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Review by Fazlur Rahman*

This book, which constitutes volume V of the series Studies in the Humanities and Social Relations of Keio University is written by Professor Toshihiko Izutsu and has emerged out of his lectures at McGill University, Montreal in the spring of 1962 and 1963. Actually, I participated in a seminar given by Dr. Izutsu at McGill during the 1960-61 session where he had tried out some of the ideas contained in this book. These seem to have matured over the years and this constitutes not only a welcome addition to the existing literature on Islam but introduces a new approach to the understanding of Islam—particularly by non-Muslims—the linguistic approach. The Arabic mistakes that appear in the book (some of which must be sheer misprints which are also frequent in the book) must not lead the reader to accuse the writer of inadequacy in Arabic which he knows and speaks fluently. Nor is this Dr. Izutsu’s first work on the Qur’an, he has already given us a work on the ethical concepts of the Holy Book.

At the outset, Dr. Izutsu gives us his idea of the science of linguistics or semantics through which he wishes to understand the Qur’an, “Semantics as I understand it is an analytic study of the key-terms of a language with a view to arriving eventually at a conceptual

grasp of the weltanschauung or world-view of the people who use that language ...".

A semantical study of the Qur'an would, therefore, be an analytical study of the key-terms of the Qur'an. In the succeeding pages, Dr. Izutsu makes it abundantly clear that by a study of the key-terms is not merely meant just a mechanical analysis of these terms or concepts in isolation or as static units but even more importantly includes their living, contextual import, as they are used in the Qur'an. Thus, although the term Allah was used by some pre-Islamic Arabs not only to mean a deity among deities but even a supreme deity in hierarchy of deities, yet the Qur'an brought a most fundamental change in the weltanschauung of the Arabs by precisely changing the contextual use of this term, by charging it with a new import—and that by eliminating all deities and bringing the concept of Allah to the centre of the circle of being. In order, therefore, to understand and even to find out the key-concepts themselves, one must know first of all the entire basic structure of the Qur'anic world of ideas. A portrayal of this basic structure or total Gestalt is then attempted in chapter 3 for, "The proper position of each individual conceptual field, whether large or small, will be determined in a definite way only in terms of the multiple relations all the major fields bear to each other within the total Gestalt".

With this we also approach the basic dilemma of Dr. Izutsu's semantic methodology. The key-terms, which, when grasped, were supposed to yield an understanding of the system as a whole (for, Dr. Izutsu assures us that the "key-terms determine the system"), cannot themselves be understood and even fixed without a prior knowledge of that system. This is what is called a vicious circle. There is nothing basically vicious with the approach (which is, indeed, a common-sense approach) that the best way of understanding a system is to study that system (in the present case the Qur'anic weltanschauung) as a whole and to pay special attention to its important concepts. I, therefore, must suspect that viciousness is the result of the desire to make semantics a science and to make grandiose claims on behalf of it.

From an Islamic point of view, however, this is only a formal difficulty; we shall now briefly see what constitutes for Dr. Izutsu the substantive structure of this Qur'anic teaching. This teaching our author discovers in the first place in a fourfold relationship between God and man. viz., (i) God is the creator of man; (ii) He communicates His Will to man through Revelation; (iii) there subsists a Lord- servant relationship between God and man and (iv) the concept of God as the God of goodness and mercy (for those who are thankful to Him) and the God of wrath (for those who reject Him). The believers in this fourfold relationship between Allah and man constitute a Community (Ummah Muslimah) by themselves and believe in the Last Day, Paradise and Hell. Dr. Izutsu's description of the historical evolution of these concepts in pre-Islamic Arabia up to the appearance of Islam is quite rich and valuable.

The main question is whether the basic structure of the Qur'anic weltanschauung, as described by Dr. Izutsu, really does adequately tally with the Qur'anic teaching. One cannot help thinking that the author has carefully and quite subjectively tailored this "basic structure" to fit what he himself has decided to be the "key-concepts" of the Qur'an. He may have thereby semi-consciously discovered in the Qur'an the counterparts of his personal religious weltanschauung. For, how else to explain the fact that in this total picture the moral element is totally wanting? Dr. Izutsu approvingly quotes Prof. Sir Hamilton Gibb to the effect that the main difference between the portrayals of Heaven and Hell by Umayyah Ibn Abī al-Salt and by the Qur'an is that in the Qur'an they are "linked up with the essential moral core of the teaching". But apparently Dr. Izutsu does not understand the implications of Gibb's statement because he himself entirely ignores the moral field as though it forms no part of the "basic structure of the Qur'anic weltanschauung". Indeed, while speaking of the "ethical relation" between God and man, Dr. Izutsu links up the ideas of salvation and damnation with purely personal faith.

One may raise the general question whether an ethical relationship, properly speaking, can be established at all between God and man. To God one can have only a worshipful attitude and not an ethical or moral attitude which he can have only towards other men; strictly speaking, one cannot be good to God but only to men. To a weltanschauung like Dr. Izutsu's, therefore, for which man-Man relationships are imperturbable by and indifferent to man-God

relationships, and can be established *per se*, the Qur'anic teaching is directly opposed—far from being adequately described by that *weltanschaung*. That the Qur'an's chief aim is to create a moral-social order, is actually proved if one historically studies the process of the revelation of the Qur'an—the actual challenges which the Prophet flung initially to the Makkani society. These challenges were not only to the pantheon of the Makkans at the Ka'bah but also to their socio-economic structure. This shows the superiority of the historical approach to the approach of the pure semanticist.

Only a historical approach can also do justice to the evolution of concepts, particularly the concept *Allah*. Dr. Izutsu, on the basis of certain verses of the Qur'an, thinks that the view of One God (Allah) generally prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia on the eve of Islam, was "surprisingly close in nature to the Islamic one". There is, however, strong evidence to believe that this "surprisingly" close concept of Allah was developed by the Makkans under the impact of the Qur'anic criticism and, on the basis of this newly evolved concept, they wanted to effect a compromise with the Prophet. The Qur'an itself bears testimony to this.

One big trouble with Dr. Izutsu's conception of the Qur'anic teaching on God-man relationship is that he does not keep the Makkani milieu in view and for him there is no difference between a Bedouin and a Makkani of the Prophet's time. The Bedouin was haughty, proud, unrestrained and boastful beyond any proper sense of reserve; he was over-conscious of his individual self-respect—he possessed the quality of *jalil* (opposed to *hilal*). The function of Islam, therefore, consisted, above all—according to him—by humbling this haughtiness and unlimited sense of pride. This was done effectively by projecting an idea of God, which is, above all, forbidding and fear-inspiring. The truth, however, is that the immediate addressees of the Qur'an were the Makkans—more particularly, their wealthy commercial classes. These people recognized no restraint on their amassing of wealth, did not recognize any obligations to their less fortunate fellow-men; regarded themselves "self-sufficient (*mustaghni*)" *i.e.*, law unto themselves. It is to them that the Qur'an first threw its challenge and required them to recognize limitations on their "natural rights". It was until they had rejected the challenge that the Qur'an backed up its demand by a theology with the doctrines of Heaven and Hell.

To make these criticisms, fundamental as they are, is not to deny the intrinsic value of this book which, according to this reviewer, lies in bringing out both the contrast and the continuity between the Qur'anic teaching and the post-Qur'anic developments in Islam at the hands of Muslims. On such vital issues as the definition of Islam and *Iman* (chapter 2, section II) and the freedom of man *vis-à-vis* God (chapter 6), how Muslim speculative theology later deviated from the pre-speculative mood of the Qur'an has been incisively brought out. One wishes the author had shown more elaborately and decisively that the Qur'an, far from being a work of speculative thought interested in system building, was as a living monument of moral and spiritual guidance, interested in keeping alive all the moral tensions which are requisite for good and fruitful life. It is because the Qur'an is interested in action that it is not shy of putting side by side the contradictory and polar terms of the moral tension. But probably the preoccupation of Dr. Izutsu to build out a system himself from the Qur'an did not allow him to do so.

Dr. Izutsu's treatment of the question of *wahy* or verbal communication from God in chapter 7 is good and comprehensive, although it is somewhat uncritical in the acceptance of traditional material on the subject and also naive in its interpretation. We are told that the verbal communication can occur only between two beings of the same order of existence—which is, of course correct. But then Dr. Izutsu tries to rationalise as to how the Prophet could have actually heard Words of Revelation and he tells us that the Prophet in his moments of Revelation, was transformed into a higher being "against his nature". He does not see that this in fact explains nothing for the question still would remain. How is it possible for a being of one order to get altogether transformed—even against his own nature—from time to time, into a being of a different order and how, after the moments of Revelation have passed and the Prophet returns to his normal self, would he keep his identity? On the whole Dr. Izutsu's use of the terms "nature" and "supernatural" in this context clearly smacks of the Christian doctrines about Jesus. The author's differentiation of the Biblical concept of Prophecy and the Qur'anic concept is again very good. I would like to add that the Prophecy of the biblical Prophets was not always natural but was often an art...
cultivated in the Jewish temples.

In the end, one would like to underline the fact that this book is from the pen of the first serious Asian non-Muslim scholar and a Japanese. As such we welcome Dr. Izutsu’s work and hope that it will be the harbinger of a growing tradition of Islamic scholarship in the Far East.

Fazlur Rahman

Preface

The present work is based on a course of lectures which I gave at the Institute of Islamic Studies in McGill University, Montreal, in the spring of 1962 and 1963 at the request of Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, then Director of the Institute. I wish at the outset to express my cordial thanks to him for giving me the opportunity and encouragement to put into coherent form the results of many years of work on both the problems of semantical methodology and those of the Qur’anic weltanschauung viewed from the standpoint of semantics.

The lectures are not reproduced here as originally delivered. I expanded them considerably and arranged the matter in a different order. In so doing I was guided by a hope that, although so many competent scholars had already studied the Qur’an from many different angles, I might still be able to contribute something new to a better understanding of the Qur’anic message to its own age and to us.

It remains to express my gratitude to all those who helped in various ways to make the production of this book possible: first, to the Rockefeller Foundation, the Humanities Division, under whose kind and cordial auspices I could undertake an extended two years’ study tour of the Muslim world (1959-1961); secondly, to all those who attended my seminars at the Institute in Canada and contributed toward making me clarify my thought by their lively questions and valuable comments; and last but not least, to Professor Nobuhiro
Matsumoto, to whose guidance and unfailing sympathy this work owes much more than I can express.

My colleague Mr. Takao Suzuki, read through the manuscript and made a number of valuable suggestions. He helped me also with the proof-reading.

It is also my pleasant duty to acknowledge my great obligation to Dr. Shohei Takamura, President of Keio University for the subsidy generously granted by the University (Fukuzawa Endowment for the Advancement of Learning and Study) toward the publication of this book.

T. Izutsu
Tokyo, September 1963.

CHAPTER 1
Semantics and the Qur’an

I. Semantics of the Qur’an

This book which is actually entitled God and Man in the Qur’an might as well have been entitled in a more general way “Semantics of the Qur’an”. I would have done so readily if it were not for the fact that the main part of the present study is almost exclusively concerned with the problem of the personal relation between God and man in the Qur’anic world-view and is centered round this specific topic. The alternative title would have the advantage of showing from the very beginning the two particular points of emphasis which characterize this study as a whole: semantics on the one hand and the Qur’an on the other.

In fact, both are equally important for the particular purpose of the present study; if we should neglect either of the two, the whole work would immediately lose its significance. For what is of vital importance here is neither the one nor the other considered separately, but this very combination itself. The combination suggests that we are going to approach a particular aspect of the Qur’an from a no less particular point of view. And, we must remember, the Qur’an is capable of being approached from a number of different points of view such as theological, philosophical, sociological, grammatical, exegetical, etc., and the Qur’an presents a number of divergent but equally important aspects. So it is quite essential that we should try to have at the very outset the clearest possible idea as to the relevance of semantic methodology to Qur’anic studies, and to
see whether there is any real advantage in approaching the Scripture of Islam from this particular angle.

The title “Semantics of the Qur’an” would suggest, to begin with, that the work will consist primarily in our applying the method of semantical or conceptual analysis to material furnished by the Qur’anic vocabulary. Again this would suggest that of the two points of emphasis to which reference has just been made, semantics represents the methodological aspect of our work, and the Qur’an its material side. Both are, as I have said, of equal importance. But practically, that is, for the purposes of the present study, the former aspect is probably more important than the latter, for this book is addressed first and foremost to those readers who have already a good general knowledge of Islam and are, therefore, ready to get vitally interested from the beginning in the conceptual problems raised by this kind of study regarding the Qur’an itself, while nothing has been assumed on their part in regard to specialist knowledge of semantics and its methodology. So I am going to put in the first part of this book less emphasis on the material side than on the methodological aspect of our problem in order to bring home to Islamists the interest and value of having a new outlook on old problems.

Unfortunately, what is called semantics today is so bewilderingly complicated. It is extremely difficult, if not absolutely impossible, for an outsider even to get a general idea of what it is like. This is largely due to the fact that ‘semantics’, as its very etymology would suggest, is a science concerned with the phenomenon of meaning in the widest sense of the word, so wide, indeed, that almost anything that may be considered to have any meaning at all is fully entitled to constitute an object of semantics. And, in fact, ‘meaning’ in this sense is furnishing today with important problems thinkers and scholars working in most diverse fields of specialized study such as linguistics proper, sociology, anthropology, psychology, neurology, physiology, biology, analytic philosophy, symbolic logic, mathematics and, more recently, electronic engineering, and still others. So much so that ‘semantics as the study of Meaning, cannot but be a new type of philosophy based on an entirely new conception of being and existence and extending, over many different and widely divergent branches of traditional science, which, however, are as yet far from having achieved the ideal of a perfect integration.

Under these conditions it is but natural also that there should be in what is called semantics an all too obvious lack of harmony and uniformity. In other words, we have as yet no neatly organized uniform science of semantics, all we have in our hands is a number of different theories of Meaning. With a measure of exaggeration we might describe the situation by saying that everybody who speaks of semantics tends—rightly, we should think—to consider himself entitled to define and understand the word as he likes. This being the case, my first task in writing this book will have to consist in making an attempt to clarify my own conception of semantics, and to state as exactly as possible what I think should be the major concern of a semanticist, his ultimate aim and, in particular, his basic attitude along with an explanation of the methodological principles that derive from all this. This I will try to do in the following, not in abstracto, but in connection with some of the most concrete and profound problems raised by the language of the Qur’an.

As will be made abundantly clear as we proceed, semantics as I understand it is an analytic study of the key-terms of a language with a view to arriving eventually at a conceptual grasp of the weltanschauung or world-view of the people who use that language as a tool not only of speaking and thinking, but, more important still, of conceptualizing and interpreting the world that surrounds them. Semantics, thus understood, is a kind of weltanschauungsllehre, a study of the nature and structure of the world-view of a nation at this or that significant period of its history, conducted by means of a methodological analysis of the major cultural concepts the nation has produced for itself and crystallized into the key-words of its language.

It will be easy to see now that the word Qur’an in our phrase “Semantics of the Qur’an” should be understood only in the sense of the Qur’anic weltanschauung, or Qur’anic world-view, i.e., the Qur’anic vision of the universe. The semantics of the Qur’an would deal mainly with the problem of how, in the view of this Scripture, the world of Being is structured, what are the major constituents of the world, and how they are related to each other. It would, in this sense, be a kind of ontology—a concrete, living and dynamic ontology, and not the kind of static systematic ontology constituted by a philosopher at an abstract level of metaphysical thinking. It
would form an ontology at the concrete level of being and existence as reflected in the verses of the Qur'an. It will be our purpose to bring out of the Qur'an this type of living dynamic ontology by examining analytically and methodologically the major concepts, that is, those concepts that seem to have played a decisive role in the formation of the Qur'anic vision of the universe.\(^2\)

II. Integration of Individual Concepts

At first sight the task would appear to be quite a simple one. All we have to do, one might think, will be to pick up out of the whole vocabulary of the Qur'an all the important words standing for important concepts like Allāh, Islām, nabi (prophet), īmān (belief), kāfir (infidel) etc., et., and examine what they mean in the Qur'anic context. The matter, however, is not in reality so simple, for these words or concepts are not simply there in the Qur'an, each standing in isolation from others, but they are closely interdependent and derive their concrete meanings precisely from the entire system of relations. In other words, they form among themselves various groups, large and small, which, again, are connected with each other in various ways, so that they constitute ultimately an organized totality, an extremely complex and complicated network of conceptual associations. And what is really important for our particular purpose is this kind of conceptual system which is at work in the Qur'an rather than individual concepts as such taken separately and considered in themselves apart from the general structure, or Gestalt, as we might call it, into which they have been integrated. In analysing the individual key concepts that are found in the Qur'an we should never lose sight of the multiple relations which each of them bears to others in the whole system.

The supreme importance of such a conceptual network or total Gestalt underlying the world-view of the Qur'an will be brought home by examining even cursorily a few examples taken almost at random. We may begin by observing that none of the key-terms that play a decisive role in the formation of the Qur'anic world-view including the very name of God Allāh, was in any way a new coinage. Almost all of them had been in use in some form or other in pre-Islamic times. When the Islamic Revelation began to use these words, it was the whole system, the general context in which they were used that struck the Makkhan polytheists as something quite strange, unfamiliar and, therefore, unacceptable, and not the individual words and concepts themselves.

The words themselves were in current use in the 7th century, if not within the narrow confines of the mercantile society of Makkah, at least in some religious circle or other in Arabia; only, they belonged in different conceptual systems. Islam brought them together, combined them all into an entirely new hitherto unknown conceptual network. And it was chiefly—I do not say exclusively, for, undoubtedly there were a number of other factors at work—this transposition of concepts, and the fundamental displacement and rearrangement of moral and religious values which ensued from it, that so radically evolutionized the Arab conception of the world and human existence. From the viewpoint of a semanticist who is interested in the history of ideas, it is this, and no other thing, that gave the Qur'anic vision of the universe so markedly characteristic a coloring.

Speaking in more general terms, it is common knowledge that words, when they are taken out of their traditionally fixed combinations and put into an entirely different and new context, tend to be profoundly affected by that very transposition. This is known as the impact of context on word-meanings. Sometimes the impact results only in subtle shifts of emphasis and slight changes of nuance and emotive evocation. But more often there occur drastic changes in the meaning structure of the words. And this holds true even when the word in question in the new system still keeps hold on the same basic meaning which it had in the old system.

Now to give some examples from the Qur'an. The name of Allāh, for instance, was not at all unknown to the pre-Islamic Arabs. This is evidenced by the fact that the name appears not only in pre-Islamic poetry and compound personal names but also in old inscriptions. At least some people or some tribes in Arabia believed in a god called Allāh and even seem to have gone to the extent of acknowledging Him as the creator of heaven and earth, as is easy to see from some of the Qur'anic verses.\(^3\) Among people of this type, even the highest position seems to have been assigned to Allāh in the hierarchy of polytheism, namely in the capacity of the “Lord of the House”, i.e., the Ka'bah at Makkah, the other gods being regarded as
so many mediators between this supreme God and human beings. 
This latter conception of the divine hierarchy most clearly reflected 
in the Qur’an. In Sūrah al-Zumar, we hear some polytheists saying:

We only serve them (i.e. worship other gods) that they may 
bring us near to Allah.

Al-Zumar, 39:4 [3]'

The underlying idea is that of shafā’ah (intercession) which 
plays an exceedingly important role in the history of religious thought 
among the Arabs and Muslims from the old pre-Islamic times down 
to the Middle Ages when it comes to occupy the attention of the 
Islamic theologians.

In much the same sense, in Sūrah al-Ahqāf, the gods besides 
Allah are regarded as qurbān, lit. means of approaching, that is, 
propitiation and intercession. There, in reference to those ancient 
cities that went to destruction as a result of their stubborn refusal 
to believe in Allah, it is asked with biting sarcasm:

Why, then, did they not help those people, the gods that they had 
taken to themselves besides Allah as propitiators?

Al-Ahqāf, 46:27 [28]

These and many other verses show clearly that the existence of 
a god called Allah and even his highest position among the divinities 
was known and acknowledged in Jāhilyyah, but He was, after all, 
but one of the gods. This age-old system of religious values was 
gravely endangered when it was proclaimed by the Prophet of Islam 
that this supreme God was not only supreme in the relative sense of 
the highest in the hierarchy but absolutely supreme, and also unique, 
i.e., the one and only God in existence, degrading thereby all other 
gods to the position of bātīl (false) as opposed to haqq (real), in 
other words, mere names without any reality, mere products of fancy 
and imagination. If the Arabs were to accept this new teaching, the 
general situation would have to suffer a complete change and repercussion would not only make themselves felt in the relatively 
confined domain of religious ideas but practically all spheres of life, 
both social and individual, would have to be thereby, affected. No 
 wonder formidable opposition to this movement under Muhammad, 
began to manifest itself immediately and grew around him.

It is to be noticed that this did not mean a mere change in the 
Arab conception of the nature of Allah alone; it meant also a drastic 
and radical change of the whole conceptual system about which we 
talked in the preceding section. The new Islamic conception of the 
supreme God affected profoundly the whole structure of the vision of 
the universe. For the first time in the history of the Arabs, a 
monotheistic and theocentric system was established, a system whose 
center was occupied by the one and only God as the sole source of 
all human actions, and, indeed, of all forms of being and existence. 
All the existing things and values were thereby subjected to a 
complete rearrangement and a new allotment. The elements of the 
universe came, without one single exception, to be uprooted from 
their old soil, and transplanted into a new field; each one of them 
was assigned a new place, and new relationships were established 
between them. Concepts that had formerly been quite foreign to each 
other were now brought into close connection; contrariwise, concepts 
that had been closely related to each other in the old system came to 
be separated in the new one.

In the realm of the supernatural beings, the acknowledgment of 
the position of Allah as the sole Lord of the whole universe deprived, 
as noted above all the other so-called gods (dīlih) of all reality.
They were now “mere names”, not corresponding to any real entities 
existing outside of language. In the terminology of modern semantics, 
we should say that in this conception the term ilāh (pl. dīlih), when 
applied to anything other than Allah Himself is nothing but a word 
having connotation but no denotation.

In Sūrah Yūsuf, we read:

That which you worship apart from Him, is nothing but names 
you have named, yourselves and your fathers. God has sent 
down no authority touching them.

Yūsuf, 12:40
Besides the so-called gods, there were also in Jāhiliyyah a few other types of supernatural beings that were worshipped, feared and venerated in varying degrees according to places and tribes: angels, demons and jinn. These were all taken up and incorporated in the new system of Islamic world-conception, but with some fundamental modifications with regard to their respective position and function in the general scheme.

Of the important category of jinn we shall have much to talk later in connection with the problem of Revelation and poetic inspiration. Here let us consider, as a typical example, the case of the angel-worship in ancient Arabia. According to information obtainable from the Hadith, there seems to have been widely practised among the Arabs in Jāhiliyyah the angel-worship. The Qur'an itself tells us that there were many who believed and professed that the angels were the daughters of Allah. The word malāk or malak meaning 'angel' was well-known not only among the town dwellers who might have been easily influenced in this respect by Judaism and the Persian religious conception, but also among the pure Bedouins. The famous pre-Islamic warrior poet 'Antarah b. Shaddād, for example, has this verse:  

(Ask any experienced warrior in our tribe,) he will tell you that on the edge of my sword there lives the angel of death, always present, never disappearing.

In the Arab conception, an angel was an invisible spiritual being somewhat in the nature of a god or superior jinni, worthy to be venerated and even worshipped, but with no definite place in the hierarchy of the supernatural beings. Sometimes an angel was venerated as an intercessor or mediator between a higher god and men, but often he was himself an object of cult and worship. To this conception Islam brought a profound change of far-reaching consequence for the weltanschauung of the Arabs. With the establishment of an entirely new theocentric system, a definite place was assigned to the angels in the hierarchy of beings. Moreover, the angels themselves were classified into several categories in accordance with their functions and thus angelic hierarchy was formed within the universal hierarchy of being. Some names came to assume a great importance being associated with some especially important missions to fulfill in the execution of the grand design of Divine Providence; such is, for example, the angel Gabriel (Jibril or Jabril in Arabic) as the heavenly messenger who is charged with the task of transmitting the words of Revelation to the Prophet on the earth.

More important still, the angels ceased to be themselves an object of adoration and worship; now they were but simple creatures of God, differing in no way from human beings in this respect, and they were naturally so made exactly as men were, to worship God, to be humble and obedient servants of God. In Sūrah 4, we are told:

The Messiah will never disdain to be a servant of God, nor will those angels who are allowed to enjoy Divine favor. Whoever disdains to serve Him as a slave, being too proud (to do so), He will assemble them to Him, all together.

An-Nisā', 4:170-171 [172]

Thus we see the angels, without ceasing to be celestial beings belonging to higher ontological order than mankind, degraded to the position of mere servants or slaves of Allah in much the same way as ordinary human beings. And if this is the case with the angels how much more should this be the case with jinn. These have also been originally and essentially created to serve and worship Allah; there can be no difference at all in this important respect between jinn and human beings. In Sūrah 51, Allah Himself declares:

I created jinn and mankind only that they might serve Me.

Al-Dhāriyāt, 51:56

And the verse is well-known in which it is solemnly declared that those the jinn who disobey Allah and refuse to serve Him will be thrown into hell on the Day of Judgment together with human kuffār (infidels) without any discrimination.

It is to be noticed that all these are but a small part of the
universal rearrangement of concepts and redistribution of values brought about by the teaching of Islam, which radically altered the nature of the Arab conception of the world. We must observe that the words have not changed in their original basic meanings; what has actually changed is the general plan, the general system, and in this new system each one of them has found a new position. The word *malāk*, for example, still retains the old meaning of ‘angel’, and yet in this new system, it is no longer what it has been; it has undergone a subtle but very profound inner semantic transformation as a result of its having been put in a new place in a new system.

The impact of a new conceptual framework on the meaning structure of individual concepts will come out much more clearly if we turn to words that stand for moral, ethical or religious values. In the nature of the case, the Qur’an abounds in excellent examples in this field. We may mention as the most typical one the word *taqwā*. As we shall see later, the basic semantic core of a living being of the word *taqwā* was in *Jahiliyyah* “self-defensive attitude of a living being, animal or man, against some destructive force coming from outside”. This word comes into the Islamic system of concepts carrying with it this very basic meaning. But there, under the overwhelming influence of the whole system, and particularly by the fact of its having been now put into a specific semantic field composed of a group of concepts having to do with ‘belief’ which is peculiar to the Islamic monotheism, it comes to acquire an extremely important religious meaning: *taqwā*, passing through the intermediate stage of “the pious fear of Divine chastisement on the Day of Judgment”, ends by meaning personal ‘piety’ pure and simple.

A great many examples may be easily adduced to illustrate the same process of semantic transformation from different angles. But it is not necessary to do so at this stage, for, after all, that precisely will be the most important subject, of this whole study, and will, therefore, continue to occupy us all through the book. So instead of going any further in this direction, I should like to stop here for a while and add some general observations on what I have called the whole conceptual system or network from a somewhat more technical point of view.

III. ‘Basic’ Meaning and ‘Relational’ Meaning

By the brief and summary explanation I have just given, the significance of a whole conceptual framework, or total *Gestalt*, has been, I hope, made apparent in affecting the meaning values of individual words that exist in totality. Concepts, we have seen, do not stand alone and in isolation but are always highly organized into a system or systems.

At this stage I should like to introduce a technical distinction between what I would call ‘basic’ meaning and ‘relational’ meaning as one of the major methodological concepts of semantics in order to facilitate our subsequent analytic work.

Now if we take up the Qur’an and examine from our standpoint the key-terms that we meet with therein, we notice immediately two things, one quite obvious and, apparently, even too banal and commonplace to be pointed out, and another which may not be so obvious at the first glance. The obvious side of the matter is that each individual word, taken separately, has its own basic meaning or conceptual content on which it will keep its hold even if we take the word out of its Qur’anic context. The word *kitāb* (book), for example, means basically the same thing whether it is found in the Qur’an or outside of the Qur’an. This word, as long as it is actually felt by the speech community to be one word, keeps its fundamental meaning—in this case, a very general and non-specified meaning of ‘book’—wherever it is found, whether it happens to be used as a key-term in a given system of concepts or more generally outside of that particular system. This constant semantic element which remains attached to the word wherever it goes and however it is used, we may call the ‘basic’ meaning of the word.

This, however, does not exhaust the meaning of the word. And here begins the second aspect of word-meaning to which reference has just been made. In the Qur’anic context, the word *kitāb* assumes an unusual importance as the sign of a very particular religious concept surrounded by a halo of sanctity. This comes from the fact that in this context the word stands in a very close relation to the concept of Divine Revelation, or rather various concepts having direct reference to Revelation. This means that the simple word *kitāb*, with its simple basic meaning ‘book’, once introduced into a particular system and given a certain definite position in it, acquires a lot of
new semantic elements arising out of this particular situation, and also out of the various relations it is made to bear to other major concepts of that system. And, as happens very often, the new elements tend gravely to affect and even modify essentially the original meaning structure of the word. Thus in this case, the word *kitāb*, as soon as it is introduced into the Islamic conceptual system, is put into a close connection with such important Qur’ānic words as *Allāh*, *wahi* (revelation), *tanzil* (sending down, of Divine words), *nabi* (Prophet), *ahl* (people; in the particular combination of *ahl al-kitāb*—the people of the Scripture—meaning peoples who possess a Book of Revelation like the Christians and the Jews, etc.).

![Diagram](attachment:image)

A—*the word kitāb in an ordinary context showing the basic meaning of ‘book’ pure and simple.*

B—*the same word kitāb in the semantic field of Revelation peculiar to the Qur’ān.*

Henceforward, the word in the characteristically Qur’ānic context will have to be understood in terms of all these related terms and this association alone gives the word *kitāb* very special semantic coloring, that is, very complex and particular meaning structure which it would never have acquired if it remained outside of this system. It is to be noticed that this is also part of the meaning of the word *kitāb* as long as it is used in the Qur’ānic context—an exceedingly important and essential part of its meaning, indeed, far more important than the ‘basic’ meaning itself. This I would call in this book, the ‘relational’ meaning of the word to distinguish it from the latter.

Thus, while the ‘basic’ meaning of a word is something inherent in the word itself, which it carries with it wherever it goes, the ‘relational’ meaning is something connotative that comes to be

attached and added to the former by the word’s having taken a particular position in a particular field, standing in diverse relations to all other important words in that system.

In view of the great methodological importance of this concept, I should like to give here another simple example showing how a ‘relational’ meaning comes into being. The word I have in mind is *yawm* whose ‘basic’ meaning is ‘day’.

Let us suppose that the big circle (Q) in the diagram represents the whole Qur’ānic vocabulary. This Q is, as we shall see in detail presently, a large conceptual system consisting of a number of smaller overlapping conceptual systems which we call in semantics ‘semantic fields’. Among them there is a ‘field’ which is of especial importance in determining the nature of the Qur’ānic world-view, a field, that is, composed of words having direct reference to the Resurrection and the Last Judgment, like *qiyyūmah* (resurrection), *ba’th* (raising, the dead), *dīn* (Last Judgment), *hisāb* (reckoning), etc. This field or conceptual network constituted by these words we may call the Eschatological field (E).

As is natural, an intense atmosphere of a very unusual nature pervades the whole field and reigns over it. Right into this atmosphere you put the word *yawm* with its proper-neutral, we might say meaning of a ‘day’, which it has in normal situations; at once you see a variety of conceptual associations formed around it, and the concept of ‘day’ tinged with a marked eschatological coloring. In short, *al-yawm* (the day) means in this particular field not an ordinary
day, but the Last Day, i.e., the Day of Judgment. Exactly the same explanation applies to the Qur’anic use of the word sā’ah whose basic meaning is ‘hour’. In order to be understood in the sense of the ‘Hour of Resurrection’, the word need not actually occur in special combinations with other words that have more explicitly eschatological associations; the word sā’ah by itself is quite sufficient to convey all the necessary eschatological implications if only we know that it is being used not in its basic meaning, but in a sense which is peculiar to this semantic field.

It often happens that the modifying power of the whole system works upon the word so strongly that the latter ends by almost losing its original conceptual meaning. When this happens, then we have a different word; in other words, we are witnessing the birth of a new word. The outstanding example is the semantic transformation which the verb kafara underwent in the Qur’an.

Kafara properly and basically means “to be ungrateful”, “to show ingratitude” towards some good done or some favor shown by some other person; it is just the opposite of shakara meaning “to be thankful”. And this is the usual meaning of the verb kafara within the larger context of the vocabulary of the Arabic language. This meaning itself does not change in any way whether the verb be used by the Muslims or by the non-Muslim Arabs; it is common to all the Arabic speaking people. Moreover, this has been so all through the ages from pre-Islamic times down even to our own days.

However, the word took quite a special course within the narrower context of Islamic theology. At the Qur’anic stage of the development of the Arabic language, the word was taken over from the pre-Islamic vocabulary by Divine Revelation and put into an extremely important semantic field composed of words having reference to the central concept of ‘belief’, namely, belief in God. A direct and most intimate conceptual connection was thereby established between this verb and the word Allāh. That is to say, within this narrowly confined semantic field—which we might call the īmān-field, īmān being roughly equivalent in meaning to ‘belief’, as we shall see more fully later—kafara was no longer the simple attitude of ingratitude, but was ingratitude towards God, or more exactly, towards God’s goodness and the favour shown by Him. And this is the first stage in the very interesting semantic development of this word in the Qur’anic context.

In order to understand the next stage we must remember the very basic fact about Islam that, according to the religious teaching of the Qur’an itself, one of the essential conditions, or rather, the very first step in attaining to the true ‘belief’ or ‘faith’ (īmān) is that man should learn to understand the seemingly quite ordinary and common natural phenomena which he observes around him not as simple natural phenomena but as so many manifestations of Divine goodness towards him—that is, in Qur’anic terminology, as so many ‘signs’ (āyāt) of God—and be truly thankful to Him for them. The Qur’an, never tires of insisting most emphatically and trying to bring home to man how all the good things which he is enjoying in this earthly life are in reality nothing but God’s gifts. Islam as a religion is, in this respect, an exhortation to gratitude towards God. At the same time it is an exhortation addressed to man to become deeply conscious of his ultimate and essential dependence on God. In the religious view of the Qur’an this consciousness on the part of man of his absolute dependence on God is the very beginning of the true faith and belief in God. This explains how the verb kafara—or its nominal form kafir deviates little by little from the original meaning of ‘ingratitude’ and comes nearer and nearer to the meaning of ‘disbelief’ or ‘unbelief’ as the flat negation of the concept of īmān. In the Qur’anic verses that were revealed to Muhammad towards the end of his lifetime, kafara was no longer the antonym of shakara (be thankful) but rather the opposite of āmana (to believe), and its participal form kāfir—this form, incidentally was destined to play a part of paramount importance in the subsequent history of Islamic thought, whether theological or political—came to mean simply an ‘infidel’. Correspondingly, the word shakara, on its part, comes very near to the concept of īmān itself. In not a few places in the Qur’an, shakara (to be thankful) to God is almost synonymous with āmana (to believe) in God, although, to be sure, the semantic transformation in this case has not been as complete as in the case of kafara.

In any case, here we see how word-meanings get affected by their neighbors, by the impact, that is, of the whole system to which they are made to belong. A word signifying ‘thankfulness’ could never have conceivably acquired a meaning coming near to ‘belief’ and ‘faith’ except by having been put into a particular semantic field, where all elements contributed towards letting it develop in that dire-
ction. And in terms of our distinction between ‘basic’ meaning and ‘relational’ meaning, we might describe fairly adequately the situation by saying that in the case of shakara a markedly characteristic relational meaning developed around the basic semantic core of the word in the Qur’an, which enabled the word to be used sometimes almost synonymously with ḍama, while in the case of kafara “to be ungrateful” the relational meaning became powerful and got the upper hand of the basic meaning so much so that it eventually produced a new word with the basic meaning of ‘disbelief’.

It remains now to say a word about the real nature of what I have called ‘basic’ meaning in distinction from the ‘relational’. It must be kept in mind that the ‘basic’ meaning which, as I said, a word carries with it everywhere and always as its conceptual core or kernel, and which, therefore, does not change in whatever system the word may be put, as long as it is felt by the community to be one word—this ‘basic’ meaning is in reality but a methodological concept, that is to say, a theoretic postulate which proves useful whenever we want to analyze the meaning of a word scientifically, which, however, we never find in this abstract form in the world of reality. We only assume as a working hypothesis the existence of such a thing in our semantical analysis of words because in most cases the assumption facilitates our analytic procedure and makes our understanding of word-meanings more systematic and scientifically exact. To say the truth, words are all complex social and cultural phenomena, and in the world of reality even a single word cannot be found, whose concrete meaning is covered completely by what I call ‘basic’ meaning. All words without exception are more or less markedly tinged with some special coloring coming from the peculiar structure of the cultural milieu in which they actually exist.

IV. Vocabulary and Weltanschauung

The previous section was devoted to a consideration of a methodological distinction between two different, although closely related, sorts of word-meaning which we named provisionally ‘basic’ meaning and ‘relational’ meaning respectively. And we examined a few examples from the Qur’an. Our real aim was not so much to explain the distinction itself by concrete examples to show how

semantical analysis of the ‘relational’ side of a word-meaning requires a minute and careful investigation into the general cultural situation of the age and the people in addition to a more specialist linguistic knowledge of the word. For, after all, what we call the ‘relational’ meaning of a word is nothing other than a concrete manifestation, or crystallization, of the spirit the culture, and a most faithful reflection of the general tendency, psychology and otherwise, of the people who use the word as part of their vocabulary.

