditional societies.

■ Seventh, while Traditionalists condemn ideology as a modern phenomenon, what they offer is itself an ideology.

■ Eighth, Traditionalism is politically reactionary.

Traditionalism fails in its criticism of modernity because it makes use of an arcane methodology and ignores the details of history, it oversimplifies the characters of both modern and traditional societies, and by making Tradition itself the standard of its evaluations, it violates the moral principles of the traditions it claims to champion. As an ideology, Traditionalism makes no provision for meaningful debate about how to improve society, reform its institutions or confront the changes that are taking place, because all deviations from tradition, glorified as the manifestation of divine principles, is opposed. Thus, the failings of the Traditional critique are both methodological and theological. Despite these failures, Traditionalist ideology may serve the useful purpose of fomenting some resistance to those who advocate modernization, development and industrialization in imitation of the Western model, and perhaps it is vain to hope for a more reasoned and nuanced approach to modernity. Traditionalism succeeds in pointing out many important faults in modernity: the loss of the sacred with the rise of secularism, the loss of intrinsic value with the rise of instrumental rationality, the loss of art and vocation with the industrialization and automation, and the loss of a coherent world view with the emergence of pluralism, diversification and specialization.²⁰ However, others have observed these faults, too. What is valuable in the Traditionalist critique of modernity is not original, and what is original is not valuable.

The Inescapability of Modernity

Traditionalists offer no alternative to modernity because they fail to come to grips with its dynamics and instead wallow in nostalgia. When this criticism was explicitly leveled against Coomaraswamy, he responded that he did not wish to return to the Middle Ages.²¹ Nevertheless, in speaking of the possibility of regeneration in the West, he says, "The possibility exists only in the event of a return to first principles and to the normal ways of

living that proceed from the application of first principles to contingent circumstances.”²² The question that remains unanswered by Traditionalists is how to apply such principles in the present circumstances of modernization. Guenon responds to this problem with an expectation of the end of the age of modernity based on Hindu cosmological ideas. In the meantime, he suggests that what remains of Tradition may be preserved by certain elites who are initiated into the *sophia perennis*. Quinn suggests, on the basis of his readings of Coomaraswamy and Guenon, that this intellectual elite might serve a function similar to that of the Hindu Brahmans as a priestly caste to reestablish Tradition after the passing away of the modern age.

The scenario painted by the Traditionalists seems unlikely, and may God forbid any such destiny. Where there are Brahmans, untouchables are usually not far. Barring global catastrophe, and/or the reappearance of Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his return), it is more reasonable to assume that modernization, along with all its benefits and injuries, will continue to spread. The challenge that faces Muslims today, is how to minimize the injuries, how to ride out modernization so that it does not take the same form among Muslims as it has in Christian society, how to preserve the sacred norms and values prescribed for us by Islam in these rapidly changing times. There are no simple solutions, no easy answers. An insistence on fundamental principles is not enough. The problem for Muslims is exactly how the fundamental principles of Islam are to be applied in the situations in which we find ourselves. Compromise is necessary because the traditional institutions and cultural forms are not sufficiently flexible to accommodate the changes with which contemporary Muslim societies are faced. Moreover, there is much in the traditional institutions that is not worth preserving. Traditional oppression, despotism, and cruelty do not become justifiable for being Traditional. Initiation into esoteric wisdom by an intellectual elite will not suffice to reform society in

accord with divine guidance. Loyalty to Islam requires a realistic appraisal of the environment in which we seek to live as Muslims and foster the flourishing of Muslim communities. Part of this realism means understanding how the conditions of contemporary societies differ from those of pre-modern societies in ways that make the reinstatement of traditional forms impossible or worse. Many of the differences are due to technology. Some are simply the result of the huge differences in the size of the populations of societies then and now. Consider the concept of *shurá* (consultation). In the small community of believers at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (s) consultation could be carried out through direct conversation with recognized leaders of tribal groups. When the community of believers comes to include millions and tribal affiliations have been erased centuries ago, it will be appropriate to adopt democratic institutions and apparatuses, even in the absence of any endorsement of democratic political theory. As another example, consider punishment. In Islamic sources there is no precedent for the collection of fines or prison sentences. Traditional authorities introduced prisons and dungeons, and the conditions in such Traditional institutions were notorious. It is neither practical nor moral to attempt to regulate traffic with threats of Traditional forms of punishment. Tradition is of no help in such matters. The example of traditional Muslim societies may help us to understand how Muslims sought to live in accordance with their religion, and in what ways they succeeded and failed in this effort, given the circumstances in which they lived. Change in traditional societies tended to be gradual and rather slow, largely because of technological limitations. This enabled traditional societies to forge an accommodation of new elements with traditional principles and values. Slow and gradual change is conducive to organic integrity and harmony.

Today, we have to find ways to live in accordance with Islam that are appropriate to the exceedingly different circumstances in

which we live. Social changes are being driven by rapid changes in technology that give no one time to adjust. This gives modern society an ugly mismatched quality. While certain measures can be taken to try to preserve some sort of proportionality, integrity becomes more of a utopian ideal than a realistic aim. In this effort, we can only rely on Allah and His aid as we seek to sort through the social, political, cultural and theological problems that face us.

Traditionalism and Islamic Fundamentalism

The term “Islamic Fundamentalism” is one that has been invented by Western journalists by analogy with “Christian Fundamentalism.” It is not a very apt term, but it has gained currency. In the Sunni world it is used for groups descended from the *Salafiyyah* movement, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. In practice, any politically active movement that opposes Westernization and calls for the enforcement of Islamic law is termed “Islamic fundamentalism,” whether Sunni or Shi‘i. Sometimes, those who take a reformist or even modernist approach to Islamic law will also be considered by journalists to be fundamentalists. Anti-Western rhetoric accompanied by exhortations to return to Islam is sufficient to brand one as fundamentalist. For the purposes of any insightful understanding of contemporary Islamic political thought, “Islamic fundamentalism” is a useless derogatory label.²³

Since Traditionalists might well be considered fundamentalists, according to the way Western journalists and too many academics use this term, one might hope to get a better understanding of Traditionalism by contrasting it with other groups that could be called fundamentalist. This issue is taken up by Dr. Nasr at several points in his *Traditional Islam and the Modern World*. It is odd that Dr. Nasr himself points out how inappropriate



the label “Islamic fundamentalism” is, yet goes to some pains to show that Traditionalists are not fundamentalists, and retains much of the disparaging rhetorical force of “fundamentalism.” A brief examination of the reasons he gives to separate Traditionalism from fundamentalism will help illuminate the extent of the extremism in the Traditionalist critique of modernity. Once that extremism is made clear, we can try to begin to articulate a more balanced view of the issues of tradition and modernity.

In traditional societies we find an integrated worldview centered upon religious belief. In modern societies this integration has been lost. To the extent that tradition remains in Iranian society, it is somewhat like a remnant of a civilization that once occupied this land but has been long since disappeared.²⁴ Under the circumstances, it makes as much sense to oppose modernity as it would to oppose hurricanes. Dr. Nasr writes:

If traditionalists insist on the complete opposition between tradition and modernism, it is precisely because the very nature of modernism creates in the religious and metaphysical realms a blurred image within which half truths appear as the truth itself and the integrity of all that tradition represents is thereby compromised.²⁵

Dr. Nasr continues by contrasting the Traditionalist perspective with that of fundamentalists and modernists. He also refers to the fundamentalist view as *counter-traditional* and *psuedo-traditional*, and sometimes *revolutionary*.²⁶ Often his distinction between fundamentalism and traditionalism amounts to little more than the accusation that fundamentalists are brutish and ugly, while Traditionalists are refined and sophisticated.

The traditionalist and the so-called “fundamentalist” meet in their acceptance of the Qur’ān and *Hadith*, as well as in their emphasis upon the *Shari’ah*, but even here the differences remain profound. As already mentioned, tradition always emphasizes the sapiential commentaries and the long tradition of Qur’ānic

hermeneutics in understanding the meaning of the verses of the Sacred Text; whereas so many of the “fundamentalist” movements simply pull out a verse from the Qur’ān and give it a meaning in accordance with their goals and aims, often reading into it a meaning alien to the whole tradition of Qur’ānic commentary, or *tafsīr*. As for the *Shari’ah*, tradition always emphasizes, in contrast to so much of current “fundamentalism”, faith, inner attachment to the *dicta* of the Divine Law and the traditional ambience of lenient judgment based upon the imperfections of human society, rather than simply external coercion based on fear of some human authority other than God.²⁷

As for the interpretation of the Qur’ān and *ahādīth*, true scholars pay attention to the commentary tradition, whether they are fundamentalists or traditionalists. Those who write popular works are more inclined to play fast and loose with the texts, but this cannot be considered a distinguishing feature that separates traditionalists from other fundamentalists. With respect to the Divine Law, as well, fundamentalists emphasize inner attachment as much as Traditionalists, and its implementation has been harsh among some fundamentalists as it has been among some traditional authorities, while others who would be considered fundamentalists have an attitude as lenient as any of which tradition might boast.

