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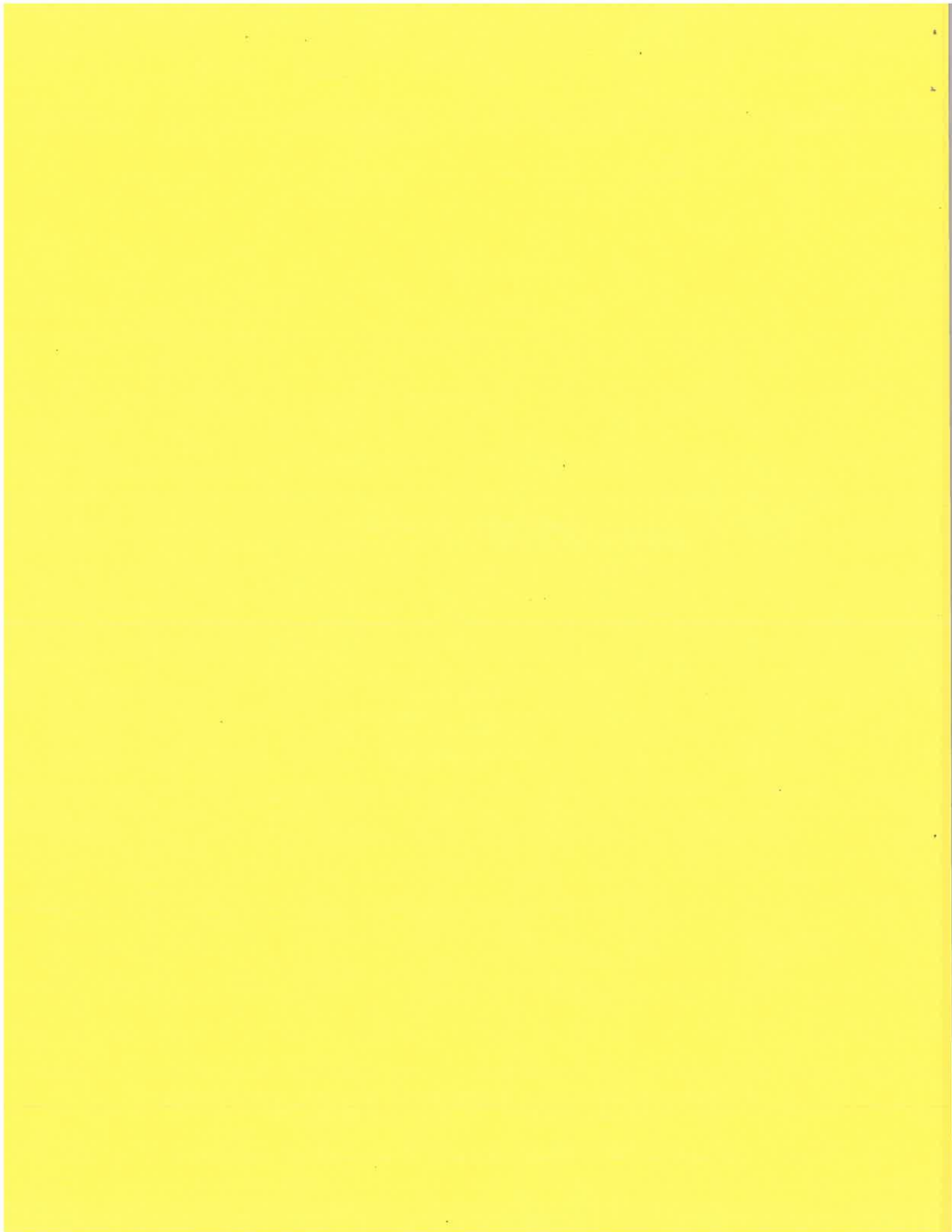
**GOOD LIFE: WHAT IS IT?
AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT ACCORDING TO ISLAM?**

by

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Allah, or God, is the focal point in the Korān, the basic source of Islamic Shari'a (the law which governs the life of Muslims, individuals and society alike). God's presence is felt wherever the Koran is read or analysed. Such a feeling is natural because the Koran, for Muslims, is the word of God. It is a word spoken particularly to man. It is the Divine communication with human beings which includes Divine guidance for man. More than that, it is the final communication and guidance, the final step in a long series of Divine communications which started with Adam and ended with Mohammad.