This, I think, has also shown that semantical analysis is neither a simple analysis of the formal structure of a word nor a study of the original meaning attached to the word-form, i.e., etymology. Etymology, even when we are fortunate enough to know it, can only furnish us with a clue as to the ‘basic’ meaning of a word. And, we must remember, etymology in many cases remains a simple guesswork, and very often an insoluble mystery. Semantical analysis, in our conception, is something that intends to go far beyond that. It purports to be a cultural science, if we are to classify it. The analysis of the basic relational elements of a key-term should be conducted in such a way that, when we really succeed in doing it, the combination of the two aspects of the meaning would bring to light one particular aspect, one significant facet of culture as it was, or is, being experienced consciously by those belonging to that culture. And at the end, if we ever reach that final stage, all the analysis done must help us reconstruct on an analytic level the whole structure of the culture as it really lived—or lives, as the case may be—in the conception of the people. This is what I would call the ‘semantic weltanschauung’ of a culture.

It remains now to elucidate more in detail what kind of a thing this ‘semantic weltanschauung’ is, how it is basically constituted, and what grounds we can offer for maintaining that it forms philosophically a dynamic ontology to which a passing reference has earlier been made.

With this in view let us begin by repeating what we have already remarked, namely, that the words in a language form a closely-knit system. The main pattern of that system is determined by a certain number of particularly important words. It is necessary to note here that not all words in a vocabulary are of equal value in forming the basic structure of the ontological conception underlying the vocabulary, however important they may appear from other points of
view. The word ‘stone’, for example, may be fairly important in the
daily life of the English-speaking people. But the word, it would
seem, does not play any decisive part in characterizing the world-
view of the present day English language. In the same way, the word
qirātās meaning ‘parchment’ which occurs in the Sūrah al-An‘ām12 is
indeed, a very interesting and remarkable word not only linguistically
but also from the standpoint of the cultural history of the Arabs, but
it does not contribute in any essential way towards characterizing
the nature of the fundamental Qur’anic vision of the universe. The word
shā‘ir (poet) is several degrees more important than this, particularly
in a negative sense, because the Qur’an is emphatic in pointing out
to the opponents that the Prophet Muhammad is “not a poet”.13
And yet, its importance, when compared with the word nabiyy (prophet)
itself, is very small. Those words that play a really decisive role in
making up the basic conceptual structure of the Qur’anic world-view,
I would call the ‘key-terms’ of the Qur’an. Allāh, Islām, imām (faith), kāfir (infidel), nabiyy (prophet), rasūl (apostle, of God) are
some of the outstanding examples. It will be the most important, but
also the most difficult part of a semanticist’s job, who would study
the Qur’an from this point of view, to isolate, before everything else,
the key-terms out of the bulk of Qur’anic vocabulary. For it will
determine all the subsequent analytic work he will be doing; this will
doubtless form the very basis of the whole ediﬁce.

Almost unavoidably a certain amount of arbitrariness comes into
this choice of the key-terms, and this may gravely affect at least
some aspect of the whole picture. Just to give one example: the
Qur’an mentions more than ten times the Heavenly ‘Throne’, ‘arsh
of Allah,14 and we know that this concept occupies a very prominent
place in the discussions of later theologians of Islam and that it plays
also an exceedingly important role in Islamic mysticism as a symbol.
But whether the concept is so fundamentally important already at the
Qur’anic stage as to be fully entitled to be regarded as one of the
key-terms will certainly be a question open to discussion. And the
semanticist will have to be confronted with many similar cases in the
course of his analysis. This, however, does not offer a real problem,
for as regards, at least, the main body of key-terms there can possibly
be no essential disagreement. Nobody will question the choice of
words like Islām imām, kāfir, nabiyy, etc., not to speak of the word
Allāh itself.

Now the key-terms constitute among themselves the general
pattern the vocabulary of which they are representative members.
And this they do by standing in diverse and multiple relations with
each other. As I said earlier they do not exist quite independently of
each other; they are connected with one another in a most intricate
way and in diverse directions. Let A, B, C, D, E, F and G be the
key-terms of a vocabulary. The word A with its own ‘basic’ meaning
is closely related with B, D and E, for example. The word B, in its
turn, itself having its proper ‘basic’ meaning has an intimate
relationship with E, F, G besides A, and the word G with C and B,
etc., etc. So that all, taken as a whole, represent themselves to our
eyes as a highly organized system of interdependent elements, a
network of semantic associations. And finally, all the words of the
vocabulary are distributed along these main lines.
Thus we see that ‘vocabulary’ in this sense is not a mere sum total of words,\textsuperscript{15} that is, it is not a mere haphazard collection of a great number of words lumped together without order and principle, each one of them standing by itself without any essential connection with others (Picture A). On the contrary, the words exist connected with each other in multiple relationships and thus form a number of largely overlapping areas or sectors (Picture B). These areas constituted by the various relations of words among themselves we may call ‘semantic fields’.

Each semantic field represents a relatively independent conceptual sphere which is quite similar in nature to vocabulary. The difference between ‘vocabulary’ and ‘semantic field’ is obviously a relative one; essentially there can be no difference at all between them. For, after all, a ‘semantic field’ is no less an organized whole than ‘vocabulary’, because it is a whole body of words arranged in a meaningful pattern representing a system of concepts ordered and structured in accordance with a principle of conceptual organization. Vocabulary usually comprises a number of spheres, that is to say, vocabulary as a larger conceptual field is divided up into several particular fields. But each of the particular fields, as an organized sector of the vocabulary, is itself fully entitled to be called a ‘vocabulary’ if it is large enough to be treated as an independent unit. Only when we consider it as a particular part of a larger whole, do we distinguish it from the latter it a ‘semantic field’. The latter, in this sense, is a system within a system, a sub-system.

Theoretically it would, then, be possible to consider even the Qur’anic vocabulary itself a particular ‘field’ within a still larger whole, the vocabulary of the Arabic language of that age. If we leave out of consideration—which, however, we should not do, practically—the tremendous cultural importance the vocabulary of the Qur’an in the history of Arabic, and adopt a strictly formal point of view, then the Qur’anic vocabulary is but a sub-system within a system. In any case, this seems to give us warning against ignoring the basic relationship it bears to other significant sections within the whole vocabulary of the Arabic language. Fortunately for us, something at least of these other sectors is known to us, chiefly through the language of pre-Islamic and mukhadram poetry,\textsuperscript{16} which has come down to us thanks to the painstaking efforts of the great philologists of the Abbasid period. The pre-Islamic poets—and partly also the mukhadram poets—share with the Qur’an a considerable amount of key-words, but their vocabulary and the underlying world-view are structured along essentially different lines from those of the Qur’an.

In these two major conceptual systems of old Arabia—the pre-Islamic and the Qur’anic—even the common elements belong as a rule in entirely different spheres of thought. And this simply means that one and the same word usually assumes a completely different semantic value according as it belongs in this system or that. And since, chronologically, the vocabulary of pre-Islam is antecedent to that of the Qur’an, a comparison between them will certainly be quite fruitful. It will, we might expect, cast an illuminating light on the original ‘basic’ meaning of some of the key-terms that are found in the Qur’an. It will further allow us to see exactly how new ideas arose and how old ideas were modified in Arabia in the critical period extending from the late Jāhiliyyah age to the first Islamic age, and observe how history acted upon and moulded the thought and life of the people. This is the main reason why in the following I shall constantly be referring to pre-Islamic poetry in explaining the semantic structure of the Qur’anic vocabulary.\textsuperscript{17}

The above considerations have, I hope, made it sufficiently clear that vocabulary, far from being a single homogeneous plain, consists of a great number—or rather we should say, an indefinite number—of strata of associative connections or spheres of conceptual association, each one of which corresponds to a predominant interest of a community in a given period of history and thus epitomizes some aspect of its ideals, aspirations and preoccupations. Vocabulary, in short, is a multi-strata structure. And these strata are formed, linguistically, by groups of key-words, which we have named ‘semantic fields’.

Our next task will be to investigate how individual ‘semantic fields’ are themselves structured in detail, and how it will be possible for us to detect one in midst of an extremely complicated whole of interlocking elements. Thus, to come back to our main topic in this chapter, which is nothing other than the semantics of the Qur’an, we shall have to begin by trying to isolate major conceptual spheres of the Qur’an, then we shall be engaged in discovering how these various spheres or semantic fields, large and small, area delimited by their neighbors, how they are related with one another, how they are...
internally structured, and how they are organized and integrated into the largest multi-strata system, i.e., that of the whole Qur’an, besides paying due attention to the particular structure of the meaning of each individual key-word.

At this point I must introduce another technical term—‘focus-word’—corresponding to a new methodological concept which will prove very useful when we are engaged in isolating and analysing semantic fields. By ‘focus-word’ I would mean a particularly important key-word which indicates and delimits a relatively independent and distinctive conceptual sphere, i.e., ‘semantic field’ in our terminology, within the larger whole of vocabulary. A focus-word is, thus, an arché in the Aristotelian sense; it is that in terms of which a particular sub-system of key-words is set off and distinguished from the rest. It is the conceptual center of an important semantic sector of vocabulary, comprising a certain number of key-words.

Since all key-words are, by definition, important terms, it will be difficult for us to decide definitely as to which, of all the possible candidates for it, should be taken as the real ‘focus’ of the system. And here again we must admit the possibility of an element of arbitrariness coming into our choice. But this must not be allowed to make us blind to the methodological utility of such a concept. Besides, the situation is made less embarassing by the fact that the concept of ‘focus-word’ is, and must necessarily be, a fairly flexible one. If a certain word is made to act as a focus-word in a certain semantic field, that does not prevent the same word from behaving as an ordinary key-word in some other field or fields. And this reflects faithfully the real nature vocabulary, which, as I said above, is always and everywhere a multi-strata structure. This I will show now, in a preliminary way, by one or two simple examples.

The word ʿImān (belief)—with all the other words derived directly from the same root, like ʿāmana (to believe), muʾmin (believer)—for instance, plays in the Qur’an an exceedingly important part. Nobody will disagree to our regarding it as a focus-word governing a special field of its own. And as soon as we take it as a focus-word, we begin to see a certain number of other important words, that is, key-words, clustering about it as the conceptual article or focal point, thus forming together a significant conceptual sphere the whole vocabulary of the Qur’an (Picture A.). These key-words clustering about ʿImān are of either a positive (P) or a negative (N) nature. On the positive side, we have among others, words like shukr (thankfulness; the verb shakara), Islām, lit. “the giving over of one’s self (to God)” (the verb aslama), tasāq, “considering (the revealed words) truthful” (the verb saddaqa), Allāh (as the object ‘belief’), etc. While the negative side of this conceptual network consists of words like kufr (disbelief), takhdhib, “giving the lie to (the revealed words)” (the verb kidhdhaba; kadhib: ‘a lie’), ʿisyān (disobedience), and niṣāq (“making a false show of belief”), etc.

Thus a group of important words, i.e., key-words, center around a word which represents and unifies the whole group, and constitute in this way a relatively independent field of concepts. If the word standing at the centre delimits the field in the gross and gives the main concept without any differentiation, the words centering around it point each in its own way, to this or that particular aspect of the main concept; they behave as the principle of differentiation while the focus-word works as the principle of unification. And the whole field constitutes by itself a small vocabulary within the larger vocabulary of the Qur’an, that is, a sub-system of concepts falling within a larger conceptual system. And this latter consists of a number of similarly structured sub-systems coexisting with each other.

This, however, does not yet give a true picture of the complex nature of system. The complexity of the matter arises from the fact that each of the words appearing in a sub-system, whether focus-word or key-word, does not remain confined within the limits of the particular field, but normally has a multiple relationship to many
other words that properly belong to other fields. The focus-word of a certain field may appear as one of the ordinary key-terms in another field; contrariwise, a word that belongs in a certain sphere in the capacity of a key-term may appear in another as its focus-word. Again, some words may be there that are common to two or more fields all in the capacity of simple key-words.

Thus, to give the most remarkable example, the word Allāh appears in semantic field of ‘belief’ which I have just mentioned, as a key-word along, with others centering around the focus-word īmān, because it is, in this particular connection, the grammatical object of īmān-īmāna bi-Allāh (“to believe in God”) being one of the standing expressions in the Qur’ān. The reverse side, I mean, conceptual side of this is that God is here being taken account of in so far as is the object of faith. There are, however, several other points of view, which the word Allāh must admittedly be looked upon as an important focus-word that gathers around itself quite a number of key-words including īmān itself. To say the truth, the word Allāh is the highest focus-word in Qur’ānic vocabulary, reigning over the entire domain. And this is nothing but the semantic aspect of what we generally mean by saying that the world of the Qur’ān is essentially theocentric. We shall have occasion to come back to the point later.

Of the remaining key-words that appear in the same field, Islām undoubtedly is fully entitled to be considered a focus-word with its own semantic field. Likewise, the word kufr on the negative side. The rest, that is, words like shukr, tasdiq and takhdhib, cannot possibly be given such a central position in any conceptual system in the Qur’ān.

The semantic field of kufr (disbelief) may be shown by this diagram (Picture B). The diagram has been intentionally simplified by the elimination of all the negative elements, that is, those words which constitute the positive side of the diagram showing the semantic field of īmān (Picture A). All the key-words that surround the focus-word in this diagram are either those that signify partial and particular aspects of the concept itself of kufr or those that stand for concepts closely related to kufr in the Qur’ānic context.19

As has been suggested above, the complexity of the whole system is greatly increased by the fact that, as a rule, one and the same key-word belongs, as key-word, in several different fields, forming in diverse spheres diverse semantical relations. Take for example the word dalāl in the semantic fields of kufr. Dalāl properly means “going astray” or “wandering off the right path”, the verb being dālla. It is part of the most remarkable religious conception of the Qur’ān that Allah shows to the mankind the “right way” to salvation but only some of them take that way and many go astray. In terms of the semantic field we are discussing now, kufr (disbelief) in God is precisely the necessary result of man’s having chosen—or having been made to choose, as the case may be20—a wrong way instead of the only right one. In other terms, “disbelief” and “wandering from the right path” refer to exactly the same thing from two different angles. And it is in this capacity that the word dalāl has its proper place in the semantic field of kufr. But the point of interest is that this is not the only proper place assigned to the word dalāl in the whole system of the Qur’ānic vocabulary, as we shall see presently.

The concept of Way, sirāt or sabīl, plays a most prominent part informing the religious conception peculiar to the Qur’ān. Even a casual reader will notice that the Qur’ān from beginning to end is saturated with this idea. Most obviously sirāt or its synonym sabīl is the focus-word governing a whole semantic field composed of a big family of words, each one of which represents in its own way and from its peculiar point of view an essential facet of the Qur’ānic thought. The key-words of this field may conveniently be classified under three major groups:

1. In the first place come those words standing for concepts that relate to the nature of the Way itself. The Qur’ān looks at this problem from the point of view of its being straight (mustaqīm,
2. Concepts relating to man's choosing, or being guided to, the right way (hudā, ihtidā, rashād, etc.).
3. Concepts of wandering off the right way (dalāl, ghawāyah, tāih, etc.)

The diagram C gives, in a very simplified form, the structural framework in which various concepts relating to the central concept of Way are put together, showing in gross outlines how they are associated with each other in smaller groups which, again, are associated with each other in a positive or negative way, and finally integrated into the large semantic field of Way.

There is here something more important to remark. If we compare the diagram C with the diagram B—that of the semantic field of kufr—we will notice immediately that the word dalāl ("swerving from the right path") is common to both systems. In other terms, the same word belongs in exactly the same capacity of a key-term in two different conceptual systems. As a key-term, it fulfils the same basic function in both B and C, but the concrete role it plays varies widely accordingly as it is regarded as a member of one or the other system. Dalāl as a key-word of kufr appears in quite a different light from the same word functioning as a key-word of the field of sirāt, because its associations are different in each case. And yet, on the other hand, it is also true that the word dalāl does establish a connecting link between the two systems. Thus we see two major semantic fields of the Qur'ān connected with each other in an extremely subtle but intimate way, without losing their relative independence. Here, of course, I am intentionally simplifying the matter to the extreme degree, knowing that in many cases methodological over-simplification brings out better the fundamental structure of things. In reality, dalāl is not the only point of contact between B and C; there must be discoverable many other such points. But the essential thing about our present problem is to see that a key-word may appear in several semantic fields at the same time in the capacity of a key-word, playing a different part in each one of them and yet functioning as a connecting link between them.

This, in addition to the fact noted above that the focus-word of a semantic field may, and does often, make its appearance as an ordinary key-word in one or more other semantic fields, will give us a clear insight into the complexity of what is called 'vocabulary'. Vocabulary as the sum total of all the semantic fields will then be seen as a vast and intricate network of multiple relationships that hold between the words, corresponding to an organized whole of concepts related with each other in a myriad of associative interconnections. Such an organized whole of concepts symbolized by the vocabulary of the community, a total conceptual system, I would call 'Weltanschauung'—or, to distinguish it from other types of worldview obtainable by other methods, e.g. philosophical weltanschauung—'semantic weltanschauung'.

It will have been observed that I have in what precedes always used the two terms 'conceptual system' and 'vocabulary' rather indiscriminately. This is due to the fact that the two, in my view, are but two different aspects of one and the same thing, that is, the linguistic is simply the other side of the conceptual. A 'concept', however it may be defined, is in itself but an extremely elusive wooly thing, hard to grasp and always with a blurred outline. It begins to exist as an independent entity with a more or less fixed contour and stability only when it comes to be couched in a linguistic form, i.e., a word. All concepts recognized and acknowledged as such in a given society in a given period of history tend, as a rule, to be linguistically fixed and stabilized sooner or later and be thus given a tangible and relatively permanent form. Only then do they become entitled to be considered social entities in the real sense of the word, commonly open to all those who belong to the community. Theoretically, I do not in any way deny the possibility of the existence of 'pre-linguistic' concepts, but if they do exist, they lie
outside the limits of our scientific interest. Anyhow whenever I use the term ‘concept’ in this book I understand one having a definite word at its back. The same is true of the whole organized body of concepts, of which we have been talking. One and the same complex network of associations is, in its linguistic aspect, a ‘vocabulary’, and, in its conceptual aspect, a ‘weltanschaung’. And it is in this and only in this sense that we shall be interested, in the following, in the problem of semantic weltanschaung of the Qur’an.

It remains to say a word about the ultimate ideal which we shall have to pursue in carrying on this research. Since every system worthy of the name must have a patterning principle on which it is based, it would be natural to presume that, in our particular case too, not only each individual semantic field but the whole system of the Qur’anic concepts comprising within itself all the layers of associative connection is based on a pattern which is peculiar to the Qur’anic thought, i.e., which makes the latter essentially different from all non-Qur’anic systems of concepts, whether Islamic or non-Islamic.

To use the words of one of the outstanding pioneers of this kind of study, Edward Sapir, “there is such a thing as a basic plan, a certain cut” to each system. To isolate this fundamental plan, or as Sapir himself has named it, the “structural genius” governing the nature and working mechanism of the whole Qur’anic system must constitute the ultimate aim of a semanticist approaching this Scripture, as long as he understands the discipline of semantics as a cultural science. For only when we succeed in doing this, can we hope to succeed in bringing to light the weltanschaung of the Qur’an, which will, philosophically be nothing other than the very “Qur’anic ontology” to which we referred the beginning of this chapter.

All this is of course a mere ideal, which, we must admit, is practically very hard to attain, or even never to be attained. The present study as a whole is but a first and very modest step towards this ultimate goal.

Notes

1. For a well-balanced broad survey of the entire field covered by semantics together with a convenient brief presentation of the historical background, the reader is referred to Prof. Stephen Ullmann’s work, Semantics—An Introduction to the Science of Meaning, Oxford, 1962.

2. In elaborating the idea of semantics as a kind of Weltanschauungsbereich I am greatly indebted to Prof. Leo Weisgerber of Bonn, who, since many years, has constantly emphasized the significance of human language as an intellectual process of world-formation (Weltgestaltung). For a brief but very impressive summary exposition of his thesis see his book Grundzüge sprachlicher Weltgestaltung, Köln u. Opladen, 1963. In many of the essential points his Humboldtian philosophy of language coincides perfectly with what is known today in the English-speaking world under the name of Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. As regards this latter theory see a most lucid critical examination by Prof. Paul Henle in Language, Thought and Culture, Michigan, 1958, Chapter 1.

3. To all appearance, these two schools have long been developing the same type of linguistic theory on both sides of the Atlantic without being acquainted with each other.

4. See later, Chapter 4, where the Qur’anic evidence concerning the pre-Islamic concept of Allāh is discussed in a more systematic way.

5. In quoting from the Qur’an, I give first Flügel’s numbering of the verses and then that of the standard Egyptian edition (in brackets) whenever there happens to be a discrepancy between the two.

6. i.e., evidence showing that they are real.

7. See Chapter 7, section III.

8. ‘Antarah: Diwān, ed. ‘Abd al-Ra‘uf, Cairo, p. 22. Here the poet is addressing his beloved girl ‘Ablah. The concept of the angel of death plays a considerable role in Qur’anic eschatology. A number of important passages (e.g. VI, 93) describe how angels will come and seize the soul at the critical moment of the death-struggle and bring it before the Supreme Judge. Besides, this concept itself was not in any way alien to the Jāhil’i mind (cf. ‘Antarah, ibid., p. 81, v. 13)


10. See Chapter 9, section II, where these and other related words are carefully analyzed from the particular standpoint of the field semantics. See also the following section, where the two important words ḫur and Islām will be treated as an illustration of the technical distinction between the ‘basic’ and the ‘relational’ meaning.

11. Sirāh 33:63, for example: “Men will ask you concerning the Hour (ṣa‘āh). Say: The knowledge of it is only with Allah. What can make
you know it? It may be that the Hour (sā'ah) is nigh.”

11. For more details about kafir, see later, Chapter 9, and also my earlier work *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*, Tokyo, 1959, where a whole chapter (9) is devoted to a consideration of the meaning of this word in the Qur’anic context.

12. 6:91, where reference is made to the Jews who jealously keep their sacred Book of Moses having “put it into parchments”.


14. For example, in 27:26, we read: 

الله لا إله إلا هوُ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْفَالِحِ

(“Allah! There is no god but He, the Lord of the great Throne”), and in 20:4[5]: 

الرَّحْمَٰنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى

(“The Compassionate One sits upon the Throne”). The importance of the concept of “Throne” may be seen from the favorite Qur’anic expression used in describing Allah “The Possessor of the Throne” (17:44[42]; 85:15).

15. The common image of vocabulary as a dictionary where words are neatly arranged in an alphabetical order is out of question here.

16. A technical term for designating those who lived the earlier half of their lives in Jāhiliyyah, and the second half in Islam; in short, the contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad.

17. We may also go a step further in this direction and try to follow from this particular point of view the Islamic culture in the ages of its progressive movement and creative development. The semantics of the Qur’an, once established, will supply a good and truly necessary preliminary to a fruitful study of all other semantic systems that arose after the Qur’anic period: theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, mysticism, grammar and rhetoric, to mention only the most important ones. This, of course, lies far beyond the scope the present study. But I will try to give at least some idea of this interesting problem in the next chapter.

18. As regards the close connection between this and Ḳūfûn, see above, p. 15. Kufûr (the verb kafara) has also been discussed there cursorily. As to the word nisāq, see my book *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*, p. 168 ff.

19. For a detailed analysis of all these words, see *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*, p. 113 ff.

20. The Qur’anic text suggests these two alternative views regarding this problem, a fact which causes later in Islamic theology the famous aporia of Divine predestination and human free will. See later, Chapter 6, section II.

21. In this book, as I did in my earlier one to which reference was made in the course of this chapter, I understand the word ‘concept’ in the scientific sense in which it is used by the authors of the outstanding work, *A Study of Thinking*, New York, 1956, J.S. Brunner, J.J. Goodnow and G. A. Austin. The book contains in the form of an appendix a no less important paper on *Language and Categories* by Roger Brown.

22. This we shall see in the next chapter. Particularly interesting will be the historical relation between the religious world-view of the Qur’an and that of Islamic theology.
CHAPTER 2
Qur'anic Key-Terms in History

I. Synchronic and Diachronic Semantics

Properly speaking, most of the problems dealt with in the present chapter do not fall within the scope of this book which, as has been made abundantly clear in the previous chapter, purports to be strictly a study of the *weltanschauung* of the Qur'an through its vocabulary. This naturally determines the extent to which our consideration will be allowed to go. Of the 'history' of the Qur'anic key-terms only the pre-Islamic, *i.e.*, pre-Qur'anic part is necessary for our special purpose, in so far as it sheds clear light on the formation of the 'basic' meanings of the words. The historical development of the meanings in the post-Qur'anic ages is not in any way a matter of direct concern to us.

If, in spite of this obvious fact, we still insist on paying attention at this point to a few at least of the significant questions raised by historical semantics regarding the vicissitudes that some of the key-terms of the Qur'an underwent in the course of history, it is chiefly for the following three reasons. First: since, generally speaking, an examination of a question from two or more different, but closely related, angles usually ends in a deeper and more comprehensive view of the matter, we might reasonably expect that in our particular case too, considering the problem of 'vocabulary' anew as a historical process, will, as a continuation of the above discussion, help towards clarifying some important aspects of the theoretical problems that have not been discussed fully in the last chapter.

Secondly, by following the semantic development of some of the key-terms of the Qur'an in non-Qur'anic systems that came into existence in Islam in course of time, we may be able to throw a new side-light on the peculiarity of the meanings which those words had in the Qur'an itself. Lastly, a careful examination of the problem of the possibility and significance of a historical semantics will clarify, by contrast, both the advantages and limitations of the methods and principles peculiar to static semantics, and, thus, enable us to combine in the most fruitful way the two semantics in analysing the structure of the Qur'anic vocabulary.

Now to go right into the *medias res*, 'vocabulary' may be looked at from two basically different methodological standpoints. In modern linguistics these two angles or points of view are called 'diachronic' and 'synchronic', respectively. Diachrony, as its etymology would suggest, is a view of language, which as a matter of principle emphasizes the element of time in everything linguistic. Thus vocabulary is, diachronically, a bundle of words, each one of which is growing and changing independently in its own peculiar way. Some words in the group may come to a stop, that is, cease to be used in the society at a certain period (As); others may continue being in use for a longer time (Bs); again new words may make their debut on the stage at a certain definite point of time and begin their history from that period (Cs).

If we cut horizontally the flow of history at a certain period, a cross-section is obtained, which may be pictured as a flat surface formed by a number of words that have survived the flow of time up to that point. On this surface, as we see, As, Bs and Cs appear all
together, regardless of whether they have a long history behind them \((A_i\) and \(B_j\)) or a short one \((A_i\) and \(B_j\)), or even none \((C)\), while those that have already ceased to be active before this point \((D_s)\) naturally do not participate in the composition of this surface, regardless of whether they have died out quite recently \((D_t)\) or long ago \((D_h)\). Such a surface is precisely what we have meant in the preceding pages by ‘vocabulary’—an organized system of words and concepts. For it is on such a surface, and on such a surface alone that words appear to our eyes in the form of a complicated network of concepts. And the point of view which cuts across the historical lines of words and enables us in this way to obtain a static system of words, we call ‘synchronic’.

We may do well to remark that vocabulary in this particular sense, i.e., a static surface of words is something artificial, to be very exact. It is a static state produced artificially by our stopping with one stroke the flow of history of all the words of a language at a certain point of time. The resulting cross section gives us the impression of being static and standing still, but in reality it only looks like so. To put it in another way, it is static only when we look at it from a macroscopic point of view. Microscopically, the surface is seething with life and movement. This latter point comes out very clearly when a language is in a critical, revolutionary period, like, for example, modern Turkish. Old elements keep dropping off, new elements keep coming in; some of the newcomers find a good place in the system, but many of them disappear quickly to be replaced by others. The whole vocabulary changes its aspect even at very short intervals. And when a language stands in such a stage of transition and transformation, it is extremely difficult to obtain a relatively stable, static surface.\(^1\)

Be this as it may, in normal cases we can obtain as many surfaces as we like by simply making such artificial horizontal cuts across the historical flow of words at several points (cross-sections I, II, III, for example, in the diagram). And if we compare these surfaces with each other, whether the whole surfaces or only some particular sections of them, we are doing historical semantics.

Historical semantics, thus understood does not consist in tracing the history of individual words per se in order to see how they change their meaning in the course of history. This latter is the typically, 19th century approach to language. Real historical semantics, as we understand it now, begins only when we study the history of words in terms of the whole static systems to which they belong, when, in other words, we compare with one another two or more ‘surfaces’ which one and the same language, say Arabic, presents at different stages of its history, separated from each other by an interval of time.

The interval may be made long or short according to the purpose of our analysis. For instance, even the language of the Qur’an itself may be regarded as a historical process extending over some twenty years with two distinct periods, the Makkah and the Madinah. In that case, we may quite reasonably make two horizontal cuts across the historical development of this language these critical points, and compare the two cross-sections with each other, if our aim happens to be the semantical study of the development of Islamic thought within the confines of the Qur’an. In fact, since Theodor Nöldeke published his epoch-making view on this matter, many important discoveries have been made regarding the ‘history’ of the Qur’anic vocabulary, which have made it clear that the language of Revelation underwent a profound change semantically after the Prophet’s migration to Madinah.\(^2\) Or, adopting rather a long-range perspective, we may also reasonably treat the Qur’anic vocabulary as a whole as a static system and compare it with other systems which came into existence later in Islam, as we are actually going to do in the present chapter.

Now, as a general rule, in the case of a young and vigorously growing culture like that of the early Islam, the historical development of language shows a very marked tendency towards progressing complexity and proliferation. In our particular case, the triumph of Islam established the unshakable authority of the Qur’an as the Sacred Book, and the direct linguistic effect of this made itself felt in the fact that practically the whole Arabic vocabulary was brought under the sway of the Qur’anic vocabulary, and the Arabic language in its entirety came to be affected gravely by this fact.

In an attempt to show this in the simplest and clearest possible
focus-word, *Allāh*, which presides not only over one particular semantic field within the vocabulary, but over the entire vocabulary comprising all the semantic fields, that is, all the smaller conceptual systems that fall under it, while the pre-Islamic system of words has no such supreme focus-word. This is one of the most fundamental differences between the two systems. And although, as we shall see, the pre-Qur’anic and the Qur’anic concepts have much in common in the meaning structure—not only as regards the ‘basic’ meaning but even a greater part of the ‘relational’ one—yet this one fundamental difference alone is enough to make the two systems totally different in nature and structure from each other in regard to the concept of *Allāh*.

In the Qur’anic system, there is not even one single semantic field that is not directly connected with, and governed by the central concept of Allah (*Picture A*). This situation it is that, as I said in the last chapter, the non-semanticists usually mean when they say that the world of the Qur’an is essentially ‘theocentric’. In the pre-Islamic system *Allāh* is but a member of one specific semantic field (*Picture B*). There is a kind of conceptual coherence in the Qur’anic worldview, a sense of a real system based on, and centered round the concept of God, which is not to be found in the *Jāhili* system. For here, in this new system, all the semantic fields, and consequently all the keyterms are under the sway of this central and highest focus-word. In fact, nothing can escape from it; not only those concepts that are directly connected with religion and faith, but all moral ideas and even concepts representing the most mundane aspects of human life, such as marriage and divorce, inheritance, commercial matters like contracts, debts, usuary, weights and measures, *etc.*, have been...
brought into direct relation with the concept of God.

Moreover, in the Ġahihīt system, the concept of Allah stands side by side with that of ālihah, ‘gods’ or ‘divinities’, with absolutely no incompatibility between them, except, of course, in the more narrowly limited and very particular field of Allah peculiar to the pre-Islamic Jews and Christians, which is not being taken account of for the moment. There is in the Ġahihīt system no sharp contrast observable between Allah and other ālihah even where the former is made to stand at the top of the hierarchy of all supernatural beings. Besides this semantic field of supernatural beings itself occupies quite a peripheral place in the whole conceptual system of Jâhiliyyah in comparison with other more important fields that have more direct relevance to the tribal life of the Arabs, the sense of honor, for example, and social and individual virtues that have nothing at all to do with God and religion.

There should be no misunderstanding here. In the Qur’anic system, too, there is the concept of ālihah. We must not confuse the ontological order of things with the semantic one. In other words, the fact that the Qur’anic world is essentially monotheistic should not lead us into thinking erroneously that semantically as well as ontologically, Allah stands alone without any peers. On the contrary there are concepts of ‘gods’ and ‘idols’ in the Qur’anic system. Only, all these stand in a negative relation to Allah; they are something the existence of which must be denied most emphatically. Speaking in more semantical terms, they are there in the Qur’an to be connected with the concept of ‘falsehood’ (bâtil), while the concept of Allah is to be connected with that of ‘truth’ (haqq).

A further implication of the above statement is this: when we say that the name of Allah came into the Qur’anic system from the pre-Islamic one, this should not be taken to mean that of all the semantic elements associated with the name, only those that were considered ‘good’ from the Islamic point of view were accepted, while all ‘bad’ elements were simply left behind. The fact is that all the elements, both good and bad, came into the Qur’anic system and only in this new field some were accepted and some were rejected. And this process of rejection and acceptance is vividly depicted in the Qur’an itself. Otherwise, words like shârik, (partner, viz. of Allah), and nidd (similar one) would never have been given a place there.

Since the Qur’an is, linguistically, a work of genuine Arabic, it will readily be seen that all the words used in this Scripture have a pre-Qur’anic or Islamic background. Many of them came from the rank and file of pre-Islamic Arabian. In other terms, many of them, even those that were raised to status of key-words in the Qur’an, had been in pre-Islamic times common words standing far below the level of key-words. Such was for example the word taqwâ which we shall analyze in detail in a later context. As everybody knows the word acquired in the Qur’an an enormous importance as one of the most typically Qur’anic key-terms, one of the cornerstones on which the whole edifice of the Qur’anic piety was based. But before that, in Jâhiliyyah, it was an extremely common word that meant simply a very ordinary sort of animal behavior—self-defensive attitude with an accompanying sense of fear.

But there were also a good number of words that came into the Qur’an in the capacity of key-terms with an important pre-Islamic history behind them. To put it in another way, some of the Qur’anic key-words had already been playing in Jâhiliyyah a remarkable role as key-words. Only, their semantic structure changed profoundly as they were transposed from one system to the other. As an illustration of the main thesis of this chapter, this latter case presents a more interesting—because more complicated—problem. As a matter of fact, some examples of this phenomenon have been given in the last chapter. But there they were considered in connection with problems of a somewhat different nature. Here I will give an extremely interesting example as a forerunner, so to speak, of what will come later in abundance.

The word I have in mind is karîm. This word was a very important key-term in Jâhiliyyah, meaning nobility of lineage—a man “of noble birth”, going back to an illustrious ancestor by an unblemished pedigree. And since, in the old Arab conception of human virtue, extravagant and unlimited generosity was the most conspicuous and concrete manifestation of a man’s nobility, karîm had acquired also the meaning of a man characterized by an extravagant generosity going to the degree of our concept of a ‘squanderer’.

The meaning-content of this word had to suffer a drastic change when it was put, in the Qur’anic context, into a close relation with taqwâ to which a passing reference has just been made. The Qur’an declared with utmost clarity that “the most karîm (noble) of all men
was the one who took the attitude of *taqwā* towards Allah:

Surely the noblest of you all in the sight of Allah is one who is characterized by the greatest *taqwā*.

*Al-Hujurāt*, 49:13

Such a combination of two words, no one would ever have dreamt of in pre-Islamic times. This old Arabic word *karīm*, epitomizing an important aspect of the Arab outlook on life, was almost forcibly—we might say—put into an entirely new sphere of the monotheistic piety of Islam. It would be no exaggeration to say that this was indeed a revolution, revolution in the history of the moral ideas of the Arabs, for nobody in ancient Arabia would ever had thought of giving a formal definition of *karam* (nobility) in terms of *taqwā* (fear of God). From now on, a man worthy to be called ‘noble’ in the real sense of the word was not a man of noble birth belonging to a noble family and noble tribe, nor was he a man who would go on squandering impulsively and thoughtlessly all his possessions without stopping to reflect for a moment that he and his whole family might, by his acting in this way, be driven to utter misery and ruin the very next morning. But precisely this latter feature used to be considered the most distinctive mark of a ‘noble’ man. And the ancient poets never tired of praising and extolling this virtue, for it was, together with that of bravery and valor on the battlefield, almost the only means of preserving one’s ancestral honor.

"We seek to defend our ancestral honor," a poet in the *Hamāsah* says, "with their (=our camels’) meat and with their milk; for, verily, a *karīm* is man who is able to defend (viz. his honor which has been handed down to him from his illustrious ancestors)."

This character which, as I have said, was one of the cardinal virtues in the eyes of the pre-Islamic Arabs, is, from the new Qur’anic point of view, not a real virtue at all. Nor is it real generosity even, because the ultimate source from which it springs is sheer vainglory and pride, the desire to make a show of generosity. Such a man is, in the language of the Qur’an, “expends of his wealth simply for the pleasure of an ostentatious display, and not from his belief in Allah and the Last Day”.

*Al-Baqārah*, 2:266 [264]

In another place it is clearly stated that those who squander away their possession from such a motive are but “brothers of Satan”.