Outside of this domain, the differences between the traditional and the counter-traditional in Islam are even more blatant. Most of the current “fundamentalist” movements, while denouncing modernism, accept some of the most basic aspects of modernism. This is clearly seen in their complete and open-armed acceptance of modern science and technology.... Their attitude to science and technology is in fact nearly identical with that of the modernists, as seen on the practical plane in the attitude of Muslim countries with modern forms of government compared to those which claim to possess one form or another of Islamic government. There is

hardly any difference in the manner in which they try to adopt modern Western technology, from computers to television, without any thought for the consequences of these inventions upon the mind and soul of Muslims.²⁸

Does this mean that the defining distinction between traditionalists and fundamentalists is that whereas the latter accept Western science and technology, the traditionalists reject it? In this way, traditionalism is paraded as a more total rejection of modernity than that found in other Islamic groups. Fundamentalist governments are condemned for pursuing Western science and technology. What would a traditionalist government do? In fact, the traditional sultans who rule over various Muslim countries today are no less eager for Western science and technology than the so-called fundamentalist governments. Indeed, the only rejection of television and other aspects of Western technology at the level of government that seems to approach what is advocated by Dr. Nasr was to be found in the recently overthrown Taliban government in Afghanistan, a paradigm of Islamic fundamentalism if ever there was one.

Dr. Nasr continues to distinguish traditionalism from fundamentalism in art and politics. In art, everything traditional is supposed to be beautiful, while the fundamentalists are tasteless. In general, those who are involved in what are called fundamentalist movements in Islam tend to be from the lowest strata of society, while traditionalists tend to be a very small group of highly educated people, some of whom, from Coomaraswamy to Dr. Nasr, have made important contributions to art criticism and aesthetics. The difference in attitudes toward the arts seems to have much more to do with education than ideology.

In the political realm, Dr. Nasr criticizes fundamentalists for accepting Western political institutions and ideas, including “revolution, republicanism, ideology and even class struggle in the name of a supposedly pure Islam.”²⁹ Among extremist

fundamentalists, it is not difficult to find people who reject all of these Western innovations that Dr. Nasr condemns.

In another essay, the differences are portrayed by Dr. Nasr in another way. He claims that fundamentalists usually share:

opposition or indifference to all the inward aspects of Islam and the civilization and culture which it created, aspects such as Sufism, Islamic philosophy, Islamic art, etc. They are all outwardly oriented in the sense that they wish to reconstruct Islamic society through the re-establishment of external legal and social norms rather than by means of the revival of Islam through inner purification or by removing the philosophical and intellectual impediments which have been obstacles on the path of many contemporary Muslims. These movements, therefore, have rarely dealt in detail with the intellectual challenges posed by Western science and philosophy, although this trait is not by any means the same among all of them, some being of a more intellectual nature than others.³⁰

This characterization, however, does not enable us to distinguish so-called fundamentalists from traditional Muslim groups, for there are Muslim groups that have been anti-intellectualist, anti-philosophical and rather outwardly oriented throughout the history of Islamic civilization. On the other hand, there are revolutionary Muslims who have been philosophers and mystics, and if most are not, this is merely a reflection of the general population. It is to their credit that Guenonian Traditionalists are interested in mysticism, art and philosophy, but that does not distinguish them from other Muslims who do not agree with their ideological principles.

In short, the main differences Dr. Nasr elaborates between fundamentalism and traditionalism is that traditionalism is more absolute in its rejection of everything modern and Western. On this account, fundamentalism seems to be downright moderate! The

other difference that he repeatedly emphasizes is that fundamentalism is crude and rude, but this seems to reveal more about social background than any defining difference in the essence of Traditionalism.

Balance and Truth-Seeking

Instead of trying to build a sense of self-worth based on the ruins of an idealized past, we need to seek whatever truth becomes available to us in our changing circumstances, regardless of whether they are enshrined in our own traditions or come from modernity or anywhere else. The only once and for all and always truths and standards that have been given to us are found in Islam. On that basis and with the aid of our limited intellectual faculties we should try to achieve a balanced understanding of our station and its duties. The course of the wise in moral affairs including politics and other issues pertaining to culture and civilization seems to be one of moderation. Moderation is not to be confused with lack of determination or an irresolute stance on issues of faith or justice. Moderation means having the wisdom to see the folly of extreme forms of modernism and traditionalism, and choosing a just course between them.

Moderation requires an understanding of the current conditions of Muslim societies today and of the elements shaping them: from global market forces to popular religious beliefs and practices. How our societies are shaped and changed is largely out of our hands. Where we do have an opportunity to effect change or to modify its direction in some way, we need the humility to admit that the results of our interference in social, political and other cultural affairs are often other than we would predict. This, however, should not be cause for timidity, but for submission to Allah in obedience to His commands, knowing that in the ordinance of His prescriptions, He knows better. The violation of the moral precepts given by human conscience and confirmed by

divine revelation to His prophets, peace be with Muhammad and his progeny and with all of them, can never be excused as a means to obtain otherwise desirable social or political goals.

Moderation requires critical analysis and evaluation of the character of our civilization and the ways in which it is changing in order to assess their positive and negative aspects according to the standards of Islamic teachings and values. We need to understand what can be done to minimize the negative effects of the modernization taking place around us. It is here that Traditionalist writings can be of assistance. They can increase our sensitivity to how religious principles are reflected in various areas of culture, and how modernization may do violence to those principles. This is often overlooked or by policy makers and politicians, as well as academics. Traditionalist writings, despite all the faults I have found with them in this paper, are invaluable aids to increasing our sensitivity, or in the popular expression, to consciousness raising with regard to how modernization does violence to the integral character of traditional cultures. Traditionalists share this feature with post-modernist writers: both are engaged in a project of unmasking various aspects of modernity. This is a task so valuable, that no matter how much I may disagree with various points of the Traditionalist position, I feel obliged to admit my indebtedness to the Traditionalist articulations of the character of modernity, especially in the indisputably erudite works of Dr. Nasr. However, we also need to recognize what sorts of modern changes may bring us into greater harmony with religious principles. The changing roles that various social and cultural elements play allow them to be in harmony with religious principles in some environments, but contrary to them in others. Elements of traditional society cannot be imported from the past with the expectation that they can play the same integrative role in the new environment as they did in their original context.

Moderation also requires critical analysis and evaluation of traditional societies and their institutions. There is nearly consensus among contemporary Muslim thinkers (with the exception of some Traditionalists) that hereditary monarchy or sultanate is incongruent with fundamental Islamic aims and values. Sultanate is oppressive. It squanders national wealth for the sake of the luxury of a few. History shows that when such power is placed in the hands of a single person or group, and that person or group is accustomed to luxury, it is easy for foreign control and domination to crop up to the detriment of Muslim society, as in the Qajar and Pahlavi collaboration with Russian and US agents, respectively.

Nothing can be retained solely for the reason that it is traditional, and nothing can be rejected solely because it is modern, whether in doctrine, economics, social institutions, forms of cultural expression, or whatever.

Consider computerization. Dr. Nasr condemns this as modern and untraditional.³¹ No doubt there is much about computer use that clashes with Islamic aims and values. To a large extent, however, it is unavoidable. On the other hand, there is much in computer use that serves Islamic aims, e.g., accessibility to information and facilitation of research, not to mention the more specifically Islamic applications, such as Islamic software, Islamic internet groups and magazines, searchable databases of *ahádith*, etc.. Traditionalist reasoning is valuable when it points out aspects of modern culture and technology that conflict with Islamic principles in ways that would ordinarily pass without notice. In our enthusiasm for Islamic software, for example, we might overlook the fact that Islamic education through a computer programme, no matter how detailed, is impersonal in the worst way. Traditionally, the relation between student and master is of utmost importance, for it is only in the context of such a personal relationship that the master can correct misunderstandings of the material presented to the student, and only in such a context that the master can

determine what materials would be helpful for the student at a particular level, and what materials might be harmful at that level. Obviously, the computer programme fails miserably by comparison. The solution, however, is not to heap scorn on Islamic software as a violation of Traditional principles of Islamic education. The software has its own advantages. In present circumstances there just aren't enough masters to go around. In Iran today something like half the population is under eighteen. For most, the choice is not between a computer programme and a master, but between educational and non-educational computer use. This is just an example, but it could be repeated endlessly. Modernization is a fact of life. Traditionalists make some valid points about its failings, but on the whole, people do not have a choice as to whether they would like to live in a traditional or modern way. They find themselves caught in the whirlpool of modernization.