Any analysis of the Korān, whether ontological, conceptual, philosophical or semantic~~ly~~, proves that God occupies the cent^a place. Semantically, for example, we find that the word Allāh "is the highest focus word in the Koranic system, which is surpassed by no other word in rank and importance."⁽¹⁾ This shows that the Koran, and therefore Islam, in general, is essentially theocentric, where Allāh reigns over all his creatures including man, and influences their existence and destiny.

Allah in Islām is all in all, and according to the Korān He is the one, and the only one, whose existence is not transitional, and therefore enjoys real and eternal existence. This makes God the necessary being according to philosophers such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna of the Latin^s),⁽²⁾ whose existence is necessary by definition, while the existence of everything else is only possible, relative to the existence of God. Nothing in the whole world; earth or heaven, man or any other being, could share God His essential quality as being the sole necessary being as opposed to all others than himself.

It is not difficult to prove that the world of the Koran, and therefore that of Islam, is a theocentric world in all its aspects.

(1) Toshihiko Izutsu: God and Man In The Koran, Tokyo, 1964., p. 95.

(2) Ibn Sina, al-Isharat wal-tanbihat,

God, the supreme, stands above the world of being, for everything other than Himself, human or non-human, depends on Him. He is the creator, the only creator, and as such, He is superior. But His superiority is not limited to the fact that He is the creator, for He has special qualities and unlimited powers which make His supremacy indefinite and beyond man's comprehension. The all in all image of Allah makes the hierarchy of the world of being depend on the nearness to God or remoteness from him.

Man, however, occupies a special position in the Koran. It is true that nothing can stand up to God; He is the highest, the most high, conceptually and ontologically, and therefore nothing could be compared ~~with~~ ^{to} Him. Yet, man is in a certain way compared ~~with~~ ^{to} God, for man was created in God's image — “We indeed created Man in the fairest stature”^(I) and he is the only creature who deserves God's communication through God's word, the Koran. As a matter of fact, one can say that man is God's main preoccupation.

Man's life, which includes his creation, nature, intellectual, spiritual and social aspirations, moral conduct, rights, duties and destiny, is the main preoccupation of God as God is viewed in the Koran. As a matter of fact, God Himself, His speech, His acts and His relation with the world are concerned mainly with man. This, however, is a kind of human problem and possibly a drama. God created the world for man to occupy and govern, — “He has subjected to you what is in the heavens

(I) All quotations of Koran are based on A.J. Arberry: The Koran interpreted, Oxford, 1964.

and what is in the earth, all together, from Him" (Koran 45,13) but this seems to be a task which cannot be managed by man without God's guidance. This guidance comes in the form of certain instructions. If man decides to obey, he will be rewarded in heaven; if not, he will be punished in hell. But man does not seem to be able to decide on his own, and this is what constitutes the Koranic drama of earth and heaven: "We indeed created Man in the fairest stature, then we restored him to lowest of low, save those who believe, and do righteous deeds" (Koran, 95,5). The main purpose of the Koran is man's salvation,

This concern of God with man, his conduct in particular, amounts to the fact that what is good or bad in man's life depends on following God's instructions or not following them. Here is the decisive factor which determines what is good and bad in man's life. This seems to be new to pre-Islamic Arabia, the Jāhiliyya (the time or age of ignorance), when Arabs did not know this all-in-all unity and supremacy of God. Of course, the pre-Islamic Arabs recognized the existence of unseen powers, and tried to appease these powers or neutralize their harmful effects through idols, minor gods and sorcerers, but the new concept of the one all-in-all God was new to them. All the unseen powers are united in one supreme existence whose presence overshadows everything else. In the face of such concept man becomes small like one particle of the desert sand; yet, he remains important in the world of being.

The dilemma of man is that although he is in charge of this

world, he is not up to this responsibility on his own. Thus God communicates with man by sending down His word. however, this communication between God and man, cannot be on the same level. It takes two different forms from each side. Communication of God with man, which is from above to below, is either verbal through revelation as in the Koran, or non-verbal through Divine acts that come in the form of different signs as the creation and the order of the world. On the other hand, man's communication with God, which is from below to above, could be verbal and non-verbal also. The verbal communication is calling God and asking Him favours, and the non-verbal is obeying God and observing His instructions in all aspects of man's life.