*Give the kinsman his due, and the poor, and the wayfarer. But never waste in sheer waste for those who squander are brothers of Satan, and Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord.*

*Al-Isrā’ or Banū Isrā’īl*, 17:28-29 [26-27]

Here we see *karīm* which once embodied the highest *Jāhilī* ideal of reckless generosity as the direct manifestation of nobility, in the process of transforming itself into something entirely new and different through the influence of a new semantic situation. The idea of generosity itself suffers a profound change; at the same time, and in correlation with it, the word *karīm* comes to be applied to a truly pious believer who, instead of expending his wealth blindly and thoughtlessly and merely for display, never hesitates to expend it for a definite purpose which is really ‘noble’ in the new conception, i.e., in alms, “in God’s way” (*fī sabīl Allāh*), being always careful to strike the happy medium, between sheer prodigality and sheer miserable,17 and that from the deep religious motive of *taqwā*.

Thus one and the same word makes its appearance with the same basic meaning in these two successive systems, but it is given an entirely different value and entirely different connotations according as it is used as a key-term in one or the other because of the particular associations it forms around itself in the particular sector of the system. And exactly the same thing happens between the Qur’anic vocabulary and the subsequent systems, albeit in a far subtler and,
therefore, less obvious way. This we shall see presently.

**II. The Qur’an and the Post-Qur’anic Systems**

When we come down to the third stage of development as distinguished above, that is, the classical age of Islamic culture, we meet with a proliferation of relatively independent conceptual systems. In other words, Islam produced many different systems of thought in the post-Qur’anic periods, theology, jurisprudence, political theory, philosophy, mysticism being among the most important of them. Each of these cultural products of Islam developed its own conceptual system, *i.e.*, its own ‘vocabulary’, itself consisting of a number of sub-systems just as we have seen in the case of the Qur’anic vocabulary. Thus we are fully entitled to speak of the vocabulary of Islamic theology, the vocabulary of Islamic jurisprudence, the vocabulary of Islamic mysticism *etc.*, in the exact sense as defined above. And the whole body of these various vocabularies constitutes the vocabulary of the Arabic language in the classical age of Islam.

In view of the tremendous and, indeed, peerless importance of the Qur’anic vocabulary as the very language of Divine Revelation, it is quite natural that all the post-Qur’anic systems were deeply influenced by it. All of them, in their linguistic aspect, were in varying degrees dependent and based on the vocabulary of the Qur’an. They could grow and flourish, so to speak, only on the soil that had already been prepared by the language of Revelation. Semantically this situation may adequately be described by saying that many, if not all of the key-terms in these systems were supplied by the Qur’anic vocabulary. Even in the case of words that were not capable of being traced back to the Qur’anic source, conscious effort was often made to relate them in some way or other to this or that expression in the Qur’an. The authority of the Qur’an was so great that every system had thus to have recourse to the Qur’anic vocabulary for its material elements, if not directly at least indirectly.

Besides, speaking in more general terms, the Arabic language—or, any language for that matter—however rich it may be, is not rich enough to supply each of the different systems with an entirely new and different set of words. So most of the elements used in constructing the systems must of necessity be common to them. Only, each elaborates nearly the same elements in its own peculiar way, and thereby constructs an independent network of words and concepts.

It is not necessary for our present purpose—nor is it at all possible—to consider in detail the semantic structure of these post-Qur’anic systems. Each would call for separate treatment. Here I must content myself with referring to only three of them—theology, philosophy and mysticism—and giving a few typical examples in each case in order to illustrate the main contention of this chapter.

Of all the conceptual systems that grew up in the classical period of Islam, theology (kalām) is the one that is most faithful and loyal to the Qur’anic vocabulary. The theological thinking begins to flourish among the Muslims partly under Greek influence but largely and mainly as a natural growth necessitated by the changed historical conditions in which Islamic civilization finds itself now. So let theology be our first object of consideration.

The very first point to notice about Islamic theology is that its material is almost wholly Qur’anic. And in this particular case, we may justifiably take the word ‘material’ in a wider sense than strictly linguistic, for almost all the basic problems of theology owe their origin to the Qur’an itself, and are therefore traceable in some way or other to the Qur’anic thought and its verbal expressions. Islamic theology, in short, is essentially based on the teaching of the Qur’an. It was, after all, the result of the effort of the human intellect and reason to grasp this very teaching more systematically and theoretically. It is natural, then, that its key-terms were largely supplied by the Qur’anic vocabulary. Almost all the major concepts of Islamic theology were directly taken from the Qur’anic text, and in many cases theological terminology was but a scholastic and theoretic elaboration of the words and phrases of the Qur’an. Of course, the principle itself of conceptual organization was quite different in each case; otherwise there would have been no theological vocabulary as an independent system of concepts. And yet, on the whole, the vocabulary of Islamic theology may be said to have remained more faithful to the Qur’anic one than any other system.

Thus theology would seem to furnish a very suitable occasion for discussing in concrete terms one of our major theoretic problems. If, on the one hand, the theological vocabulary is, in a certain sense,
a continuation and development of the Qu’ranic one, and, as such, owes much of its material to the latter, and yet, on the other hand, constitutes an independent conceptual stem by organizing the whole material according to its own principle of structuralization, then the difference between the two will have to be sought mainly in the ‘relational’ side of the key-terms. The difference, however, is in many cases extremely subtle, and difficult to grasp, particularly when exactly the same words are used in almost exactly the same contexts. The opposition of kāfīr (infidel) and muslīm (Muslim) offers an excellent example, as we shall few paragraphs later.

I would like to begin by taking up an easier case. Even the word Allāh is made to change its conceptual structure when it leaves the Qur’ān and the theological system. In theology, the central position occupied by this word remains of course the same as in the Qur’ānic vocabulary. It is still the highest focus-word reigning over the whole system. And all the key-constructs are still under the undisputed sway of this highest concept. So, apparently, nothing has changed. And yet we observe here a profound inner transformation that has taken place just under the surface.

The structure of the concept of Allah was transformed in this new system, first and foremost, by its having been put into a direct conceptual relation to the so-called Ninety-Nine Most Beautiful Names. Of course, if we look for these ‘ninety-nine names’ in the Qur’ān, we find them already adumbrated everywhere. The Qur’ān is full of words and phrases that describe Allah from various angles: Allāh is such and such—for example, He is wāhid (One), ghafīr (All-forgiving), rahīm (Merciful) etc. etc.; and Allāh does such and such a thing—for example, He “speaks”, He “creates” etc. etc. But these and the like are there in the Qur’ān as simple descriptions that should be taken naively as they are, without sophistication. In theology, this principle of simple and unsophisticated understanding is no longer kept intact. For the theologians, all the concepts of this kind represent so many manifestations of the very nature of God; they are, in other words, all Divine attributes, that is, inherent qualities of the Divine essence.

This means simply that the concept of Allāh has now come to be understood in terms of ‘essence’ (dhāt) and ‘attributes’ (sifāt), and this, again, means that the theologians have now assimilated the typically Greek way of thinking, which tends to interpret the whole world of being and existence in terms of ‘essences’ and ‘attributes’. As part of the grand scale process of the arabization of the Hellenistic heritage, so characteristic of the Abbasid period, this may have to be considered an achievement worthy of acclamation. But from the purely and strictly Qur’ānic point of view, this marks nothing but a big step away from the original form of thought. We read, for example, in the Qur’ān that God “speaks” to man, but in no way is speaking regarded there as an attribute of Allāh; there is not even a slightest suggestive hint for such interpretation. While in theology ‘speech’ (kalim) constitutes one of the most essential Divine attributes. This is not surely the Qur’ānic approach. And the concept of God itself, when understood in this way as a transcendental ‘essence’ opposed to its ‘attributes’, is no longer a Qur’ānic concept in its original form.

It is not the scholastic theology alone that caused such a radical inner transformation in the conceptual structure of the word Allāh. Other systems did same thing, each according to its dominant mode of thinking. This point will be made thoroughly clear by a comparison of the theological vocabulary with those of mysticism and philosophy.

There are grounds for regarding Islamic mysticism, or Sūfism, also as continuation and development of the basic religious teaching of the Qur’ān. Semantically this means that the mystics make use of many Qur’ānic words as their key terms. Compared with the theologians’ use of the same words, however, theirs is in most cases extremely free and even arbitrary. They tend to attach to the words they find interesting in the Qur’ān meanings—i.e. ‘relational’ meanings—that are detached from the actual contexts, their guiding principle being always one of symbolic interpretation. It is quite natural that the symbolic meanings that they read into the words turn out in many cases to be of an essentially different nature and far removed from those attached to the same words by the theologians.

The mystic system affects most profoundly even the central concept of Allāh. Several remarkable points of difference occur to our mind as worthy of notice in this connection, but here it will be enough to consider briefly the most conspicuous and decisive one. In all non-mystical systems as well as in the Qur’ān itself, Allāh epistemologically, can only be an object of ilm. In other words God can only be known to man indirectly. Man is not allowed to approach
God too closely. You cannot see God without any veil (hijab), at least in this world. There can be here no intimacy, i.e., an immediate personal communion. Certainly, God reveals Himself, but He does so only through his ayat (signs). And man, on his part, is allowed to know God only through the ayat, that is, natural things and natural phenomena understood as so many ‘signs’ indicative of Divine goodness, majesty and power. Even Moses who, in the Qur’an, is allowed to come closest to Divine Presence cannot look God in the face. This kind of knowledge given “from behind the veil”, to use the Qur’anic expression, is ‘ilm. It is an indirect sort of knowledge that can only be gained through some other things that are directly given to man.

The mystics, in Islam as elsewhere, claim to have a knowledge of God that is essentially different from this: ma’rifah, that is ‘gnosis’, a direct, immediate, and most intimate sort of personal contact, which in some form or other culminates in a personal union of the knower and the known, just as a lover and his beloved become united in the experience of love into one person.

As is obvious, this changes everything. Not only is the conception of human nature and human psychology completely transformed, but the very concept of God must necessarily change in its semantic structure by being made an object of ma’rifah, while in the non-mystical systems it can only be an object of ‘ilm. Semantically we may describe this situation by saying that the ‘relational’ meaning of the word Allāh varies according as it is taken is the object of mystical ma’rifah or as the object of normal human ‘ilm.

Of course, as long as you are a Muslim, Allah you believe in remain objectively always the same God of the Qur’an, whether you are a mystic or theologian. But the aspect of this God, which manifests itself in your conception of Him is quite different in each case.

In the diagram here given, a man (a), an ordinary orthodox Muslim, forms for himself the concept of God through ‘ilm, while (b), a mystic, does the same through ma’rifah. The resulting concepts A and B, as concepts, are essentially different from each other, although the denotatum, i.e., the objective God Himself, lying beyond these concepts is exactly the same. So essential and fundamental was this difference between the two concepts that the Islamic orthodoxy often came to the conclusion that the concept A and concept B of God could not refer to one and the same God. And this naturally led to a very grave indictment against the mystics. For if, in reality, the denotatum itself—not the concept—of the God of the mystics was different, the latter would simply be doing nothing other than worshiping a different God from the God of Islamic Revelation. Many mystics had to face the constant danger of being accused of heresy by the intransigent orthodoxy, in spite of all the references they made to the Qur’an in defence of their position. In this sense the mystic exegesis of the Qur’an is of paramount importance and interest to a semanticist.

When we turn from mysticism to philosophy, we find the same process of semantic transformation pushed further ahead. If, of all the post-Qur’anic systems, theology remained on the whole most faithful to the original Qur’anic usage of words and concepts, Islamic philosophy took a bold and determined step in the direction of arabizing a foreign system, and this is disclosed with particular clearness in the usage of the most important Islamic key-terms, Allāh, for example, nabi (prophet), wahy (revelation), aql (intellect), and others. The matter is complicated because it is not a simple straightforward departure from the Qur’anic usage of these words. The philosophers, who, Arabs or non-Arabs, used Arabic as their intellectual tool in thinking and writing, struggled, on the one hand, to build up a new vocabulary in Arabic language, which would be capable of expressing with exactitude Greek ideas and concepts, and yet, on the other, tried to attach it to the Qur’anic tradition. Hence the very peculiar nature of the relational meanings that grew around the Qur’anic terms.

Thus the word Allāh, which is being the central point of our interest now, does no longer denote in philosophy simply the same thing as that living God of Creation and Revelation as He is so vividly depicted in the Qur’an. Among the theologians, too, this concept suffers, as we have just seen, a drastic change, and yet it is still an intellectual and theoretic elaboration of the original Qur’anic
conception. Here, among the philosophers, the underlying image is not so much the Qur’anic one of God as the Aristotelian concept of the cosmic ‘Mover’ plus that of the Plotinan ‘One’. The philosophers do their best to show that they are just trying to bring out the deep philosophic meanings that lie hidden under the Qur’anic expression. They do use Qur’anic words and expressions in describing Allah; they refer to the Qur’an, and they treat problems raised by the Qur’an. But this of course does not satisfy the pious believers, as is shown in the most outspoken way by the harsh expression which the intransigent theologian Ibn Taymiyyah uses in reference to them: “a small insignificant group of the ignorant philosophers” (juhâl al-alfalâsîfah).

The philosophers assert, for instance, that their ‘God’ can be in reality no other than the God of the Qur’an, the Lord of Creation. But there appears on the stage a man like al-Ghazzâlî18 who tries to tear off mercilessly the veil to disclose the real nature—as he sees it—of the philosophical concepts. He shows for example, how in his view Avicenna’s khalq (creation) is but a mock-concept, i.e., a pseudo-concept of creation, which has, in reality, nothing at all to do essentially with the true Qur’anic concept of Divine Creation, and is even susceptible of being considered a flat negation of the latter, because it is nothing but a disguised form of the neo-Platonic concept of Emanation.

It will be obvious that the language of Islamic philosophy presents a number of extremely interesting problems to the semanticist. Some of them that appear to be directly relevant to our immediate concern will be dealt with theoretically towards the end of the present chapter. There I shall try to show by some concrete examples the truly singular make-up of the philosophical vocabulary as a conceptual system in Islam. Meanwhile I would like to go back to the vocabulary of the theologians, from which we have deviated, and discuss a few interesting cases which would illustrate my main contention on historical semantics.

I have no intention at all here to go into historical details even as regards the four or five key-terms that I am going to take up. This is evidently not a proper place for a discussion of that kind; it would belong to the semantics of Islamic theology. My intention is only to show, in connection with immediate theoretic problem that concerns us, how in course of time there occur gradually—and almost imperceptibly, in most cases—shifts of emphasis, changes in interest and subjective approach in the understanding of one and the same word, as it moves from one system to another. What I am going to give is a broad and general outline, just the skeleton of the matter, so to speak, without flesh and blood.

With this initial understanding, we shall take up as our first example the conceptual pair formed by the words muslim (Muslim) and kâfir (infidel) which stand, as is obvious, in opposition to one another. If we trace these two Qur’anic key-terms back to the earlier pre-Islamic stage, we notice that originally they did not even form a pair. Both words were there certainly, but there was no essential connection between them. Moreover, neither of them had any religious connotation, muslim meaning “a man who hands over something precious to another who demands it of him” and kâfir “a man who does not show gratitude to his benefactor”. It is only at the second stage of development, that is, within the Qur’anic system, that the two are put in opposition to one another. In other words, the Qur’an brings them together for the first time and puts them into one semantic field, putting muslim on the positive side and kâfir on the negative. This semantic field is that of îmân (belief) which we have come across earlier.

In this new field, kâfir (or, to use the corresponding nominal form, kufîr) stands opposed to îmân contradictorily, while İslâm (the nominal form corresponding to muslim) and îmân are complementary concepts. Most obviously, emphasis, in the Qur’an, is mainly and predominantly placed on the contradictory opposition of îmân-İslâm and kufîr. And this reflects faithfully the real state of affairs in the earliest period of Islam, when the Prophet and the small number of his followers were fighting hard for the establishing of the new religion and had to wage a fierce war against those who refused to accept it. It was literally a war between İslâm and kufîr, between ‘Muslims’ and ‘Kâfir’. The situation was such that everybody had to make a decision as to whether he should choose İslâm or kufîr.

Only in an important passage, İslâm is made to stand in sharp contrast to îmân and the two are clearly and very consciously distinguished from each other.
The Bedouins say: “We believe [īmān].” Tell them: “You do not believe yet. You should say rather, ‘We have surrendered’ [Islām], for the belief [īmān] (in the true sense of the word) has not yet permeated your hearts.”


This is, indeed, a remarkable statement, because here we see _Islām_ defined in the clearest possible terms as the first step towards _īmān_, a preparatory stage at which ‘faith’ has not yet penetrated deep into the heart. However, we must bear in mind another significant fact that this definition of _Islām_ was given in explicit reference to the Bedouins of the desert, whose lukewarm nature in religious matters is often referred to not only in the Qur’ān but also in Ḥadīth. As regards ordinary Muslims, the Qur’ān never makes such a distinction. Far from being a superficial kind of ‘faith’, _Islām_, as a spiritual act of the complete surrendering of one’s self to Divine Will, is regarded as a supreme religious value.

As a matter of fact, in normal contexts, the two words _muslim_ (a man of _Islām_) and _muʿmin_ (a man of _īmān_) are used interchangeably, both being used to denote a man who has chosen the straight way of Divine Guidance (_ḥudā_) and thereby escaped from the future punishment of Hell. In more technical terms, we might say that the two words have exactly the same denotatum although each of them refers to this same denotatum through a different connotatum. As our diagram shows, the same concrete individual, say, Hasan, may be referred to differently as “a man who believes in God” or “a man who surrendered himself to God”. That is to say, the two words refer to different conceptual aspects of one and the same person.20

In any case, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the contrast between _īmān_ and _Islām_ was, at the Qur’ānic stage, far less important and crucial than the sharp opposition in which these two concepts as a unit stood to _kufr_. The opposition _muslim-(muʿmin) kāfir_ was one of the burning problems that confronted the nascent community of Islam.

This fundamental conceptual opposition was carried over just as it been into the theological system that arose in the post-Qur’ānic period. Now, from the semantical point of view, Islamic theology is, as we saw earlier, a conceptual system based essentially on the Qur’ānic vocabulary. It inherits from the Qur’ān a whole body of words and concepts. The opposition we are talking about is part of this conceptual heritage. So nothing changes apparently as regards the basic pair, _muslim-kāfir_. However, if we examine the matter more carefully we find that there has occurred a subtle, but clearly observable shift of emphasis and interest, a change in the fundamental outlook on the same problem. In other words, the contrast between _muslim_ and _kāfir_, though outwardly the same, does no longer carry exactly the same meaning. And this is attributable to the changed cultural situation in which the Islamic community has found itself.

Islam as a religion has now long been established. Arabia as a whole embraced this religion; then, immediately following this, the islamization of the major part of the ancient world of civilizations has changed the cultural map of the world. Within this well-established system of Islam, it is naturally no longer necessary to lay so much stress on the opposition of Muslims as monotheists and _kāfirs_ as polytheists. In place of this old opposition, there appears a new opposition of concepts, which begins to occupy the attention of the thinkers.

The rise of the _Khārijyyah_, Khārijī sect, brings right into the Islamic sphere of concepts itself the basic contrast between _muslim_ and _kāfir_. As far as the outward form goes, this contrast remains just the same, but its inner structure is no longer the same. For the problem does not fundamentally concern any longer the difference between the Islamic monotheist and the pagan polytheist or idolater. It concerns now a distinction within the very confines of Islamic monotheism, among the very Muslims. For, according to the view held by the Khārijites, a Muslim, once he has committed a grave sin ceases to be a _muslim_; he must be considered a _kāfir_ destined for Hell, and may, therefore, even be justifiably killed. This introduces into Islam a very dangerous element, because the concept itself of the “grave sinner” is one of an extremely flexible or mobile nature in
sense that it is susceptible of being extended to any direction so that it may include anything one does not like.\textsuperscript{21} Take, for example, the famous Hadith preserved by al-Tirmidhi in his \textit{Collection of Authentic Hadith}\textsuperscript{22} concerning the Qur’anic exegesis, which runs:

«من فسّر القرآن بالرأي، أي بغير علم، فقد كفر.»

One who interprets the Qur’an according to his personal opinion, that is, not according to the knowledge,\textsuperscript{23} has proved himself by that very fact to be a kāfir.

We can picture from this the gravity of the situation if we remember that this and similar bitter indictments were made freely and were even circulated in the name of the Prophet.

It is quite understandable that such a general state of affairs came to be reflected in the semantic structure of the word kāfir, and, consequently, of the word muslim. Hitherto these words had been signs of two fixed categories, and the basic contrast between them had been somewhat like this (see diagrams on page 52).

In the circle (I) which symbolizes the earlier Islamic community, every member is a Muslim. And no Muslim can conceivably be a kāfir, as long as he believes in the unity God and recognizes Muhammad as the Apostle of God. In the \textit{Diagram B}, the circle (I) still represents the Islamic community. But we perceive a remarkable change that has taken place here. Now the concept of kāfir has been brought right into this circle, and muslim and kāfir form a sharp conceptual contrast in the very midst of the Islamic system. Henceforth a Muslim, that is, one who believes in God and acknowledges Muhammad as the Apostle of God, may very easily be turned into a kāfir and publicly labeled as such merely by thinking or acting in this or that way. The concept kāfir has lost its denotative stability and fixedness, and become something mobile, ready to be applied even to a pious Muslim if he happens to do this or that. Thus we see that this is not a mere continuation of the Qur’anic contrast between muslim and kāfir, but an essentially new one, in a certain sense at least, although the two words still keep their basic meaning and a greater part of their relational meaning as well.

It is implied in the very nature of what we generally call a ‘system’ that, if any important point in it happens to be changed or moved, repercussions inevitably make themselves felt in all the remaining parts of it. The changed relation just described between muslim and kāfir made it incumbent upon the Muslims to take up the concept of muslim itself, to examine its content more systematically and to define the word afresh in terms of the new historical and social situation in which they lived. This may be considered, as Wensinck\textsuperscript{24} has said, an attempt made by the young Muslim community to define its own position, not against other communities, but, primarily, for itself. Such was indeed the compelling force of the age. Further, this must be viewed against background of the increasing intellectual tendency among the Muslims, which was remarkably directed towards theoretic and systematic speculation, and through speculation towards more and more rigorous structualization of Islam.
It was in accordance with this new intellectual trend that the problem of the relation between ʿīmān and Ḩiṣām became a matter of no small concern to Muslim thinkers. The principal problem regarding ʿīmān (belief) was now how its concept was structured, not so much in contrast to ʿafāf, as it had been case at the Qur’anic stage, as in itself. The question, in short, was: Of what and how many conceptual elements was it composed? And the question, conceived and formulated in this way, necessitated that the answer be given also analytically. Thus the various answers that were actually given to this basic question were all strikingly ‘analytic’, in the sense in which modern semantics understands the word. Al-Ṣāfī’s famous definition of ʿīmān in terms of three concepts: (1) assent by heart, (2) public verbal confession, and (3) the observance of religious duties, was a clear attempt to answer this question through conceptual analysis. Al-ʾAshʿārī’s no less famous formula is another example, which makes ʿīmān consist of (1) ‘saying’ (qawl) and (2) ‘doing’ (ʿamal).

A great number of different answers were offered in the course of the development of Islamic theology by different sects and, indeed, by different individuals. The Murjiʿites (murjiʿah), for example, held that ʿīmān should properly be defined in terms of ‘knowledge’—i.e. knowledge of God, excluding thereby ‘doing’, that is, actions, from the concept of ‘belief’. The Karamites (karrammiyyah), to take an extreme case, took the view that ʿīmān should be defined solely in terms of ‘saying’, that is, verbal confession (al-iqrāʾ bil-līsān). This definition led to a grave, but extremely interesting, theoretic consequence.25

They held that a man who kept ʿafāf (disbelief) secretly in his heart but professed ʿīmān should be considered a muʿmin (believer) in the real sense of the word, although he was destined to live afterwards in the Fire eternally, while a man who had real ʿīmān in his heart but did not publicly confess it was not muʿmin, although he was actually going to be rewarded in the Hereafter by life of eternity in the Garden.

Such technical discussions on the structure of the concept of ʿīmān raised inevitably the problem of the exact conceptual relation between ʿīmān and Ḩiṣām, both of which, as we saw, had meant in the earlier period practically the same thing. And the concept of Ḩiṣām, too, was submitted to a semantical analysis.

Here again a number of divergent definitions were offered. But the commonest type makes Ḩiṣām consist of what later comes to be known under the name of the Five Pillars of Islam. The first and foremost place is occupied by the ʿīmān itself; then come ʿsalāt (ritual prayer), zakāt (alms-giving), sawm (the fast—of Ramadān) and Ḥajj (pilgrimage to Makkah). In other words, understood in terms of a hierarchical combination of the concept of Ḩiṣām is now understood in terms of the concept of faith with those of the cardinal religious duties. Semantically this is tantamount to saying that the concept of Ḩiṣām now constitutes a small but typical semantic field by itself, with ʿīmān as its focus-word and the remaining four words surrounding it.

As we have seen above, Ḩiṣām in the Qur’anic context meant initially “self-surrendering (to God)”. The corresponding verb aslama was inchoative; it signified that a man, by this very act of self-surrender, went into an entirely new phase of life, that something entirely new started from that moment in his life. This original connotation became very much obscured, if not completely lost, in the new conceptual system life. Here we have a clear case of the shift of emphasis in the structure of word-meaning to which reference was made earlier.

This kind of semantic elaboration of concepts, with ensuing shift of emphasis is observable everywhere in the Islamic thought of that age. Here I will give one more example, which is similar to but somewhat different from, the case we have just examined. The word is ilm, meaning generally ‘knowledge’.

The basic meaning of this word, to be more exact, is one’s knowing something about something—‘knowledge by inference’ as opposed to and distinguished from ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ in the terminology of Lord Russell, as we have already seen. As far as concerns this ‘basic’ meaning, the word stands for one and the same concept whether it is used in pre-Islamic poetry, the Qur’an, or theology. But its ‘relational’ meaning differs in an essential point from system to system. The difference comes from the conception—which varies from case to case—of the ‘source’ from which the knowledge is derived. In other words, what matters most in determining the real concrete semantic structure of the word ilm is the question: Where have you derived your knowledge from? It will be easy to understand this point if we remember that ‘knowledge
by inference’ is by definition a piece of derived knowledge, that is, something induced from some given data.

In Jāhilīyah, ‘ilm meant primarily a kind of knowledge about something, derived and induced from one’s own personal experience of the matter. ‘Ilm in this sense was opposed to zann, which meant the result of mere subjective thinking, and, as such, something groundless and, therefore, unreliable. The following verse by the famous pre-Islamic poet Tarafah brings out this contrast very clearly:

What he wants to say is this: “I know through experience that when a near relative (or cousin) of a man has (been allowed to) fall into an humiliating situation, that would mean no other thing than that he himself has fallen into such a situation”. And he emphasizes that this is his ‘knowledge’ (‘ilm), and not a mere zann. By this he means that this is an absolutely reliable knowledge because he has derived it from his own experience, which is quite different from a piece of groundless thinking with no objective guarantee to support it.

In the Jāhilī conception, ‘ilm may have its source in something different from this: tribal tradition. It is a particular kind of knowledge that has been handed down from generation to generation in the tribe, which, therefore, has the tribal authority behind it. In reality, this is not at all different in nature from the first kind. For it is nothing other than the result of innumerable pieces of personal experience by different persons that have been gradually accumulated through ages and handed down as an immaterial tribal asset. This latter type of knowledge guaranteed by repeated experiences through untold ages goes easily beyond the limit of a tribe and tends to become what we may call a national asset of the Arabs as a whole. Such knowledge is usually formulated and propagated and handed down to posterity in the form of proverbs (amthāl). Hence the very great value attached to proverbs in ancient Arabia. And it was part of the important function of poets to give terse and forcible expressions to this kind of knowledge.

In conclusion, we may give a brief definition of the word ‘ilm as understood by the pre-Islamic Arabs by saying that it is a sound, well-grounded piece of knowledge guaranteed by personal or tribal experience which, therefore, can claim an objective and universal validity.

In the Qur’an, the word becomes a very important religious key-term. It goes without saying that here I am putting out of consideration ‘ilm as: Divine attribute, for that is another problem. We are concerned now only with ‘ilm as a human phenomenon. In the Qur’an ‘ilm is still used in opposition to zann, as well-grounded knowledge opposed to groundless pseudo-knowledge. So here again nothing has changed apparently.

Only, we notice that there has occurred a radical change in the conception of the ground for validity. ‘Ilm is, as I have said, an absolutely reliable piece of knowledge because its validity is fully guaranteed by something objective because it has been derived from a good source. Thus far its meaning is the same whether the word occurs in pre-Islamic poetry or the Qur’an. But the ground, the source from which it is derived is remarkably different in the two cases.

In the Qur’an, the word is placed in the new conceptual sphere of Divine Revelation and associated with other words than those it used to be associated with in Jāhilīyah; it is now knowledge derived from the Revelation of God, that is, information given by no other than God Himself; it has an objective validity because it is based on the ‘Truth’ (Haqq), the Divine Haqq which is the only Reality in the full sense of the word. Compared with the absolute reliability of this source, all other sources are essentially and by nature unreliable. And viewed in this light, the old ‘ilm, i.e., that kind of knowledge that used to be considered sound and well-grounded in Jāhilīyah because derived from one’s own personal experience must be degraded to the lower degree of zann.

Quite a big part of what has once been regarded as well-grounded knowledge in Jāhilīyah must now be considered something essentially groundless: mere fancies and surmises, conjectures. A great number of Qur’anic verses may be adduced in illustration of this fundamental change. Here is, one of them:

Of that they have no certain knowledge (‘ilm). They are merely conjecturing (zann).

Al-Jāhiyah, 45:23 [24]
This is said in reference to the Kāfirs who stubbornly refuse to believe in God and the Hereafter, and say emphatically that “There is nothing but our earthly life. We die, we live, and that is all!”, as if they had an ultimate knowledge about human destiny. In reality, the Qur’an declares, what they have is not ‘ilm; it is a mere conjecture.26

The Qur’an goes a step further and makes it clear that the ground or source of zann is hawā, i.e., the natural inclination of the impulsive and perverse human soul which is by nature blind and reckless in its behavior, as is well shown by the pre-Islamic usage of the word hawā in the sense of the blind passion of love. Zann, in this sense, is often paraphrased in the Qur’an as ittibā’ al-ahwā27 meaning literally “the following of one’s own personal caprices”, and is, in this form, put in opposition to ‘ilm, which, in such a context, means, in short, nothing but Divine Guidance, or Revelation.

Nay, but those who do evil (i.e. Kāfirs) follow their own caprices, without knowledge.

Al-Rūm, 30:28 [29]

Here the expression bi-ghayri ‘ilm (‘without knowledge’) must not be taken in the simple sense of ‘without knowing’, i.e., ‘unintentionally’. For, according to the Qur’an, the evil doers do what they do very consciously. The word ‘ilm carries greater weight, and bi-ghayri ‘ilm means “instead of having recourse to ‘ilm”—‘ilm being understood in the sense just explained. The contrast between ittibā’ al-ahwā and ‘ilm comes out still more clearly in a verse like the following:

If you should follow their caprices (ahwā’), after the knowledge (‘ilm) that has come to you, then you would have no protector against God nor any defender.

Al-Ra’d, 13:37

Thus there is no room for doubt that the word ‘ilm, when it is used in the capacity of a key-term in the Qur’an, means the knowledge derived from the absolutely reliable source, which is nothing other than Divine Revelation. And the same word in the well-known Qur’anic phrase al-rāṣikhūna ft al-‘ilmī (“Those who are firmly rooted in knowledge”), which designates the true believers, can be understood only in this sense.

This relational meaning which the word has acquired in the Qur’an is brought into Islamic theology. Here, again, the fundamental semantic structure shows no change. Only, the conception of the absolutely reliable source becomes enlarged, because now the traditions of the Prophet have established the claim to rank with the Qur’an as another real source of ‘ilm. And this necessarily alters the whole balance of power in the system. Moreover, we observe here even a subtle shift of emphasis and interest. That kind of absolute knowledge based on Divine Revelation, upon whose supreme importance the Qur’an so emphatically insisted, is no longer a problem for debate and discussion, as it once was between Muslims and Kāfirs.

In the well-established Islamic world, its importance is so self-evident to be discussed; it is something to be simply taken for granted. The attention of the Muslims is now drawn mainly towards the nature of the other source of true ‘ilm, which, although human in nature and not divine, is, nevertheless, said to be capable of furnishing human knowledge with something like super-human validity.

Under such intellectual conditions, with the problem of the validity of Hadith occupying the attention of the thinkers, the word ‘ilm comes to acquire the meaning of a very particular kind of knowledge that can be traced back by an unbroken and unblemished chain of authorities to the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. “On such and such an occasion the Apostle of God gave such and such an opinion on such and such a question”. This is ‘ilm. It is a kind of
absolute knowledge, because its source is the Prophet himself, who, as Imám al-Sháfi’í pointed out, is mentioned in the Qur'án side by side with God in the form of “Allah and His Apostle”. Only those who, in making any statement, base their assertion on this absolutely reliable authority, are infallible. All others are but followers of their own personal ‘caprices’ (ahwā’). And any assertion based on hawā is called ra’y (personal opinion), meaning an arbitrary, groundless opinion. It is to be noticed that the word ra’y carried in those days a far greater weight than the simple translation ‘opinion’ would suggest, because it was directly associated by many people with downright kufr. It may also be interesting to notice in this connection that the orthodox school of theology often referred to heterodoxy as ahl al-ahwā’, lit. ‘people of caprices’.

By this summary history of the word ‘ilm through three different stages—Jahiliyyah, Qur’án and theology—together, with the consideration that preceded it of the field of imán, islám and kufr, I think I have illustrated how concepts undergo a gradual and subtle semantic change each time they are introduced into a new system. So much for theology.

We shall bring this chapter to an end by discussing in some detail the nature of the vocabulary of Islamic philosophy so that we might have an occasion to examine the basic problem we have been dealing with from a somewhat different point of view.

In opening this new section, will it be necessary to remind the reader that the motive from which I take up now this subject is not the desire to talk about Islamic philosophy for its own sake? My real aim is to explain by a concrete example what I have called the ‘diachronic’ view in semantics, i.e. a comparative examination of the various conceptual systems that arise in the course of history within the confines of one and the same language, which, in our particular case, happens to be Arabic.

Now Arabic, at the apogee of the Abbasid period, becomes an extremely rich and highly organized cultural language—indeed, one of the most important among all the cultural languages of the world. Its richness does not consist merely in the astonishing number of the words used, but, first and foremost, in the number and complexity of the conceptual associations, i.e., systems, that they form among themselves. The philosophical vocabulary is one of them.

The tremendous importance and interest which the rise and development of Islamic philosophy presents to the semanticist lies in the fact that, semantically, it was a most radical and daring attempt on the part of the outstanding philosophers to create their own vocabulary away from the linguistic authority of the Sacred Book. In fact, the vocabulary of the philosophers in Islam has one very remarkable peculiarity which, linguistically, makes it something of an essentially different nature from all other sister systems, like theology and jurisprudence, mysticism, etc., that arose in Islam in the post-Qur’anic period. All these were, from the linguistic point of view, invariably a natural growth and elaboration of the original genuine Arabic language, each in a particular direction. Nothing was forced upon Arabic and its natural resources from outside. Certainly, remarkable changes did occur in many places, as we have seen above. Theology, in particular, was very much influenced by Greek philosophy in the formation of its linguistic tool. But cases of this kind were after all, sporadic and were not systematic. On the whole we might say that the growth of the post-Qur’anic vocabularies was a result of a spontaneous and natural process of conceptual transformation which was brought about and made necessary by the changing cultural situation. Philosophy forms the exception.

Only in the case of philosophy, a complete system of foreign concepts, a very particular conceptual network that had originally nothing at all to do with the Arabic language and its world-view was given from outside as the ideal model. And in order to meet the demand of this stranger, the conceptual network originally existent in Arabic had to be largely disorganized and reorganized, and many new concepts that were quite alien to the Arab weltanschauung were forcibly introduced. In short, a whole new system of concepts had to be built up on the Greek model.

Here the Muslim intellectuals learnt new concepts first and then had to look for suitable words in the Arabic language to symbolize them. But since the concepts themselves were foreign, there occurred naturally discrepancies between thought and language everywhere.

Not even one single key-term of Greek philosophy found a perfect equivalent in the Arabic language, to be very exact. A similar situation had already occurred when Greek philosophy began to be transplanted in the Roman world in the Latin language. Cicero complained of the difficulty of handling Greek concepts in Latin because of the immaturity of his language, however rich it was, for
an abstract philosophical thinking. But the distance between Greek
and Latin was both culturally and linguistically almost minimum
when compared with that between Greek and Arabic.

Thus the Arabic language, in this case, had to face suddenly the
overwhelming impact of a foreign thought with a long historical
process behind it, fostered in an entirely different cultural milieu, and
couched in a language which was in many important respects even
diametrically opposed to it. Here Arabic had to abide a most crucial
test in its capacity as a cultural language. And it did stand the test.29

The result was that there appeared in the Arabic language a very
particular sort of vocabulary—a conceptual system on a grand scale,
based on the semantic principle of what I would call ‘semi-
transparency’. This I shall try to explain in the following.