In the more theoretical realm, modernity pits history and all the modern sciences against metaphysics. Some of my criticisms of traditionalism revolve about this conflict. The history of the world's religions testifies to their particularities while a metaphysical viewpoint seeks universal themes. The critical historical attitude, once established, can never be banished. There can be no restoration of metaphysics to its former authority. This is felt nowhere so keenly as in theology. The error of modernism is to believe that historical study makes metaphysics otiose, merely another item for historical inquiry itself. The error of traditionalism is to hope for a reassertion of metaphysical principles in a victory over historical criticism. If we are ever to move beyond the impasse of such errors, we will have to learn how to integrate historical and metaphysical thought, or, at the very least, some sort of uneasy truce will have to be maintained between them. In some areas, both sides will have to retreat. One problem here is that so much modern science is built upon presuppositions that conflict with any sort of

traditional metaphysics. In order to realize integration, modern science would have to be dismantled and built back up again without its biases against religion and metaphysics. Even if such a project could be successful, it would take several generations of scholars in virtually all the fields of the modern sciences, and while this work was going on, the established sciences of modernity would not sit still. At this point, we can only learn to live with it, and in this, modern history itself can help us to see the biases against metaphysics that have come to permeate the sciences as the products not of science itself, but of the historical forces at work during the formative period of the development of modern science. This recognition of the biases of the culture of modernity including its sciences and history is only the beginning of the sort of critique demanded by the Mennonite theologian Jim Reimer:

...a rather thorough critique of modern liberal culture and its assumptions is necessary... but... it cannot be accomplished by using pre-Enlightenment categories in their purity, or by recovering and conserving the past in its pristine form. A recovery of classical categories from antiquity is necessary for the purpose of judging and transcending our own culture..., but these concepts must first go through the crucible of the Enlightenment before they can be effectively appropriated....³²

Theology, in my opinion, does not have the freedom to be or not to be “modern,” or “non-modern” for that matter, as if its practitioners sit above the historical flow of things making such choices. It has been shaped by modern scientific, rational, and historical assumptions. We participate in the age of which we are a part. The fact is that new paradigms cannot arbitrarily be created or chosen; they emerge gradually replacing older paradigms that have lost their power.³³

The challenge for Muslims and Christians is to find a way through the process in which faith is maintained despite the evils of

modernization. The hope for Muslim societies is that they may move beyond modernization without suffering all the injuries this has brought in the West, *in shá' Allah*.

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¹ *U.S. News & World Report*, June 26, 1989. Jaroslav Pelikan is the Sterling Professor Emeritus of History at Yale University where he served on the faculty from 1962-96. He is the immediate past president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is one of the world's leading scholars in the history of Christianity and has authored more than 30 books including the five volume *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (1971-89). His 1997 book was *What Has Athens to Do With Jerusalem? "Timaeus" and "Genesis" in Counterpoint*.

² See Richard P. McBrien, "Roman Catholicism", in *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (MacMillan, 1987).

³ First published in the *Egoist* (1919); reprinted in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1968), pp. 1807-1814.

⁴ See the article, "France" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*.

⁵ This point is emphasized by Quinn and others, but disputed by Kennedy. However, the reasons given by Kennedy pertain to the particular content of Guenon's views, for example, that the characters identified by Guenon in his *The Lord of the World* (1927) are derived from "authentic" Jewish tradition rather than through visions as in the case of Madame Blavatsky, or that Guenon lent support to the Polaires, a group that sought to find a hidden utopia in the unexplored polar regions, at the same time that the Theosophical Society was promoting Krishnamurti as the World Saviour. Aside from such differences about personalities, however, the structural similarities found among Theosophists and Traditionalists is striking.

⁶ Whitehall Perry, in *The Unanimous Tradition: Essays On The Essential Unity Of All Religions*, ed. Ranjit Fernando (The Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies Press, 1999).

⁷ Guenon rejected Buddhism as an authentic tradition until persuaded to the contrary by other traditionalists, including Coomaraswamy and Schuon, through Marco Pallis. See Lings. The resolution of this disagreement indicates the importance of having some criteria by which to determine what should be included among the “authentic traditions.”

⁸ Muhammad Legenhausen, *Islam and Religious Pluralism* (London: al-Hoda, 1999), §2.3, 117-155.

⁹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1, p. xx, Theosophical University Press Online Edition.

¹⁰ Blavatsky, xliv-xlv.

¹¹ From Martin Lings, “Rene Guenon.”

¹² From Martin Lings, “Rene Guenon.”

¹³ *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 84.

¹⁴ Guenon, *Orient et Occident* (Paris: Payot, 1924), 236, cited in Quinn, 179.

¹⁵ For a balanced examination of some of these themes, see the writings of Charles Taylor, especially *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), Alasdair MacIntyre, especially *After Virtue* 2nd ed., (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), or such earlier writers as Arnold Toynbee, *An Historian’s Approach to Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), and W. E. Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958). All of these writers are critical of modernity, but carefully examine the development of its major themes and offer suggestions for how important elements of threatened traditions may be protected.

¹⁶ To his credit, Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr recognizes the need for Muslim intellectuals to become aware of criticisms of modern Western civilization by Westerners, but he seems to take such criticism merely as confirmation of the Traditionalist view that Western civilization is breaking down. See his *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 83, 307-309.

¹⁷ See Maurice Cranston's article "Ideology" in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (CD-ROM 2001 ed.)

¹⁸ See Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 21, 306.

¹⁹ Nasr, *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 17.

²⁰ See Quinn, Ch. 13, 247-263.

²¹ See Quinn, 292.

²² Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Am I My Brother's Keeper?* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967), 62, cited in Quinn, 296.

²³ See *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 303-305.

²⁴ See Muhammad Khatami, "Tradition, Modernity and Development," in *Islam, Liberty and Development* (Binghamton: Institute of Global Cultural Studies, 1998), 17-37.

²⁵ *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 14.

²⁶ *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 18, 28.

²⁷ *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 18.

²⁸ *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 19.

²⁹ *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 21.

³⁰ *Traditional Islam in the Modern World*, 84.

³¹ *Traditional Islam and the Modern World*, 24, fn. 8.

³² A. James Reimer, "Doctrinal Renewal and the "Dialectic of Enlightenment", in Reimer (2001), 56.

³³ A. James Reimer, "Transcendence, Social Justice, and Pluralism: Three Competing Agendas in Contemporary Theology", in Reimer (2001), 70.

Islam: Facts and Distortions

In Conversation with ‘Allāmah Sayyid Murtazā ‘Askarī

Q: Before beginning this interview, we thank you for accepting our invitation. Can we start our conversation by requesting you to talk to us briefly about your life?

‘Allāmah ‘Askarī: In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate. I, too, would like to thank you for this meeting. I was born in the month of Jamādī al-Thānī, in 1332 AH (1914), in Sāmarrā. My father, the late Sayyid Muhammad Ismā‘il, was an Islamic scholar and the son-in-law of Ayatullah Mīrzā Muhammad Sharif ‘Askarī Tehrānī, popularly known as *Khātimah al-Muhaddithīn*. The families of both my parents had settled in Sāmarrā. I was ten years old when I was sent to the theological school. I could understand the Arabic language very well by the time I began studying the *Jāmi‘ al-Muqaddamāt*. Thereafter, I went on to study the formal books of the *Hawzah*. Books were my best friends and I was particularly fond of reading books on the “*sīrah*” as well as on travel accounts – a passion that stayed on with me, throughout my youth.

During my theological education, I recall, that there were times when I would not complete the study of some of the books with my teachers. Instead, I would take some lessons and then complete my acquaintance with the rest of the subject during the debate and query sessions. I still remember the long poems I had memorized during those days. In the year 1350 AH (1931), during the days of the *Marja'iyat* of the late Grand Ayatullah Hājj Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim Hā'irī, I came to Qum. I completed my higher studies as well as the study of ethics, morals, *kalām*, and exegesis of the Holy Qur'ān under the grand Ayatullahs Mar'ashī, Shari'atmadār Sāvujī, Pā'in Shahri, Imam Khumaynī, and Hājj Mirzā Khalil Kamareh'i in this city. I stayed on in Qum for four years, during which time my friend Sayyid Mahmūd Tāliqānī and I, designed a new system of education for the study of Qur'ānic and religious sciences. The number of people that formed the core group involved in this fresh venture had reached nine when, somehow, our idea was rejected by the principal of the *Hawzah*. Following this unwelcome response from the *Hawzah*, I lost patience and left Qum, returning to Sāmarrā. By the grace of Allah, I joined the circle of the students of Hājj Habibullāh Ishtihārdī, known as Mudarris 'Askarī – who was one of the students of Hājj Shaykh Hādī Tehrānī – and completed my *Khārij* studies (the final stage of the higher theological studies) in Iraq. You could say that my main teacher was Hāj Habibullāh, who also gave me private lessons. My other primary teachers were the late Mirzā 'Alī and Shūshtarī Mar'ashī. Following the end of World War II, I decided to establish a school in Kāzimayn for the Shi'ites, but was denied the permission by the government to do so. Subsequently, I returned to my teacher Mirzā Habibullāh and studied '*Urwah al-Wuthqā* under him.

During this period which coincided with the *marja'iyat* of Grand Ayatullah Burūjirdī, I returned to Qum and discussed my plans for the establishment of a new religious school with this great

leader of the Shi'ite world, who welcomed my proposal. However, due to the start of the movement for the nationalization of the oil industry in Iran, I had to leave for Baghdad albeit reluctantly. But here also, as the representative of the Grand Ayatullah Hakīm, and I extensive social activities.

Following the uprising led by Imam Khumayni in Iran in the year 1963 and the killing of religious students in the Fayziyyah School in Qum (by the Pahlavī regime), I organized mourning sessions in Baghdad. And I can still recall how the Baghdādī youths covered the walls with revolutionary slogans (in support of Imam Khumayni). And on a journey for Hajj and to the Bayt al-Muqaddas, I composed a poem for the martyrs of Qum in order to align myself with Imam Khumayni's movement.