The ontological and conceptual differences between God and man, lead to an unbalanced relation involving a substance-accident relation, to use philosophical terms, which is manifested in the Lord-servant relation as is expressed in the Koran. On one hand we have Allah the Lord, the Almighty, the Sovereign, the Supreme, the Majesty, along with all other titles which confirm God's Mastership; and on the other we have man, who is weak and helpless, for "the greatness of Allah is emphasized through the helpless weakness of man His most illustrious creature". (I) Man's status is different from that of the lord to the degree that he only can be servant.

(I) G.E. Von Grunebaum, Islam; Essays in the nature and growth of a cultural tradition, London, 1955, P.7.

His good conduct could bring him close to the master in his capacity as a servant; this should involve "humbleness, modesty, absolute obedience, and other properties that are usually demanded of a servant" (I). The best life for man is to serve God. This is what is man for: — "I have not created Jinn and mankind unless to serve me" (Koran 51,56). The absolute freedom of such a servant is to be a good servant with all the qualities of ^a good servant. Thus, a good man should not have pride, arrogance, haughtiness, and other similar qualities which belong to ^{the} Jahilliyya, ~~at~~ the time of ignorance.

The Lord-servant relation is not the only consequence of the ontological and conceptual gaps between God and man. the contrast between perfect and imperfect beings is another consequence that is related to man's worldly life. This is manifold issue. On the ethical level, there is a basic contrast between two different ^(On the one hand ...) natures. A perfect being whose ethical perfection makes Him God ~~of the~~ ^{who} infinite goodness, mercy, forgiveness and benevolence, but at the same time, ~~is~~ is the God of wrath and ^{of} strict and unrelenting justice. On the other hand, we have man who is ^{of} ~~contradictory~~ ^S and equivocal. He could be good and bad, but certainly not perfect. He is weak and needs God's support, yet he can rebel and disobey. He is perplexed, but can be vehement in his ^{unbelief} ~~infidelity~~ (Kufr) and in his unthankfulness.

This imperfect nature is behind the idea of reward and punishment, Paradise and Hell as called, which lead us to another level of the

(I) Izutsu, God and man, P.77.

contrast between perfect and imperfect beings. Our wordly life is imperfect because it is temporal and transitory, it is imperfect, because it isn't eternal. The ^{her} hereafter, which is eternal, is the perfect one, but it cannot be perfect if one does not do good on earth. Thus the wordly life is a preparatory stage to ^{in the here} the life after, the real and perfect life. What is good on earth is good only as far as it helps in the preparation of man for the life to come. —“O men, God's promise is true; so let not the present life delude you” — (Koran 35, 5) — and “the present life is but the joy of delusion” — (Koran 57,20).

The present life, or “the lower life” as it is referred to in the Koran, is correlated to future life or to the hereafter which is higher and in full contrast to the lower life. The two concepts of present and future life are ^{as} represented in the Koran ^{as} closely related, but in direct opposition to each other at the same time. This close and ^{oppositional} relation creates an atmosphere of spiritual tension felt in Koran.

The hereafter in its two components, ^{the} Garden (Jannah) and ^d hell (Jahannam), is not remote from this present world or lower life (al-dunyā). “On the contrary, it is most directly and immediatly connected with human life on this earth, in this very present world. The two concepts are not only directly connected with that of al-dunyā; the whole system is arranged in such a way that work directly upon to life of the Dunyā and control it in terms of eternal ‘reward’ and punishment.” (1) The idea ^{the} of Garden and hell is so strongly felt whenever a Muslim takes a decision, does something or acts on any wordly issue; he would be

(1) Izutsu, p. 89.

thinking, whether consciously or unconsciously, of al-Ākhira or the hereafter with its two opposite poles. In such a way the hereafter becomes the criterion of good and bad, and the root of moral values and ethical norms. Individual Muslims and the whole community give the Garden and hell first consideration upon choosing to act or refrain from acting on worldly affairs. Thus, ^{since} for the hereafter takes precedence over the present life, this is the main difference between ^{Muslims} them and the unbelievers who are described in the Koran as —“those who have purchase^d the present life at the price of the world to come” (Koran II,80) disobeying God who said: —“You desire the ephemeral goods of the present world, while God desires (for you) the hereafter” (Koran 8,67-68).