Let us, to begin with, recall the very fundamental fact that
Arabic is a language which, besides being astonishingly rich in basic
words, shows an amazing capacity in deriving new words out of
given material with a systematic regularity. This rendered it possible
for the philosophers to find—not without difficulty, to be
sure—almost always genuine Arabic words whose ‘basic’ meaning
corresponded at least approximately to the basic meaning conveyed
by the Greek philosophical terms. In such cases, all they had to do
was strip the Arabic words in question of their ‘relational’ elements
that had grown around the ‘basic’ meanings and replace the former,
by means of definition, by the relational ones peculiar to the
respective Greek words.

The word ‘aql, to take a typical example. This word in pre-
Islamic times roughly meant ‘practical intelligence’ displayed by man
in ever-changing situations. This corresponds to what is called
in modern psychology the problem-solving capacity. A man with ‘aql
was a man who, in whatever unexpected situations he was put, could
find by himself some means of solving the problems arising from the
new conditions and find a way out of the danger. Practical intel-
ligence of this kind was greatly admired and highly estimated by
the pre-Islamic Arabs. And no wonder, for otherwise it would have been
impossible to live safely in desert conditions. The famous robber-poet
al-Shanfarī uses this word exactly in this sense in the following verse
in which he boasts of his being naturally endowed with such practical
intelligence:

As long as a man keeps his intelligence active (wa-hawa ya’qūlu) there


in the Qur’ān this word, as a key-term, acquires a more

specified religious meaning. There, in contexts of decisive im-

portance, it is used to mean the intellectual and spiritual capacity of

the human mind, which enables man to understand the ‘signs’ (dīwān)

that God graciously shows to the mankind and to grasp their deep

religious implications.

Making reference, for example, to the rain which God “sends
down from heaven” so that it might give life again to the earth after
its temporary death, it is said:

Verily wherein indeed are signs (dīwān) for people who keep their

‘aql active (ya’qūlūna, verbal form corresponding to the noun

‘aql).

Al-Rūm, 30:23 [24]

Likewise, referring to one of the ancient Cities that were

destroyed by Divine wrath which their inhabitants incurred upon
themselves by their wrongdoings:

Here the mouldering ruins of an ancient city are interpreted as

“a clear sign” of the lash of Divine wrath, a grave warning to those

who refuse to believe in God. Similar examples abound in the

Qur’ān.

The same word ‘aql comes into Islamic philosophy, again as one
of its key-terms. But its semantic content, that is, the structure of the concept symbolized by the word is no longer the same, because the whole underlying world-view is entirely different, being something essentially foreign to the traditional Arab one. Whenever we come across this word actually used in Islamic philosophy as a technical term, we are strictly required to understand it, not in terms of the original meaning which it carried before the rise of philosophy as a genuine, Arabic word, whether in Jāhilīyyah or in the Qur’an, but in terms of the Greek concept of nous in its Aristotelian and neo-Platonic sense. This is not in any way a natural development of the pure Arabic concept of ‘aql, but something artificial. At least initially, it was artificial.

The same old word ‘aql is still used, as if nothing changed. In reality, it has undergone a remarkable change, for the word has been made ‘transparent’, as it were; we are required to “see through it, and to read the Greek word nous behind it. Just as in modern times we have to read behind the Arabic word shuyū’iyyah the European word ‘communism’, and behind qaumiyah (nationalism), so here, too, the Arabic word ‘aql must be understood in accordance with the meaning structure of the Greek word nous, which it has acquired in classical and Hellenistic philosophy. The word has now a very particular meaning of ‘intellect’ on a grand cosmic scale covering all the successive stages of Emanation, from the Universal Intellect which is the first emanation from the Divine essence down to the human intellect and reason.

Let it be noticed, however, that this word, as a genuine Arabic word, carries its own long history on its back, and this weighty past cannot help making itself felt, to a certain extent at least, whenever the word is used, even in philosophy. This proves a hindrance to its acquiring complete transparency. Hence the very peculiar state of semi-transparency of this kind of words. And it is characteristic of Islamic philosophy that almost all its key-terms are of this type. Semantically, Islamic philosophy is a very curious system consisting of ‘semi-transparent’ words.

The reason why I would call this type of word ‘semi-transparent’ will be made much clearer if we compare words like qaumiyah, ‘nationalism’ (from qaum, ‘people’ or ‘nation’) and wad’iyyah, ‘positivism’ (from wad’, ‘putting’) in modern Arabic with such words as dimāqratiyyah (democracy) and telefān (telephone). The latter words are completely transparent; Western words are there palpably in the most naked form, while words like qaumiyah and wad’iyyah mean what they mean only through the intermediacy of genuine Arabic words, each one of which has its own proper meaning and history in Arabic language. The word wad’iyyah, for instance, would mean literally ‘positing-ism’ because wad’ means ‘putting’ or ‘positing’, and this much of literal meaning functions as a semantic bridge between the two words, i.e., wad’iyyah and ‘positivism’; the point is that, through this middle term, one should be led to the Western concept itself of ‘positivism’ in a flash, passing over the bridge as lightly as possible.

In this respect, the contrast, again in modern Arabic, between telefān and hātīf, both meaning ‘telephone’, is very interesting and illuminating. Or as we have just seen, completely ‘transparent’, being nothing but an arabized form of the word ‘telephone’ itself, and the other is obviously ‘semi-transparent’. ‘Semi-transparent’ here means that the word has its own long history behind in the Arabic language and that this heavy history still tends to make itself felt whenever the word is used. Hātīf in classical Arabic means “somebody whose voice you hear but whom you do not see anywhere around”. In this we find the word often used in old Sufi literature in reference to some mysterious voice calling a future mystic from somewhere in heaven, urging him to renounce the worldly pleasures and turn to other-worldliness. The existence of such a weighty past naturally offers a serious obstacle to the word’s becoming a simple sign of a new idea introduced from the West only recently. Compared with its rival telefān, which is ‘transparent’ from the very outset, hātīf finds itself in a very difficult situation because it has to overcome the obstacle before it can become a perfect Arabic equivalent of the word ‘telephone’.32

The problem that concerns us next is that of the degree of semi-transparency. ‘Aql which we have treated above is a typical example of the case in which semi-transparency was achieved in an ideal way. But in many other cases the semi-transparency was not achieved so easily. The word ‘aql as an Arabic equivalent of the Greek nous did not present any serious problem to the philosophers because the basic meaning was roughly the same in both languages. Sometimes it so happened that the Muslim thinkers—or to be more exact, the first translators from Greek to Arabic—starting from a given Greek
concept, did not find easily a word, within the Arabic vocabulary, with a basic meaning which would make it an appropriate equivalent of the Greek word; the concept of Being is an example in point, to take by far the most important of all.

As everybody knows Greek philosophy from its very beginning till its end was consistently and predominantly concerned with the problem of being and existence. In other words, ontology was the central preoccupation of the Greek thinkers. Consequently the concept of being occupied the most important place in their philosophical thinking. This is particularly conspicuous in Aristotle, who was admittedly the greatest teacher of the Arabs in this matter.

The Arabs, on the other hand, had traditionally shown no concern at all with such a problem particularly at such an abstract level of thinking. Certainly, even a Jahili Arab knew that things did exist, including himself, his camels, and other people around him, but he had never made the ‘existence’ itself of such things a particular subject for reflection. Being a matter of no concern, there was no corresponding concept, and there being no concept, there was no word to express it.

Speaking in more general terms, we may say that the Arabs as a whole were a least metaphysical people. The general and the universal did not attract their attention. Their dominant—and almost exclusive—concern was with individual, concrete things, or rather, the concrete aspects of the concrete things. The ancient Arabs seem to have taken an infinite delight in scrutinizing with a most penetrating eye details after details of the concrete things that they saw around them. Hence the astonishing richness of the Arabic vocabulary expressing all the observable aspects of all the concrete things. But they, to all appearance, were lacking in the genius of going in the opposite direction, i.e., that of going up step by step from the most concrete individual things and their concrete material aspects to general and abstract ideas tracing the logical lines of connection between individual things and abstract ideas. They were fundamentally ‘particularists’ in this sense.

Here I cannot resist the temptation to quote a few lines from the Fajr al-Islām (“Dawn of Islam”) by the late Prof. Ahmad Amīn of Cairo. In chapter IV of this remarkable book, dealing with the problem of “The Intellectual Life of the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times”, he writes as follows:

The Arabs did not look at the world with a general comprehensive view, as did the Greeks, for example, the latter, when they began to philosophize, encompassed the whole world of being with a general view and put to themselves questions like the following: How did this world come into existence? The world as I see it is full of changes and alterations; is not there behind all these changing things one unchangeable principle?... The whole world as I see it looks like something essentially one, all the parts of which are connected, with each other, and which, as a whole, seems to be following some immutable laws; What, then, is this order? How and from what did it originate?

These and other similar questions the Greeks put to themselves, and that was the origin of their philosophical thinking, the very basis of which was thus a comprehensive view of the world. The Arabs, in contrast to them, did not look in this direction, and that even after the advent of Islam. They looked around themselves, and if by chance the eye caught some particularly interesting sight, they got excited and the surging emotions would find an outlet for expression in verses or proverbial sentences...

As to a comprehensive view and a careful analysis of the principles and properties of the things that excited such emotions their intellect (‘aqīl) found them quite foreign to itself. Moreover, even when an Arab did look at a thing, it did not usually induce in his mind a deep reflection on the object; on the contrary, he would merely stop at this or that particular aspect which seemed of his interest. When, for instance, he stood in front of a tree, he would not view it in its entirety: he would only fix his sight upon some particular point of it, the straightness of its trunk, for example, the beauty of its branches, etc. Standing in front of a garden, he would not try to get an extensive of the whole of it, nor would his mind try to have a photographic grasp of it. His mind would rather be like a bee flying from flower to flower, taking sip from every flower.

It is this peculiarity of the Arab mind that explains both the defect and beauty that you find in Arabic literature, even in that of the later Islamic ages.

... In short, the Greek mind if it looks at something, looks at it as a whole, examines it, and analyzes it while the Arab mind goes around it, and discovers there beautiful pearls of various kinds, which however are not strung together into a necklace.

As is easy to see, people of this type make first-rate lyrical poets, but are not good by nature for philosophy. This implies also
that their language will be at its best in lyrical poetry, and at its worst in ratiocinative philosophy, for its vocabulary, if left to itself in its natural state, would not develop abstract concepts that are indispensable for metaphorical thinking.

The concept of Being was one of the most important abstractions that were lacking in the vocabulary of the Arabs—the abstract concept of *to einai* which was a haunting obsession of the Greek philosophical mind. When it came into the Islamic world, and the thinkers really felt themselves forced to look for a word in the Arabic language that might stand appropriately for this concept, two words offered themselves.\(^{34}\)

One of them was the verb *kāna* (*kawn*). But this was far from being the exact equivalent of the Greek abstract concept of Being, for the verb meant basically “to take place” or “come to pass”. There is, in other words, an important element of ‘becoming’ in the meaning structure of this word: not pure ‘being’ but ‘being’ as something that is born and then goes on growing or changing in course of time: *werden* instead of *sein*, the Germans would say.

So quite naturally the word ends in Islamic philosophy by becoming rather the Arabic translation of another Greek word *genesis* which was used by Aristotle as an important technical term of his ontology, to designate the concept ‘coming into being’, i.e., the dynamic process of ‘becoming’ rather than the static idea of ‘being’ pure and simple.

Another candidate was the root *WJD*, with the basic sense of ‘finding’. This root-meaning, particularly when taken in the passive sense ‘to be found’ (*wujîda*), comes tolerably near to the meaning of *to einai*. At least it excludes connotation of ‘becoming’ or ‘coming into being’; moreover it conveys the sense of something being there by chance: in other words, of something being there simply existent, without its being necessary to be there. This last element, which in philosophical terminology is called ‘contingency’ is something essential in the conceptual structure of ‘being’ and ‘existence’, except of course in the only one case of the ‘Necessary Being’ (*wajib al-wujâd*).

In this way the word *wujûd* with the understanding that one should take it in the passive sense of ‘being found’ came gradually to be established as the Arabic equivalent of *to einai*.

However one cannot help feeling that something foreign and strange had been forced here upon the Arabic language from outside, and in fact the word *wujûd* in this philosophical sense remained for a long time outside the common Arabic usage. This we can see from the causal remarks made by al-Ghazâlî in his *Maqâsid al-Falâsifah*\(^{35}\) to the effect that “it often happens to be difficult to make the word *wujûd* understood in the strictly philosophical sense so that it is necessary and desirable from time to time to use a foreign word if the philosophers want to make themselves quite clear”.

And we see also Ibn Rushd (Averroes) hesitant to use this word without reserve, for, as he says, it often misleads the readers. The passive participle of the same verb *mawjûd* is used in Islamic philosophy as the Arabic equivalent of the Aristotelian *to on* (Latin *ens*): i.e., ‘being’ in the sense of “something that exists” or an “individual substance”. But, according to Ibn Rushd, many people, instead of making the Arabic word *mawjûd* semantically semitransparent and reading directly the Greek concept *to on* behind it, as they should do, make the word *mawjûd* opaque, so to speak, and tend to understand it in the sense of “something found”, which is, really, the basic meaning of this word in Arabic. That is why, he says, the new abstract noun *huwwa*, lit. ‘he-ness’ or ‘it-ness’ has been coined, from the pronoun *huwa* (*he*), as a more accurate equivalent for the Aristotelian subject-substance, i.e., individual substances.\(^{36}\)

It will have been seen from what precedes that a comprehensive and systematic re-examination of the history of Islamic philosophy from the particular point of view of semantics is something that will richly repay the effort. Such a study will not only bring to light a great many interesting points regarding the details of semantic transformation which individual concepts underwent; it will, further, contribute much towards letting semantics advance as a cultural science, i.e., as a really productive tool for research in the scientific analysis of *weltanschauung*. This, however, is mentioned here only as a possible future task. It is not necessary—nor is it possible at all—for present purposes to go into any more details. What I wanted to do in the last section of this chapter was simply to show, first, that there can be theoretically such a thing as ‘diachronic’ semantics which differs in its fundamental attitudes from ‘synchronic’ semantics, but is, at the same time, intimately connected with the latter, and, secondly, by way of illustration, how Islamic philosophy, as a conceptual system, had to take great pains in developing its own
vocabulary within the confines of Arabic vocabulary, under the immediate and overwhelming influence of an entirely foreign conceptual system.

Let us now turn to our proper subject: the problem of the structure of the Qur'anic weltanschauung.

Notes

1. This is the main reason why it is so difficult to compile a good dictionary of present-day Turkish.

2. There is a certain respect in which Prof. Montgomery Watt's works, Muhammad at Mecca, Oxford, 1953 and Muhammad at Medina, Oxford, 1956, may be rightly regarded as a comprehensive study of this phenomenon. As one of the most interesting examples we may mention the very problematic word tazakāt, which he discusses from the philological point of view in Muhammad at Mecca (Excursus D). He shows there how this word representing the important religious concept of 'self-purification' or 'being purified' falls off gradually and fades out in course of time before another more important word Islām meaning 'self-surrendering'.

3. Regarding the significance of this particular vocabulary in the formation of the Qur'anic language, see, for instance, C. C. Torrey, The Commercial-Theological Terms of the Qur'an, Leiden, 1892.

4. We must remember that Madinah at that time was one of the biggest centre of Judaism.

5. As regards Hanifs and their language, see later Chapter 4, section V.

6. Except, of course, in the narrower section of the Judeo-Christian monotheistic ideas. But evidently the Jews and Christians are not in any way representative of the pre-Islamic Arabia. They are, after all, a local phenomenon, linguistically at least.

7. In the diagram A, the central area surrounding the word Allāh represents a semantic field consisting of words which stand for various concepts used in the Qur'anic description of what Allah 'does' and 'is'. This is what will develop later in Islamic theology into what is known under the name of 'Divine attributes' (ṣiṭāt Allāh).

8. For a detailed consideration of the relation between the purely Jāhilī conception of Allah and the Judeo-Christian one, and the influence which the latter might have exercised upon the former before the name

of Allāh came into the Islamic system, See Chapter 4, which is exclusively devoted to this very problem.

9. See Chapter 9, section II.

10. Diwan al-Hamāṣah (sharh al-Marzūqī), ed. Ahmad Amān and 'Abd al-Salām Hārūn 4 vols., Cairo, 1951, Number DCCXLVI, 2, the name of the poet unknown.

11. See for example, 57:57; 2:263-264 [261-262];


13. This point has been brought out admirably well by Dr. Daud Rabbar in his book, God of Justice, Leiden, 1960. See particularly its introductory chapter.

14. Theologically, this is the famous problem of 'Beautific Vision', which has been much discussed by the theologians in Islam.

15. Hence the paramount importance attached in the Qur'an to the concept of āyāt. A passing reference to this point has already been made above, but the problem will be dealt with more systematically in a later context (Chapter 6).

16. The distinction may be brought out by saying that we know about God, but we do not know God. In the terminology of Bertrand Russel, 'ilm is 'knowledge by inference' as opposed to and distinguished from 'knowledge by acquaintance'.

17. Goldziher's study, Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung, Leiden, 1920, may regarded as a good introduction to this problem.

18. Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī (or al-Ghazzālī), 1059-1111. His Tahāfut al-Falāṣīfah, known in the West as Destructio Philosophorum is a systematic refutation of Islamic philosophy represented by Avicenna (Ibn Sinā, 980-1037). Besides, his argumentation in this book is principally based on a conceptual analysis. And many passages of it may be adduced, as they are, even as an illustration of the analytic technique of modern semantics.

19. Or, "We have become Muslims (formally)''.

20. The Qur'anic connotation of mu'imin, according to the definition given by the Qur'an itself, is this: a man who has an unwavering faith (īmān) in God and His Apostle, never conceives doubt, and is ready to stake his wealth and life for the cause of God (cf. 49:15). The connotation of muslim is: he who has surrendered his whole being, soul and body, to God, and to God alone, absolutely (cf. 2:122 [128]; 125 [131]).


22. Sahīh al-Tirmidhī, Cairo, 1950, II, 157. The hadīth here quoted is to all appearance spurious, but this gives a better ground for regarding it
23. Thereby is meant the particular kind of knowledge that can be traced back by an unbroken chain of truthful transmitters to the Prophet or his immediate companions.
26. This is an extremely important passage disclosing as it does to our eyes the dark pessimistic mood which underlied the weltanschauung of the pre-Islamic Arabs, and which drove many of them, particularly, the more reflective minds, to a notoriously riotous and dissolute life (cf. The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran, chapter V). This passage shows that, from the Qur'anic point of view, the pre-Islamic pessimism is nothing but a result of zann, and is, therefore, completely groundless.
27. aḥwād pl. of hawā.
28. See his famous Risālah, Cairo, 1940, ed. Ahmad Shākir, for instance. The entire book may be taken as a clear manifestation of such an attitude towards this problem.
29. The problem is not only of historical interest. It is also of contemporary relevance, because present-day Arabic is again faced with a big problem of a similar nature under the impact of Western culture, namely, the pressing need of assimilating the key-concepts of the West and creating a new vocabulary out of old material, a vocabulary that will be rich enough and flexible enough to cope with the new situation of the world, and that without overstraining the natural morphological and lexicological resources of this language. In fact, all the non-Western nations are faced with the same problem. And the problem is, extremely important because it is not a mere matter of language, but a matter of weltanschauung, namely, the question of how we should articulate and interpret the world we live in. It is, in this sense, a big problem that involves grave cultural issues.
31. See chapter 6, section I.
32. As a matter of fact, the word hātīf has succeeded in making itself ‘semi-transparent’ in Syria and Lebanon, where it is currently used in daily life, but not in Egypt. As regards the more general problem of the arabization of the Western present-day Egypt, we have an extremely valuable book by Mr. Mahmūd Tāwīr, *Mu‘jam al-Hadārah (Lexicon of Modern Culture)*, Cairo, where almost all the names of things and ideas belonging to modern civilization that have recently been introduced into Arab world are classified and examined critically one by one by one.
33. Ahmad Amīn, Fajr al-Islām, Cairo, 1955, p. 41-44.
34. See the most lucid exposition of this problem by Mlle. Goichon in her *Philosophie d’Avicenne*, Paris, 1951, chap. II, to which I am greatly indebted in what follows.
36. Goichon, op. cit. p. 78.
CHAPTER 3
The Basic Structure of the Qur’anic Weltanschauung

I. Preliminary Remark

This chapter aims at giving a bare outline of the basic structure of the Qur’anic weltanschauung as a preliminary to a more detailed analysis of some of the most important semantic fields that will come in the remaining chapters. Such a total picture is indispensable if we want to be in a position to assign the appropriate places to the particular problems that are going to occupy us; regarding the relation between God and man in the Qur’an. For, as we know already, the proper position of each individual conceptual field, whether large or small, will be determined in a definite way only in terms of the multiple relations all the major fields bear to each other within the total gestalt.

Furthermore, there is a more immediate reason why we should begin our work by trying to obtain a general view of the conceptual scheme of the Qur’anic weltanschauung. As will have been made abundantly clear in the preceding two chapters, the semantical analysis of the Qur’an, in the sense in which we understand it in this book, does not mean a lexicographical treatment of the whole Qur’anic vocabulary, i.e., a study of all the words that happen to be there in the Qur’an, but it means an analytic and systematic study of only the most important words that seem to play a decisive role in characterizing the dominant note1 that runs through, permeates and dominates the whole Qur’anic thought. Only the important words of this kind, i.e., the key-words, determine the character of the whole system. But in order to be able to measure the importance of the words and distinguish what is relatively more important from what is relatively unimportant in this particular sense, we must have beforehand a general schematic picture of the whole thing. Otherwise, we would simply end by losing ourselves in the minutiae.

For the purpose of isolating the fundamental conceptual framework of the Qur’an as a whole, the first requirement is that we should try to read the Book without any preconception. We must, in other words, try not to read into it thoughts that have been developed and elaborated by the Muslim thinkers of the post-Qur’anic ages in their effort to understand and interpret their Sacred Book each according to his particular position. We must try to grasp the structure of the Qur’anic world conception in its original form, that is, as it was read and understood by the Prophet’s contemporaries and his immediate followers. Strictly speaking, this must always remain an unattainable ideal, and yet at least we should do our best to approach this ideal even a step nearer.

Now in reading the Qur’an for this purpose, and as a semanticist, the first and overwhelming impression I get is that this is a large multi-strata system standing on a number of basic conceptual oppositions, each one of which constitutes a specific semantic field. Speaking in terms less semantical, I would say that I get the impression that here I am in a world over which reigns an intense atmosphere of spiritual strain and tension. What is before our eyes is surely not a plain, objective description of what has happened, what is happening and what will happen. This is not a world of calm peaceful description.

On the contrary, we feel that there is some intense spiritual drama going on. And a ‘drama’ always occurs only where there is a dynamic opposition between the principal actors. This is a complicated system of oppositions that are formed, each one of them, by two poles that stand facing each other. The pole is indicated, semantically, by what we have called a ‘focus-word’. In short, from the semantical point of view, the Qur’anic weltanschauung is capable to be represented as a system built on the principle of conceptual opposition.
II. God and Man

The first and most important ‘opposition’ in this sense is constituted by the fundamental relation between God and man, Allāh and insān. Needles to say, Allah, according to the Qur’ān, is not only the supreme but also the Only Being worthy to be called ‘being’ in the full sense of the word—Reality with a capital letter—to which nothing in the whole world can be opposed. Ontologically, the Qur’ānic world is most evidently theocentric, as I have said more than once. God stands in the very centre of the world of being, and all other things, human or non-human, are His creatures and are as such infinitely inferior to Him in the hierarchy of being. There can be, in this sense, nothing that would stand opposed to Him. And this is precisely what was meant when it was said above that, semantically, Allah is the highest focus-word in the vocabulary of the Qur’ān, presiding over all the semantic fields and, consequently, the entire system.

There is, however, a certain respect in which we might feel ourselves justified in putting the concept of ‘man’ (insān) at the opposite pole from God. For among all these created things ‘man’ is the one which is attached so great an importance in the Qur’ān that it attracts at least the same amount of our attention as God. Man, his nature, conduct, psychology, duties and destiny are, in fact as much the central preoccupation of the Qur’ānic thought as the problem of God Himself. What God is, says and docs, becomes a problem chiefly, if not exclusively, in connection with the problem with how man reacts to it. The Qur’ānic thought as a whole is concerned with the problem of the salvation of human beings. If it were not for this problem, the Book would not have been “sent down”, as the Qur’ān itself explicitly and repeatedly emphasizes. And in this particular sense, the concept of man is important to such a degree that it forms the second major pole standing face to face with the principal pole, that is, the concept of Allah.

And this basic confrontation of the two major poles with each other constitutes the most important conceptual opposition in the Qur’ān that, together with the others, goes to create that intense dynamic and dramatic atmosphere of spiritual tension which, as I have just said, characterizes the Qur’ānic weltanschauung.

Thus, the world of the Qur’ān may be visualized as a circle with two principal points of reference upon it, opposed to each other, one from above, the other from below (Diagram). And this circle would symbolize the world of Being as the main stage on which all human dramas are enacted.

Jahiliyyah did not know such a circle. The world-view of Jahiliyyah was homocentric. There, man was the sole conceptual pole to which no other basic pole stood in fundamental opposition. Man, his destiny on earth, his position in the tribe to which he belonged, the relation of his tribe to other tribes, his virtues which were essentially tribal in nature, these were the major problems of a Īhili man. Of course he recognized the existence of unseen powers superior to himself in the scale of being, ranging from Allah to Jinn, but these occupied, after all, a narrow, limited section of the world of his concern; they were not so important as to constitute an independent major conceptual principle which would divide this world with ‘man’ into two halves. There was, consequently, no atmosphere of spiritual tension running through the whole world of being as a Īhili man conceived it.

Now in the new world of Islam, the dramatic and spiritual tension to which I have just referred is caused, semantically speaking, by a particular relation between the two major conceptual poles, i.e., God and man. This relation is neither simple nor unilateral; it is a multiple and bilateral, that is, reciprocal relationship.

This complex relationship may conceptually be analyzed in terms of four major kinds of relation between God and man. In other words, the Qur’ānic ‘divina commedia’ is enacted on the main stage to which reference has just been made in the form of four different types of relation between Allāh and insān.

1. Ontological relation: between God as the ultimate source of
human existence and man as the representative of the world of being which owes its very existence to God. In more theological terms, the Creator-creature relation between God and man.

II. Communicative relation: here, God and man are brought into close correlation with each other—God, of course, taking the initiative—through mutual communication.

Two different ways of communication are to be distinguished: (1) verbal type and (2) non-verbal type. The verbal type of communication from above to below is Revelation (wahy) in the narrow and technical sense, while from below to above, it takes the form of ‘prayer’ (du‘ā’).

The non-verbal type of communication from above to below is the Divine act of the sending down (tanzīl) of the ‘signs’ (āyāt). From below to above, the communication takes the form of ritual worship (salāt), or more generally, cult practices.

III. Lord-servant relation: this relation involves, on the part of God, as the Lord (rābb), all concepts relating to His majesty, sovereignty, absolute power, on the part of man as His ‘servant’ (‘abd) a whole set of concepts humbleness, modesty, absolute obedience, and other properties that demanded of a servant. This human part of the relation has a negative correlative that consists of the concepts implying haughtiness, arrogance, self-sufficiency and other similar qualities that are comprised in, and associated with the word Jāhiliyyah.

IV. Ethical relation: this is based on the most basic contrast between two different aspects that are distinguishable in the very concept of God, God of infinite goodness, mercy, forgiveness and benevolence on one hand, and on the other, God of wrath, and severe, strict and unrelenting justice. Correspondingly, there occurs, on the human side, the basic contrast between ‘thankfulness’ (shukr) on the one hand, and the ‘god-fearing’, attitude (taqwā), on the other. As we have seen above, shukr, and taqwā together form one category and this last makes a sharp contrast with kufr both in the sense of ‘unthankfulness’ and in that of ‘disbelief’.

III. The Muslim Community

These basic relations once established between God and man, they give birth, midst of mankind at large, to a particular group of men who acknowledge them and choose the positive side of the matter as the basis of their outlook on life and existence. What I call here ‘positive’ response consists as regards the first ontological relation, in their acknowledging God as their Creator, i.e., One who has conferred upon man as an extraordinary favour his very existence and being, and, having given him life, takes care of his destiny. In regard to the second relation, that of communication, it consists in man’s responding willingly and wholeheartedly to the divine call and following its guidance to the way of salvation. In regard to the third Lord-servant relation, the positive response means that man throws away from himself all the remants of his former Jāhiliyyah and behaves to God, his Master, as truly befits a slave. Lastly, in regard to the ethical relation, it means that he shows ‘thankfulness’ to God’s favors and—which is in reality nothing but the reverse side of the same thing—to fear seriously the divine chastisement.

These people form in the nature of the case a compact group, a religious community. This is the concept of ‘community’ (ummah), or to be exact, ummah muslimah which originally meant a “community of people who have surrendered (themselves to God)” but ended by acquiring the meaning of the “Muslim community”—to which the Prophet in the Hadīth constantly refers by calling it umma‘īf (“my community”).

The importance of this concept cannot be too much emphasized. Its birth marked really a decisive moment in the history of Islam. Hitherto in Arabia, the principle of social and political organization had been of an essentially tribal nature. The point needs no laboring because it has been studied so much by so many different authors. In short, blood-kinship had been the most decisive element in the Jāhili Arab conception of social unity. Against this time-honored conception, the Qur’an developed a new idea of social unity based no longer on kinship, but on a common religious belief.

The establishment of this new concept of ‘religious community’ caused naturally a great disturbance in the structure of the semantic field of ‘society’. First of all, it created a sharp conflict between the concept of the Islamic ummah and that of those who definitely and
openly refused to come into this community, i.e., kuffār, the Kāfirs, the latter category including within it as a subdivision the smaller category of munāṣṣīqūn (hypocrites), who pretended outwardly to belong in the Muslim community, but, in reality, remained in the other camp.\(^5\)

But there was a far more delicate problem there. The concept of ummah once established in Islam, the Muslims found that there were around them all other ‘religious communities’ which had already been long existent when Islam arose, like Jews, Christians, Sabians, and Zoroastrians. The Qur’an calls these as a whole “the People of Scripture” (ahl al-kitāb), meaning those who possess a Scripture, those nations to whom, in each case, a Prophet has been sent, who has brought them a book of Revelation.

Looking back from this standpoint, the Qur’an divides the whole mankind before the advent of Islam into two major categories: (1) the People of Scripture and (2) those to whom the Book has not been given, people with no Scripture (ummiyyūn). And these two categories are sharply opposed to each other. The opposition is clearly mentioned in several verses; for example:

\[
\text{And say to both those to whom the Book has been given and the ummiyyūn...} \quad \text{(Ali 'Imrān, 3:19 [20]),} \]

the context itself makes it clear that, in this verse, “those to whom the Book has been given” refers to the Jews and the Christians, while by ummiyyūn the idolatrous Arabs are meant.

It is important to notice that the pagan Arabs, before the advent of Islam are called here, as in many other places, ummiyyūn (“non-Scripture people”). Properly speaking, they are not yet Kāfirs (kuffār or kāfirūn), because as yet they have never been admonished to open their eyes to the marvelous work of God. Real Kāfirs are those who consciously show the most determined opposition to the Divine scheme, after the Revelation has made the truth clear to them. The Prophet himself was a pagan, an erring man\(^6\) (dāllī), before he began to receive Revelation.

Be this as it may, the fact that in the Qur’ānic thought the concept of ummiyyūn is most closely related with (1) that of kitāb (the Book)—that is, in short, Revelation—and (2) that of rasūl (the Messenger) who is charged with the task of transmitting the Book to his people, and (3) the idea that the people before Revelation are in the state of dalāl (errring), is shown by the following verse:

\[
\text{He it is who has sent among the ummiyyūn a Messenger (rasūl) from among them, so that he might recite His revelations to them, purify them, and teach them the Book (kitāb) and the Wisdom, while heretofore they were clearly in error (dalāl).} \]

All this would seem to imply an extremely important thing, namely, that, according to the Qur’an, the Arabs, who had been one of the ummī peoples, were raised by the ‘Arabic’ Revelation for the first time in their history to the rank of a People of Scripture. The concept of Islamic ummah is based on this thought. But the idea of the People of Scripture comprises many communities besides that of the Muslims, that are parallel to the latter, particularly the Jewish and Christian communities. And this situation makes it incumbent upon the youngest ummah to define its own position among the whole People of Scripture. Thus the idea is advanced that the Muslims are now “the best ummah ever produced for mankind” and that God has made them “a middle ummah”,\(^6\) meaning thereby probably an ummah that occupies the central position in the whole, away from all the extremes that are represented by other communities within the People of Scripture.

As a matter of fact, the People of Scripture in pre-Islamic times, in the Qur’ānic view, had conspicuously degenerated. Originally they were men of the true religion, who, following their prophets, believed in God and His words. By the time Islam arose, however, they had consciously falsified the truth that had been revealed to them by God, adopting some parts of it that pleased them, and rejecting or concealing others. In short, the original pure religion, which the Qur’an calls the “Hanīfī religion” symbolized by Abraham, the monotheist, hanīf had been corrupted into a kind of disbelief. Islam, according to what the Qur’an itself declares, was a movement for cleaning up these religious scandals with a view to reconstructing the true monotheism in its pure original form.
Thus we see that the relation of the Islamic ummah with the People of Scripture (ahl al-kitāb) is far from being a simple and straightforward one. On the one hand, the Islamic ummah stands closely affiliated with ahl al-kitāb the Jews and Christians in particular, but, on the other, they are opposed to each other with bitter enmity between them. And on the whole, this enmity becomes more and more conspicuous in course of time, and this process is clearly reflected in the history of the Qur'anic thought. In this sense, the conceptual opposition of the Islamic ummah and other People of Scripture is no less sharp than that of the Islamic ummah and the idolatrous Kāfirs. The diagram is intended to show the general situation of mankind, in the Qur'anic world-view, that resulted from the establishment of the Islamic ummah, which, again, was a result of the establishment of the four basic relations between God and the Arabs through Muhammad the Prophet. It is to be remarked that here again the whole system is clearly based on the principle of multiple conceptual opposition.

A = People of Scripture
B = Muslims
C = Hypocrites
D = Kāfirs

In the above diagram, the sector marked B symbolizes the Islamic ummah. It is worth noticing that the inner structure of this ummah as a social organization based on a new conception of society became soon a matter of grave concern to the believers who lived within it. This of course was a phenomenon peculiar to the period that followed the Hijrah, i.e. the Madīnān period, when the ummah first came into being. As everybody knows, the Islamic community, once established in Madīnā, grew larger at an astonishing speed and became more and more firmly consolidated in Arabia. This state of affairs is reflected in the Qur'ān itself, and the problem of the inner structure of the Muslim community is dealt with in great detail in the Sūrah s revealed in Madīnā in terms of the concepts of social system. These concepts concern the laws and regulations governing the various human relations within the Islamic community. Unlike most of the Qur'ānic key-terms that have to do with relations between God and man, the key-terms of this field express primarily relations between man and man in social life in this world. They constitute a large semantic field of social system. These concepts may be conveniently classified into seven sub-fields: (1) marital relations comprising concepts that relate to marriage, divorce, adultery and fornication; (2) parents-child relations, comprising the duties of parents towards children, and the duties of children towards their parents, and regulations concerning adoption; (3) laws of inheritance; (4) criminal laws concerning particularly murder, theft, and retaliation; (5) commercial relations comprising concepts of contract, debt, usury, bribery, and justice in commercial dealings; (6) laws concerning charity, i.e., alms, legal and voluntary; (7) laws concerning slaves.

As is obvious, this vast network of words signifying various human relations within the closed community of Islam is destined to develop later into a grand-scale system of Islamic jurisprudence. And we could perhaps find the best place for discussing the key-concepts of this field when we come down, from the Qur'ānic stage to the semantics of the vocabulary of Islamic Law, because there in the major systems of Law we find all of these concepts minutely analyzed by the Muslim thinkers themselves in a methodological way which is not so far removed from our semantical analysis.¹⁰

IV. The Unseen and the Visible

The Qur'ānic view divides the present world in which man lives into two halves: “the Domain of the Unseen” (ʿālam al-ghayb) and “the Domain of the Visible” (ʿālam al-shahādah). This is the second major conceptual opposition discernible in the world-view of the Qur'ān. And these are the two basic forms of the whole world of being, which is nothing but the main stage on which the aforesaid divina
commedia is enacted.

Of these two, only the visible part is at man’s disposal, while God reigns over both of them, as we are told, for example, in Sūrah al-Zumar:

َقَلْ نَظَرَ النَّزْلَةَ وَالْأَرْضِ عَالِمَ الْغَيْبِ وَالسُّمَاعِ

Say: O Allah! Thou creator of the heavens and the earth! Thou who knowest the Unseen (al-ghayb) and the Visible (al-shahadah)!

Al-Zumar, 39:47 [46]

It is to be remarked that this distinction itself is meaningful only in reference to the basic epistemological capacity of the human mind. It is, in other words, a distinction made purely from the human point of view, for, from the standpoint of God, there can be no ghayb at all. He is omniscient, as the Qur’an declares so categorically and so repeatedly. “Allah encompasses everything in knowledge”. Thus, to take a typical example regarding the knowledge of the Hour (al-sā‘ah), i.e., the knowledge as to when exactly the Day of Judgment would come, which was one of the paramount problems of the day for both the Muslims and the Kāfirūn, they were told that Allah alone knew ‘when’, and no one else in the world, not even the Prophet himself.