I spent long years in Baghdad, during which time, I spent my days with students – teaching them – while in the evenings I delivered lectures in the East Karādih locality. During those days, the situation in Baghdad was quite perturbing. The trend of cultural invasion had begun to sprout, with the devious aim of eradicating religion and bringing in secularism in the universities. And at the same time, nationalism and Marxism were gaining momentum in Iraq, during that crisis-ridden period, which saw the coups d'état of General 'Abd al-Karim Qāsim (1958) and Colonel 'Abd al-Salām 'Ārif (1963) and the Ba'thists (1969). I was forced to leave Baghdad for Beirut because of my activities against Ba'thist rule. However, my family members enjoyed no safety and were arrested by the Ba'thist regime. But soon, by the grace of Allah Almighty, we managed to come to Iran, and ever since I have been living in this land.

Before the Islamic Revolution, along with a group of my friends, I established a scientific association in Tehran which was engaged in cultural and educational activities as well as in the publication of Islamic books. In the year 1996 I established the Usūl al-Din College for teaching Qur'ānic sciences and *hadīth* at

the post graduate level. And within a period of two years, a branch of the college, at the graduation level, was set up in Dezful.

Q: Respected ‘Allāmah, your analytical book entitled, *‘Abdullāh ibn Sabā*, is an invaluable gift to historians. We are curious to know how you initially got inspired to introduce the forgers of *hadīth* and to expose them to society.

‘Allāmah ‘Askarī: I was busy working on some *ahādīth* one night when I found that the narrator of these *ahādīth* was a person by the name of Sayf bin ‘Amr. By referring to books on *Rijāl* (the branch of Islamic science that deals with the verification of the authenticity of the narrator) I discovered that Sayf bin ‘Amr was an atheist, liar and possessed many undesirable qualities. I prepared a file on the *ahādīth* narrated by him and named it ‘forged narrator’. I initially collected all the *ahādīth* supposed to be narrated by him about ‘Abdullāh ibn Sabā. I showed them to my grand-father Shaykh Mirzā Muhammad who responded in these words: “If you succeed in proving your claim, you will have rendered a useful service.”

I was acquainted with the Islamic scholar, Shaykh Rāzī Āl-i Yāsīn, the author of the book, *Sulh al-Hasan* [The Peace Treaty of (Imām) Hasan – ‘a]. I went to visit him and found him sitting on a bed. As soon as he saw me, he stood up and said: “Do you know what you have done? You have removed the ugly blemish that had been imposed upon the Shi‘ites.” As I was working on this research, I began to wonder if Sayf bin ‘Amr had forged the names of any other people besides ‘Abdullāh bin Sabā, who he had falsely introduced as a companion of the Prophet (S). Within two months of researching, I discovered that Sayf had created some 140 spurious companions which did not exist at all! After completing my research on this subject, I had it published in the form of a book entitled, *‘Abdullāh bin Sabā and Other Myths*.

Q: Your books have virtually rectified the documents and other evidences of the Sunnis. How have they reacted to your works?

‘Allāmah ‘Askari: The publication of this book entailed wide-spread reaction and it won acclaim from al-Azhar and the *al-Wifāq* magazines as well as from Radio Beirut. I then went on to conduct a study on the biographies of the fictitious companions of the Prophet and gathered data on the same. And so far, I have succeeded in exposing the names of more than 150 so-called *sahābah*.

I was determined to write a book that could serve as an emendation (*Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*) and, therefore, began to collect the *ahādīth* which I would need for my research. During the research, I realized that as far as the *sīrah* of the Prophet (S) was concerned, there was no disagreement between us and our Sunni brothers and that it was only after the passing away of the Prophet (S) that disagreements had crept in. Therefore, I decided to refer to the books on *sīrah*, written by the scholars of the various Muslim schools of thought. I began with the *Sahīh* books and for example, discovered in the *Sahīh al-Muslim* that there were some *ahādīth* that were quoted by ‘Āyishah Umm al-Mu’minin and Abū Hurayrah. I sensed that these *ahādīth* were not very reliable and that they needed to be scrutinized carefully.

At this point, I began to study the material I found on the *fatāwā* or legal opinions expressed by the *sahābah* and realized that they contained some rather far-fetched and incredible matters. This prompted me to evaluate the authenticity of these kinds of *ahādīth*. I classified these *ahādīth* into different categories which I named, The *Ahādīth of ‘Āyishah*, The *Ahādīth of Abū Hurayrah*, The *Ahādīth of Anas* as well as one that I called, The *Ahādīth of the Fictitious Narrator*.

Q: While we are on the subject of your books, could you please elaborate on your other works?

‘Allāmah ‘Askarī: Since I found that in Iran and perhaps also in Iraq, the religious speakers and orators strayed from the authentic version of the *Maqatal* during the mourning ceremonies for Imam Husayn (‘a), I decided to write the book, *Maqatal al-Husayn*. I benefited from reference to the *sirah* of the Prophet (S) and this also added to the number of my works ultimately. I am currently engaged in writing a book called *The Myth of Ibn Sabā*.

Q: As we are aware, the system of documenting the *ahādīth* of the school of Ahl al-Bayt began during the lifetime of the Prophet (S). Islamic principles and laws were extracted from the Glorious Qur’ān and their explanations and interpretations were left to the Prophet (S) and after him to the other primary disseminators of Islam. Whatever was divinely revealed to the Prophet (S) – which mankind shall be in need of until the Day of Resurrection – was all documented at the hands of his cousin and son-in-law Imam ‘Alī (‘a) and was organized by the Prophet (S) himself. We request you, honourable ‘Allāmah, keeping in view your extensive research in the history of Islam, to explain to us how and in what manner the teachings of the Prophet (S) were transferred to Imam ‘Alī (‘a).

‘Allāmah ‘Askarī: Various *hadīth* books have recorded detailed accounts of the regular sessions of Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a) with his cousin, the Messenger of Allah, in order to acquire knowledge from him. For example, the book *al-Kāfi* has recorded the Imam (‘a) as having said that he visited the Prophet (S) in seclusion twice daily and wherever the Prophet (S) went, the Imam (‘a) accompanied him. All the Prophet’s (S) companions knew very well that such meetings with the Prophet of Allah were exclusive to Amīr al-Mu’minīn (‘a). These private meetings often took place in Imam ‘Alī’s (‘a) home and the Prophet (S) would answer all his questions. I take your permission to quote a small part of Imam

‘Alī’s (‘a) words that have been recorded by Shaykh Kulaynī in *al-Kāfi*, according to which the Imam (‘a) says: “Every verse, without exception, that was revealed to the noble Prophet (S) was recited by him to me, which I took down in my own handwriting through his dictation. And then the Prophet (S) taught me its meaning and interpretation (*ta’wīl wa tafsīr*), its *nāsikh wa mansūkh*, *muhkam wa mutashābih*, and *khāss wa ‘āmm*, and he requested Allah to grant me the power to perceive and memorize it.” Imam ‘Alī (‘a) adds: “After the *du‘ā* of the Prophet (S), none of his teachings were ever wiped out from my memory.”

It is only appropriate, at this point, that I quote yet another *hadith* narrated by Zayd bin ‘Alī bin al-Husayn that says: “The Prophet (S) made sure to keep in mind, the days on which he did not meet ‘Alī (‘a), and when they would meet, he would say: ‘O’ ‘Alī, on such a such a day, such and such a matter was revealed to me.” And in this way, he would continue, until he would make up for all the days that they had not met, and only then would the Prophet (S) discuss the present day’s revelations with Imam ‘Alī (‘a). From these words of Imam ‘Alī (‘a) we can affirm that the Prophet of Allah (S) taught him all the divine do’s and don’ts and the lawful and forbidden, whether concerning those times or future issues, as well as all the things that had been revealed to the earlier prophets (‘a) and were in their divine books.

Q: In the course of your previous answer you have made mention of the regular and routine visits between Imam ‘Alī (‘a) and the Prophet of Allah (S) that have been recorded in the reliable sources from both the schools (Shi‘ite and Sunni). It would only be appropriate here, so as to complete this discussion, that you also add a few words on the random meetings between the two, for the benefit of our readers.

‘Allāmah ‘Askarī: Sure, in fact it would be very appropriate that we do this. As per the *al-Jāmi‘ al-Sahīh* of Tirmidhi, one of the

six primary sources of the Sunni school, Jābir bin ‘Abdullāh al-Ansārī has been quoted as saying: “During the Battle of Tā’if, the Prophet of Allah (S) sent out for ‘Alī (‘a) and started conversing with him in a low tone. Some of the people around started saying in objection: ‘How long this private conversation of his with his cousin ‘Alī (‘a) has taken.’ When the Prophet (S) learnt about this, he said: ‘I did not get into this private conversation with him on my own account. It is Allah Who is having this private conversation with him.’ In explanation of this matter, Tirmidhī says that by these words, the Prophet (S) meant to say that it was Allah Who commanded him to have this private conversation with ‘Alī (‘a). Now let us look into the matter of the private conversation between the Prophet of Allah and his cousin Imam ‘Alī (‘a). Was this “ear-whispering” some kind of consultation regarding the ensuing battle? But then it was the way of the Prophet (S) to seek consultation, commonly from everyone, during battles; and he never sat in private consultations with any particular person. And history had already recorded this tradition of the Prophet (S) during the Battles of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq, etc. Then we have to admit that this random sitting as well such other random meetings between the Prophet (S) and Imam ‘Alī (‘a) were of a similar nature to their regular, daily meetings. Or we could probably say that these types of random meetings were of the kind that Zayd bin ‘Alī bin al-Husayn had described and which we have discussed earlier. Thus, we could conclude, from what I have mentioned thus far, that the purpose of all the regular and random meetings between the Prophet of Allah (S) and his cousin, ‘Alī bin Abī Talīb (‘a) was in order to transfer all the Islamic sciences and knowledge, from beliefs to laws, etc. to the Imam (‘a).