Man has a tendency to get involved in this world and forget the better, permanent one. God, however, is merciful and generous, when He created man, and possibly before, from all eternity, He “ordained how men ought to behave, both individually and in community”. He instructed man in the proper way to conduct his life, as an individual and in society, both vis-à-vis God, to whom we shall all return, and vis-à-vis our fellow ^{men.} Hence, there is always a right way to live and to live that way is to live the good life.

Man, however, is sinful, and very foolish, as described in the Koran (33-172) for he accepted the “trust” of the world when it was offered to him. The stakes are high, for man conforms for a while then starts to neglect and forget. Yet God would not leave man without

guidance on how ^{to} ~~mankind should~~ live, and ~~soon He~~ sends down ~~the~~ messages again and again. This happened ~~so~~ many times, one message after another, and one revelation to follow a previous one. Amongst the many messag^{er}s whom God had sent to mankind few are known; Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

The history of mankind seems quite discouraging, for human beings are prone to error, "but God's mercy is supreme," and in a final move He salvaged the ongoing situation by sending His final word and guidance through ~~a messenger~~ "who would deliver it, interpret it, live it, with undeviating precision"; ^(I) in a way that man would have no excuse whatsoever. Reading the biography of the prophet and being acquainted with his sayings, or traditions, is supposed to illustrate how man should act and behave in order to gain both worlds, the present and the future ones.

Al-Shari'a, the Islamic law, had existed before the time of Muhammed, at least ⁱⁿ principle. What Muhammed had done is to put all these principles into practice and to incorporate them into worldly life. The ideals are manifested, and the Muslim community is more than a social group; it is a religious body, ^{in which} ~~where~~ religion and society are one. Faith is still an individual matter, and society at large is the vast laboratory for practicing that faith and introducing new aspects of the Divine conduct.

Faith is not distinct from society; it involves believing in God

(I) W.C. Smith. Islam in Modern History, New York, 1959, P. 18,20.

and his messenger and observing the rules which were ordered by God and practised by His prophet. It is true, theoretically speaking, that man is saved by his faith, by recognizing the truth, by knowing what he ought to do in the first place. Yet, Muslims have always disagreed on what is good and not on what is true. Theological issues were not matters of dispute as much as cover up for disagreements concerning practice. Thus, a good Muslim is not necessarily the one who adheres to the apparent truth, rather the one whose religious commitment may be expressed in practical terms that conform to an accepted code. (I) The main debates and disagreements of Islam have always been over practice rather than theory.

Islam had insisted on the idea of sacrificing the lower life of this world for the better life of the world after, yet in its endeavour to integrate temporal righteousness with timeless salvation, the Muslims got carried out with disputes over what is good that the way Islam should be practised.

On the bases of the new revelation a new community was formed. A community with fresh ideas and new social structures. As far as ideas are concerned the individual and the community at large acknowledged God not ^{only} as the Creator, but also as the Creator who did man an extraordinary favour when He gave him His very existence, granting him life and shaping his destiny. In return ^{for} this favour, Muslims should respond, not only willingly but also wholeheartedly, to God's instructions, obeying His law and following His guidance to salvation.

(I) W.C. Smith, Islam, P. 28.

This necessitates that man get rid of all remnants of arrogance and ignorance of ^{the} Jāhiliyya, and behave truly as God's servant, to the degree of ^{en} slaving himself to his Master, keeping in mind that this should be done willingly and with thanks and gratitude to God.

The community which is formed of such men is called the Muslim community; that is to say a community that submits and surrenders totally to Allah, rejecting previous ties based on blood kinship and forming a new social group united on the ^{is} bases of the new religious beliefs. The inner structure of this community will soon become the major concern of the individuals who belong to it. That is because the new community will soon grow to cover the whole of Arabia and this requires new rules of the Divine law. This is reflected in the Koran itself, where the inner structure of the community dominates the part of the Koran revealed during that time.

The rules governing the various human relations within the Islamic community^e "indicated novel solutions for recognized problems."^(I) These solutions dealt with major issues such as:

- The revision of the prevailing ideas of the Jāhiliyya or education, and the replacement of such notions with views based on the new ideas
- ^e Revising relevant issues such as parent-child^s ~~man~~ relation^s and ^c vice versa, as well as responsibility towards one's family and society.