Men will ask thee about the Hour. Answer: “The knowledge of it is with Allah”. What can make thee know? It may be that the Hour is nigh.

Al-Ahzāb, 33:63

When asked such a grave question concerning the ghayb, the Prophet should answer only in the following way:

لا أُرِي أُرِي إِلَّا مَا تُوعَدُنَّ مَعَهُ فَيُنْسِلُهُ رَبُّكَ أَمَامًا عَالِمُ عَالِمَةَ مَعَهُ

He tries to discern with his eyes what is hidden in the invisible (i.e. in a place which he is unable to see through), compressing tight his eyelids, and his eyesight confirms what his ears have heard.

The same word is often used in the sense of “what is hidden in the heart”, “what is kept secret in the heart”. For example, al-Hutay’ah says:

لَا مَا بَنَّيْتَ لِمَّا كُنْتَ غَيْبَ الْمَسِيمَٰكَ...

“Well at last the real sentiment which had been kept secret in your heart became disclosed to me...”, meaning thereby the hidden
hatred towards him.

But there seems to be no trace in pre-Islamic heathenism of the word’s having been used in a religious sense. The same is true of its positive counterpart, shahadah, the basic meaning of which is “to be present in one’s own person at an event, and be witnessing what actually happens”.

V. The Present World and the Hereafter

From an entirely different point of view, this world as man actually experiences it and lives in it is, as a whole, called al-dunyā, lit. ‘the Lower’ or ‘the Nearer’ world. The Qur’an mostly uses the phrase al-hayāt al-dunyā (‘the lower life’) in place of the simple word al-dunyā. The denotatum of this word in the Qur’an is the same world of being and existence which we have symbolized above by a circle with ‘God’ and ‘man’ as two points of reference. In other terms, it denotes the same main stage of the divina comedia on which God and man come into contact with each other in the four major types of relation as distinguished above. Only, the angle from which it is viewed is now quite different from the preceding one.

To understand this point it will be enough to notice that the word al-dunyā belongs to a particular category of words, which we might call ‘correlation’ words, that is, those words that stand for correlated concepts, like ‘husband’ and ‘wife’, ‘brother’ and ‘sister’, etc.: each member of the pair presupposes the other semantically and stands on the very basis of this correlation. A man can be a ‘husband’ only in reference to ‘wife’. The concept of ‘husband’, in other words, implicitly contains that of ‘wife’, and vice versa. In just the same way, the concept of al-dunyā presupposes the concept of the ‘world to come’, i.e., the ‘Hereafter’ (al-akhirah), and stands in contrast to it. And the Qur’an is very conscious of this correlation whenever it uses either of the two words, not to speak of those frequent cases where both are mentioned together in the same breath, as, for example, in the following verse:

```
فَوَيَبْنُونَ عَرْضَ الْدُّنْيَا وَاللّهُ يُبْدِي الْأَخْيَارَ
```

*You desire the ephemeral goods of the present world (al-dunyā),

while God desires (for you) the Hereafter (al-akhirah).

*Al-Anfāl, 8:68 [67]*

The word al-dunyā occurs frequently, in pre-Islamic literature. And this very fact would seem to suggest that the correlate concept of ākhirah was also known to the pre-Islamic Arabs. The famous authority on pre-Islamic poetry al-Asma’ī (740-828) is often quoted as saying: “the major subject of ’Antarah was habār (war), that of ’Umar b. Abī Rabī’ah was shabāb (youth, always associated with love and the pursuit of sensual pleasures), while the main subject of Ummayyah b. Abī al-Salt was al-akhirah (the Hereafter).”

The fact that here the ‘Hereafter’ is put in close connection with Umayyah b. Abī al-Salt17 would suggest that this concept, and consequently that of al-dunyā, too, were most probably propagated in pre-Islamic Arabia first by Judaism and Christianity. To look on the present world as something ‘lower’ is possible only where there is firmly established the idea of the Other World being far more valuable and important than the present world. Such a view is surely not of the pure Arabian paganism, whose fundamental outlook on human existence may be aptly described as ‘pessimistic hedonism’ stemming from the deep-seated conviction that there can be absolutely nothing after death. This typically Jahilli view of life we find well epitomized in a verse like this:

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لاَّ مِلَامِحُ الرَّحْلِ بِرَبِّي وَيَغْنِي شَرُورُ الْآيَامِ بِالْعُمَوْنَاءِ وَالْعَذَابِ
```

Let us forget reproachful words of the people with cups amid, and cut away the ills of the Day with jest and joy.

It is evident that the disparaging view of the present world, that is, to look on Dunyā as literally dunyā (lower), belongs properly to a spiritual religion. That such a view of Dunyā was very common in the Christian circles in and around Arabia in ancient times may be easily seen by even a cursory inspection of the history of Christian literature in Arabic. Here I will give a typical example.

The famous princess of the Christian Court of al-Hirah, Hurqah, daughter of the last king of this dynasty al-Nu‘mān b. al-Mundhir, and noted for her excellent personality as well as for her poetic talent, is related to have recited a poem which begins with the
following two lines in the presence of the Muslim general Sa'd b. Abi Waqqás, when he defeated the Persians at al-Qādisiyah: 19

The meaning of the verses is somewhat like this: We have been ruling the people with an absolute authority in our hands, when, all of a sudden we find ourselves changed into their subjects who must serve them. Alas, how detestable is the Dunyā in which no happiness lasts for long! The Dunyā tosses us about in its shifts and changes, itself being in perpetual ebb and flow.

However this may be, the word al-dunyā itself seems to have been widely used among the pre-Islamic Arabs even outside the monotheistic circles, although it is extremely doubtful whether any religious value was attached to the concept. In the following verse, for instance, the poet 20 recognizes in the Dunyā something inspiring confidence, worthy to be relied upon, and therefore, positively valuable.

Supply yourself for your journey (viz. of life) with the goods of the Dunyā, for, surely, they are, whatever happens, the best provision for a man preparing for a journey.

There may be in this verse some vague consciousness of the basic correlation between the Dunyā and the Other World still lingering on, but in the next one by 'Antarah there is no longer any trace of such consciousness discernible. 21

From the excess of passionate love, I lower myself to (my beloved) 'Ablah (i.e. I content myself with being a "slave" of 'Ablah), and of all things of the Dunyā I make her the sole concern of mine.

As we have seen above, the Qur’ān re-establishes this conceptual correlation in its original form, and puts afresh these two concepts into direct opposition to each other. And this is the third of the major conceptual oppositions which, as I said, contribute towards creating the intense atmosphere of spiritual tension that characterizes the weltanschauung of the Qur’ān.

As regards the conceptual structure of al-akhirah itself, we should remark that it is also based on the principle of dichotomy, i.e., here again we see a basic opposition of two major concepts: the Garden (al-jannah, pl. al-jannah) and the Hell Fire (al-jahannam). And this determines the general structure of this field. The conception of the Hereafter in this form does not, in the nature of the case, appear very often in pre-Islamic poetry, but it would be too rash to say that it was completely unknown. As a matter of fact, in view of the cultural situation of Arabia in late Jahiliyyah we should rather expect to meet with such a conception among the Arabs. There is one interesting example in 'Antarah's Dīwān. Describing his love-affair with 'Ablah, the poet says:
The bliss of being united with you is a heavenly garden (jannāt) beautifully adorned, while the fire of being separated from you burns out everything, leaving nothing behind.22

It is interesting to note that the poet here compares the unbearable torment of separation to the scorching Fire of Hell that burns to ashes everything that is thrown into it. Although he does not actually use the word jahannam, ‘Hell’ in this verse, the image is palpably there. And this, if the verse is genuine, would be indicative of a strong influence on the pre-Islamic world-view of the Judeo-Christian religious imagery. Besides, such indications are far from being rare in pre-Islamic literature.

In any case, the word itself jahannam occurs in the Dīwān of the same poet. This is rather an exceptional case.

The taste of the water of life in abjection is like Jahannam, while even Jahannam, if only one lives there in glory and power, is an abode sweet and delightful.23

There is a point which is extremely important as regards the position of the concepts of jannah and jahannam. This conceptual pair is not there in the Qur’anic image of the Hereafter simply as something lying far away from this present world. On the contrary, it is most directly and immediately connected the 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 they work directly upon the life of the Dunyā and control it in terms of the eternal ‘Reward’ and ‘Punishment’. The presence of jannah and jahannam must make itself felt in the form of the moral conscience whenever a man does something, whenever a man acts in this world. It is the very source of the moral values. Man, as long as he lives as a member of the Muslim community, is morally demanded to choose always certain ways of acting that are connected with jannah, and to avoid those that are connected with jahannam. This is the very simple and very vigorous principle of moral conduct in this new community.

So here again we meet with that phenomenon of the re-evaluation and reassessment of old concepts in Islam. The concepts themselves of jannah and jahannam might very well have been known to the Jāhili Arabs, but the position they occupied in the Jāhili conceptual system was quite peripheral, so peripheral that they were not even key-terms. In the Qur’an, they are given an entirely different place in an entirely different semantic field. Now they are key-terms of central importance; they represent in clear imagery the good and the bad, and the right and the wrong on this earth as God Himself defines them.

VI. Eschatological Concepts

Between the Dunyā and the Hereafter the Qur’an puts something that acts as a connecting link, something representing the transition stage between the two worlds (The sector E in the diagram). It is a particular group of concepts that we may roughly classify as eschatological concepts: The Last Day, the Day of Judgment, Resurrection, Reckoning and similar ones.

Of all the concepts that fall under this category, the most controversial among the Makkans in the first days of Islam was that of the resurrection of the dead. Many of them responded with sheer denial and scorn to the Qur’anic message of the resurrection connected with the concept of the Judgment of the Last Day. “Who shall quicken the bones when they have rotted off?”—this brief sentence summarizes their attitude toward this conception. For them it was sheer nonsense that they would come to life again in a bodily form long after they had become decayed bones. Often they dismissed the teachings as “old fables” and “nightmare illusions”, if such a thing did happen, they said, it would be “nothing but a magic manifest”.27

This attitude toward the concept of bodily resurrection has
evidently its root and source in the more general and more fundamental world-view of those people to which the Qur'an makes a clear reference in an oft-quoted passage which runs:

\[
\text{في الظلام ما في صدوركم} \\
\text{وهم يحكمون الله} \\
\text{فأخرجوني في يوم الحساب أو يعجل في مرض}
\]

They say: there is nothing but this present life of ours; we die and we live, and it is only Time that destroys us.

Al-Jāthiyah, 45:23 [24]

Such was, indeed, the typical, representative attitude of the Makkans on the problem of resurrection raised by the Qur'an in an uncompromising way. At bottom there is a deep tone of nihilism here; nihilism coming from the keener consciousness that there can be nothing beyond the grave. The same nihilism which, as we have seen, drove the Arabs of the desert to hedonism, manifested itself with the Makkans, under the form of an intense and exclusive concentration on the prosperity in this world. They were, in short, clever able merchants, worldly-minded businessmen who had no wish at all to learn about the future life and the Last Day, because in their eyes there could be no such things. The negative attitude of the Makkans toward the Qur'anic concept of resurrection can easily be understood in terms of this businessman mentality. It was the direct outgrowth of the self-confidence—\( \text{istighn\aa} \), lit. “the thinking of one’s self independent” as the Qur’an calls it—of the prospering merchants.

However, it would be dangerous to generalize it and say that the concept of resurrection was unknown in Jāhiliyyah. There are certain undeniable traces in pre-Islamic poetry of a belief in the Hereafter associated with the idea of the Day of Reckoning beyond the grave. Some of them may quite reasonably be traced back to a Christian or Jewish source. The very famous verses (vv. 27-28) in the Mu'allaqah of Zuhayr b. Abī Sulfā', in which there is an explicit reference to the Heavenly Record (\( \text{kitāb} \)) which registers all evil actions of men for the Day of Reckoning (\( \text{ywm al-hisāb} \)) furnish an outstanding example.

The verses mean literally:

Never try to hide from Allah what is within your breast (i.e. whatever evil thoughts you nourish secretly) so that it might not be disclosed, for whatever is concealed from God, He knows. It (i.e. the Divine punishment) may be deferred and (your evil) set down in the Book and kept for the Day of Reckoning, or it may be accelerated (i.e. be inflicted already in the present world) and vengeance taken; (in any case, you will never be able to escape Divine punishment for any wrong you have done).

A generation or two ago, it was fashionable among the Orientalists to explain away these and other similar verses in pre-Islamic poetry—and the examples are far more numerous than one might expect—as due to interpolation and forgery by later Muslim philologists. We have learnt to be much more cautious this matter.

Instead of emphasizing the occurrence of ideas of this kind in Jāhiliyyah as a strong argument against the authenticity of its literature, we are today inclined to take it rather as a confirmation of the view that the intellectual atmosphere of Arabia in late Jāhiliyyah was not at all purely pagan, but was in general permeated by monotheistic ideas, for, as we shall see in the next chapter, such ideas are clearly presupposed by the Qur’an itself in its refutation of the \( \text{Kāfīrs} \)’ view on Allah.

As regards Zuhayr’s verses just quoted, which, by the way, Ibn Qutaybah in his Book on Poetry and Poets considers an indication that this poet believed in the Resurrection, and which modern scholars have tended to explain away as forgery, I think the truth of the matter becomes clear when we reflect a little on the general situation in which Zuhayr composed this poem.

The tribes to whom Zuhayr addressed these words were, as Charles Lyall\(^\text{28}\) pointed out long ago, living in the midst of people who were well familiar with Christian and Jewish religious ideas. To the west and north were Yathrib, Khaybar and Tayma’, all flourishing Jewish centers, to the north the tribe of Kalb, almost entirely Christian, and Tayyi’ where Christianity was spreading steadily. In such a cultural situation there is nothing strange about the fact that some Biblical ideas appear as important concepts in Zuhayr’s poems.

This, of course, should not be taken to mean that the Arabs before the advent of Islam were, in general and as a whole, already quite familiar with the major religious concepts of Judeo-Christian...
origin. Even those of the Judeo-Christian concepts that were relatively well-known among the pagan Arabs not evidently form the genuine Jāhili Weltanschauung. The notion of Resurrection entertained by the ordinary Arabs of the desert were also presumably a far vaguer and weaker one than that expressed by Zuhayr in the lines we have examined. And yet the presence itself of notions of this kind among them is also difficult to deny. The evidence is not far to seek.

All readers of the Qur’an know that in this Book the idea of the resurrection of the dead body is expressed usually by words like ba’th (verb ba’atha) and nashr (verb anshara). In the Qur’an, we meet with the Kāfirs saying:

"There is only our present life, and we shall never be raised from (mab’ithina from ba’atha)."

Al-An’ām, 6:29

"There is nothing but our first death; we shall never be raised from (munsharina from anshara)."

Al-Dukhān, 44:34 [35]

This negation itself of ba’th and nashr would be unthinkable without supposing that the Kāfirs did possess from the beginning the concepts of ba’th and nashr understood in the sense of the resurrection of the dead. Generally speaking, you can only negate a word when you know what it means. This view is confirmed by a similar usage of these words by pre-Islamic Arabs. For example, al-Shaddākh b. Ya’mar, a Jāhili poet, says:39

The poet is here trying to encourage his tribesmen who are flinching from attacking their powerful enemy, saying that “our enemies are also ordinary like you, who have hair on their heads, and who will never be revived (nashr) once they are killed”. The expression “they will never be revived” would be completely pointless and meaningless if the concept of nashr (resurrection) were unknown.

The word hashr is more characteristic, because it means precisely resurrection on the Day of Judgement. ‘Antārta talks proudly of his glorious fame as a warrior which will last till the time of General Assembly.30 And Salmah al-Ju’ff, a Mukhadram poet, bewailing the death of his brother says:31

I used to suffer something like death from even the separation of one day; can I endure a long separation which comes to an end only by meeting again on the day of resurrection (hashr)?

We may also point out in this connection a very interesting heathen custom, baliyyah as something indicative of the existence in Jāhiliyyah of a belief in resurrection. In the days of Arabian paganism, when a man died, his riding camel was tied up at his grave, her eyes plucked out, her fore-shank bound to the upper arm, and she was left there without food and water till she died. The custom referred to very often in Arabic literature. An example will suffice here.32

Now who will help this miserable fellow, husband of a starving woman, (lean) as a baliyyah-camel, and clad in rags?

According to the explanation given by the Arab authorities of the Abbasid period, the pre-Islamic Arabs kept up this old custom because they believed that the dead man would ride upon his camel thus starved to death by the grave of her master and come to the place of Gathering (mahshar) on the Resurrection Day.

Without giving full credit to this kind of explanation, we may be fairly confident in concluding from what we have seen that the pre-Islamic Arabs had at least a vague notion of Resurrection and the Judgment Day. Only, as in the case of all other major religious concepts, it was not given a definite place in a definite system of concepts. This and similar concepts were simply there, scattered about here and there, with no coherent internal connection between
them. This means that although there were eschatological concepts in Jāhilīyāh, there was no clearly defined and solidly established semantic field of eschatology as a middle field between the Dunyah and the Hereafter. In any society, there are a number of stray concepts having no definite semantic field to belong in. Concepts of this sort, lacking support from any strong coherent systems of concepts, are weak and cannot in any way play a decisive role in the culture. This is the most fundamental difference between the pre-Islamic concepts of eschatology and the Qur’anic ones.

By way of conclusion I would give here in a simple diagrammatic form the general structure of the Qur’anic Weltanschauung, to which we have been led by this preliminary analysis. This furnishes us with a general framework in which every Qur’anic key-concept will be given a proper place. In the following chapter only the semantical structure of the first—but patently the most important—part of this whole system will be dealt with. In other words, we shall be engaged in examining in detail the structure of the Dunyah in terms of the fourfold relation between God and man, which we mentioned at the beginning of the present chapter.

The Basic Structure of the Qur’anic Weltanschauung

Notes

1. I quite agree with Dr. Daud Rahbar when he says (op. cit., p. 721) that “what is expected of a great book of revelation is not absolute logical consistency, but consistency of the dominance of an idea. Prophets do not offer philosophy. They offer wisdom of a type, a wisdom which has a dominant note”. The search after the dominant note in this sense is our task. Only, this can be done by many different ways and methods, and semantics is one of them.

2. As regards these four basic forms of God-man relation, we have to be content with this synopsis at this stage. We leave the problem here without any further explanation, for it will form our main topic all through the remaining chapters. As to the other aspects of the general Qur’anic world-view, that we are going to mention in the present chapter, some details will be given in view of the fact that they will not be dealt with properly in this book.

3. "Our Lord, make us submissive to Thee, and of our seed a community submissive Thee! (It is Abraham who addresses these words to God) (Al-Baqarah, 2:122 [128])"

4. The relevance of this concept is in no way restricted to the period we are dealing with in this book; it extends into all corners of Islamic history, as Sir Hamilton A. R. Gibb writes: "The key word for everything that has to do with Islamic culture is Umma Community. It is in the historical development of this concept and its modalities that the true significance of Islamic history and culture must be sought", ("The Community in Islamic History", in Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 108, 1963, p.173)

5. For an analysis of the concept of religious hypocrisy, see The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran, chapter XI.

6. "(God) found thee erring (away from the right path) and guided thee". (90:7).

7. "You are the best community ever produced for mankind, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong, and believing in God. (Āl ‘Imrān, 3:106 [110])"

8. Likewise We made you a middle ummah, that you might be witnesses to all people. (Al-Baqarah, 2:137 [143]).
9. On this important term, see the next chapter, section V.
10. Those who are particularly interested in the Qur'anic concepts of social system may obtain a general introductory knowledge from The Social Laws of the Qur'an by Robert Roberts, London, 1925, although the investigation is not conducted from a semantical point of view. For a more detailed survey of the subject, I would recommend Muhammad Darwaza's book, al-Dustūr al-Qur'ānī fi Shu'ān al-Hayāt, Cairo, 1956.
11. (65:12)
12. See above, Chapter I, section II.
16. The contrast between shahādah and ghayb in this sense is most clearly observable in a verse by a Hudhayl poet Ma'qil b. Khuwaylid (Diwān al-Hudaiyyīn, III, Cairo, 1950, p. 70, v. 3).
17. On this poet and his singularly monotheistic thought, see the next chapter, section V.
18. The poet is Iyās b. al-Aratt, Diwān al-Hamāsah CDLXXXV, 2. It is quite interesting to note that the same words lāhw (jesting, diversion), and la'ib (sporting) occur in this combination also in the Qur'an, but with a completely reversed intention, i.e., the intention of disparaging the so-called goods of the present world:

The life of the present world is naught but a pastime and diversion. Surely far better is the Abode of the Hereafter for those who are godfearing. Do you not understand? (Al-An'am, 6:32). See also 57:19-20 [20].
24. (36:28)
25. (83:73)
CHAPTER 4
Allah

I. The Word Allah, its ‘Basic’ and ‘Relational’ Meanings

As I have pointed out repeatedly in the course of the previous account, Allah is the highest ‘focus-word’ in the Qur’anic system, which is surpassed by no other word in rank and importance. The weltanschauung of the Qur’an is essentially theocentric, and quite naturally in this system the concept of Allah reigns over the whole from above, and exerts a deep influence on the semantic structure of all the key-words. Whatever aspect of the Qur’anic thought one may wish to study, it is necessary that one should have from the outset a clear idea as to how this concept is structured semantically. This is why I have decided to devote a whole chapter to a somewhat detailed analysis of the concept before entering upon the consideration of our major problem, that of the fourfold relation between God and man. It goes without saying that the real semantic structure of the word Allah will become fully clear only after we have analyzed this God-man relation, because, as I said at the beginning of the last chapter, God in the Qur’anic weltanschauung does not subsist in His glorious self-sufficing solitude and stand aloof from mankind as does the God of Greek philosophy, but deeply involves Himself in human affairs. Leaving this latter aspect of the problem to the following chapters, I would like to concentrate on the present chapter on the more specific subject of the pre-Qur’anic history of the concept of Allah. This will put us in a better position to see what is original in the Islamic concept of God, and will thereby serve as a good preliminary to the analysis that will come later of the fundamental relation between God and man in the Qur’anic thought.

Let us begin by remarking that the name itself of Allah is common to Jāhiliyyah and Islam. When, in other words, the Qur’anic Revelation began to use this word, it was not introducing a new name of God, a name strange and alien to the ears of the contemporary Arabs. The first problem, then, that we must answer is: Was the Qur’anic concept of Allah a continuation of the pre-Islamic one, or did the former represent a complete break with the latter? Were there some essential—not accidental—ties between the two concepts signified by one and the same name? Or was it a simple matter of a common word used for two different objects?

In order to give a satisfactory answer to these initial questions, we will do well to remember the fact that, when the Qur’an began to use this name, there immediately arose serious debates among the Arabs of Makkah. The Qur’anic usage of the word provoked stormy discussions over the nature of this God between the Muslims and Kāfirūn as is most eloquently attested by the Qur’an itself.

What does this mean from the semantical point of view? What are the implications of the fact that the name of Allah was not only known to both parties in their discussion but was actually used by both parties in their discussion with each other? The very fact that the name of Allah was common to both the pagan Arabs and Muslims, particularly the fact that it gave rise to much heated discussion about the concept of God, would seem to suggest conclusively that there was some common ground of understanding between the two parties. Otherwise there could have been neither debate nor discussion at all. And when the Prophet addressed his adversaries in the name of Allah, he did so simply and solely because he knew that this name meant something—and something important—to their minds too. If this were not so, his activity would have been quite pointless in this respect.

Speaking more generally, a name, i.e., a word, is a symbol of something; a name is always the name of something. So when a man addresses another using a particular word and the latter understands his speech and even gives a retort, we may reasonably suppose that the name points at least to some conceptual element which is common to both parties, however much they may differ from each other in their understanding of the name as regards all other elements.
And this common semantic element in our particular case must have been something referring to an extremely important aspect of the concept of Allah, seeing that it raised such a keen and crucial issue among the Arabs of that time.

Now the problem is: What was this common element? We may answer this question conveniently in terms of the methodological distinction between ‘basic’ and ‘relational’ meaning. In other words, the common semantic element of which we are talking now may be sought for in two different directions.

Let us begin with the ‘basic’ side of the matter, keeping well in mind that the ‘basic’ meaning does not exhaust the common element in question.

As regards the ‘basic’ meaning of Allah, we may remark that many Western scholars have compared rightly—to my mind—the word in its formal aspect with the Greek ὁ θεός which means quite simply “the God”. On such an abstract level the name was common to all Arab tribes. In pre-Islamic times each tribe, as a rule, had its own local god or divinity known by a proper name. So, at first, each tribe may have meant its own local divinity when it used an expression equivalent in meaning to “the God”; this is quite probable. But the very fact that people began to designate their own local divinity by the abstract form of “the God” must have paved the way for the growth of an abstract notion of God without any localizing qualification and then, following this, for a belief in the supreme God common to all the tribes. We meet with similar instances all over the world.

Besides, we must remember, there were the Jews and the Christians with whom the Arabs had constant opportunities of a close cultural contact. And naturally these Jews and Christians both used the same word Allah to denote their own Biblical God. This must have exerted a great influence on the development of the pre-Islamic concept of Allah among the Arabs towards a higher concept than that of a mere tribal divinity, not only among the town dwellers but also among the pure Bedouins of the desert.

However this may be, it is certain from the Qur’an alone, that by the time Muhammad began to preach, the pagan Arabs had come to cherish at least a vague idea, and perhaps also a vague belief in Allah as the highest God standing above the level of local idols.

Thus much we may reasonably assume as the ‘basic’ meaning of the word Allah in Jâhiliyyah. And this much meaning, at least, must the word have carried into the Islamic system when the Qur’an began to use it as the name of the God of Islamic Revelation. For otherwise, as I have said, even a polemic discussion on this Islamic God could not have been possible between the Muslims and the Makkah pagans.

However, this is not the whole picture. We would commit a grave mistake if we imagined that this ‘basic’ meaning was the sole point of contact between the two conceptions of God. The thing did not occur in such a way that the pure concept of Allah with its simple ‘basic’ meaning, which is suggested by its formal structure—Allah—ho theos—came straight into the Islamic conceptual system falling down, so to speak, from some metaphysical world of pure concepts. But actually, i.e. historically, it came into the Islamic system through another system, namely, the pre-Islamic system of religious concepts, however crude the latter might have been. Before the name came into Islam, it had already long been part of the pre-Islamic system, and a considerably important part, too.

What does this fact imply semantically? It implies before anything that this word, in addition to its ‘basic’ meaning, had acquired in the Jâhili system a great deal of ‘relational’ meaning peculiar to the Jâhili weltanschauung. And all these ‘relational’ elements must have been present in the minds of the people of Makkah who listened to the Qur’anic recitation, at least in the first period of Muhammad’s prophetic career, because they were still completely heathen, and were still living in the old traditional Jâhili system of concepts. To put it in another way, when the Islamic Revelation began, the pagan Arabs of Makkah could possibly have no other way of understanding the word Allah than by associating with it all the semantic elements that were already present in their minds. This was the first big semantic problem which faced the Prophet Muhammad when he started his prophetic career.

Now the problem is: What were these relational semantic elements which the word had acquired in the Jâhili system? And how did Islam react to them? Did it reject them altogether as essentially incompatible with the new conception of God, as one might be tempted to suppose? All the historical evidence that has come down to us speaks eloquently against this view. Since Jâhiliyyah and Islam have always been put in sharp contrast, we are almost instinctively
inclined to think that there must have occurred a complete break in every respect between the two when Islam arose. However, the Qur’an itself bears abundant testimony to the fact that the matter was not so simple.

Certainly, of all the ‘relational’ elements that had grown around the concept of Allah in the system of Jāhiliyyah, Islam found some quite erroneous, incompatible with its new religious conception, and it fought strenuously against them and against those who upheld them. The chief of those objectionable elements was the idea that Allah, although admittedly the supreme God, allowed the existence of so-called ‘associates’ (shurakā’) besides Him.

But apart from this polytheistic element and some other less important points, the Qur’an acknowledges that the general concept of Allah entertained by the contemporary Arabs was surprisingly close to the Islamic concept of God. The Qur’an even wonders in a number of important verses why the people who have such a right understanding of God can be so obstinate in refusing to admit the truth of the new teaching, as we shall see presently.

In considering the problem of the development among the pre-Islamic Arabs of the ‘relational’ meaning of the word Allāh, I think it is essential that we should distinguish between three different cases and examine the matter very carefully from the three different angles.

I. The first is the pagan concept of Allah, which is purely Arabian—the case in which we see the pre-Islamic Arabs themselves talking about “Allāh” as they understand the word in their own peculiar way. The interesting point is that pre-Islamic literature is not the only source of information we have at hand on the subject; full first-hand information is obtainable from an extremely vivid description of the actual situation given by the Qur’an itself.

II. The case in which we observe the Jews and the Christians of pre-Islamic times using the very word Allāh in referring to their own God. In this case ‘Allah’ means of course the God of the Bible, a typically monotheistic concept of God. Exceedingly interesting examples are found in this respect, for instance, in the work of ‘Adī b. Zayd, a well-known Arab Christian, the Court poet of al-Hiraḥ.

III. Lastly, the case in which we see the pagan Arabs—non-Christian, non-Jewish pure Jāhili Arabs—handling the Biblical concept of God under the name of ‘Allāh’. This happens, for instance, when a Bedouin poet finds occasion, as he often does in Jāhiliyyah, to compose a poem in praise of a Christian king, his patron. In such a case, he is using the word ‘Allāh’, consciously or unconsciously, in the Christian sense and from the Christian point of view, despite the fact that he himself is a pagan. Quite apart from the problem as to how deep was the degree of the Arab understanding of the Christian concept of God in general, it is, I think undeniable that very often in such cases, particularly when the poet happened to be a man of keen intellectual curiosity like Nābighah and al-Ashā al-Akbar, or a man of a deep religious nature like Labīd, that considerable effort was exerted on their part, if not consciously and intentionally, at least unconsciously, to put themselves in a Christian position temporarily by a sort of empathy. And this empathic attitude, whether its core was a deep religious emotion or but a superficial understanding of a foreign belief, must have been powerful enough to influence the conception of God not only of the poet himself but more generally of his listeners, and thereby modify, in however slight and almost imperceptible a degree, the Arab concept of Allah in the direction of monotheism.

This last case is, as is easy to see, the most interesting and the most important of the three. But it seems to have escaped the attention of those who have dealt with the problem of the influence of Christianity on pre-Islamic Arabia.

In any case, these three different ways of approach seem to have been gradually moving in the last years of Jāhiliyyah towards a point of convergence; they were preparing the way for the coming of a new concept of Allah, that of Islam. It will be well to recall in this connection that the Arabs in the sixth and seventh centuries were no longer living in primitive cultural conditions as one might be tempted to imagine. On the contrary, Arabia at that time was an open stage of lively cultural contact and international competition between peoples of ancient civilization, and the Arabs themselves were beginning to take an active part in this competition, as we shall see more in detail later. Under such conditions, we should rather be greatly surprised if the concept of God among the Arabs remained just as it had been in the days of primitive paganism.

To the three cases we have just mentioned we may add one more case—an extremely special one—which remained to the last independent of and somewhat aloof from, the others until Islam arose and brought it suddenly into the brilliant light of history. I am
thinking of the concept of Allah peculiar to a very particular group of men in Jāhiliyyah, known under the name Hanifs, and represented by, in our case, by the poet Umayyah b. Abī al-Salt, who, although was neither a Jew nor a Christian, held religious ideas that were strikingly monotheistic in nature, and who must have made in many ways an important contribution to the permeation of Arabia by Jewish and Christian ideas. He was indeed an extraordinary figure in late Jāhiliyyah. And the way he used the word Allāh is most interesting from the Islamic point of view.

II. The Concept of Allah in Arabian Paganism

Let us now turn to the first of the four cases as distinguished above, that is, the autochthonous concept of God in pre-Islamic Arabia. I would begin by pointing out that even without having recourse to non-Qur’anic literature, that is, relying solely on the testimony of the Qur’an itself, we can ascertain the very important fact that not only did the concept of Allah exist in the religious view of the pre-Islamic Arabs, but, furthermore, the concept had already a well-developed inner structure of its own, namely:

1. Allah in this conception is the Creator of the world.
2. He is the Giver of rain, i.e., more generally, the Giver of life to all living things on earth.
3. He is the One who presides over the most solemn oaths.
4. He is the object of what we might justly describe as ‘momentary’ or ‘temporary’ monotheism, the existence of which is evidenced by the recurring expression in the Qur’an “making (momentarily) their faith pure for Him alone”.
5. Finally, Allah is the Lord of Ka‘bah.

These five fundamental points are discernible in the structure of the concept of Allah in the weltanschauung of Arabian paganism; this we know by the testimony of the Qur’an. And of course no stronger testimony could be on this point. These are, roughly speaking, the major elements of the relational meaning attached to the word Allāh in Jāhiliyyah, that the Qur’an did not find incompatible with its new religious conception. Here follows a brief explanation of these points.

As has been casually mentioned in the preceding section, the concept of Allah that was prevalent among the pre-Islamic Arabs on the eve of the Islamic era was, in general, surprisingly close in nature to the Islamic one, so close, indeed, that the Qur’an sometimes even wonders why such a right understanding of God does not finally lead the disbelievers to acknowledging the truth of the new teaching.

In Sūrah al-‘Ankabūt, for example, we read:

If you ask them (i.e. the pagan Arabs) “Who has created the heavens and the earth, and has imposed law and order upon the sun and the moon?” They will surely answer, “Allah!”

Al-Ankabūt, 29:61

And immediately following this passage:

If you ask them “Who sends down rain from the sky and revives therewith the earth after it has been dead?” They will surely answer, “Allah!”

Al-Ankabūt, 29:63

Apparently, then, Allah was, already in the conception of the pre-Islamic Arabs the Creator of the world and the Giver of rain, i.e., the giver of life to all that exists on earth. The only serious complaint brought against them by the Qur’an in this respect was that the pagans failed to draw the only reasonable conclusion from the acknowledgment of Allah’s being the Creator of the heaven and the earth: that they should serve Allah alone and none else. The Qur’an expresses this sentiment by such phrases as “How, then, can they be turned aside (from the right direction)” and “But most of them do not know how to exercise their intellect (i.e. how to draw the right conclusion)”.

Even of greater interest than this in this respect is the fourth of the above-mentioned points. It is a singular phenomenon which I have called ‘temporary monotheism’, and which the Qur’an describes by a no less singular phrase: “making their religion sincere, or pure,
for Him, *i.e.*, for Allah alone*.

In many passages of the Qur’an we are told that the pagan Arabs, when they find themselves in danger of death, with almost no hope of escape, particularly on the sea, call upon Allah for help and “make their religion pure for Allah”. Only one example may suffice.

And when waves ensnare them like dark clouds, they cry unto Allah, making their faith pure for Him alone.

Luqman, 31:31 [32]

It is indeed remarkable that this expression implies that in an emergency, when they really felt that their own life was in mortal danger, the pagan Arabs used to have recourse to ‘temporary monotheism’ apparently without any reflection on the grave implication of such an act. That the phrase “making one’s religion pure for Allah” in contexts of this kind means what we might call ‘momentary—or temporary—monotheism’, and not simply ‘sincerity’ or ‘earnestness’ in one’s prayer[1] is clearly shown by the fact that in the majority of the verses in which this expression is used the Qur’an adds the remark that these pagans, as soon as they reach the shore and feel sure of absolute safety, forget about all that has passed and begin again “to ascribe partners to Allah”, *i.e.*, fall back into their original polytheism.

But when He brings them safe to land, behold, they begin to ascribe partners.

Al-Ankabut, 29:65

That the Jahili Arabs were prone to neglect the worship of Allah in ordinary daily conditions, but were always reminded of His name whenever they found themselves in an unusual and serious situation is shown also by the fact that, according to the Qur’an, the most sacred and solemn oaths used to be sworn in Jahiliyyah in the name of Allah.

And they swore by Allah their most earnest oath.

Fatir, 35:40 [42]

Of particular importance in determining the place occupied by Allah in the Jahili system of concepts is the fact that He was considered the ‘Lord of Ka’bah’, the highest sanctuary of Central Arabia. This we can prove by ample evidence from pre-Islamic poetry, but nothing, of course, can be more decisive and authoritative than the Qur’an itself. In the very famous Surah Quaysh which is admittedly one of the oldest pieces of Revelation, the Quraysh are urged strongly to worship “the Lord of this House”,[2] who causes the two annual caravans, in winter and summer, to be equipped, and takes good care of them with a view to making them live in peace and security. Here the idea of Allah’s being the Lord of Ka’bah is simply taken for granted as something natural and generally acknowledged. It suggests that at least the religiously more enlightened ones of the people of Makkah were conscious of worshipping Allah at this shrine.

Allah, in this particular capacity, was known among the pre-Islamic Arabs under the name of the “Lord of the House” (Rabb al-Bayt), “Lord of Ka’bah” (Rabb al-Ka’bah) or “Lord of Makkah” (Rabb Makkah). Pre-Islamic literature furnishes ample evidence to show that the conception of Allah as the Lord of Makkah sanctuary was exceedingly widespread among the Arabs even outside the narrow confines of the town of Makkah. Here I give one of the most interesting examples. The following is a verse by the very famous pre-Islamic Christian poet of al-Hira, ‘Adi b. Zayd. The verse is in one of his odes which he composed in the prison into which he had been thrown by the King al-Nu’man III.

The poet complains to the king saying that the malignant slanderers did everything they could in order to sow discord between him and the king.

“The enemies tried hard against me”, he says, “without desisting from doing anything that could harm me, by the Lord of Makkah and
the Crucified”.6
In this verse ‘Adf b. Zayd claims his complete innocence and says that the misunderstanding on the part of the king has been produced only by the machinations of the slanderers envious of his good fortune, and in order to give special weight to this declaration he swears by the Lord of Makkah and Christ putting together the two ‘Lords’ into a single oath.

What is important to remember regarding this verse is that the poet ‘Adf b. Zayd was an Arab Christian, but he was neither a simple Arab nor an ordinary Christian. He was a man of the highest culture of his age. He was brought up and educated in a high Persian society at the time when the Sassanian culture was at its apogee under Kšr šrš Anšširwšn; he occupied a high official position, went to Constantinople in the capacity of a diplomat, so to speak, when the Emperor Tiberius II was at the head of Byzantium and came to know Christianity more deeply at this big center of Christianity. And as an Arab poet, he was justly regarded as the greatest of the whole tribe of Tamš.

The fact that this man of highest culture and education put in one of his solemn oaths, the Lord of Makkah and Christ together is significant, in my view in two different ways: it is of importance, first of all, in connection with the problem of the relational meaning of the word Allāh in its purely Arabian aspect. That a highly educated Christian, not a pagan Arab, living in al-Hfrā, away from Makkah, did use this concept of the Lord of Ka’bah in this way shows better than anything else how widespread and influential was this particular connotation of Allāh.

But it is also significant, and perhaps even more significant—albeit more delicate and subtle—in connection with the second case as distinguished above, that is, the problem of the purely Christian conception of Allāh that was prevalent among the Arab Christians of that age.

The example of ‘Adf b. Zayd’s verse would seem to suggest, at least to my mind, that there was in the Christian psychology an unconscious tendency or inclination towards identifying their Christian concept of Allāh with the purely pagan Arabian concept of Allāh as the Lord of the Makkah shrine. I would not say a complete identification, but at least the first step towards it, i.e., a non-incompatibility between the two. Otherwise the expression would have been merely a most strange and bizarre combination of ideas.

And if this understanding of mine is right, then perhaps we might say with some confidence that this kind of attitude on the part of the Arab Christians must have played an extremely important role in the development of a lofty and spiritualized concept of God among the pagan Arabs themselves.

However this may be, we do not have to attach so much importance exclusively to this very particular problem of the partial identification of Allāh the Lord of Ka’bah and Allāh the Christian God. More generally, the very fact that the Christians—and the Jews, for that matter—used the same word Allāh in reference to their Biblical God this fact alone must have been very influential on the religious development of the conception of the pre-Islamic Arabs, particularly so in the case of those of the more enlightened type represented by poets like al-Nābiqhah, al-’Ashš al-Akbar and Labīd, those Arabs, that is, who although pagan, had a good first-hand knowledge of the Christians and the Jews, their creed and their custom, a knowledge they owed to their close personal contact with them. This last point will be dealt with in more detail a few paragraphs later. In any case, the verse we have just examined will serve as an excellent introduction to our next topic which is presented by the case in which we see the word Allāh used by the Jews and Christians according to their own conception of God.

III. The Jews and the Christians

The main problem of this section need not be dealt with at length in view of the fact that the general cultural situation of the Jews and the Christians in Jāhiliyyah is a matter of common knowledge among the Orientalists. I shall restrict myself to some points of direct relevance to the topic of the present chapter.7

In those days, the Arabs lived surrounded closely by great Christian powers. Abyssinia, to begin with, was Christian; the Abyssinians were Monophysites. The Byzantine empire, whose high civilization was greatly admired by the Arabs was of course Christian. The dynasty of Ghassan who served as a kind of outpost in Arabia for the Greek Emperors of Constantinople was Christian, from the second king ‘Amr I, famous for having built the monasteries
of Hālī, Ayyūb and Hannād, down to the close of the dynasty in A.D. 637, when the last king Jabalah II was de throne by the Muslim conquerers. The Ghassānids, too, were Monophysites.

Al-Hirah on the other hand, which was the Persian vassal-state and which exercised a great influence on the life and concep tion of the desert Arabs, was, as is well-known, an important center in East Syrian, i.e., Nestorian Church. And as a result of their direct contact with these big centers of Christianity, some of the big monastic tribes were in the process of Christianization. Furthermore, as noted above, many of the Arab intellectuals of the age had a considerable knowledge of Christianity. The great poet al-Nabighah is an outstanding example. Another great poet of Jahiliyyah, al-A'shá al-Akbar had an intimate personal contact with the Bishops of Najran, and his knowledge of Christianity was far from being a superficial one, as his Diwan shows clearly and conclusively.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the people of Makkah remained entirely uninfluenced by such a situation, if only for the reason that they, as professional merchants, travelled on business so often to these Christian centers. Besides, in Makkah itself, there were also Christians, not only Christian slaves, but Christians of the clan of Banu Asad b. 'Abd al-'Uzza.

As to the Jews, quite a number of Jewish tribes had settled in Arabia. Yathrib, Khaybar, Fadak, 'Yayma' and Wadi al-Qura being some of the most important centers settled by immigrant Jews or Jewish proselytes. And although in Makkah there seems to have been practically no Jew, the Makkans must have been familiar with some at least of the basic ideas and concepts of Judaism.

Both the Jews and the Christians in Arabia used Arabic as their vernacular, and, as I have pointed out earlier, referred to their Biblical God by the very word Allah, which was something quite natural seeing that the 'basic' meaning conveyed by this word was a very abstract one that would correspond roughly to the Greek ho theos. This conceivably provided a good opportunity for the convergence of the two different concepts of God into a certain kind of unity, albeit a very vague one, in the Jahili minds.

In general, Judeo-Christian religious concepts were, so to speak, in the air at that time, ready to influence both sides, I mean, both the Jahili Arabs and the Jews and Christians in their understanding of the position of each other. This is clearly reflected in many important traditions. I will take up here one of them as an interesting example. It is a famous tradition about Waraqah b. Nawfal connected with Muhammad's first appearance on the stage of history as Prophet and Messenger of God. Al-Bukhari records it in his chapter on 'How Revelation began to visit the Prophet' in his Hadith collection. The story runs like this:

When the very first Revelation 'Recite in the name of thy Lord who created' came to the Prophet in a very strange and awe-inspiring form, the Prophet who had never experienced such a thing before, naturally got panic-stricken. He lost all self-confidence; he was uneasy, nervous, and distressed. In short he himself did not know how he should understand this strange experience.

His wife Khadijah not only reassured him, but sought stronger reassurance for him from an authority. This authority was her cousin, the very famous Waraqah b. Nawfal b. Asad. Here is the text of the main part of the story as it has been handed down to us by al-Bukhari:

Then she (i.e. Khadijah) took him to Waraqah b. Nawfal b. Asad b. 'Abd al-'Uzza, her cousin. Now this man who, had been converted to Christianity in the days of paganism was thoroughly conversant with Hebrew and had made a copy of a considerable portion of the Evangel in Hebrew. He was at that time a very old man and had already lost his eyesight. Khadijah said, "O my cousin, listen to the son of your brother." Waraqah asked him, "Son of my brother, what have you seen?" Thereupon the Apostle of God told him about what he saw. Waraqah said, "This is precisely the nāmis that was once sent down to Mūsā b. Imrān (i.e. Moses). Would that I were young in (your days of prophethood)! Would that I might still be alive when your tribe will expel you!" The Apostle of God asked, "Will they really expel me?"
“Yes”, he replied, “No man ever brought what you have brought now without being treated as an enemy. If I could live until the day when you will be expelled, I should support you with all my might!”

There is no positive reason for doubting the authenticity of this tradition; on the contrary, the very occurrence of the word nāmūs, which is evidently non-Qur’anic, instead of the common Qur’anic term Tawrāt (Torah) argues very strongly for its authenticity and genuineness. The word nāmūs, which is indeed the pivotal point of the story, is clearly the Greek word nomos for ‘law’ i.e. the exact equivalent of the Hebrew Tōrā.

In any case, the story tells us that Waraqah who was well-known for his Christian religion and his good knowledge of Hebrew scripture, as soon as he heard from Muhammad what had happened to him, identified this apparently strange experience of Muhammad as something authentic belonging to the tradition of the Judeo-Christian monotheism. And this identification, to all appearance, gave confidence to Muhammad’s mind.

All the preceding consideration would seem to lead us towards the only reasonable—to my mind at least—conclusion that by the time Islam arose in Makkah, a considerably lofty conception of Allah had already been developed among the Arabs, or was developing gradually, as a converging point of two originally different concepts of God. On the one hand, the Arabian paganism, had been gradually developing the concept of Allah, as the Creator of the heaven and the earth, the Giver of rain which causes the earth to produce all the good things for the benefit of mankind, the Mighty God who watches over the sacredness of oaths, the Founder of some of the old religious customs, and the Great Lord (Rabb) having the whole world in his hand. For this much we have the undeniable testimony of the Qur’ān itself. And there is no cogent reason to deny that all this was part of the autochthonous religion of Arabian paganism, although this was evidently only the highest and best part of this religion.

On the other hand, the monotheistic concept of God was spreading steadily among the Arabs, who, if they did not accept it as a matter of personal belief and faith, must have been at least well aware of the existence of some such concept of God among their neighbors and must have been quite familiar with it.

IV. The Judeo-Christian Concept of Allah in the Hands of the Pagan Arabs

In the last two sections we have examined, first, the purely pagan concept of Allah, and then, the Judeo-Christian concept of Allah. We have seen how these two were gradually tending to converge into one in the latter years of Jāhiliyyah. There was also something very important which served, as it were a bridge between the two shores. And with this we turn to the third case as distinguished above, namely, the case in which the Arabs, that is, the pagan Arabs who professed neither Christianity nor Judaism, had to talk about the latter, had to refer in their talk to things pertaining to these monotheistic religions. And, we might safely surmise seeing the general cultural situation of the time, such cases must have occurred not infrequently. Although we have no faithful contemporary records of how the Arabian people were saying among themselves on these matters, we find at least some interesting evidence in the work of the poets, particularly those who used to compose in praise of their patrons, whether Christian kings of al-Hīrah or of Ghassān. And this is even far more important still than those cases in which we see the Christians and the Jews using the word Allāh in reference to their God, because after all that is, in itself, something natural, too natural to give us any valuable clue to anything of real importance.

The case is quite different when, for example, al-Nābīghah, a simple Bedouin poet, in addressing the Christian king of al-Hīrah, al-Nu’mān b. al-Mundhir, and singing in praise of the latter, uses the word Allāh in this way:

\[
\text{ورَضِبَّ عَلَى الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ صَلَّى عَلَى الْرَّحْمَةِ نَابِيًّا}
\]

Allah has completed upon him the best of his favors and let him gain victory and power over mankind.

This Lakhmī prince al-Nu’mān, widely known as Abū Qābūs, whose reign fell roughly between 580 A.D. and 602 A.D., was a Christian who had been brought up in the Christian family of the very famous Zayd, the father of the poet ‘Adī b. Zayd whom we have just met. So when the poet al-Nābīghah uses the word Allāh in
saying that the king owes his wonderful prosperity, wealth and power to the great favor of Allah, he must naturally mean the Christian God. At least this must be his intention.

We have a confirmatory evidence in another verse by the same poet. Al-Nabighah, having lost the royal favor of al-Nu'man, went to Ghassan and was warmly welcomed and honored there by King 'Amr b. al-Harith al-Asghar, and began composing panegyrics on this new patron and his family, known today under the name of “Ghassan encomia” (Ghassaniyyat). In one of the most famous Ghassaniyyat, we find the following two verses that are far more interesting for our purpose than the one I have just quoted: 

لهم بنيت أسم تعطها الله عزه

سياستهم ذات الأمة وديستهم قومهم بما برغون غير العواقب

Here in praise of the Christian Ghassan he says, “They have a nature, like of which Allah has never given to any other man, that is, generosity accompanied by sound judgement that never deserts them. Their Scripture is that of God (al-ilah, the original form of Allah), and their faith is steadfast and their hope is set solely on the world to come.”

This phenomenon is of particular relevance to our present topic in two important ways.

1. When the poet used the word Allah in this way—and, we must remember, he did not do it only once, but very frequently—something must have occurred in his psychology. It may have been, in the beginning, simply a slight change of nuance or a slight shift of viewpoint; in any case, something of no small consequence to his religious outlook must have been growing in his mind. For it is difficult to imagine that this way of using the word Allah did not exercise, unconsciously if not consciously, any influence on his image of God particularly when it repeated itself so often. And this, again, may very well have cast its reflection on his conception of Allah even when he was using the same word in reference to the non-Christian, purely Arabian God.

2. Equally important is the fact that in Jahlitiyyah, the social position of the poet was very high. The words uttered by a poet, especially a well-known great poet, were feared, venerated or loved according to cases as a real spiritual force; and they had all the weight of a valuable social, or even sometimes national, asset. Poetry at that time was not a simple matter of personal expression of thoughts and emotions. It was a public phenomenon in the full sense of the word.

Impressive words uttered by a famous poet were propagated immediately within the tribe and beyond the tribe to the corners of the Arab world, “flying faster than an arrow” as they said. The poets were literally leaders of the public opinion.

So the fact that a great poet like al-Nabighah used the word Allah in the Christian acception, putting himself, at least at that very moment, in a Christian position by empathy, should not be taken as a mere matter of personal liking or inclination. On the contrary, it must have influenced in an indirect unconscious way the religious outlook of his pagan contemporaries. It must have taught them how to understand the word Allah in its Biblical acception; more important still, it must have, further, induced them gradually to identify almost unconsciously their own pagan concept of God with that of the Christians.

V. Allah of the Hanifs