Q: Keeping in mind your elaborate explanation, could you now please clarify as to how many “kinds” can the revelation of Allah to his Prophet (S) be classified into?

‘Allāmah ‘Askarī: Divine Revelation can be broadly divided into two kinds. The first kind included matters which could immediately be conveyed to mankind since the time and the conditions were ripe. These kinds of matters were delivered personally by the Prophet (S) to those who were in his blessed presence, without the use of any intermediary. However, the second category included those matters, the time of implementation of which would come to be ripe only after the age of the Prophet (S). Such matters were taught only to Imam ‘Alī (‘a) by the Prophet (S). And Imam ‘Alī (‘a) would put down both these categories of Revelation in two separate books, in his own handwriting, as per what the Prophet (S) would convey and explain. This went on right until the passing away of the Prophet (S). ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Amr bin ‘Ās, has been quoted in *Tārīkh Ibn ‘Asākir*, as saying: “The Prophet of Allah (S), while on his deathbed said: ‘Send for my brother.’” ‘Alī (‘a) arrived by the Prophet’s (S) bedside. The Prophet (S) then threw his robe over ‘Alī (‘a) and covered him until they were very close and then whispered softly to him.

In another *hadīth*, Umm-i Salamah swears that the last person to be in conversation with the Prophet of Allah (S) was ‘Alī (‘a).

Finally, let me remind you that the book, *Tabaqāt Ibn Sa’d*, has recorded the details of this incident in the words of Imam ‘Alī (‘a) himself.

Q: The very first book compiled in the course of the history of *hadīth* was a book that was dictated by the Prophet of Allah (S) himself, while it was taken down by Imam ‘Alī (‘a), and is known by the name *Jāmi‘ah*. And the appreciation that has been shown towards the *Jāmi‘ah* in the various *ahādīth* indicates the importance given by the Prophet of Allah (S) to the documentation of *hadīth* from the very onset, especially since the Prophet (S) intended to leave a documented legacy for his successors. There are other *ahādīth*, too, in this regard that can, however, only be used to prove the importance given by the Prophet of Allah (S) to the

documentation of his legacy. Nevertheless, according to some other *ahādīth*, this book contained all the religious laws and obligations as well as all other matters that fell under the purview of the divine *halāl* and *harām* (lawful and forbidden). In all probability, this book was not made universally accessible by the Imams (‘a) for reasons of *taqiyyah* as well as some other reasons. However, mention of this book has also been made by some *hadīth* books of the Sunnis. A clear and rational explanation by your esteemed presence would help us in gaining a better understanding of this legacy of Imamate.

‘Allāmah ‘Askarī: From numerous *ahādīth*, it can be understood that Imam ‘Alī bin Abī Tālib (‘a) had many books containing all the Islamic laws and religious knowledge. However, here I shall only limit myself to the discussion of the book, *Jāmi‘ah*, that you have referred to. The books, *Usūl al-Kāfi* and *Basā‘ir al-Darajāt* have recorded a *hadīth* quoted through Abū Basir that is extremely interesting. Abū Basir says: I presented myself in the presence of Imam Ja‘far al-Sādiq (‘a) and said: ‘May my soul be your ransom, based on some *ahādīth*, your Shi‘ites claim that the Prophet of Allah (S) had opened a door of knowledge for ‘Alī (‘a) through which door, a thousand other doors are opened.’ The Imam answered: ‘O’ Abū Muhammad, we possess the *Jāmi‘ah* and what do they know what the *Jāmi‘ah* is!’” At this point, Abū Basir requested Imam al-Sādiq (‘a) to explain what the *Jāmi‘ah* was, and the Imam answered him in these words: “The *Jāmi‘ah* is a book that is 70 cubits long, all the matters contained in which, have been uttered through the two lips of the Prophet of Allah (S); and ‘Alī (‘a) has written them down in his own handwriting. In that book, mention has been made of all lawful and forbidden matters as well as everything that the people of those times needed and for times to come shall be in need of; including as much as the *diyāh* (monetary compensation) for even a superficial scratch on the surface of the skin.” References have

been repeatedly made to the book *Jāmi'ah* or the *Book of Imam 'Alī* ('a) in numerous *ahādīth* but I think the above-mentioned *hadīth* should suffice. It is important to know that the first Imam ('a) to have made mention of the *Book of Imam 'Alī* ('a) was Imam 'Alī bin al-Husayn ('a) and this fact has been quoted in at least eight authoritative *hadīth* books. We can note that there were times when Imam al-Bāqir ('a) and Imam al-Sādiq ('a) have been known to have opened the *Book of Amīr al-Mu'minīn* ('a) in the presence of the followers of the khilāfat school in order to show them certain matters. The twelve Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) would sometimes explain the related laws for a certain issue from Imam 'Alī's ('a) book and made certain to emphasize that it was from Imam 'Alī's ('a) Book and they would sometimes explain the same law without mentioning the name of the Book. I have explained this matter in my book, *Ma'ālim al-Madrisatayn*. This is the reason why all the *ahādīth* of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) stem from the same, single source and share a complete common alignment. Hishām bin Sālim, Hammād bin 'Uthmān, and others have quoted thus from Abū 'Abdullāh Imam al-Sādiq ('a): "My *hadīth* is also my father's *hadīth* and my father's *hadīth* is my grand-father's *hadīth*; and my grand-father's *hadīth* is Husayn's ('a) *hadīth*, and Husayn's ('a) *hadīth* is the *hadīth* of Hasan ('a), and Hasan's ('a) *hadīth* is the *hadīth* of 'Amīr al-Mu'minīn ('a); and 'Amīr al-Mu'minīn's ('a) *hadīth* is the *hadīth* of the Prophet of Allah (S) and the *hadīth* of the Prophet of Allah (S) are the words of Allah 'Azza wa Jalla." We have specified thus far as to how the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) would let the Islamic *Ummah* know that they were the heirs of the Prophet of Allah (S) in Islamic sciences and divine knowledge and how this knowledge that was dictated by the Prophet of Allah (S) and was taken down by Imam 'Alī ('a) in his own hand in a special book.

Q: After the Glorious Qur'ān, the second source of learning about Islamic laws and beliefs is the *sunnah* of the Prophet of Allah

(S) and the *ahādīth* of the Infallible Imams (‘a). In this regard, we can see from the Glorious Qur’ān that Allah, the Almighty, has instructed His Prophet (S) in Verse 44 of *Sūrah al-Nahl* to explain Qur’ānic matters to the believers; and the noble Prophet (S), through the *Hadīth al-Thaqalayn*, put his seal on the authenticity of the *sunnah* and the *sīrah* of his Household (‘a). Moreover, the infallibility and the proficiency of the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet of Allah (S) have been emphasized in Verse 31 of *Sūrah al-Ahzāb* and Verse 9 of *Sūrah al-Wāqī‘ah*. A glimpse into the history of early Islam clearly proves that the prohibiting of the documentation of the Prophet’s *ahādīth* began only after his passing away, and was initiated by the caliphs. As a result of this undesirable trend a large number of Islamic jurists and narrators of the *ahādīth* refrained from documenting and compiling *hadīth*, or in other words, they respected and abided by the prohibitory order. As you would agree, respected ‘Allāmah, it is thus only evident that as a result of the implementation of this undesirable policy, many of the Prophet’s (S) *ahādīth*, especially those that concerned the merits of the Ahl al-Bayt, came to fall out of circulation or were forgotten altogether. We would like to hear your valuable comments on this matter.

‘Allāmah ‘Askarī: As we know, the principles of Islam have been given in the Qur’ān, but their interpretations and explanations are delivered through the *sunnah* of the Prophet (S), i.e. via his *hadīth* and *sīrah*. As regards this matter, Allah says to His Prophet (S): “...*We have revealed to you the Reminder that you may make clear to mankind...*” (16:44). Thus we find that what was revealed through the Prophet (S) was the overall reference to the laws concerning *salāt*, fasting, *Hajj*, *khums*, *zakāt*, *nikāh*, *talāq*, inheritance, will, etc. which appear in the Glorious Qur’ān. However, the details concerning these laws have been explained for mankind through the practice and behaviour of the Prophet (S); but since the policies of the governments after him strayed from the laws and his *sunnah*, those with vested interests preferred that no

one gained acquaintance with these laws so that they would not face any objection. And, thus, they left no stone unturned in preventing the *hadīth* of the Prophet (S) from being narrated and staying in circulation.