(I) ^{G.} Q.E. Von Grunebaum, "Islam as religion and civilization" in unity and variety in Muslim civilization, Chigogo, 1955, P.22.

- Changing the whole concept of warfare in a way that war in itself is rejected, but wars waged for the spread of the new faith is a religious responsibility. The Jihād, or fighting for God's sake and for his law are the best deeds ever performed; it would guarantee the fighter eternal happiness in the Garden of hereafter.
- Replacing the old individualistic life of the Bedouin with a solidified community, for "Islam turns from the aimlessness of the Bedouin to the discipline of the townsman".
- It ^{laid} ~~laid~~ the ground for "the later precedence of the pen over the sword, the scholar over the soldier". The thinker and the scholar are considered closer to God than other Muslims. (I)

These new concepts dominated "the laws and regulations governing the various human relations within the Islamic community". They were felt in all the Islamic rules which govern social affairs and which could be classified as follows:

- Rules concerning marital relations comprising rules which relate to marriage, divorce, adultery and similar issues.
- Rules concerning parent-child^s relation, including the duties of the parents and children towards one another and other matters related to family life.

(I) Ibid. 2.

- Laws of inheritance
- Other laws related to crime such as murder, theft, and revenge.
- Commercial relations comprising contracts, debt, usury, bribery, and justice in commercial dealings.
- Laws concerning charity, mainly alms; legal and voluntary. (I)

These new rules, involving all aspects of personal and social life, were due to develop later on into a large scale system of Islamic jurisprudence. As a matter of fact, jurisprudence was the main occupation of most Muslim scholars, and Islam as a religion and as culture produced in the field of law more than ⁱⁿ all other fields of philosophy, theology, historiography, mysticism and science combined. If we can say that the Greek culture is philosophical and ~~the~~ modern western culture scientific, we can say in the same manner that Arab-Islamic culture is juristic. Islamic jurisprudence was a new, original trade mark of Islam, for it was, and still is to a great extent, the first, and possibly the best, expression of the Arab mind.

But what is this Islamic jurisprudence? Where does it come from?

(I) Izutsu, P. 82.

What ^{are} ~~is~~ its concern^s? and, is it supposed to make the life of the Muslim a good one?

Islam and jurisprudence were almost synonym^yous. Actually, for many Muslims Islam and Shari'a are one and the same. The concept of Divine law is essential in the Koran, ^{in which} ~~where~~ Allah appears as commanding and forbidding, rewarding and punishing. This was followed by the activities of the prophet Muhammad which were supposed to present the Divine law in a living form, so the law is not only in writing, it is lived and practised. Later on, the Arab-Muslim Empire expanded this law in order to establish a legal system which would help govern the expanding Islamic territories.

Originally, the Divine law is that God commands and forbids and man submits and obeys willingly and with joy. So the good life is derived from the joyful performance of the law. ~~The~~ ^{to} obedience of God was always considered by the Muslims ~~as~~ a happy duty with great religious value. It is not solely necessary, for the right ord^{ering} of the ^{life} of the individual in ^{this} ~~the~~ world, but ~~is~~ is also his pass-way to better life in the world to come. "The Shari'a is seen by the Muslims primarily as an all-embracing system, which should ideally govern all phases of Islamic life,"^(I) insuring happiness in both the present life and the future one.

Although a Muslim was to be distinguished originally by his faith, it later became that the emphasis is on what is done. Muslims became

(I) John Alden Williams (ed.), Islam, New York, 1963, P. 79.

concerned more with what men do than with what they believe, jurisprudence took precedence over theology. The most influential scholars were always the jurists who considered themselves ~~as~~ the custodians of the religion. It is they who have traditionally decided what is an "official position".

To simplify the matter we could say that the three major factors of Shariā could be summar^{ed}ied up as follows:

- 1) Ibādāt or worship
- 2) Mu'āmalāt or social dealings
- 3) The ordinance of the community.