Let us now turn to the fourth and the last variety according to our classification, i.e., the conception of Allah peculiar to a group of people known as Hanifs, the pre-Islamic monotheists. The word hanif is an extremely problematic one. Its etymology still remains obscure, and consequently its ‘basic’ meaning is very hard to define in a final way. But the problem in itself, however interesting, is of comparatively small relevance to us as far as concerns our present topic. What concerns us at this stage is the singularly monotheistic—we might almost say, Qur’anic—conception of Allah entertained by the of this category. Let it suffice to remark that in the Qur’an the word hanif—which is used many times, particularly in the Madinan Strahs—means ‘monotheist’ in sharp contradistinction to the ‘polytheists’ or ‘idol-worshippers’ (mushrikin). The word is associated with the name of Abraham “who was a Hanif, and neither a Jew nor a Christian, one who did not belong to the idol-worshippers”. In an important passage, it is declared that this pure
monotheistic belief symbolized by the name of Abraham is “the true
religion”, “the natural predisposition (fitrah) to which God
 predisposed (fatara) mankind”.

Among all those pre-Islamic Arabs who are known as Hanifs
Umayyah b. Abi al-Salt presents an unusually important case, because
he was a very famous poet of the tribe of Thaqif in Ta’if, and a
considerable number of poems have been handed down to us under
his name. Besides, Islamic Tradition (Hadith) has also shown a lively
concern for this man, because of his very particular relation with the
Prophet Muhammad, so that his life is known tolerable, well at least
better than any other Hanifs. He is, in this sense, not a dark mystery,
like other Hanifs; he is in this sense, not a dark mystery like other
Hanifs; he stands to a certain degree in the daylight of history.

As regards the poems that have been handed down to us, there
is of course the big problem of genuineness. The problem is parti-
cularly delicate in this case because his words and ideas bear so close
a resemblance to the Qur’anic ones. Many of the poems attributed to
him must be spurious. But even supposing that half of them are
non-genuine, there is no reason to doubt the genuineness of them as
a whole, unless we take the absurd view that all the Muslims who
made reference to this poet from the Prophet Muhammad himself
down to the scholars of the Abbasid age were having a nightmare and
talking in delirium strange things about him that did not correspond
to any historical reality.

Besides, even the forged part must contain a modicum of truth
in it, for in cases like this, one cannot forge without having before
one’s eyes a real model for copying, that is, some reality on which
to base one’s forgery. So even the forged poems must reflect in a
peculiar way the original thought and ideas of this poet.

This man Umayyah b. Abi al-Salt is indeed an extraordinary
figure in the whole Jâhili literature. He was one of the leading
personalities of the tribe of Thaqif, and according to Abû ‘Ubaydah,
the greatest poet of the tribe. In Jâhiliyyah he was said to be in
search of the true monotheistic religion, away from all idol-worship,
but he remained an isolated dissenter without being converted to
Judaism nor to Christianity. And yet the spiritual atmosphere in
which he lived was almost completely Christian and Jewish, partic-
ularly the latter, and the Christian and Jewish elements he
assimilated were mainly of Yemenite origin.

He is reported to have studied Hebrew and Syriac seriously and
read those parts of the Holy Scripture that were available to him at
that time in those languages; this is partly corroborated by the exis-
tence of a great number of Hebrew and Syriac words in his verses,
which struck the philologists of the Abbasid period as extremely
strange, so much so that, as Ibn Qutaybah says, of all the Jâhili poets
he was considered to be the only one whose poems could not be used
as hujjah (evidence) in interpreting the Qur’an “because of this
defect” i.e. “because of the abundance of strange words” (kalimat
gharibah) he used.

According to tradition he wore always sack-cloth or coarse hair-
cloth (masâh) as a mark of a man wholly devoted to worship—he
was predecessor of the later Sufis in this respect—declared wine to
be unlawful (harâm), called the religion he was in search of din al-
hunafa’ (“the religion of Hanifs”) and associated it with Abraham
(Ibrâhîm) and Ishmael (Isma’îl).

So far so good. But here begins that aspect of his which induced
the Muslims to call him an “enemy of God” (‘adâwâ’ Allâh). He is
said to have been firmly convinced that a ‘prophet’ (nabiyy) would be
raised among the Arabs, and that he himself would be that person.
According to one tradition he held the view that after Jesus Christ
there would be six appearances of ‘prophethood’ (nubuwâwâr),
already five occasions had passed and there remained only one and
the last chance, and he was expecting the choice to fall upon him.

Whether this is true or not, when Muhammad appeared as the
Prophet of the Arabs, Umayyah got furiously angry or dissapointed,
or perhaps both, and began his campaign against Islam. He instigated
greatly the Quraysh of Makkah to oppose him, and some poems have
been handed down to us which he composed bewailing the pagans
killed in the battle of Uhud. Among them there were two of his own
maternal cousins, Utbah and Shaybah, and he urged his tribesmen to
take revenge upon Muhammad for their blood. And afterwards, he
flew to Yemen, his spiritual home.

He did not change to the last this inimical attitude towards the
Prophet of Islam, and on his death-bed he is related to have said:
“This illness will inevitably cause my death. I know that the religion
of hanîf is true, but I cannot help entertaining a doubt as regards
Muhammad”.26

As regards his poems themselves we should say that they dis-
close a very, strange and even grotesque vision of the universe. Of course when we look at it from the Islamic point of view, there is nothing strange and bizarre in his poetic vision, but when we look at it against the background of the normal mentality of the Jahili Arab, we understand why even in his lifetime he was already beginning to be enshrouded in a cloud of myths and legends. His world is a dark forest of Jewish imagery; a unique world of Jewish fantasmagoria. This world is also theocentric. There is One and only one personal God at the center of this world and He presides over everything existent. Around the image of this God, whom of course he calls Allah, there appear before our eyes apocalyptic pictures of His abode and His kingdom. He is sitting on His Throne\textsuperscript{27} alone and unique\textsuperscript{28} enveloped in a dazzling veil of light.\textsuperscript{29}

No human sight can penetrate through this veil of light and go up to the Divine Presence. The veil of light is surrounded by the heavenly host of angels whom he sometimes calls “strengthened creatures”\textsuperscript{30}, \textit{i.e.}, creatures made strong and powerful by Divine assistance; they are “arranged in lines”, some of them carrying the Throne, some of them silently listening to Divine Revelation;\textsuperscript{31} among them Jibrîl, \textit{i.e.} Gabriel and Mîkâl, \textit{i.e.}, Michael and some others occupy the highest places.

Then the Biblical stories of creation are told. The present life which we on earth are living is called \\textit{dunyâ} and its essential ephemerality is emphasized: nothing remains for ever; every living being must sooner or later become worn out and perish\textsuperscript{32} except the only One who remains eternally, the Holy One, possessor of Majesty.\textsuperscript{33}

Then comes an exhortation to the true monotheistic religion which he calls “Hanifitic religion”\textsuperscript{34} (\textit{din al-hanîfiyyah}); the only right way for man to take in this transient world is to stop following his blind desire (\textit{hawa})\textsuperscript{35} and to follow the Divine guidance (\textit{huda}).\textsuperscript{35} But, he says, the human mind is so made that it is naturally inclined towards “turning away from the truth”\textsuperscript{36} like “a blind man who goes deviating from the right path”.\textsuperscript{37}

The ultimate end of all this is the Last Judgment. And here we have an abundance of eschatological concepts stemming from the Bible. Hell and paradise are minutely described. All the sinners are brought up naked to the place of judgment and are thrown into the “ocean of fire”,\textsuperscript{38} bound with long chains and crying “Woe is me!”\textsuperscript{39} (\textit{muttaqîna}) are richly rewarded with the abode of blissful life,\textsuperscript{40} under the cool shadow of trees.

This is, in broad and simple outlines, the picture of the world which Umayyah b. Abî al-Salt presents to our imagination. Even supposing, as I said above, that half of this picture were a forgery yet the animating spirit of the original \textit{weltanschauung} and its constituents are not at all difficult to grasp through it.

As to the Hanifitic conception of Allah, we may observe that according to this poet, He is the “God of the whole world”,\textsuperscript{41} the “Creator”\textsuperscript{42} of everything and all creatures are “His servants”.

\begin{center}
\textit{\textit{He is Allah, the Creator of everything, and all the created things serve Him willingly as faithful servants.}}
\end{center}

That is to say, He is the Lord (\textit{rabb}) of His servants.

He is the Great King of the heavens and the earth,\textsuperscript{43} who reigns over his subjects with absolute sovereignty. This majestic aspect of Allah is referred to by one of the ‘strange words’—\textit{al-kalîmât al-gharibât}, as Ibn Qutaybah called them—that have greatly vexed the commentators and lexicalists of the Abbasid period. The word in question is \textit{salîbat}, originally a Syriac word, which occurs in the oft-quoted verse:

\begin{center}
\textit{\textit{\textit{إن الأئمَّة رغبًا افْتُلِمُ مَنْ كَفَّارٌ هوُ الْمُلْكُ لَهُ وَفَوقَ الأَرْضَ مَسْتَعِيرُ}}}
\end{center}

All men are Allah's subjects; He is the Absolute Sovereign, on earth Omnipotent.\textsuperscript{44}

And, most important of all, He is Unique, absolutely One.

\begin{center}
\textit{\textit{\textit{وَمَرْضِيَتُهُ مِنَ الْخَلَقِ إِلَّا مُرْضِيَتَهُ وَمَنْ تَفْرَقَ عَنَّ الْعَالَمَ مَعْمُورَ}}}
\end{center}

One with whom no one of the creatures ever disputes the kingdom, He is the One who stands alone without peers, even if His servants (\textit{i.e.} men) do not make Him one, (that is, worship besides him other gods and idols).
Such is his conception of Allah. As far as these points are concerned, we see that the Hanafite conception of God has absolutely nothing contradictory and incompatible with the Islamic one.

In any case, the very existence in Jāhiliyyah of a man like Umayyah B. Abī al-Salt would seem to be a striking indication that religious ideas resembling those of Islam were extant among the pre-Islamic Arabs, and that concepts characteristic of a spiritual religion were not at all unknown and alien to their minds, at least in the period just preceding the rise of Islam. This makes it also understandable why the Qur’ān attached the new Islamic movement to the Hanafite tradition. This is the positive side of the matter.

But it has also a negative side. While the positive side concerns the similarity between the Hanafis and the Qur’ān, the negative side relates to the essential difference between the two. Referring to “the immense difference” between the Qur’ān and the production of Umayyah B. Abī al-Salt, Sir Hamilton Gibb remarks:46 “This is the vibrant moral tone that permeates it.” While the poems may echo the same moral lesson, there is nothing of the urgency and passion of the Qur’ānic presentation. However vivid and sensuous Umayyah’s descriptions (of Paradise and Hell, for example) may have been, they do not seem to have had any marked effect upon his fellow-citizens of Ta’if, let alone the Makkans. Similar materials presumably circulated among other monotheistic circles and in other parts of Arabia, of course take their place within the total content of the Qur’ān. But what gave them their effect in their Qur’ānic presentation was that they were linked up with the essential moral core of its teaching.

We should remark, too, that the so-called ḥan?fīyyah was not a strongly organized spiritual group movement. These people stood each one of them alone and isolated in the pagan society. Their aim was strictly restricted to personal salvation, and not the salvation of other people, much less of mankind at large. In short, they were only isolated, exceptional figures. And in this sense, the religious weltanschauung of Umayyah of which we have just had a glimpse was presumably much less influential in determining the general atmosphere of pagan Arabia than the vague and more general influence exercised directly by the Christians and the Jews. In any case his world-view did not represent the dominant note of the Jāhili spirituality. On the contrary, there is evidence to show that it was regarded by the pagan masses as something quite fantastic and bizarre. This we can see from the way the Makkans people reacted in general to the monotheism and eschatology of Islam as presented by the Qur’ān.

However it seems to be also certain that the activity of a man like Umayyah contributed considerably towards making the apocalyptic and eschatological ideas somewhat known to the pagan Arabs, who, although finding them quite repelling and absurd, must have at least come to know that there were around them a few queer people who entertained such strange ideas.

Keeping in mind the main points we have just examined, let us go back to the problem that was raised in the first part of this chapter concerning the way in which the Qur’ān presented the Islamic concept of Allah to the pagan auditors. I think we are now in a somewhat better position to understand why the Qur’ān, whenever it mentions the name of Allah, does not show any sign of hesitation or apprehension, any sign, that is, of offering something quite alien and unknown to the hearers. On the contrary it urges the pagan Arab to be more strictly consistent in their belief in Allah, and blames them for being logically so inconsistent. In addition to the examples already adduced we may quote, for instance:

*Say: “Whose is the earth and whoever is in it, if you have the capacity to understand rightly?” They will say: “Allah’s”. Say: “Will you not then remember?” (i.e. will you still refuse to come to your senses and awake to the Truth which is already there in your hearts in a latent form?)

_Al-Muʿminūn_, 23:86-87 [84-85]

This expression “Will you not then remember?” (a-fa-lā tadhakkarūna) like a similar one which is also very often used “Will you not exercise your intellect” (a-fa-lā taʿqīlūna), implies, in contexts of this kind, blaming and reproaching the pagans for being unable to draw, or perhaps even being unwilling to draw, the final and most important conclusion about Allah despite the fact that they have already such a right understanding of His nature.

The next passage is even more explicit on this point.
Say: “In whose hand is the supreme dominion over all things and He protects while against Him no one can protect anybody, if you know?” They will say: “Allah’s”. Say: “How then are you bewitched?”

Al-Mu'minun, 23:90-91 [88-89]

We should notice this last forcible expression “How then are you bewitched?”. It expresses suprise at the sight of the people who know and acknowledge that Allah has in His hand the supreme dominion over the whole world of being, and yet do not worship Him as He should be. Their attitude is not understandable unless you suppose them all to be bewitched.

Such an argument would lose its point completely if we do not suppose that the Qur'an assumes from the outset in those to whom Muhammad is to convey the Divine message at least some vague conception of Allah, which, although quite erroneous in many essential points from the standpoint of Islam, contains also a number of good and right elements that are quite acceptable. It is remarkable that the Qur'an, far from combating the latter, tries to make these elements more precise and impressive by force of logic.

Notes

1. See Chapter 7.
2. (29:63)
3. Of course this statement does not apply to a verse like the following, where the expression “making one’s religion sincere” should be taken in its literal sense.

And they were commanded naught else than to serve God, making the religion pure for Him, as men of pure monotheism (Al-Bayyinah, 98:4 [5])

4. Also Al-Nalh, 16:40 [38]
5. Al-Quraysh, 106:1-3:
6. Many people would feel inclined to translate the last word in the verse salib as ‘Cross’, not ‘Crucified’ as I have done. I prefer my interpretation because it makes the expression livelier and more colorful in that it places two different ‘Lords’—Christ and Allah—side by side. If we adopt the alternative interpretation, the reference to Christ becomes slightly less direct and the expression seems to lose thereby the nakedness, so to speak, and becomes less forcible. In either case, however, the general meaning remains exactly the same.
7. For a more detailed survey of the whole problem, see, for instance Carlo Nallino, “Ebrei e Christiani nell’ Arabia Preislamica” (Raccolta di Scritti, vol. III), to which I myself am deeply indebted.
8. Hadith No. 3: (اللّه) كِفَ كَانَ بْنُ الْوُحُي إِلَى رَسُولِ اللّهِ ﷺ
9. (اللّه) كِفَ كَانَ بْنُ الْوُحُي إِلَى رَسُولِ اللّهِ ﷺ
10. Literally: he could write the Hebrew writing.
11. In addressing her old cousin, she made Muhammad “cousin of Waraqah” in order to show respect to the latter.
12. Literally: if your day reaches me.
13. 4:139 ff.
15. Diwan al-Nabighah, Beirut, 1953, p. 88, v. 4
17. majallatu-hum; var. mahallatu-hum, “their home is God's own land”.
18. Or, “their religion (dīn) is right”.
19. Or, reading khayra instead of ghayra, “what they wish for is the best of the ultimate end, i.e. Hereafter.”
20. Arabic hanif, pl. hunafa’.
22. For instance, 3:60 [67]; 3:89 [95]; 22:32 [31], etc., etc.
23. 30: 29 [30].
24. 2:129 [135]; 3:60 [67]
26. هذه المرة تأتي، وأننا أعلم أن الحقيقة حك، ولكن الدنيا تأتي في حقها.«
CHAPTER 5
Ontological Relation Between
God and Man

I. The Concept of Creation

In a religious or philosophical weltanschauung, the being and existence of man forms as a general rule the major problem. The eternal and ever recurring question: Where does man come from? What is the source of his very being here in the world? This is one of those basic problems that have always disquieted the human mind. In the Qur'anic conception, the right answer—and the only right one—to this question is not far to seek: the source of being is God Himself; existence is conferred upon man by God as a gratuitous gift: In other words, there is, between God and man, a fundamental relation of creator and creature in this part of the Qur'anic divina commedia, Allah plays the role of the Giver of being and existence to man. He is the Creator of man, and man is nothing but his creature. Indeed, Allah is the Creator of the whole world, ranging from the angels above (40:18 [19]), Jinn (55:14 [15]), the heavens and the earth (14:22 [19], etc.), the sun and the moon, the day and the night (41:37, etc.), to the mountains and the rivers (13:3, etc.), trees, fruits, grain and herbs (55:10-11 [11-12], etc.), and all kinds of animals, "some of them going upon their bellies, some of them going upon two feet, some, again, going upon four" (24:44 [45]). There will be no end if we go on enumerating what He has created. He is, in short, the "Creator of everything". And man is only one of these created things, albeit the most important one. In fact, the Qur'an may be regarded in a certain sense as a grand hymn in honor of Divine
Creation. At any rate, the whole Qur'an is literally pregnant with the thought of Creation and a feeling of profound admiration for it.

In the preceding chapter, we have seen that the concept itself of Divine Creation was not at all unknown to the pre-Islamic Arabs, and also that this concept seems to have been usually associated with the name of Allah. This association between ‘creation’ (khalq) and ‘Allah’, however, was not always necessarily firm and definite. For the Qur'an tells us that there were some idol-worshippers who attributed this power of creation to the idols.

Or do they assign to Allah associates who have [allegedly] created just as He has created, so that the creative activity of both seems alike to them? Say: "Allah is the Creator of everything, and He is the One, the Almighty".

Al-Ra'd, 13:17 [16]

But this was presumably only an exceptional case. In more normal cases, creative activity was to all appearance ascribed to the highest God, Allah. And often, in Jahiliyyah literature, we are surprised to meet with the concept of Divine Creation which is exceedingly close to the Qur'anic one—unless, of course, we explain away all such cases as forgeries and interpolations. In the following verse, for instance, the concept of creation is associated with that of ‘Lord’ (rabb). The poet is ‘Antarah.²

O bird, perching on the arāk-tree, by a Lord who has created you, you must surely know where they (i.e. my beloved ones) dwell now.

It is significant that the expression of “a Lord who created a bird” is here in an oath-formula.³ Still more Qur'anic is the thought expressed by the poet in the following verse.⁴

Speaking about a girl who has just died, ‘Antarah says, “She was clinging to (the hope of) a long life. However, the One who created all living beings has taken her life away to make her return (to her original state)”.

There seems to have been even the conception of Allah’s having raised up the sky and established the moon there. In the next example, the famous Jahili warrior-poet, Bā’ith b. Suraym al-Yashkūrī refers to this idea, again in a solemn oath-formula. He swears “by the One who has raised up the sky and the moon” that he will surely take vengeance on his enemy.⁵

I solemnly swear by the One who has raised up the sky to its place and the moon also, both when it is full in the middle of the month and on the night when it is a crescent.

Since the testimony given by the Qur'an itself and that afforded by pre-Islamic literature agree with each other as to the existence of the concept of creation among the Jahili Arabs, we may be quite sure about this matter. The problem that must be solved is rather: To what extent was this concept of Divine Creation influential in determining the nature of the weltanschauung of the pre-Islamic Arabs. And when it comes to this point, we must admit that the concept was, on the whole, an extremely weak one having little influence on the actual life of the Jahili Arabs; it does not seem to have affected in any essential way the conception of human life and existence. In other words, a Jahili man could very well live on quite comfortably without having to pay any attention at all to the origin of his own existence. The significance of this point will be brought home if we remember, by way of contrast, the fact that the Qur'an urges the Muslims to be constantly conscious of their essential creatureliness. A Muslim who lost this sense of creatureliness would by that very fact cease to be a muslim in the real sense of the word, for, then, he would have fallen into the grave sin of ‘presumptuousness’—an important concept which the Qur'an signifies by words like tughān and istighnā, the former meaning roughly "to exceed the (human) bounds by insolence" and the latter "to feel one's self completely free and independent (i.e. owing nothing to anybody, not even to God)".
Thus the consciousness of creatureliness is linked directly with the problem of the Lord- servant relation between God and man which we are to discuss in a later chapter.

So the mere occurrence of words like *khālīq* (creation), *khālīq* (creator), *bārī* (originator) etc. in pre-Islamic literature should not mislead us into thinking that the concept of Divine Creation was playing a decisive role in the *Jāhili weltanschauung*. These and several other similar words meaning ‘creation’ that gathered around the name of Allah constituted only a vaguely defined and loosely delimited semantic field, which itself belonged in a larger field that consisted of words having reference to the supernatural order of being. But, we must recall, this semantic field of supernatural beings occupied in the whole of the pre-Islamic conceptual system only a narrow and peripheral place. Unlike the Qur’anic system in which Allah the Creator governs the entire weltanschauung, *Jāhiliyyah* did not attach great importance to this semantic field, which, therefore, did not play any decisive role in the *Jāhili weltanschauung*. This is tantamount to saying that the idea of Allah’s being the very ‘source’ of human existence, if it was there, meant very little to the minds of the pre-Islamic Arabs. And this is why the Qur’an tries so hard to bring home to them the very significance of this idea and to awaken them to the grave implication of it.

**II. Human Destiny**

There seems to be another important reason why the concept of Divine Creation was such a powerless one in the days of paganism despite the fact that concept itself did exist, as we have seen, among the *Jāhili* Arabs. It was a weak concept because the Arabs in pre-Islamic times were not very much concerned about the problem of the origin of their being. Their attention, instead of being called to the ‘beginning’ of life, was predominantly directed toward the ‘end’ of life, that is, Death. In fact, every reader of pre-Islamic literature will become aware sooner or later that Death was the only subject that was liable to arouse in the *Jāhili* mind something like philosophical meditation. The *Jāhili* Arabs who, as we saw earlier, were by nature a people least inclined to philosophical thinking, could become philosophers only when they were made seriously conscious of the inevitability of death. Hence the favorite subject of pre-Islamic poets: the problem of *khulūd* (the eternal life), the absolute unattainability of which they were so painfully aware of, and which drove them to their characteristic philosophy of life, the pessimistic nihilism.

In any case, whenever a *Jāhili* man was not entirely absorbed in worldly-affairs, bravery, spoiling and plundering, whenever he found time to come back to himself and reflect on his life, the first problem that came to his mind seems to have been that of Death and of the ‘powers’ or ‘causes’ that would bring it to him. This was the problem of human destiny for the pre-Islamic Arabs. It should be noticed that in this conception there is not involved the notion of the Hereafter, while in ordinary cases ‘human destiny’ concerns mainly the problem of life after death. In the case of the *Jāhili* Arabs, even with regard to this problem attention is almost exclusively centered on the span of life on earth in the very present world, with major emphasis placed on the end of the line; what will come beyond that final point, whatever, it may be, is of no concern to the *Jāhili* mind. Besides, as we have seen, for most of the pre-Islamic Arabs there could be absolutely nothing after the end of the present life. The body, once buried in the earth, decays and becomes dust while the soul flies away like the passing wind.

What are we (if we were not a sort of combination of a body with a soul?) The body, we go down’ with it (at our death) under the earth, while the soul (passes away) just like a gust of wind.

Of all the stages of the life-time of a man, the last stage, *i.e.*, Death, was, as I have just said, the most important one in the *Jāhili* conception of human existence. The first stage, that is, the origin and beginning of his existence, was not very much cared about. But when it was, it was normally linked up with the concept of creation. We remarked in the last chapter that the concept of Allah-Creator was known to the pre-Islamic Arabs. In the *Jāhili* system, too, man was considered to owe his being and existence to the creative activity of Allah. But there is here an extremely interesting point to note. Man, once created by Allah, severes his ties, so to speak, with his Creator,
and his existence on earth is, from that time on, put into the hands of another, far more powerful, Master. And the tyrannical sway of this Master continues till the very moment of his death, which is nothing but the culmination of the tyranny and oppression under which he has been groaning through all his life. The name of this tyrannical Sovereign is Dahr (Time). In Chapter 3 we have quoted in connection with a different problem a verse from the Qur'an, in which this word with precisely this meaning, is put in the mouth of the Kā'irs.

They say: there is nothing but this present life of ours; we die and we live, and it is only 'Time' (Dahr) that destroys us.

Al-Jāthiyah, 45:23 [24]

Dahr has various other names: Zamān (Time), 'Asr (Age), Ayām (Days), 'Awd (Time), but the underlying idea is always exactly the same. Here I give only a few examples.

'Awd:8 وَلَوَلْ قَبَلَتْ عَوْضٌ فِي حُضُبٍ تُؤُدِّيُّ وَتُؤُدُّينَ

Zamān:9 فَعَفَّوْنَ أَيْمَانَ الْمَيْلِ سَعْتُ أَنَّ زَمَانَ كَفُّبَ

Zamān:10 هَلَ عَيْشٌ طَالِبَةً فَإِنَّ أَنْثى زَمَانَ فَيْضَةً وَخُبْيَهَا

'Asr:11 فَإِنَّ نُبِيبَ الفَلَوْنَ فَدَامَ عَمْرٌ وَعَفَاةُ الأَصَافِرِ أَنْ يُنْبِيَنَّ

As regards Dahr itself, it is quite easy for us to isolate its basic image underlying this concept from any verse in which the word occurs. The following verse by Ta'abbata Sharran, for example, gives us the image of a merciless, cold-blooded tyrant against whom not even the bravest hero can fight:

Dahr has plundered me, the Dahr who is a merciless tyrant, of (a dear friend of mine) a haughty one who has never allowed his client to be disgraced, (i.e. let alone himself).12

Very frequently Dahr is described as a wild ferocious animal that bites you with sharp teeth.

فِنَ الْذِّنَبَ أَحْصَلْ فَوْ شَخِيْبٍ...

... for Dahr has hooked teeth (that never quit), ever ready to injure us.13

إِذَا السَّمَرُ عَضَّتَتْ أَيْمَانَنَا لَدَى السَّمَرُ قَوْرُبَ بِهَا أَزَمَّرَ

When Dahr bites you with his dog-teeth in misfortune, bite him back with all your might as much as he bites you.14

Thus the pre-Islamic view of human life has at its very center 'Something' dark and mysterious that extends its tyrannical sway over the life process of every individual man from the cradle to the grave. And this 'Something' which roughly corresponds to what we usually call 'Fate', is almost exclusively conceived of as a half-personal destructive force that not only brings all things to decay but also causes incessantly all kinds of suffering, misery and misfortune to human existence all through the span of life. This latter aspect of manifestation of its destructive activity has a number of particular names, like surāf ("surāf of Dahr"), hadathān (hadathān of Dahr), or hawādith, rayb ("rayb of Dahr" or "rayb of Zamān"), etc., all meaning approximately "unpredictable turns of (Fortune)"; it is sometimes called metaphorically banat al-dahr (Daughters of Dahr).

After having seen the death of (my grandfather) the king al-Hārith, and (my father) Hujr the Peerless, who possessed so many mansions, how
could I hope for tenderness from the surūf (turns) of Dahr, which, I know, never leave untouched even the lofty mountains of massy rocks?\textsuperscript{15}

The Daughters of Dahr have shot at me from a place I cannot see. What can a man do when he is shot at without being able to shoot back?\textsuperscript{16}

And no one, not even the most valiant warrior, the wisest sage, can escape from the blind and capricious tyranny of Dahr. At the root of the deep irremediable pessimism of Jāḥiliyyah lies such a dark conception of human destiny.

The destructive power of Dahr becomes particularly manifest at the end of a man’s existence. It is interesting that Dahr then changes its name and assumes various new names, the commonest among them being maniyyah (pl. manāyid), manūn, himān, hummah.\textsuperscript{17} In the following verse from the Diwān of the Hudhayl tribe, two of the words here mentioned are used side by side, showing that they were practically synonymous with each other.

\[\text{عَفَّرَ وَعَطَّلََا يَعَزَّ مَعَ تَمَيُّزَا تَمَيُّزَا أَحَلَّامُا}

Yes, indeed, Manāyid always gains the ultimate victory, and even talismans are of no use against the destructive power of Himām.\textsuperscript{18}

These words all mean ‘death’. But they do not simply mean ‘death’, but ‘death’ as the last and most destructive manifestation of the power of Dahr. So, although in contexts of this kind we find the word mawī (death) often used in such a way that it might be replaced freely by one of these words, there is semantically a wide difference between the two cases. Mawī (death) as a natural—biological, we might say—phenomenon, while the group words that we are dealing with here belong to the semantic field of human destiny represented by the focus-word dahr. They refer, in other words, to the phase of the Dahr’s rule over a man’s life-time; they represent the particular forms which Dahr assumes when it approaches the ultimate goal. It is, quite natural that this goal itself should also be often designated by the same words.\textsuperscript{19}

As regards this concept of the final point or goal of the Dahr’s rule, there is other important thing to be noticed. As we have remarked this final point corresponds, from the biological point of view, to ‘death’, just as ‘creation’ corresponds to ‘birth’. But this is not yet the end of the whole story. The final point of the Dahr’s death rule is capable of being viewed from a somewhat different angle, that of determinism. And it was in reality a very common view among the pre-Islamic Arabs.

\[\text{Allāh} \rightarrow \text{Dahr} \rightarrow \text{maniyyah etc.} \rightarrow \text{ajal} \rightarrow \text{birth} \rightarrow \text{death}

The conception is that the final point of a man’s span of life is in each individual case definitely and immutably fixed and determined beforehand. Everybody, in other words, has an appointed day on which he has to meet his death. ‘Death’ from this point of view is called ajal (pl. ajal), ‘the doom’ or ‘the appointed time’.

When that day arrives, anything, however small and weak, can kill anybody, however strong and powerful he may be. Al-Salakah, mother of the famous pre-Islamic outlaw al-Salik, says bewailing the death of her son and consoling herself at the same time:\textsuperscript{20}

\[\text{كلَّ ذَائِقُكَ فَذَائِقُهُمْ} \rightarrow \text{حَيَّنَ ذَائِقُكَ أَحَلَّكَ}

Anything indeed can kill you when you meet your own ajal.

It is, as al-Nabighah says in one of his poems on Dahr,\textsuperscript{21} something ‘written (maktub, from kataba, to write)’. And nobody can put it back by a single day.

\[\text{فَقَدْ قَالَ} \rightarrow \text{كَيْفُ تَقَيْسُوْنَ} \rightarrow \text{عَرَفَ عَنْ ذَائِقَةِ ذَاكِر} \rightarrow \text{مَا نُصَّبَ}

When I get the arrow of Death [the allusion is to the game of chance, a kind of lottery by arrows], I shall never lose my composure, for (of
what avail will it be?) Is there anybody at all who can remain alive beyond (the appointed time)?

Whatever you may do, you cannot add even a single hour to your appointed time, as ‘Antarah\(^{23}\) emphasizes in one of his poems:

\[
\text{وَلَّاَ نَطَعُ الْمَلَامِحَ}
\]

\[
\text{فَما وَرَتَ الْمَأْمُوْلَةِ فِي الأَحْلَٰلِ}
\]

Do not flee once you have gone deep into a battle, for flying before the enemy will never defer your appointed time (ajal).

Thus everybody has his own ajal, and every day is a step towards that fated time. Before the philosophic eye of the Jāhilī poet there unfolds itself a magnificent and tragic panorama of all mankind marching steadily towards the ultimate end.

\[
\text{بِنَاءَةَ مَا مَلَأَّهُمْ شَمْسُ وَلَا غَرْبَتُ إِلَّا عَطْبَ أَحْلَٰلِ لِيُعَادَ}
\]

Listen, Háthir! There never rises the sun and never does it set but that the djl (pl. of ajal) draw nearer the promised time (mi‘ād).\(^{24}\)

This is, indeed, a very gloomy view of life, the whole span of life being conceived of as a series of calamitous events, governed not by the natural law of growth and decay, but by the inscrutable will of a dark, blind, semi-personal Being, from whose strong grip there can be no escape. And only against the background of this tragical atmosphere can we understand the real historical significance of the Qur’anic world-view.

In fact, the Qur’an offers an entirely different picture of the human condition. All of a sudden, the sky clears up, the darkness is dissipated, and in place of the tragic sense of life there appears a new bright vista of the eternal life. The difference between the two world-views on this problem is exactly like the difference between Night and Day.

In the new Islamic system, too, Allah as the Creator marks the starting point of human existence. But already here, at the very outset, we begin to observe a fundamental change. In the old Jāhilī system, the creative activity of Allah is both the beginning and the end of His intervention in human affairs. He does not act as a rule take care of what He has brought into existence just like an irresponsible father who never cares for his children; the task is taken over, as we have just seen, by another Being called Dahr.

In the Islamic system, on the contrary, creation marks just the beginning of the Divine rule over the created things. All human affairs even the minutest and apparently most insignificant details of life are put under the strict supervision of Allah. And the most important point about this is that this God, according to the Qur’an, is the God of justice, who never does any wrong (zulm) to anybody. No more Dahr, nor more secret machinations of Dahr. The very existence itself of some such thing as Dahr is flatly denied and dismissed as a mere product of groundless imagination. The whole course of human life is now placed under the absolute control of the will of God.

Of course, the problem of death still remains. Death is inevitable.

\[
\text{إِنَّا نَكُونُونَا بِكُلِّ ذِي أَمْوَاتٍ وَلَوْ نَكُونُونَا بِمَعْلُومٍ مَّلِئَةً}
\]

\[
\text{Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, though you hide yourselves in castles solidly built.}
\]

\text{An-Nisā’}, 4:80 [78]

\[
\text{Even the Prophet himself cannot be an exception.}
\]

\[
\text{إِنَّا نَكُونُونَا بِكُلِّ ذِي أَمْوَاتٍ وَلَوْ نَكُونُونَا بِمَعْلُومٍ مَّلِئَةً}
\]

\[
\text{Never have We assigned immortality to any man before you (Muhammad). What! if you die, can other people live forever?}
\]

\text{Every soul must taste of death.}

\text{Anbiya’}, 21:35-36 [34-35]

This is because Allah has “measured out death to all mankind”\(^{25}\). Allah “gives life and gives death”\(^{26}\) as He likes.

The concept of ajal continues to exist in the Islamic system just as it did in Jāhilīyah. Here, too, ajal is the ‘appointed term’, and, when applied to the concept of human life, it means nothing other than ‘death’ as the ultimate term determined by Allah.
Day of Judgment. Beyond this final ajal, man steps into the new life of eternity. It is to be remarked that in the Qur’anic conception, this whole process, comprising both the life in the Dunyā and the life in the Hereafter, is under the administration of Allah, as shown in the above diagram. This raises, within the limits of the first half of the course of human existence—i.e., the stretch of the line between birth and death—the very famous problem of Qadā’ wa qadar (Divine ‘Foreordination’), which is admittedly one of the most difficult problems that the later Islamic thought had to face.

Whether this thought of Divine Foreordination is already there in the Qur’ān clearly stated and formulated as the theologians assert, or whether, as Dr. Daud Rahbar thinks, the theologians are here reading into the Qur’ān their own thought, is a difficult point to decide. But, however this may be, it is quite certain that the Qur’ān itself raises this problem in an extremely acute form by the very fact that it puts the whole course of human life under the absolute control of the will of God.

It is not necessary for us in the present study to try to explore the intricacies of this problem. The problem, in my view, rather belongs properly to Islamic theology. Besides, all the relevant passages in the Qur’ān have been examined philologically by Dr. Rahbar. So I would be content here with adding few words to what he has said on this problem.

That the concept of Foreordination is not an invention of the theologians is shown by the fact that even before the rise of Islam, almost exactly the same idea seems to have been circulating among some Arabs of a special religious tendency, and that even outside the small circle of the Hanīfs. The great poet Labīd who, as I have pointed out before, was famous for his deep religious nature, was one of those who openly professed the belief in Divine Foreordination. Here is an example:

We men are not able to erase what He (i.e. Allah) has once written down (kitāb). How can this be, when His qadā’ is absolutely unalterable.

The word qadar is also used by Labīd with the same meaning.
missed the sense of this verse in his translation of the Diwân of this poet.
8. “If only there were no arrow of ‘Awd stuck into my whole body and limbs...”, said by the Jâhilî poet al-Find al-Zimmâni (al-Hamâsah, CLXXVI, 3) lamenting over the decay due to old-age.
9. (The wind and the rain) have completely changed the aspect of the abodes together with the decay due to time. Indeed, no guarantee there is against the destructive power of Zamân. (Tara’ah, Diwân, ed. M. Seligsohn, Paris, 1901, IV, 4)
10. “No sooner does a way of living seem enjoyable to us than it is destroyed completely by Zamân, whether it be old or new.” (“Antarah, Diwân, p. 61, v. 5)
11. “If my locks grow grey, it is the work of ‘Asr, and the inevitable end of all that are young is grey hair.” (“Abd Allâh Salimah, Al-Mufaddaliyyât, XVIII, v. 11)
12. al-Hamâsah, CCLXXIII, 6.
17. On these and other related words in pre-Islamic literature, see an interesting philological study by Werner Caskel: Das Schicksal in der altarabischen Poesie, Leipzig, 1926.
19. Of course it often happens the words are used in a more loose sense. Then they are simply synonyms of dahr.
20. al-Hamâsah, CCCX, 4. The poem is attributed to al-Salakah by al-Tîbrîzî, while al-Marzâqî attributes it to “a woman whose name is unknown”.
21. al-Nâbighah, Diwân, V, 4. As regards the important concept of ‘writing’, see last paragraph of this chapter.
25. 56:60.
26. 9:117 [116].
27. Note the word kitâb (“what is written”) in this verse.

Notes

1. ﷺلاَّ أَلْهَ مَعَ رَبِّي الَّذِي رَكَّزَ الْفُؤَادَ لَنِّي إِلَّا هُوَ حَيُّ الْحَيَّ حَيَّ الْأَمْنِيّ} (الْأَغْفَاءْ; 102).

2. This then is Allah your Lord. There is no god save Him, the Creator of everything (Al-An‘âm, 6:102).
4. See above, Chapter 4, section II. The verb barâ, for bara‘a, is a synonym of khalaqa, meaning ‘to create’.
5. Diwân, p. 60, v. 8. Mubdi, for mubdi‘ comes from the verb abda‘a meaning “to bring something into existence for the first time”: another synonym of khalaqa.
7. For a more detailed account of this Jâhilî philosophy of life, see The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran, chap. V.
8. Reading namurrî instead of tamurrî. The poet is ‘Abid b. al-Abras (Diwân, Beirut, 1958, IX, 21). It is to be remarked that of the two ʿurwâhs, the first is the plural of râh (soul), and the second is the plural of râh (wind). It seems to me that Charles Lyall has completely
CHAPTER 6

Communicative Relation Between God and Man: Non-linguistic Communication

I. The ‘Signs’ of God

There are two chief types of mutual ‘understanding’ between God and man. One is linguistic or verbal, that is, through the use of a human language common to both parties, and the other is non-verbal, that is, through the use of ‘natural sign’ on the part of God and gestures and bodily movements on the part of man. In both cases, quite naturally the initiative is taken by God Himself, the human side of the phenomenon being basically a matter of ‘response’ to the initiative displayed by God.

The will of God to open up direct communication between Him and mankind manifests itself, according to the Qur'an, in the form of His “sending down” the āyāt (pl. of āyah, ‘signs’). On this basic level, there is no essential difference between linguistic and non-linguistic Signs; both types are equally divine āyāt. Revelation (wahy) which is the typical form of communication from God to man by means of language, is in this sense only a partial phenomenon comprised with several others under the wider concept of God-man communication. This is why the Qur'an actually calls the revealed words āyāt without distinguishing them from other ‘signs’ of a non-linguistic nature that are also called āyāt.

But since the linguistic or verbal āyāt form by themselves a very particular class, which is better designated by the technical term of Revelation (wahy), and since, moreover, this class is in some important respects quite different in nature and structure from the non-verbal āyāt, and has so many characteristic features that are not shared by the latter, we may justifiably regard it as an independent unit and give it a separate treatment. This will be the special subject of the following chapter.

The present chapter, in this sense, may be considered rather an introduction to the more specific and more important problem of Revelation, for it purports to give, first and foremost, the more general structural characteristics of Divine communication comprising both the verbal type and the non-verbal one. In any case most of what will be said in this chapter will apply equally well to the phenomenon of Revelation, of which it will provide a kind of background knowledge. This is true of course only of communication in the descending direction, i.e., the case in which God is the sender of the signs and man the receiver. As to communication in the ascending direction, i.e., from man to God, there is too immense a difference between the verbal type and the non-verbal type that the two cannot in any way be treated in the same breath. Let us begin with the communication from God to man.

God is showing ‘signs’ at every moment, āyah after āyah, to those who have enough intelligence to grasp them as ‘signs’. The meaning of this, in the sense in which the Qur’an understands it, is that all that we usually call natural phenomena, such as rain, wind, the structure of the heaven and the earth, alternation of day and night, the turning about of the winds, etc., all these should be understood not as simple natural phenomena, but as so many ‘signs’ or ‘symbols’ pointing to the Divine intervention in human affairs, as evidences of the Divine Providence, care and wisdom displayed by God for the good of human beings on this earth.

Just as a waymark must not cause a traveller to rivet his eyes on itself, but direct him towards a certain place which is the real destination of his travel, so every natural phenomenon, instead of absorbing our attention, as a natural phenomenon, and transfixed itself to itself, should act always in such a way that our attention be directed towards something beyond it. At this depth of understanding, a natural phenomenon is no longer a natural phenomenon; it is a ‘sign’ or ‘symbol’—āyah as the Qur’an calls it. And this Something Beyond to which all the so-called natural phenomena point as ‘signs’ in the Qur’anic conception, God Himself, or more precisely, this or that aspect of God such as His...
Benevolence, His Power, His Sovereignty, His Justice, etc.

The Qur’anic conception may be made more understandable by a comparison with the philosophical weltanschauung of a modern Western philosopher, Karl Jaspers who, interestingly enough, has made precisely this point one of the foundation-stones of his system. In this system much attention is paid to the problem of the symbolic nature of the world. According to Jaspers, we live at several different levels. When we leave the level of the normal, daily commonplace reason (Verstand), at which natural things including man appear to our eyes simply as natural things, and step into the realm of Existenz, we find ourselves suddenly in a strange world, standing in front of God, whom he calls philosophically das Umgreifende meaning something infinitely great comprising everything from above. This All-Comprising keeps talking to us, not directly, but through the natural things. Things no longer exist here as natural, objective things, but they are symbols, through which the All-Comprising talks to us. Things at this stage are ‘ciphers’ (Chiffer as he calls them) or cryptograms. So that the whole universe is represented as a big Chifferschrift, a book written entirely in cryptograms. In other words the world is a big book of symbols, a book which only those who live at the level of Existenz are able read. This would exactly correspond to the Qur’anic thought according to which all things are in truth dyâl of Allah, and their symbolic nature can only grasped by those who have ‘aqîl (intellect) who can ‘think’ (tafaqkhar) in the true sense of the word.

Regarding the problem as to whether or not this usage of the word dyâh originated by the Qur’an, we should remark that it was not certainly in the Bedouin tradition, that is to say, in the genuine Arabic language. As far as I know, there is no trace of the word having been used in a religious sense; it is always used in the naturalistic sense. This, however, does not seem to be true of the Hanfistic circle. The poet Lab’d, for example, who, as we saw, shows a markedly Hanfistic coloring in both his diction and conception, has the following verse:

\[
\text{وَالمَاءَ وَالْعَرَاءُ بِنَبَتَيْنِ أَلْفَيْنِ}
\]

And water and fire (i.e., the rain and the heavenly lights such as the sun, moon and the stars) are His (i.e. Allah’s) dyâl. In them there is a lesson to learn for those who are not jâhil (i.e., those who are capable of thinking rightly).

The problem, however, is not of central importance for our present purposes. What is more important is the semantic structure of the concept of dyâh in the Qur’anic system itself. To this problem we shall now turn.

The Divine dyâl as the Qur’an understands the word in a general sense, comprise as I said at the outset, both verbal and non-verbal symbols. The verbal type, i.e., Revelation, is, in the nature of the case, much more precise than the other type, being essentially conceptual. It presents Divine Will in an articulate form. In other words, what God wants to convey to the human mind is here given analytically, one element after another, each element being given as much conceptual precision as possible. While in the non-verbal one, Divine Will is manifested globally, not analytically. And since in the latter case there can be no conceptual precision, the message conveyed must necessarily be extremely vague and inarticulate. But the non-verbal dyâl have one conspicuous advantage: they can be and are actually addressed to mankind at large without any discrimination; moreover they can be given directly without any intermediary, while the verbal type can be given directly only to one particular person, the Prophet, and only indirectly and mediately to mankind. All men are living in the very midst of the world of divine symbols, and these are accessible to anybody if only he has the mental and spiritual capacity to interpret them as symbols.

Now, as we know already from what has been said in the first chapters of this book on the methodological principles of semantics, the semantical analysis of the concept of dyâh in the Qur’an will consist in our trying to understand what it means in terms of the ‘semantic field’ which this focus-word forms around itself. We have, in other terms, to examine the words of decisive importance—the key-words—that surround it in the Qur’anic contexts.

For this purpose, the most important thing to remark is, in my view, the fact that, given the Divine dyâl, whether verbal or non-verbal, the only possible human response is, according to the Qur’an, either ‘acceptance’ or ‘rejection’—tâsdiq lit. “regarding and accepting, as true” or takdisr lit. “regarding as false”. Man either accepts the dyâl as Truth (haqq) or rejects them altogether as Falsehood.
(bâtil) having no reality behind them, mere products of fantasy and groundless imagination. And of course, tasdiq (acceptance) is the first step towards imân (belief), and taklîb is the very gist of kufr, the only different being that the former pair (tasdiq-taklîb) is much more realistic and naked in conception than the latter pair (imân-kufr) which is a degree higher in scale of abstraction. In the Qur'anic world-view we witness tasdiq and taklîb as two opposite principles engaged in a fierce life-and-death conceptual battle with each other. And this is one of the basic oppositions which, as I said earlier, contribute towards producing that intense dramatic tension that reigns over the Qur'anic world-view. In this sense, the relation between tasdiq and taklîb must be considered the very axis around which revolves the whole semantic field, and which, therefore, assigns to each of the key-terms its proper place in this conceptual system. All this must be considered in more detail now.

Let me begin by giving in a tabular form the general conceptual structure of the entire semantic field of āyāh.

The beginning of the whole thing is the Divine act of “sending down” (tanzîl) the ‘signs’. Without this initial act on the part of God, there could be no religion in the Islamic sense of the word.

This Divine act, however, would remain barren and effectless if there were no man there to understand its profound meaning, as the Qur'ān says:

\[
\text{We have made clear to you the signs (āyāt), if you can understand.}
\]

Āli 'Imrān, 3:114 [118]

However much God calls men to the right path by showing them āyāh after āyāh, if all men were incapable of understanding the meaning of them like the Kāfrîs who are “deaf, dumb and blind and do not understand”, then the āyāt could not work.

The āyāt begin to show their positive effect only when man shows on his part a deep understanding. Here begins the human side of the matter. And this very important human activity is expressed by a number of verbs (see Table, Column 2) which designate various aspects of ‘understanding’.
According to the Qur'an, this human act of understanding has its source in the psychological capacity called *tubh* or *qalb* (the 'heart') (Column 3). All the mental activities mentioned in Column 2 are nothing but concrete manifestations of this basic mental capacity or principle. The 'heart' is the very thing which enables man to 'understand' the meaning of the Divine *āyāt*. So, when this principle is sealed and covered and does not function properly man cannot show any understanding at all.

And a seal has been set upon their hearts (qalb); so they cannot understand.

*Al-Tawbah*, 9:88 [87]

The *qalb* (heart) is naturally made in such a way that it might understand the meaning of the *āyāt* if it functions normally. What does it see in those *āyāt* if it understands them properly? This is the problem of Column 4. It concerns the meaning of the Divine *āyāt* that are revealed to an understanding *qalb*. For such a *qalb* they are mainly symbols of two things, that are diametrically opposed to each other. Some *āyāt* symbolize the Divine Goodness, the infinite love, benevolence and clemency of God, while others symbolize the wrath of God, the imminence of dreadful punishment and vengeance. In the former case, the Divine act of showing an *āyah*—or rather, the transmission of it through the Prophet to mankind—is called *tabshir* ('the bringing of good news', 'evangel' in the etymological sense). In the latter case, it is called *indhār* (warning) or more nakedly, *wa'īd* (threatening). Correspondingly, the same Prophet is called in the Qur'an sometimes *mubashshir*, a 'bringer of good news', and sometimes *mundhir*, a 'warner'.

The next Column (5) concerns the human response to the *āyāt*. The basic human response consists in either "regarding and accepting the *āyāt* as true" (*tasdiq*) or "regarding them as totally false and nonsense and rejecting them" (*takdhib*). This bifurcation of the human response to the *āyāt* is very important because it is directly conducive to 'belief' or 'faith' on the one hand, and 'disbelief' on the other. The immediate consequence of this bifurcated human response together with its semantic structure, is shown in Column 6 of our synaptic table. When man accepts as true the Divine favor as symbolized by the *āyāt* of the first category—[A]+[a]—the result is *shukr* (gratitude) [I] in religious sense. When he accepts also as true the *āyāt* of the second category—[B]+[a]—it results in *tagwād* [II], which, as we have seen, means originally and basically the fear of the austere Lord of the Day of Judgment and His chastisement. When, on the contrary man regards [A] as false—[A]+[b]—the result is *kufr* [III]. As we know already, this is soon extended to [B]; then—[A] [B]+[b]—*kufr* acquires the technical meaning of 'disbelief'.

At the final stage, represented by Column 7 in our diagram, [I] and [II] united into one, and the concept of *imān* (belief) in the Islamic sense of the word is born of this combination. And *imān* here stands opposed to *kufr* in the sense of [A] [B]+[b].

It will be evident that all this, beginning with the Divine act of sending down the *āyāt* and ending with the human act of either belief or disbelief constitutes a coherent conceptual system. It forms a very compact network of associations, in which each one of the words is related to all other members of the network in a peculiar way, and each one of them is tinged and colored by being related to all others. The concept of *āyah* and its field furnishes also a good occasion to show by a concrete example what kind of a thing a 'semantic field' is, and how it is to be distinguished from a chance combination of words. A 'semantic field', of which we have here an ideal example before our eyes, is not a mere context, in which a number of words happen to be used together in a casual combination. In a semantic field, nothing is casual; every combination within the field is essential in the sense that it represents an essential aspect of the *weltanschauung*.