Q: Could you please cite some examples of these treacherous activities?

‘Allāmah ‘Askarī: Sure, I will give you some clear examples. For one, Abū Bakr is known to have said to the companions of the Prophet (S): “You narrate *ahādīth* from the Prophet of Allah (S) over which there is dispute (among yourselves), and the people to come after you will dispute even more than you. Therefore, you must refrain from quoting anything from the Prophet (S), and if people ask you about any matter, tell them that the Qur’ān is among us and that the Qur’ān is all-sufficient for us. Treat the *halāl* (lawful) from it as *halāl* and treat its *harām* (forbidden) as *harām*. Similarly, the *Tabaqāt Ibn Sa’d* mentions: “During the days of ‘Umar bin al-Khattāb, the number of *ahādīth* soared. He appealed to the people to bring forth written *ahādīth*; and believing that ‘Umar intended to use these *ahādīth* to the benefit of Islam, they brought them forward. But as it turned out, ‘Umar ordered all those *ahādīth* to be put to flames.” He also summoned to Madīnah, the companions of the Prophet (S) like ‘Abdullāh bin Hudhayfah, Abū Dardā’, Abū Dharr, and ‘Uqbāh bin ‘Āmir, who used to narrate the Prophet’s (S) *hadīth* in the different cities and then did not allow them to leave Madīnah right until his death. The attitude of ‘Uthmān as regards the narration of the *ahādīth* was no different either. Thus, when he became the caliph, he ordered that “no *hadīth* should be narrated except for the ones that had been narrated during the times of the two previous caliphs.” Moreover, he also exiled Abū Dharr, first to Shām and then to Rabadhah, because he continued narrating those *ahādīth* of

the Prophet (S) with which the policies of the present government were in clear conflict.

One of the other reasons for which the caliphs prevented the *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S) from being in circulation was in order to take precautions against the spread of the merits and supreme qualities of ‘Amīr al-Mu‘minīn (‘a). This was mainly because Imam ‘Alī (‘a) had slain in defensive combat many of the leaders of the Quraysh during the early battles of Islam and it was very difficult for the Qurayshī Arabs to remain indifferent to this reality. Moreover, the *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S) that were in admiration of Imam ‘Alī’s (‘a) merits could impede the Qurayshite from coming to power. And especially those *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S) in which he had confirmed that certain Qur’ānic verses had been revealed in praise of Imam ‘Alī (‘a). Thus, many of those *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S) that had been safeguarded by his companions in Madinah were, unfortunately, taken with them to the grave.

In order to justify the actions of the caliphs, during the time of Mu‘āwiyah, many *ahādīth* were forged, like the one which wrongly attributes to the Prophet (S) the words: “Do not document any of my sayings and destroy any document quoting my sayings, presented by anyone, except for the Qur’ān.” The *Sahīh al-Muslim* alleges that people had asked for the permission of the Prophet (S) to document his *ahādīth* to which he had declined. There are many other *ahādīth* on this subject but for the sake of brevity this shall have to suffice. In any case, the caliphs did succeed in confining the *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S) within the boundaries of Madinah (and that too, within the hearts!). In this manner, they managed to create a rift between the actual *sunnah* of the Prophet (S) and the Muslims living outside of Madinah. But of course, this was excluding those *ahādīth* that did not threaten the interests of the government of the caliphs, and if this trend would have been allowed to continue, no traces of the original laws and beliefs of Islam would have survived. However, in resistance to this

detrimental trend, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) and the subsequent Imams (‘a) put in tireless efforts in preserving and spreading the original *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S), and in this way, they salvaged and propagated real Islam.

Q: After the Prophet of Islam (S), the body of the caliphate rule in which all the members were Qurayshites decided to separate the Qur’ān from its *sha’n al-nuzūl* (the purpose of its revelation) and efforts were made by them to circulate the Qur’ān, devoid of any explanation and interpretation. Gradually, false or mistaken beliefs became prevalent among the Muslims and the Qur’ānic concepts came to be distorted. Could you please elaborate on this undesirable trend in more detail?

‘Allāmah ‘Askari: As you know, whenever a verse of the Qur’ān was revealed to the noble Prophet (S), he would recite it for the people and would explain its meaning to them. One of the companions of the Prophet (S) is known to have said that the Prophet (S) would teach the people ten Qur’ānic verses at a time in the Madinah Mosque, and that he would not go on to the next ten verses until they had learnt all the laws and explanations that came through those verses. In other words, everything that came under the scope of the Qur’ānic sciences was explained by the Prophet of Allah (S) to the people and all those who knew how to write would take down their lessons on pieces of leather, wood, bone, etc., whether it was in the form of noting down of the Qur’ānic verses or of the Prophet’s (S) explanations of the meaning of its words, or of his description of the purpose of its revelation, or the laws revealed through those verses. Thus, we see that the teaching and the documentation of the Qur’ān in the time of the Prophet (S) included the explanations and the interpretations provided by the Prophet (S) himself, and it was not customary to merely take down the verses of the Qur’ān. At this point, let me refer to a few examples of the *sha’n al-nuzūl* of the verses that were in these

mushafs (copies), so as to be able to answer your question more effectively. For example, it was mentioned that in revelation of the verse “*Surely your enemy is the one who shall be without posterity*” (108:3), the one originally referred to as the “enemy” was ‘Ās bin Wā’il, the father of ‘Amr bin ‘Ās. Similarly, the “evil-doer” referred to in the interpretation provided for the verse, “*If an evil-doer comes to you with a report...*” (49:6) was named as Walid. And in the interpretation of the verse, “*The accursed tree (al-Shajarah al-Mal’ūnah) in the Qur’ān...*” it was explained that the “accursed tree” referred to the Umayyids. These verses and tens of other verses that were written in the early *mushafs*, along with the explanations provided by the Prophet (S), referred to the Quraysh.

‘Abdullāh bin ‘Amr bin ‘Ās says: “I used to take down the *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S). The Quraysh (by “Quraysh” he meant some of the companions of the Prophet – S) objected to that by saying: ‘You take down everything that the Prophet (S) has said.’ Then ignoring the truthful status of the Prophet (S), they added, ‘The Prophet (S) is just like any other human being who is sometimes pleased and is sometimes angry’, meaning to say that just like all ordinary human beings, the Prophet (S) praised certain people when he was pleased with them and criticized them when he was angry with them.” To this ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Amr bin ‘Ās adds: “I stopped taking down the *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S) and then one day, I narrated this incident to the Prophet (S) himself, who said: ‘Do take down my words. I swear by Him in Whose Hands lies my life, that nothing but the very truth ever comes out from my mouth.’”

This narration of ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr bin ‘Ās has been mentioned in several of the books of the khilāfat school, including the *Sunan al-Dārimī*, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, *Musnad Ahmad* and the *Mustadrak al-Sahīhayn*. This incident reveals the fact that the Qurayshite were against the documentation of any *ahādīth* that would not be in their personal interest, right from the days of the

Prophet (S). Following the passing away of the Prophet (S) it was these very people that also propounded the slogan, “*Hasbunā Kitāb Allāh*” (The Book of Allah is sufficient for us).

After the Prophet (S), the Qurayshites took the reigns of power into their hands and decided to create a split between the Qur’ān and its interpretation. This was mainly due to the fact that in the copies of the Qur’ān that were in the possession of the people, the explanations of the verse, “*O Apostle! Deliver what has been revealed to you from your Lord...*” (5: 67) mentioned the words, “*fi ‘Alī*” (Regarding ‘Ali), and this interpretation was not agreeable to the caliphs. Thus, from the time of ‘Abū Bakr”, the separation of the Qur’ān from the explanations given by the Prophet (S) began; and during the rule of ‘Umar, he commanded that the Qur’āns be written without any commentary. The Qur’ān that is in our possession today was compiled during the time of ‘Umar, which he then left in the custody of his daughter, the Umm al-Mu’minin, Hafsa, waiting for an opportunity to replace the earlier *mushafs* that were in the possession of the people with this one. Thus, the Qur’ān that we have, today, is the same Qur’ān of the times of the Prophet (S), but devoid of his interpretations and explanations. Besides, ‘Umar had commanded his governors to keep the people occupied with the Qur’ān and to divert their attention from the *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S). Qarzah bin Ka‘b, one of the companions of the Prophet (S) mentions: “‘Umar appointed me as the governor of Kufa. As I was leaving for Kufa, he (‘Umar) accompanied me, until we had travelled a short distance from Madīnah. He then asked me: ‘Do you know why I have accompanied you?’, to which I responded, ‘Since I am a companion of the Prophet (S).’ He said: ‘Yes, but there is another reason to this as well.’ ‘Umar continued: ‘The people of the town that I am sending you to, recite the Qur’ān a lot, such that their voices sound like the buzzing of the bees. Do not divert them from their recitation of the Qur’ān into the hearing of the *ahādīth* of the