Ibādāt always occupies the first section of the books of fiqh or jurisprudence. It is concerned with rules that man's determine toward God: The different types of worship required by a Muslim are prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and going on ^{the} ~~to~~ pilgrim^{age}, and last and most important is the ^{declaration} ~~pronouncing~~ that there is no God but Allāh and that Moḥammad is his ~~servant and~~ apostle. This latter is the ^e decisive factor which determines the conversion to Islam. Performing these Ibādāt is supposed to open the mind of the individual, purify his heart, and bring joy to his life, in addition to granting him happiness for future life. Refraining from performing these Ibādāt, the first one in particular, would not only cause suffering in this world, but in the world to come, and if the suffering of this world could be bearable, that of the hereafter is beyond the imagination of anyone.

After dealing with Ibādāt the fiqh books usually pass to Mu'āmalāt,

or the laws governing human relations. Marriage, divorce, fosterage and inheritance occupy the vast area of this part. Mu'āmalāt, however, ^{also} covers dealings between individuals, including minute issues, such as how to eat alone and in public, what to drink and when, how to choose your friends and on what conditions, the rights and duties of friendship, the virtues of learning and the rules which should govern the relation^s between the teacher and his pupils, the virtues of listening to the chanting of the Korān and the way it should be done, how to listen to singing, and even how to brush your teeth the way the prophet used to do, etc.

These rules and many others are supposed to provide man with the best conduct which is pleasing to God and to the Muslim individual. Al-Ghazālī (d.III) the famous Muslim scholar, explains in his renowned work Ihyā, (the ^{revival of the} ~~revival~~ of religious sciences) how these rules are supposed to help Muslims to come close to God and to please Him, in addition to providing the Muslim with the best way to insure good life and happiness in the two worlds. Al-Ghazālī enumerates many of these rules, explains them and tries to theorize them and give them ^a philosophical dimension^s.

From these rules it could be concluded that Divine laws have been extended to include all worldly affairs, and any analysis of these rules would prove that Islam is somewhat a worldly religion. It is worldly in the sense that it is not against enjoying life, but this enjoyment should be according to certain rules which are supposed to be Divine rules. Legislation for the individual and the community had brought the Divine law from heaven to earth, and Islam which is

supposed to sacrifice the lower life for the sake of the next, as we have seen earlier when dealing with human affairs, confirms the right to enjoy this life, according to certain rules; even sexual intercourse is encouraged — “marry such women as seem good to you, two, three, four” — (Koran 4, 3), and drink and food is to be enjoyed — “Eat of the good things wherewith we have supplied you” — (Koran 7, 160). Such verses are abundant^a in the Koran, and rules which govern^a such affairs are numerous. Wealth, power, fame, remain acceptable aspirations, they are integrated into the new rules, and Islam in the final analysis is worldly in the sense that it encourages good living, but it insists that such living should come under the control of Divine laws.

The ordinance of the community was the major preoccupation of the prophet Moḥammad, after he had migrated from Mecca, his birth place, to Medina where he established the first Islamic community. He^a ran the newly born state as a state should be run; he sent messengers to other heads of states, he organized the army, and appointed its staff, he had personal advisers for crucial decisions, and he gave instructions to peasants, farmers, merchants and other^{members:} ~~functions~~ of his community. The main idea was to establish God's kingdom on earth which would pave the way for God's kingdom in the world to come. The Islamization of Arabia during the life⁽time of the prophet and after^{it} brought essential changes ^{to} the pagan Arabs. A cultural transformation took place, and the Arabs felt as if they had set foot ⁱⁿ on the heavenly world. The laws which govern^{ed} their new society were considered Divine, possibly because of the cultural changes ^{that} ~~which~~ the society had witnessed, although these

laws have no Koranic reference whatsoever.

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It might be that the best way to end this paper is to summarize the three new valuations which Islam introduced to the Arab society, and which are the real bases of the Islamic understanding of good life and the way to achieve it.

- 1- "Islam sets for life an otherworldly goal. Life in this world is no longer an end in itself but rather a means to secure eternal felicity". The more the individual and the society achieve this goal the more happiness would be the reward in the two worlds.
- 2- It makes "the individual responsible for his fate in the next world; the new faith completed, or at least advanced significantly, the process of legal and moral individuation, besides it makes every movement of the believer's life supremely relevant. For the effort to gain salvation must never be relaxed".
- 3- It stressed "the indispensability of the community to the fulfilment^l of some of the basic obligations of the individual Muslims, Islam stressed the necessity of political organization." (I)

(I) G.E. von Grunebaum: "The problem: Unity in Diversity" in unity and variety in Muslim civilization P. 21.