Prophet (S).’ Thereafter, fearing the caliph, I refrained from narrating any of the *ahādīth* of the Prophet (S).” Similarly, ‘Abū Mūsā Asha’rī is quoted in the book, *Tārīkh Ibn Kathīr* as saying: “‘Umar appointed me as the governor of Basra and ordered me to promote only the recitation of the Qur’ān among the people.” The situation deteriorated to such an extent that it has been recorded that one day, while delivering a sermon from the pulpit, on reaching and reciting the Qur’ānic verse, “*And fruits and herbage*” (80:31), ‘Umar asked: ‘What does this verse mean?’, and continued to himself: ‘Well, you don’t know what it is ‘Umar! Act upon whatever you know from the Qur’ān and treat its *halāl* (lawful) as *halāl* and its *harām* (forbidden) as *harām*.’ Moreover, ‘Umar has been known to have sometimes asked for the interpretation of certain Qur’ānic verses from people like Ka’b al-Ahbār, the Jew, and sometimes from ibn ‘Abbās, and that too, only such things that promoted the interest of his own rulership. Thus, as a result of this policy of the caliphs, the people from the Muslim cities limited themselves only to reciting the Qur’ān and those who possessed the copies of the Qur’ān that included the interpretations provided by the Prophet (S) were prohibited from narrating his interpretations. During the time of ‘Uthmān, the people became highly dissatisfied with the functioning of ‘Uthmān and his associates like Walid, Sa’id, ‘Abdullāh bin ‘Abī Sarh, and Mu‘āwiyah and they gradually started gaining awareness. Since the period of the latter half of ‘Uthmān’s rule, the objections of the people increased, and they began reading the interpretations concerning the ‘Umayyids and the caliphate, from their *mushafs*. At this point, ‘Uthmān asked for the copy of the Qur’ān that was compiled during the times of ‘Umar and which was in the possession of Hafsah. He then ordered for six copies to be made from this Qur’ān and sent a copy each to the cities of Meccā, Shām, Kufa, Basra, Hims, and Iskandariyah (Alexandria) and commanded that further copies of the Qur’ān should only be made from these master-copies only. He also kept

one copy in Madinah. Thereafter, he collected all the *mushafs* belonging to the *sahābis*, containing the interpretations of the Prophet (S) and put them to flames. As a result, the Muslims were left only with this Qur'ān, without any interpretation. The only person who did not hand over his *mushaf* was 'Abdullāh bin Mas'ūd, who was therefore subjected to a lot of accusations. For example, they spread the lie that "he does not hand over his *mushaf* since it does not contain some parts or that it contains some additional parts". This was the fate of the Qur'ān during the times of the three caliphs. Of course, the Qur'ān and its teachings were subjected to many worse and disastrous acts, which we shall, God willing, deal with at a more appropriate time in the future.

Q: With your permission, let us lead our conversation to the period of the rule of Imam 'Alī ('a). We would like to know how Imam 'Alī confronted the distortions that had been caused in the Qur'ānic concepts, particularly the distortion of the *sunnah* of the Prophet (S) and also how he dealt with such issues as misappropriation of power and the stratification of society.

'Allāmah 'Askarī: After the assassination of 'Uthmān, for the first time in the history of Islam the Muslims took their fate into their own hands and swore allegiance to Imam 'Alī bin 'Abī Tālib with complete freedom. Thus, this can be considered as the only true allegiance, after the allegiance with the noble Prophet (S), since it had taken place without any coercion or compulsion. When Imam 'Alī ('a) took control of temporal power, he intended to deal with the people with justice and thus appointed competent people from among the *Ansār* as his governors. The same Qurayshites revolted against him and under the leadership of Umm al-Mu'minin 'Āyishah, accompanied by Talhah and Zubayr, schemed the Battle of Jamal. Consequently, since this prevented Imam 'Alī ('a) from being able to completely implement his intended reforms in Madinah which was the capital of the caliphs and the centre of

the Quraysh rule, he was thus prompted to make Kufa the centre of his rule. This was mainly because the people of Kufa were either from the non-Quraysh Arab tribes or they were the newly-converted Iranian Muslims who would be more open to absorbing the “real” Islam. We can thus briefly conclude, as the answer to your question, that during his rule in Kufa, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) promoted the genuine Islam that he had received from the Prophet of Allah (S) and the laws of the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (S) to society.

Q: Is the *Mushaf Imam ‘Ali (‘a)* the same Qur’ān that included the *sha’n al-nuzūl* of the verses and has passed on from one Imam (‘a) to the next? How was this *mushaf* compiled? Can you offer us some explanations in this regard?

‘Allāmah ‘Askarī: Following the passing away of the Prophet (S), Imam ‘Ali (‘a) gathered the Qur’ān that was taken down by him in the house of the Prophet (S) on animal hides and such other material and compiled its chapters in the order that had been directed by the Prophet (S), including the interpretations and the *sha’n al-nuzūl* of the verses. He then presented it before the caliph of those times. However, since this Qur’ān contained such interpretations and *sha’n al-nuzūl* that evidently exposed the Quraysh and the people close to their rulership, it was not accepted by them. Consequently, Imam ‘Ali took this *mushaf* to his own home and kept it under his possession. This came to be passed on for one Imam (‘a) to another, and was used by them to narrate its explanations and interpretation for the Muslims. Presently, this *Mushaf* is in the possession of Imam Mahdi (May Allah hasten his reappearance), who will make this book public, and will instruct people to teach from it. Whatever Imam ‘Ali (‘a) had acquired as the interpretation of the Qur’ān from the Prophet (S) was presented by him to the people, in the form of sermons, during his rule. And his followers from Kufa narrated whatever they had heard from

him to the others. Most of the Shi'ite and Sunni exegesis that today contain the explanations that were given by the Prophet (S) are from this source. If not for Imam 'Ali's rule and his shifting of the capital from Madinah to Kufa, and save for his sermons and speeches, today there would have been no traces of any of the original interpretations or exegesis of the Qur'ān. Thus, in this manner, we can see how Imam 'Ali ('a) returned to the Muslims, the actual interpretation of the Qur'ān, that was earlier prohibited by the caliphs preceding him. It is within this context that the term "The Bearers of Allah's Book", which we can find in the *Ziyārat Jāmi'ah Kabīrah* refers to the Imams ('a), in general, and to Imam 'Ali ('a) in particular. It was Imam 'Ali ('a) who had announced in the Kufa Mosque: "O' People! Ask me (whatever you need to know) before I depart from among you. I swear by Allah that I am more familiar with the pathways of the Heavens than with any of the pathways of the earth. There is no verse about which I know not as to whether it was revealed in the mountain or the desert or whether it was revealed in the night or in the day..." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 189). However, some ignorant or malicious people misused this noble offer and asked the Imam ('a) irrelevant or, what they believed to be, difficult questions in order to ridicule him or to perplex him, to which Imam 'Ali ('a) gave appropriate answers.

Descriptive Bibliography of ‘Allāmah ‘Askarī’s Works

‘Allāmah Sayyid Murtazā ‘Askarī has written a large number of books in the Persian and Arabic languages. Besides evaluating Shi‘ite books in the light of the Qur’ān and *hadīth*, he has also evaluated the sources of the Sunnī school – which he refers to as the “School of the Caliphs” – and his books are also considered as reliable sources and reference works by the Ahl al-Sunnah as well. As a result, ‘Allāmah ‘Askarī’s efforts and endeavours towards protecting Islam from distortion have been appreciated by both the schools of Islam.

Most of ‘Allāmah ‘Askarī’s works have been published in the Arab countries, Lebanon and Egypt in particular, and have been welcomed by research scholars engaged in researches on Islam. Moreover, some of ‘Allāmah’s books have also been translated into the English language.

Among some outstanding features of ‘Allāmah ‘Askarī’s books are their clarity of expression and fluency of language, which appeal to the readers. What follows is an introduction to the

most prominent works of ‘Allāmah ‘Askari that has been presented hereunder for the benefit of our esteemed readers.

1. *Khamsūn wa Mi’ah Sahābī Mukhtaliq* (Hundred and Fifty Fictitious Companion), Publisher: Majma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-Islāmī.

This highly analytical work deals with 150 fictitious and non-existent persons, who have come to be regarded as companions (*sahābīs*) of Prophet Muhammad (S). These were created by opportunistic elements under different pretexts to create turmoil in the Islamic community, and to block the path of the progress of Islam. The history of Islam has recorded many evidences of the perfidious and hostile activities of such hypocrites.

In the preface of this work the author writes:

Some people have distorted the *sīrah*, the history, and the *hadīth* to such an extent that they are beyond comprehension. And they have even gone to the extent of projecting the murderer as the victim, the oppressor as the oppressed, the night as day, and the day as night... The presence of such false *ahādīth* has resulted in the misrepresentation of Islam.

This 4-volume work, which was the result of ‘Allāmah ‘Askari’s inquisitive mind when he came across weak and illogical narrations, has been widely hailed by Sunnī research scholars as well.

2. *Ahādīth Umm al-Mu’minīn ‘Āyishah* (‘Āyishah’s Role in the History of Islam), 2-volumes, Publisher: Tawhīd Publications.

The first volume of this work comprises the events pertaining to the period of Prophet Muhammad (S) until the end of the period of Mu‘āwiyah. Some of the topics of discussion in the first volume are: *‘Āyishah in the Prophet’s House, A Fleeting Glance at ‘Āyishah’s Life*, and *The Secret behind the Prophet’s (S) Multiple Marriages*, and *The Period of ‘Uthmān and Imam ‘Ali’s Caliphate* in which the author provides the reader with some of the historical events extracted from reliable sources and documents, in order to

enable the reader to understand ‘Āyishah’s real personality, thoughts, beliefs, and psychological characteristics. This background has been provided by the author to aid the readers in consequently evaluating the credibility of the Prophetic Traditions (*ahādīth*) ascribed to ‘Āyishah that have been presented in this work with a detailed discussion. *During Mu‘āwiyah’s Period* is the last subtitle of the first volume of this work, in which the author has reviewed the basis of ‘Āyishah’s cordial relations with the Umayyids, her influence on the Umayyid court, and her personal characteristics.

The second volume of this work, which has been published by Usūl al-Dīn Faculty, contains the *ahādīth* that have been ascribed to ‘Āyishah as well as those which have been falsely attributed to her. Finally, the author has discussed her efforts in standing up against some distorted narration as well as the unjust and false accusations targeted at Prophet Muhammad (S).

3. ‘Abdullah bin Sabā wa Asāfiru Ukhrā (‘Abdullah bin Sabā and Other Myth) 3-volumes, Publisher: Majma‘ al-‘Ilmi al-Islāmi.

In this work, ‘Allāmah ‘Askarī has proved, by resorting to reliable evidences and documents, that ‘Abdullah bin Sabā is merely an imaginary and fictitious figure and that the stories narrated by historians about him as being the founder of the Shi‘ite school are only a bunch of lies and fabrications.

The author has taken a profound look into history and has reviewed a large number of books, and through his diligent efforts, has provided readers with invaluable facts on this subject.

In the preface of his book ‘Allāmah ‘Askarī writes as follows:

This discussion destroys the basic foundations on which some of the renowned historians had mistakenly based their beliefs about the history of Islam, considering them to be irrefutable. It also proves that many accounts on the history of Islam are incorrect and

that the evidences, documents, and sources referred to are weak and unreliable.

In the first part of the work, the author discusses the myth of a figure referred to as ‘Abdullah bin Sabā, and how this myth came into existence as well as the chain of the people who have narrated this lie.

The incident of Saqifah in the traditions narrated by Sayf, apostasy in Islam, the imaginary figures and the fabricated heroes of Sayf, and the causes of the spread of Sayf’s fabricated traditions constitute the other topics of discussion in the book.

4. *Naqsh-e A’immah dar Ihyā-ye Dīn* (The Role of the Imams in the Revival of Religion), November 1979, Edited by the Grand Islamic Library, Publisher: Nashr-e Kowkab and Majma‘ al-‘Ilmi al-Islāmi.

This work is a compilation of the speeches of ‘Allāmah ‘Askarī on subjects like the primary responsibility of the prophets and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), the distortion of religion after the demise of every prophet, the incorporation of truth and falsehood, etc. In the first part of the work, the causes of conflict between the prophets and the satanic rulers like the conflicts between Moses (‘a) and Pharaoh, Abraham (‘a) and Nimrod as well as the struggles of the Companions of the Cave (Ashāb Kahf) etc. have been discussed.

This work, fourteen volumes of which have been published thus far, includes the following topics of discussion: *The Condition of the Pre-Islamic Arab Society, The Religious Situation within the Arabian Peninsula, A Brief Glance at the Sirah of Prophet (S), The Influence of the Beliefs of the People of the Book on the Culture of the Muslims, The Role of Etymology in the Comprehension of Thought, The Belief in God in the Shi‘ite and Sunnī Schools*, etc.

5. *‘Aqāyid-e Islam dar Qur’ān-e Karīm* (Islamic Beliefs on the Basis of the Glorious Qur’ān), Publisher: Majma‘ al-‘Ilmi al-Islāmi.

In the preface of this book, the author expresses his motive for writing this book in these words:

Since I observed that the different schools of thought are opposed to the glorious Qur’ān and that the human legislators, under the influence of such views, base social laws on fighting Qur’anic decrees; and that such baseless opposition will be relied upon and referred to by the future generations, ... I endeavoured to write this book with the following topics of discussion: *Discussions on Divinity, The Various Creatures of Allah in the Glorious Qur’ān, Discussions on Lordship, The Divine Preachers and Teachers of Mankind, The Qualities of the Preachers, and The Struggles of the Prophets.*

6. *Ma‘ālim al-Madrisatayn* (The Teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt School and the Caliphs School), 3-volumes, Publisher: Dānishkadīh Usūl al-Dīn, Qum, 2000.

This book comprises discussions on the related religious documents of the two schools of Imamate and Caliphate. The other topics of discussion included in the book are: *Debates between the Two Schools on the Issues of ‘Companions’ and ‘Companionship’, The Sunnah of the Prophet (S) and Imam Husayn’s (‘a) Uprising against the Deviation from the Sunnah of the Prophet (S), that had emerged due to unauthorized interpretations, and The Ability of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) in Reviving the Sunnah of the Prophet of Allah (S) in the Islamic Society following Imam Husayn’s Uprising.*

In another part of the book the author explains the meanings of the terms that are frequently used in discussions on Imamate and Caliphate, viz. *Shūrā, Bay‘at, Khalīfah* and Allah’s *Khalīfah* on

Earth, Amīr al-Mu'minīn, Imam, *Amr* and *Ulū al-amr*, *Wasī*, and *Wisāyat*.

7. *Akharīn Namāz-e Payāmbār (S)* (The Last *Salāt* of the Prophet – [S]), Publisher: Intishārāt-e Parvīn, 2001.

The events that took place during the lifetime of the Prophet of Allah (S) stimulate research scholars to engage in meticulous researches on historical issues, in order to discover and distinguish the factual and accurate incidents from the forged ones. One of such incident is Abū Bakr's alleged leading of *salāt* at the Prophet's (S) place regarding which 'Allāmah 'Askarī has conducted a thorough research and has discussed the same in a separate treatise entitled *Salāt Abī Bakr*. This treatise which is on analytical result of the spurious account, has been translated into the Persian language by Muhammad Bāqir Adibi Lārijānī.

8. *Adyān-e Asimānī wa Mas'alah-ye Tahrīf* (Revealed Religions and the Issue of Distortion), Publisher: Majma' al-'Ilmi al-Islāmī.

A study of this book enables the reader to discover how, unlike many materialistic or worldly leaders, the Prophet of Allah (S) never succumbed to arrogance or lose his humility, in spite of his large number of companions and followers. The author explains how a mere increase in the number of Muslims did not delight the Prophet (S) so as to overlook their mistakes. Rather, he clearly drew the lines to identify future deviations and warned the Muslims against committing crimes or aligning with criminals.

9. *Saqīfah: Barrasī-ye Nahwīh-ye Shiklgīrī-ye Hukūmat pas az Rihlat-e Payāmbār-e Akram (S)* (Saqīfah: A Review of the Formation of the Government after the Passing Away of the Prophet), compiled by Muhammad Dashti, Publisher: Nashr Kongirah.

This book is the compilation of 'Allāmah 'Askarī's speeches at the mourning sessions held during the months of Muharram and

Safar of the year 1419 AH, which have been extracted, compiled, edited and published by Dr. Muhammad Dashti.

The basic focus of this book is on the incident of Saqifah and the way in which it was organized. The other parts of the book have been dedicated to such issues as *Saqifah and the Allegiance to Abū Bakr*, *Saqifah as narrated by Bukhārī and Tabarī*, *Abū Bakr's Will and 'Umar's Caliphate*, *The Period of 'Uthmān's Caliphate*, *The People's Revolt against 'Uthmān and the Role of Imam 'Alī ('a)*, and *The Shiqshiqiyah Sermon*.

10. *Bar Gustarih-ye Kitāb wa Sunnat*, Publisher: Majma' al-'Ilmi al-Islāmī.

This book is a collection of 15 different booklets in each of which the author has discussed a different subject in the light of the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (S). In the preface of the book 'Allāmah 'Askari writes as under:

It is the need of the hour to return to the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (S) and to restore our unity on the basis of the Book and the *Hadīth*. It is for this reason that in our discussions, we resort to the Qur'ān and the practice of the Prophet (S) repeatedly, in order to find a way for resolving our differences, such that, God willing, we may manage to restore our unity.

The titles of the booklets included in this work are: *Mourning the Deceased*, *Commemorating the Prophets*, *The Verse of Purification (Ayah Tathīr)*, *In the meanings of the Two Schools*, *This Ummah has Twelve Imams*, *Mushaf According to Hadith and Other Sources*, *Badā' or Expunction / Corroboration on the Basis of Divine Reasoning*, *Jabr*, *Tafwīz*, *Ikhtiyār*, *Qazā'*, and *Qadar*, *Temporary Marriage in Islam*, *The Infallibility of the Prophets*, *Reconstruction of the Tombs of the Prophets and the Imams and Offering Prayers in Them*, *Seeking Refuge in the Prophet of Allah (S)*, and *The Attributes of Allah, the Almighty*.