This, be it remarked incidentally, should not be taken in the sense that all the words that belong in this particular field cannot enter into other combinations in other semantic fields. One and the same word may and usually does belong to several different fields. The word *qalb* is not exclusively the locus of *tasdiq* and *takdhib*; it is the locus of a number of other mental activities. The word 'aqala does not exclusively and necessarily mean "understanding Divine *āyāt". But as long as it works within this particular field of *āyāt*, it has a very particular and very important semantic coloring which it has acquired by being associated with all other members of this
system and influenced by the peculiar structure of the whole field itself.

This kind of semantic coloring is very delicate and subtle to grasp, but also extremely important in determining the meaning of word. The meaning of a word is not exhausted by its basic meaning. It has also a relational meaning and this latter always comes from the essential combinations into which it enters in a given system.

II. Divine Guidance

In the preceding section we have examined the general structure of the semantic field which forms itself around the focus-word َآية. The basic part of this semantic field may be described more briefly as follows: (1) God sends down the َآية; (2) man responds to it by either accepting it as Truth (تاسديق), or rejecting it as Falsehood (تاكذيب); (3) the former naturally leads to ‘belief’ (مأمن) and the latter to ‘disbelief’ (كفر).

Diagram I

This, however, is not the only semantic field of َآية to be found in the Qur’ān. In fact, the Qur’ān offers two different fields formed around the central idea of Allah’s sending down the َآية. The interesting point is that they do not exist in the Qur’ānic wereldanschauung quite independently of each other as two separate fields, but are formed in such a way that they correspond exactly to each other as regards their basic structure. As far as concerns the abstract skeleton framework, both are almost exactly the same; only the same structure is used twice, being each time provided with different conceptual clothing produce two different semantic fields. And this formal correspondence between two sister fields reflecting one and the same piece of reality—the communicative activity of God, in our particular case—in two different ways is exceedingly important for our purpose, because here we see the Qur’ān

interpreting itself, so to speak, before our eyes.

It is one of the characteristic features of this second system that the ‘articulation’ of the field is done in terms of a set of concepts which, unlike those used in the first system, have apparently nothing to do with communication.

Diagram II

Here the concept of َآية, to begin with, is replaced by the concept of ‘Guidance’ (هدى). This would imply that God’s act of sending down the َآية is, according to the Qur’ānic view, just the same thing as His guidance; the َآية are but the concrete expression of the Divine intention to guide mankind to the right path. And just as in the first system man could choose either تاسديق or تاكذيب, so in the second system man is free to respond to this divine act in one of the two possible ways, i.e., either by ihtida’, ‘following the guidance’ that has been offered or الدليل, “going out of the right way” by refusing to follow the guidance that has been so graciously offered to him. And those who choose the first way are on the road to Heavenly Garden (جنة) while those who choose the second are on the road to Hell (جحيم).

All this is still only the first half of the whole picture. The second half is no less important than the first, and although at the Qur’ānic stage the two are simply there existing side by side without apparently causing any trouble at all, they later begin to clash with one another, and, particularly in theology, end by standing in sharp unequivocal opposition.

In this second version, the whole field is viewed from the standpoint of the Foreordination (قدّر وقادر) which we have already examined in connection with the problem of the ontological relation between God and man. From this particular point of view, everything that happens on this earth is due ultimately to God’s Will. In this perspective, a man who takes the right way preferring ihtida’ to الدليل or who swerves away from the right way, by choosing الدليل.
Instead of ihtidā', is not, in reality, choosing anything for himself by himself. His very act of responding to Divine guidance in either way is the necessary result of God’s Will. He chooses dalāl or ihtidā’ not because he wills, but simply because God himself wills that he should do so. In other words both man’s ihtidā’ and dalāl, are equally due to Divine Will (masht’ah). Thus we read:

Whomsoever God will, He makes him go astray, and whomsoever He will, He sets him on a straight path.

Al-An‘ām, 6:39

This second interpretation of the matter may be shown conveniently in the form of a simple diagram (III). And if we compare the two diagrams (II and III) with one another, we will see immediately the fundamental difference between this and the first one.

The comparison will make it clear that in the second system, it is not the case, as it is in the first, that man responds to Divine guidance either with ihtidā’ (being guided) or with dalāl (going astray). Rather, he responds to Divine hadā with ihtidā’, and to idlāl (leading astray) with dalāl (going astray). This is tantamount to saying that man, in this view, is no longer free to choose either ihtidā’ or dalāl, given Divine guidance. Everything would have seemed to be already fixed and decided from the very beginning. So man’s “going astray” is nothing but the direct and necessary result of God’s idlāl (leading astray). And this Divine act of “leading astray” alone can resist, in such a case, not even the Prophet himself can ever hope to lead anybody back to the right path, as the Qur’ān itself repeatedly emphasizes.

Thus we see in this second system, already at the initial stage, a basic opposition of hadā (guiding) and adlāl (leading astray) and this opposition runs through the whole system, so that we have here two lines running parallel to each other from the very beginning to the end.

The existence of these two different ‘versions’ of one and the same ‘story’ and the contrast between them in the Qur’ān could not but raise later among the Muslim thinkers grave problems regarding the concept of human freedom and moral responsibility. For once you adopt a strictly logical point of view, you must recognize the existence of a logical contradiction between these two systems. Only, the standpoint of the Qur’ān is not that of pure logic; the Qur’ānic thought unfolds itself on a plane which is essentially different from that of the logic of human reason. And as long as one keeps oneself on this level of thinking there can be no place for such a problem. In any case, the Qur’ān itself did not raise the problem of human freedom in this particular form.

Without going any further into the theological problem of human freedom and God’s justice, let us now turn to the inner semantic structure of the concept of Guidance, which is admittedly one of the most important concepts the Qur’ān. We have seen above how the same field is conceptualized in the Qur’ān in two different ways. But whichever system we take as basic, we meet with always the same conceptual opposition of ihtidā’ and dalāl as soon as the human part begins. This is common to both systems. And this opposition of ihtidā’ and dalāl is to be found almost everywhere in the Qur’ān; indeed the two constitute one of the commonest and most frequently used conceptual pairs in the Qur’ān. 4

As I have said before, this pair has its counterpart, in another semantic field, in the opposition of tasdiq and takdhīb as the two basic forms of human response to the āyāt sent down by God. But the first pair (I) has something which distinguishes it definitely from the second (II). Unlike the latter, the opposition ihtidā’...dalāl is not
conceivable without there being a more basic concept underlying it: that of ‘Way’. The concept of ‘Way’ is the ‘focus-word’ of the entire field. In other words, the concept of ‘Way’ plays in this semantic field the role which the concept of ‘sign’ (āyah) plays in the other. In the Qur’ān, this concept of ‘Way’ is signified by various words, sabīl, strāt, tarīq being the most important ones.

Likewise, ihtidā’ and dalāl have each a number of synonyms. In place of ihtidā’ are sometimes used, for example, rashd or rashād meaning “to enter on the right path”, qasd meaning “to take one’s way toward the right destination”. As to dalāl (verb dalla), many different words are actually used in the Qur’ān as synonyms: ‘amīha, for example, which means “to wander about away from the right way” (ex. 2:14 [15]), qaṣata (“to swerve from the right way”) (ex. 72:14-15), nakaba or nakiba with the same meaning (ex. 23:76 [74]), ṭāḥa (“to get lost in the desert and wander in bewilderment”) (ex. 5:29 [26]), and ghawā, ghawīya (inf. ghayy and ghawāyah), “to go astray” (ex. 7:143 [146]).

It will be easy to see that there underlies all these concepts the very basic concept of Way. The problem is always: Does a man take the right way leading to his true destination, that is, God and the salvation of his soul, or does he deviate from it and wander about blindly in the desert of godlessness? But what is more important to remark is that the Way in question is not simply a way; the most decisive element in this image of Way in the Qur’ānic conception is its being ‘straight’ (mustaqīm).

The Way which God indicates through His āyāt is ‘straight’. This means in the Qur’ānic context that if you but follow its line, it will lead you straight to salvation. And this straightness of the Divine Way stands in sharp contrast to ‘crookedness’ (‘iwayf) of all other ways. Crookedness means in this context that the way, instead of leading you to your destination, leads away from it.

(God commands, saying:) This is My straight way, so do you follow it. Follow not other ways (subul pl. of sabīl, with the implication that they are all ‘crooked’) lest they scatter you away from His way.

Al-An‘ām, 6:154 [153]
Non-linguistic Communication

in one of his poems says boastfully:

نَهَى وَتَأْوَىٰ بِيَتِىٰ الْفَتْحُ بِهَا نَأْمُسُهَا كَأَلْفُ دُوَّرَةٍ
خَلَّةُ نَهَاةٍ بِعَبْرَةٍ ...

Enough! (Let us change our subject). Often an immense desert where even the professional guides (hādātī pl. of hādī) lose their way, its expanse stretching far, its sand looking like stripes on a Yemen robe, a limitless desert, I crossed on a tall stout camel."

From this we see how vitally important it was those days for a man to be a good hādī himself or at least to have an experienced and reliable hādī with him. In the Qur'anic world too, the concept of hādī occupies a place of vital importance. Only, in the Qur'an, the hādī is God Himself, the Guide who never goes astray, who is therefore, absolutely reliable. Thus the Qur'an completely spiritualises the concept; it transfers it from the sphere of the most material aspect of human life to the level of the religious conception of human life. It was originally a concept relating to the experience of real travelling in the desert. Now in the Qur'an it is a religious concept relating to the course of human life metaphorically taken as a vast desert that man has to travel across.

Quite naturally, the same thing happened to the concept of 'way' itself. Thus sirāt10 and sabīl that are the most representative words for 'way' in the Qur'an, are used evidently in a religious sense. The two are completely synonymous with each other in the Qur'an, and belong to the category of the key terms that go to determine the basic structure of the Qur'anic weltanschauung. In pre-Islamic times too, the poets used these two words frequently, but always in a non-religious, material sense.

To say the truth, it is not the question of a few key-words taken separately. The whole semantic field of Way acquires in the Qur'an a deep symbolic meaning. The Qur'an, to put it in another way, transposes the entire conceptual field, with all the individual words that form it, from the material level of thinking to the religious level of thinking, spiritualizes it, and makes the metaphorical system of concepts thus produced the very basis on which to build up its religious philosophy.
III. The Worship as a Means of Communication

As already remarked, communication between God and man, verbal or non-verbal, is not a unilateral, but a bilateral, reciprocal phenomenon. Corresponding to the verbal type of communication from God to man, which is nothing but Revelation, there is *du'a* (personal prayer), conversation of the human heart with God, calling on God for His favor and aid, as the verbal type of communication in the ascending direction. In a similar way, the non-verbal Divine communication consisting in God’s sending down the non-verbal *ad-dāl*, has a human counterpart in the services of worship and the religious exercises known in Islam as *salāt*. In fact, *salāt* or the Worship is susceptible of being looked at from various points of view. But from the particular standpoint of the present study, it is the non-linguistic variety of communication in the ascending direction, *i.e.* from man to God, for it is a formalized ‘expression’ on the part of man of the profound adoration which he feels in the presence of the Almighty. Man, instead of merely receiving the words and signs of God in a passive way, is strongly urged and commanded to express positively his feeling of adoration through a cycle of physical acts in company of others who share with him the same feeling.

Certainly *salāt* contains some verbal elements, because besides the prescribed bodily movements, reading from the Scripture, reciting the confession of faith (*shahādah*), the benediction for the Prophet etc., constitute an important part of the Worship. But we must remark that the verbal elements *i.e.*, words, are used here in quite a different way from the words in personal prayers (*du’a*), for in *salāt*, they are used ritualistically; all the words assume a markedly ritualistic significance, while in *du’a* type of prayer, the words are used primarily for the expression *ad hoc* of strictly personal thoughts and feelings calling for expression at a particular moment. A man in his *du’a*, in short, really ‘means’ what he says. While in *salāt*, the words he utters do not describe his own personal ideas, but are by nature symbolic in the sense that they form part of the ritual. The verbal elements in *salāt* are not at all verbal in the ordinary sense of the word. Moreover, what is important here is the whole pattern of worship, which is something far more than verbal. It is, on the whole, a non-verbal way of communication from man to God; it is the human way of establishing direct contact with God through the prescribed form of ritual.

With Prophet Muhammad, *salāt* seems to go back, in spirit not in name, to his pre-Islamic days. All the important *Hadiths* agree in asserting that Muhammad, following the practice of some of the devout Makkans, used to go in temporary seclusion from the worldly affairs to a cave on al-Hira’ near Makkah every year for a certain number of days. And according to the traditional account, this had continued for several years before finally the Truth visited him and raised him as Apostle of God. In the *Hadiths* this is called *tahannuth*. Although the etymology of this word is obscure, it is fairly certain that it meant some devotional exercises. And perhaps we may consider it the pre-Islamic stage of the *salāt*.

Be that as it may, the *salāt*, the ritual prayer or Worship, soon became one of the major institutions of Islam, and was given an exceedingly important place among the religious duties as a distinctive feature of the nascent Muslim community. It is not necessary here to go into the details of this institution. Let it suffice to note that *sujūd* (verb *sajada*), ‘prostration’, which is the very culmination of this type of worship, and which consists in the believer’s prostrating with his forehead touching the ground before the object to be worshipped, was known among the pre-Islamic Arabs as the form of expressing the deepest admiration heightened to the degree of adoration. The poet al-Nabighah, for instance, describing the enthralling beauty of a girl, says:

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أَوْ زُوْجَةُ عَنْامٌ بَرَاءةٌ َّوَدَّٰتَ َهُبٌ بِيَأْمُومٍ
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Or (she may be likened) to a large virgin pearl, before which the diver, in a glee, lifts up his voice in adoration and prostrates himself.

If such a girl showed herself to the eyes of a Christian monk with gray hair on his head, he would begin worshipping God (*i.e.* he would prostrate on the spot in admiration), even the monk who, unmarried, has spent all his life in pious devotion.

As to the basic meaning of *salāt* we know that the verb *salāt* generally meant “to invoke blessings upon someone” in both the pre-
difference consists in the fact that here the qiblah, instead of being the direction of Makkah Shrine, is the imperial palace of the Persian Emperor, and the worship itself is the Imperial cult, instead of being the divine cult of Allah.

Notes

1. Labid, Diwan XLII, v. 5. As regards the meaning of jähil, I shall give a detailed later (see Chapter 8).
2. 2:166 [171]
3. Take for example the Qur'anic verse “They (Moses and his page) forgot their fish” (18:60 [61]). The combination of the two words ‘forgetting’ and ‘fish’ is quite casual. It is a mere context; it does not produce in any way a semantic field. Nobody would say that the verb nasiya (to forget) has acquired a special semantic from this particular combination.
4. For example, 39:38 [37]; 2:170 [175], etc.
5. قزَّانْ أَقَابَانِ بِمَا كَذَبْنَاهُ بِالْحَزَرِ أَكْبَرَ النَّاسِ (الْوَسُودٍ: 74)

Those who believe not in the Hereafter are deviating from the right way.
6. ‘iwaikan for mu’waqiyatan.
8. v. 19.
10. A very old borrowing from the Latin strata (i.e. via strata, ‘paved way’) meaning the so-called Roman road. The word appears in the Diwan of ‘Abid al-Abras in the plural from surat meaning just ordinary roads. The Jähil Arabs, in so far as we can judge from their literature, seem to have lost all memory of this etymology.
12. For such details, see E. E. Calvert, Worship in Islam, Madras, 1925.
14. قَلْنَعْلَى فِلاْنً دَاخِلَةً وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُنَّ نَحْوَهُ بَارِكَ
9:85 [84]; 9:104 [103]; 33:42 [43] may be adduced as some of the Qur'anic examples.

15. Cf. *Lisan al-'Arab*, p. 242; *irtasa* means "to pray to God for protection", but according to Abū Hanīfah, the verb here means "to seal up the jar tightly".


CHAPTER 7

Communicative Relation Between God and Man: Linguistic Communication

I. God's Speech (*Kalām Allāh*)

The communicative relation between God and man in the Qur'anic view is, to repeat what has been pointed out several times, basically twofold: (1) from God to man and (2) from man to God. In the previous chapter we have dealt with the non-verbal type. As I said there, the verbal type which is going to be the subject of the present chapter, is in the last analysis but a particular case of the more general phenomenon of God-man communication represented in a typical way by the non-verbal category. This being the case, what has been said about the fundamental structure of the non-verbal communication applies in toto to the verbal one, as far as concerns the God-man side of the matter. In other words, Revelation is nothing but a very particular case of the "sending down" of the *āyāt*. Only, Revelation stands out so clearly and distinctly from all other forms of "sending down" that it demands to be treated separately as an independent category. And this is also the Qur'anic view on this question. In the Qur'an, Revelation is given a very special place. It is treated there as something extraordinary, something mysterious, the secret of which cannot be disclosed to the ordinary human mind. Hence the necessity of the intermediary called 'Prophet'. In this respect, the *āyāt* which God sends down in this special form are wholly different from all other *āyāt*, which are 'natural' and, therefore, accessible to any human being who is possessed of the normal capacity of 'right understanding'.
We may point out as one of the most characteristic and distinguishing marks of the three great religions of Semitic origin, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the view common to all of them that the very historical source, the ultimate guarantee, of the Truth of the religious experience of the believers lies in the initial fact of God’s having revealed Himself to human beings. And Revelation means in Islam that God ‘spoke’, that He revealed Himself through language, and that not in some mysterious non-human language but in a clear humanly understandable language. This is the initial and the most decisive fact. Without this initial act on the part of God, there would have been no true religion on earth according to the Islamic understanding of the word religion.

It is no wonder, then, that Islam should have been from the very beginning extremely language conscious. Islam arose when God spoke. The whole Islamic culture made its start with the historic fact that man was addressed by God in a language which he himself spoke. This was not a simple matter of having “sent down” a sacred Book. It meant primarily that God ‘spoke’. And this is precisely what ‘Revelation’ means. Revelation is essentially a linguistic concept.

Now Revelation in this sense has, within the Qur‘anic contexts, two different, but equally important aspects. One of them concerns its being a ‘speech’ (kalām) concept, in the narrow technical sense of the term ‘speech’ as distinguished from ‘language’ (lisān). The other has to do with the fact that of all the cultural languages that were available at that time the Arabic language was chosen by God by design and not by accident—as the Qur’an emphasizes in several places—as the means of divine speech. Using the Saussurian terminology we may distinguish between these two aspects by saying that the former is the parole-side, while the latter is the langue-side of the problem, kalām and lisān in Arabic being roughly equivalent to the French parole and langue respectively. Both of these aspects will come to have grave cultural repercussions later in the history of Islamic thought, the significance of which will be made clear as we go on. Let us first concentrate our attention on the parole-aspect of Revelation.

We shall begin by remarking that Revelation, according to the Qur‘anic conception of the phenomenon, is God’s parole: Revelation (wahy) = God’s speech (kalām Allāh). Far from being an arbitrary interpretation, this is actually the paraphrase which we meet with frequently in the Qur’an. And, as will be easy to imagine, the fact is very significant in regard to the subject of this chapter. Just one or two examples from the Qur’an may suffice to make this point convincing. Thus in Sūrah al-Tawbah we read:

\[
\text{If anyone of the polytheists comes to you (O Muhammad) seeking thy protection as a client, make him thy client so that he may have the chance of hearing God’s speech (kalām Allāh).}
\]

al-Tawbah, 9:6

Here it is contextually evident that “God’s speech” refers to what God has spoken and said to the Prophet, i.e., words revealed to him. Likewise in Sūrah al-Baqarah, in reference to the revelation of the Mosaic Law it is said:

\[
\text{Can you have any hope that they (i.e. the Jews) will submit to you when a party of them used to listen to God’s speech (kalām Allāh), then changed it arbitrarily and consciously after they had understood it?}
\]

al-Baqarah, 2:70 [75]

The very possibility of turning ‘Revelation’ into a more analytic form of “God’s speech” shows most clearly that this phenomenon has semantically two different points of emphasis: (1) God and (2) speech. In other words, the concept has two bases on which it stands.

When particular emphasis is put on the first basis, i.e., God, and the whole phenomenon viewed from that side, the concept of Revelation is signified by a certain class of words that cannot properly be applied to any aspect of the ordinary and normal human speech behavior, like tanzīl (sending down), wahy etc. Tanzīl can never be used in reference to an occurrence of speech act between man and man. The ‘basic’ meaning of the word, in which, in this case, etymology makes itself felt with particular clearness, forbids it
to be applied except to supernatural communication. For the root from which the word is derived, *NZL*, means ‘descending’, and *tanżil*, therefore, has the meaning of “causing (something) to go down”. As regards *wahy*, we may notice that it is sometimes used in reference to human communication, or indeed, for that matter, even to animal communication as often happens in pre-Islamic poetry, but even in such cases, the word can be used only when the communication in question, whether human or animal, occurs in an extraordinary situation, and it is always accompanied by a sense of secrecy and mysteriousness. This point will be examined later in more detail, when we come to the problem of the meaning structure of this important word in the Qur’an.

It suffices to remark at the moment that Revelation, when looked at from this angle, is not a speech act in the natural and ordinary sense of the word. And if we go a step further and place an absolute emphasis on this first basis of the concept, Revelation becomes a theological mystery incapable of being grasped by human analytic thought. The phenomenon of Revelation, in this respect, is something essentially mysterious, that does not allow of analysis; it is something only to be believed in.

We should not forget, however, that the concept of Revelation has another and equally important basis, which renders it capable of being analyzed in a normal way. Revelation, as I have suggested above, is semantically equal to “God’s speech”. If, instead of putting an exclusive emphasis on the first constituent, we view the matter from the angle of the second element, we realize at once that Revelation is, after all, a kind of ‘speech’. Otherwise, the Qur’an would not have used the word *kālām* (speech) in describing Revelation.

It is difficult, then, to resist the conclusion that, although, in so far as it is *God’s* speech Revelation is something mysterious and has nothing in common with ordinary human linguistic behavior, in so far as it is *speech*, it must have all the essential attributes of human speech. In fact, the Qur’an uses also other words in reference to Revelation, that are most commonly applied to ordinary, commonplace products of speech: *kalimah* meaning ‘word’ for example, in Sūrah al-Shūrā:

\[
\text{And God will wipe out the Falsehood and establish the Truth as Truth with his words.} \quad \text{al-Shūrā, 42:23 [24]}
\]

Qawl is another word of this kind; it is evidently of the commonest of all terms relating to the human speech behavior. *Qāla*, i.e. “someone said something”, is one of the words that have most frequently been used in Arabic from the earliest time of its history until today. The word *qāla* is so commonplace that it needs almost no explanation. The word is there; and everybody understands its meaning. In connection with the topic under discussion, it is important to note that in the Qur’an God Himself often uses this word in reference to the content of His own Revelation.

Thus in Sūrah al-Muzāmmil, God, addressing Muhammad, says:

\[
\text{Verily, We are going to cast upon thee a weighty word!} \quad \text{al-Muzāmmil, 73:5}
\]

It should be noticed that here God refers to His own Revelation by means of a word which is the commonest of all words for human speech act, *qawl*, though, to be sure, it is qualified in this verse by a very strong adjective meaning ‘weighty’ or ‘heavy’ (*ihqāl*).

The conclusion to be drawn from this brief consideration is that, although revelation in itself is a phenomenon that goes beyond all comparison and defies all analysis, yet there is a certain respect in which we can approach it analytically and try to discover the basic structure of its concept by considering it an extreme, or rather, an exceptional case of the general linguistic behavior common to all beings that ‘speak’ at all.

What makes Revelation such a particular non-natural kind of linguistic phenomenon is that in it the speaker is God and the hearer is a man. This means that speech occurs here between the supernatural order of being and the real order of being, so that there is no ontological balance or equilibrium between speaker and hearer. In the normal give and take of words, both the speaker and the hearer exist on the same level of being, standing on the footing of ontological equality. A human being speaks to and is understood by another
how did the Arabs themselves of that age experience it and what kind of conception did they form for themselves of this strange happening? That will be our main concern in the first half of this chapter.

But before we begin to grapple with this difficult problem, we must try to analyze the original meaning of the word wáhy, which is admittedly by far the most important of all words in Arabic denoting the phenomenon of Revelation.

II. The Original Meaning of the Word Wáhy

Fortunately, the word wáhy is one of those that are used repeatedly in pre-Islamic poetry, and this facilitates very much the analysis of the original, that is, pre-Qur’anic, structure of the concept. From various examples of its usage I would isolate as its essential semantic conditions the following three points:

1. It is ‘communication’, in the first place. In order to smooth the way for analysis, I would like to introduce at this point a new methodological concept: ‘two-person-relation word’, and begin by saying that ‘communication’ in general belongs semantically to the class of two-person-relation words. What does this mean? Let me first explain briefly what I mean by a ‘two-person-relation word’.

The conception, as we shall see presently, plays an exceedingly important role in the analysis of the semantic structure of Revelation.

In analysing word meanings in general, we find it often very useful to begin by paying attention to the ‘number’ of persons involved, the word ‘person’ in this context being taken in the sense of *dramatis personae*. In other words, it is often important for us to know, as a first step in semantical analysis, how many persons—actors—should be there on the stage in order that the event denoted by the word might actually occur. This is of course restricted only to those cases where the idea of ‘person’ is involved in the basic structure itself of the meaning. A table is there, for example, for people to sit at, and books are there for people to read, but the meaning structure of ‘table’ or ‘book’ does not contain the idea of ‘person’ as one of its primary and essential constituents.

What I mean by a ‘two-person-relation word’ will be best understood after these general remarks, if one compares with each other the two simple sentences “I eat” and “I blame”. The verb in the

human being. There can be no linguistic communication between a man and, say, a horse, except as a metaphor, because, between a man and an animal, however intelligent the latter may be, there is no equality in regard to the level of being. The utmost that can be produced between the two partners in such a case is a non-verbal or extra-linguistic exchange of signs. The poet ‘Antarah offers an extremely interesting example regarding this problem.

In the well-known verses of his *Muʿallaqah-Ode*, he describes in a most touching and pathetic way his experience of such a non-verbal communication between himself and his horse. The intimate—as personal, we should say—relation between the poet and the horse has been proverbial among the Arabs.

In these verses ‘Antarah depicts the tragic death of his beloved horse on the battle-field. Already the horse is mantled in blood. With several spears stuck in the breast, the horse flinches and turns aside, being no longer able to spring forward toward the enemy. “Then he complained to me with gushing tears and sad whimpering. Had he but known what it was to exchange words, he would have described his pains, had he but known how to speak he would have spoken to me.”

A man and an animal cannot communicate with each other linguistically for two closely related reasons: (1) lack of a common sign-system between them and (2) essential difference of an ontological nature. Stated thus abstractly, the same thing is true of the theoretic impossibility of verbal communication between God and man, for here too there is no common sign-system between the two, and an essential ontological difference separates them from each other.

However, in the case of the Qur’anic Revelation, the first hindrance regarding a common sign-system was removed by the fact that the Arabic language was chosen by God Himself as the common sign-system between God and man. But the second, ontological, hindrance was not of such a nature that it could be removed so easily. Hence the extraordinariness of this phenomenon. For here genuine linguistic communication does occur between two levels of being that are worlds apart and between which lies an infinite distance of essential separation. And yet God speaks to man, and man hears the words and understands them. And that is Revelation. How should we account for this extraordinary phenomenon? Or rather,
first sentence is a ‘one-person-word’ while the verb in the second sentence is a ‘two-person-relation word’. I have chosen intentionally the verbs ‘eat’ and ‘blame’, both of which are so-called ‘transitive’ verbs, to show that the semantical distinction we are now talking about is something apparently similar to, but in reality quite different from, the grammatical distinction between the transitive and the intransitive.

Both ‘eat’ and ‘blame’ are transitive verbs, and yet the former is a ‘one-person’ word, while the second is a ‘two-person’ word. In the case of ‘eating’, only one person is required to be on the stage. Of course, there may be more than one person, but that is something quite accidental and of only secondary significance as far as the basic semantic structure of ‘eating’ is concerned. There is one actor on the stage; he eats, and this is all that is required in order that there may be an occurrence of the verb ‘eat’. This kind of words I would call ‘one-person’ words. In the case of the verb ‘blame’, on the contrary, there must be two persons on the stage. The act called ‘blaming’ cannot in the nature of the case actually occur unless there are at least two persons. If there is no one else, the actor blames himself, if he does blame at all. And this is also, structurally, a two-person-relation, the actor playing a double role.

Coming back to the word in question wāhy, we observe, in the explanation, that it is a two-person-relation term. There must be, in other words, two persons on the stage in order that the event which is called wāhy may actually take place. Let us call them A and B. In this process A acts actively (A--+B), and the act itself is the transmission of A’s will by means of a sign or signs. And there can be here no reciprocity, that is to say, the relation, once established, cannot absolutely be reversed. It is strictly unilateral communication.

2—It is not necessarily verbal. That is to say, the signs used for the purpose of communication are not always linguistic, though words may also be used.

3—There is always a sense of mysteriousness, secrecy, and privacy. In other words, this type of communication is esoteric, so to speak. The communication is strictly a private matter between A and B. A makes himself perfectly clear to B, but to B only. There is a perfect communication between them, but it is made in such a way that the context of communication is difficult to understand for the outsiders.

With these three essential conditions in mind let us examine closely one interesting example, and see how wāhy looks like when the conceptual structure just explained becomes materialized. The example is from one of the well-known odes of ‘Alqamah al-Fahl, a first-rate poet of pre-Islamic times:4

The poet is here describing, with a pleasant touch of humor coming from personification, the homecoming of a male ostrich. This male ostrich has got far away from home in search of food. Suddenly, on a rainy and windy day, he remembers "his wife and children"—i.e. the female ostrich and the eggs whom he has left at home. The rain somehow makes him feel anxious about them, and he begins to run as fast as he can toward his home. He comes back and there he finds his family safe and in peace. Relieved of his anxiety, he begins to talk to his wife delightfully. He is saying something to her. What is he saying? No one knows besides themselves: it is a secret between the two. This is the situation which the poet is trying to convey. He says:

The male ostrich is talking to her (yūh, a verbal form corresponding to our wāhy) with cracking sounds (inqād, which is the 'ostrich language') and with naqānah (an onomatopoeic representation of the 'cracking of the ostrich'), just like the Greeks talk with each other in an incomprehensible language (tāritānu) in their castles.

The word tarātānu (for tātātānu) in this context is very important for our purpose. The basic verb ratāna, of which tātātānu is a derivative form, consists semantically of two fundamental elements. One is the idea of the speaker’s being a foreigner, that is, a non-Arab, whose mother-tongue is some non-Arabic language. And the second is that it is completely incomprehensible to an Arab hearer. The derivative form tarātānu turns the combination of these two elements into a ‘two-person-relation’, with an additional idea of reciprocation so that it produces in our minds the image of foreigners talking with each other in some incomprehensible language. Whenever such a thing happened among the Arabs, quite naturally they got very suspicious. In the Musnad of Ibn Hanbal, one of the canonical collections of the Hadiths, for example, it is related that a young Greek was once seen talking to a Greek
woman married to an Arab "in their own incomprehensible language"; and that this was immediately taken as conclusive evidence that there was a secret and illicit relationship between the two.

In the light of this information, the second half of this verse would seem to give an important clue as to how we should understand the key-word in the first half, yūḥi, that, in short, wahy. Suppose two persons are talking with each other in your presence with an air of intimacy in a foreign language which you do not understand. You are sure that between the two persons there is perfect communication of ideas and sentiments going on, but you cannot penetrate into the content itself of the communication, because you are an outsider. You are completely shut out from their intimacy. And this naturally arouses the sense of of witnessing something mysterious.

That the semantic structure of the word wahy contains an element of mysteriousness coming from incomprehensibility may be shown by another fact. In pre-Islamic poetry the word wahy is very often used to mean ‘writing’, ‘letters’ or ‘characters’. Thus Labid in his Mu‘allagaq-Ode, speaking of the remains of the old abode of his beloved, long deserted by the inhabitants, says that its trace has not yet been completely erased; it still remains “like characters” (wāhiyy, pl. of wahy).6

Likewise al-Marrār b. Munquidh, a poet of the first century of Islam:

> وَرَكَّبْتَ مِنْ هَا رُسُومُ مَا نَدْعُوُتْ مِنْ حَذْفِ اللَّهِ مِيِّ رَحْمَيِّ الْزَّيْبِ

Now you see only some faint traces (of the old abode) just like the letter L in the writing of books.7

The Arabic lexicons usually give two different meanings to this word wahy: (1) revelation and (2) letters, as if there were no connection at all between the two. This view overlooks the very important fact that for the pre-Islamic Arabs, who were mostly completely illiterate, letters were something mysterious. We know how they were struck with astonishment by the strange—they felt—South Arabian characters engraved on the rocks. It was the time when the word qalam (pen) still carried unusually grave and deep implications as is shown by the fact that the word occurs in one of the oath-formulas which characterize the earliest Sūrahs of the Qur’ān.

By the Pen, and what they inscribe (therewith)?

Al-Qalam, 68:1

Again, in another important passage, the same word appears assuming symbolic meaning:

> رَوَّاهُ الرِّبَّ أَكْرَمُ الْعَمَّ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ الْقَالِبَ الْقَالِبِ الْإِبْنِ الإِسْلَامِ

Recite: And the Lord is the Most Generous, who taught by the Pen, taught man that which he did not know (before).

Al-‘Alaq, 96:4-5

The written letters were signs of something, all Arabs knew it very well. The written letters were there to convey some meaning, but most of the pre-Islamic Arabs did not know what those signs conveyed. They were to their minds something mysterious. ‘Communication’ coupled with the sense of ‘mysteriousness’—this was the connotation of writing at that time. Thus understood, the two allegedly different meanings of the word wahy are, far from being different from each other, just one and the same thing.

In regard to this idea of mysterious way of communication conveyed by the word wahy, attention may be drawn to the existence of a very interesting example in the Qur’ān. To be more strict, it is not so much a ‘mysterious’ as ‘non-natural’ way of communication. Still, in any case, the basic idea is the same.

In the Sūrah Maryam, Zakariyyā is made dumb and speechless for three days as a sign (āyah) of God’s special favor. There we read:

> فَطَلَّ بَعْضَ الْحَجَارَةِ نَفَرًا مِّنَ الْمُحَارِبِينَ مَا نَسْخَوُوا

Then he came out unto his people from the sanctuary and signified (awdh, the same word as yūḥi—wahy) to them: Glorify
in this respect. Quite exceptionally, God even “speaks” to Moses directly—the word used being kallama. This word is a transitive verbal form of kalām, ‘speech’ (parole) to which reference was made at the beginning of this chapter, and implies definitely a two-personal relation between A and B.

For instance, in the Sūrah Al-ʿarāf, Moses goes up, alone, to Mount Sinai to meet God—one of the well-known Biblical scenes. There “the Lord spoke to Moses (kallama-hū)” in complete seclusion from all other human beings. And in the Sūrah Al-Nisā’, we read:

And Apostles of whom We have told thee before and Apostles We have not yet told thee. And unto Moses God spoke directly (kallama taklīman).

Al-Nisā’, 4:162 [164]

In another passage, the same Sinai scene is described in a different way that is, in terms of different concepts:

And We—the speaker is God—called to him from the right side of mount (Sinai) and let him come near in order to have a personal talk with Him.

Maryam, 19:52 [53]

The verse here quoted is remarkable in that it uses two interesting linguistic concepts which, if interpreted rightly, would provide a clue to a very important aspect of the phenomenon of wahy. The two concepts of which I am now talking are nādā and nafīy.

The verb nādā is in meaning roughly the same as kallama, the only difference being that the concept signified by the former is specially conditioned in terms of the space relation between A and B: it means, A speaks to B, A being in a far-off place. It means “to talk to somebody from afar”; there is always the element of a long distance involved between A and B in this concept. In this sense, it is the contrary of waswasa (“to whisper into another’s ear”) which we shall discuss later. Waswasa implies the shortest possible distance between
favor by speaking to him directly.

It will be worth remarking further that in this two-person ($A \rightarrow B$) relation, if $A$ happens to be not God but Shayṭān (Satan or Demon), then the communication is not usually called wahy, but waswasah (whispering). But structurally these two are not entirely different from each other. Besides the difference in regard to the ‘distance’ between $A$ and $B$, which we have seen above, the only main difference between them lies in the ‘source’ of natural communication: in one case it comes from God, while in the other it is Shayṭān who happens to be the source of inspiration. Semantically, waswasah is contained as a small sector within the larger field of wahy. This is shown by the fact that the Qur’an uses sometimes the verb awhād (wahy) exactly in the particular sense of waswasah.

Likewise We have appointed to each one of the Prophets an enemy—Demons, whether of humankind or jinn, who inspire (yāhū) in one another words adorned with false embellishments, beguiling one another.

\(\text{Al-An’ām, 6:112 [113]}\)

Verily, the Demons are inspiring (yāhūnā) their companions (i.e. Kāfirs) to dispute with you (i.e. Muslims).

\(\text{Al-An’ām, 6:121}\)

Coming back to the word waswasah, it is worth noticing that, in the Qur’anic conception, the human soul itself plays sometimes the role of the Shayṭān, as we see from the Surah Qāf, where we read:

\(\text{We created man, and We know what his soul whispers (tuwawaswūt, from waswasah) to him.} \)

\(\text{Qāf, 50:15 [16]}\)
Usually in cases like this, the word connotes something mysterious, said in a low, whispering tone, which deranges and agitates the mind and puts into it an alluring temptation. Al-'A'shâ al-Alqâbar uses the word in describing the clattering sound of bracelets and anklerings as the beautiful girl Hurayrah walks away gracefully, which entices him and stirs up in his heart an irresistible passion:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{وَتَرَى أَنَّكَ نُبَتَتْ بِالْبَزْرَةِ رَضِيَّةٌ إِذَا اسْتَصَرَّتْ كَمَا اسْتَعَمُّتْ بِمَيْدَانِ الْجَرْحِ} \\
\text{You hear the tempting sound (waswâs) of her ornaments as she walks away, a sound just like a rustling 'ishriq-tree when the wind blows through its (leaves) (lit. when it (i.e. the tree) seeks help from a wind).}
\end{align*}
\]

Interestingly enough this verse of the great poet seems to respond to a Qur'anic verse, in which the pious Muslim women are admonished not to do anything that is likely to provoke men's lust.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{وَلَا تَضْرِبُوا بَيْنَ أَرْحَامَنَّكُمْ لِيَعْلَمَ مَا يُحَبِّبُونَ مِنْ رَجُلٍ} \\
\text{Let them not stamp their feet so as to be known (i.e. so as to disclose) the ornaments (i.e. the anklerings) which they hide.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\text{Al-Nûr, 24:31}
\]

This is a very well-known verse and is often quoted in Islam as a ground for prohibiting dancing. The commentator al-Baydawî says that the clattering (taqa'qu') of anklerings is likely to excite lust in men.

Thus understood, the Qur'anic verse throws an illuminating light on A'shâ's description of Hurayrah, and consequently, on the very nature of the concept of waswasah.

III. The Semantical Structure of Revelation

I turn now to the Qur'anic concept of Revelation (wahy) in the proper technical sense, with a view to analysing it from the semantical point of view. This will be done by isolating one by one all the essential conditions under which the word standing for that concept is naturally and properly elicited.\(^{13}\)

To put it in a more plain language: When and in what kind of concrete situation is the word wahy actually used in the Qur'an? What are the strictly necessary conditions which, when fulfilled, will enable one to use this word properly? To give a detailed analytic answer to this basic question will be the main task of this section.

The first essential condition is the most general one. Revelation is a concrete speech behavior (kalâm) which corresponds to la parole in the terminology of modern linguistics. The parole is, in Saussurian terminology, linguistic communication which takes place in a concrete situation between two persons, one of whom plays an active role, and the other a passive role (A→B). And this is exactly what is meant by the Arabic word kalâm. In this respect wahy is a partial and more particular concept falling under the general concept of kalâm. And this implies that all the semantical conditions of the word wahy, which it will be our task to isolate, should be such as bring out the specific characteristics of wahy which contribute towards making it a particular concept within the wider field of kalâm.

Now in regard to this first condition, there are two important points to note; namely, first, that it is essential to any act of speech, that is, parôle qua parôle, that both A and B should resort to one and the same system of signs, which is, as we saw earlier, nothing other than what is called today in French langue corresponding to the Arabic lisân. In other words, in order that there might be an effective linguistic communication, A should speak the language which is comprehensible to B. In normal cases both A and B belong to one and the same language community. Otherwise, A should speak the language of B, or at least he should use some foreign language which happens to be comprehensible to both of them. In the Qur'anic Revelation, God (A) talks Muhammad (B) in B's language, that is Arabic. The problems relating to the use of Arabic as the language of Revelation in Islam will be dealt with more fully in section IV.

The second point is that it is essential that A and B should stand on the same level of being, that they should belong to the same category of being. In the case of Revelation—and here begins the real characteristic of the concept of Revelation—this basic rule is violated. For A and B, i.e., God and man, are quite different from each other with regard to the order of being. Here most evidently A and B do not stand horizontally on the same level of being. The relation is vertical: A stands above, representing the highest level of being, and B stands below, representing a far lower level of being.
against his nature comes to pass forcibly in himself. This causes him most naturally the keenest pain and torture, not only mental but also even physical. This happened to Muhammad in various forms. *Hadiths* tell us of his intense sufferings, physical pains, the feeling of being choked at those moments. ‘A’ishah relates—and this is one of the most famous authentic *Hadiths* about Revelation—"I saw him as Revelation came down upon him on an extremely cold day. His forehead was running with beads of perspiration". Other *Hadiths* report that when the Revelation came, his face darkened; sometimes he fell to the ground as if intoxicated or swooning; sometimes he groaned like a camel-calf etc.

Ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddimah* explains this phenomenon in this way. This physical pain, he says, is due to the fact that in this supernatural experience, the human soul which is not by nature prepared to experience such a thing, is forced to leave momentarily its humanity (*al-basharīyyah*, ‘human-ness’) and exchanges it for angelicality (*al-malākiyyah*, ‘angel-ness’), and becomes actually for the time being part of the angelic world until it resumes its human-ness.

But this is of course a theoretic or philosophical explanation of the phenomenon. This was not certainly the way the Arabs in Muhammad’s time approached the problem. Indeed the pagan Arabs had ready at hand a very convincing—of course to their minds—way of interpreting this kind of phenomena.

We must keep in mind in this connection that we are as yet only at the second stage of our analysis. All we have established so far is that we have here a case of verbal communication coming from a supernatural being to a human being. Properly speaking, the problem of Who or What this supernatural being might be is not yet solved. Now, if we stop at this stage—and the pagan Arabs did stop at the stage and obstinately refused to go any further—and look at the matter from the *Jāhili* point of view, then the whole thing would appear to be just the very familiar phenomenon of possession (*tajinīn*), which is, in no way peculiar to the Arabs or the Semites, but something of the widest occurrence throughout the world and generally known in modern times under the name of shamanism. Some invisible supernatural being, whether a spirit or divinity, suddenly possesses an ecstatic person momentarily, and utters through him impassioned words, mostly in verse, which the man could never...
compose by himself in ordinary, i.e. non-ecstatic, moments.

This phenomenon was extremely familiar to the pre-Islamic Arabs. For the kāhin (soothsayer) was exactly this type of man who was able to be possessed at any moment by a supernatural force. And this was the sole form of verbal inspiration known to the pagan Arabs. The ‘poet’ (shā‘ir) also was, originally, this type of man.

Let us first examine the concept of ‘poet’ in ancient Arabia as an ‘inspired’ man. In doing this we must bear in mind the very important fact that the pre-Islamic poetry which has been preserved and handed down to us is mostly the product of the latter Jāhilī period, when the Arabic poetry had already passed long ago the cruder stage of primitive shamanism. By the time Islam appeared the poetry had already been elaborated and refined to a very great extent into art, almost in the sense in which we usually understand the word today. The famous pre-Islamic poets, like Imr’ al-Qays, Tarafah and others were no longer shamans; they were rather real artists.

And yet in their work there are some sporadic remains of the ideas belonging to the older stage, and particularly there is a branch of poetry called al-hijā— a kind of satirical poetry, which is based precisely on this primitive idea of word-magic.¹⁶

This hijā ‘poetry, as was shown admirably well by Goldziher’s now classical work on this branch of Arabian poetry,¹⁷ preserved even right into the Umayyad period the pre-historic shamanistic conception of poetry. Besides, we have also a huge amount of old oral traditions preserved in various books, which provide with valuable material for studying the Arab conception of the poet and poetry in the earliest, unrecorded times.

What was poetry and what kind of man was a poet in the original form in Arabia? To make a long story short, the poet, as his very name shā‘ir—it is a derivation from the verb sha‘ara, or sha‘ura meaning “to have cognizance of”, i.e., in this case, of something to which ordinary people have no access—implies, was a person who had the first-hand knowledge of the unseen world. And this knowledge of the unseen world he was supposed to derive, not from his own personal observation, but from constant intimate commerce with some supernatural beings, called Jinn. Thus poetry at this stage was not so much an ‘art’ as supernatural ‘knowledge’ derived from direct communication with the unseen spirits who were believed to be hovering around in the air.

The Jinn did not communicate with everybody. Each had a special choice. When a Jinn found a man of his or her liking, he or she pounced upon him, threw him down to the ground, kneeled upon his chest, and forced him to become his mouthpiece in this world. This was the initiation ceremony of poetry. The man, from that time on, was known as a ‘poet’, in the full sense of the word. And there was established between the poet and the Jinn a particular kind of extremely intimate personal relationship. Each individual poet used to have his own Jinn who came down upon him from time to time to give inspiration. The poet usually called his Jinn his “familiar friend” (khalīf). Not only that; the Jinn who came into such an intimate relationship with a particular poet was even known by a proper name somewhat like John or Mary. For instance the Jinn of one of the greatest pre-Islamic poets al-A‘shā al-Akbar had the personal name Mishal, the original meaning of which is “carving knife”—a name symbolic of his glib, eloquent tongue. This Jinn Mishal appears only in his poetry.

Here I will give only one example,¹⁸ which is particularly significant in connection with our present topic.

The situation is somewhat like this. The poet is being attacked by an enemy poet. He must make a counterattack: otherwise he would not only lose face personally, but he would let his whole tribe suffer a defeat according the basic belief of the age. He feels irritated, impatient and uneasy, and somehow he cannot utter a word. As an excuse he describes his strange relationship with his Jinn, and says that he remains dumb and speechless in the face of his enemy, not because he is incompetent or ignorant but simply and solely because his Jinn does not yet give him words.

He says: “I am not an inexperienced debutant,”¹⁹ in the art of poetry but my situation is like this: whenever Mishal bestows upon
me the word I begin to be able to speak. Between us we are two intimate sincere friends; a Jinn and a human being who is naturally fit to him. If he only speaks (i.e. if he inspires me), then I will no longer be incapable of saying anything I would say. He suffices me so long as he is neither a tongue-tied one nor an awkward stupid fellow”.

It is important to note in this connection that this kind of demonic inspiration was always felt by the poet to be something “coming down” from above i.e., from the air. And for this aspect of poetic inspiration, the word nuzul (verb nazala, to come down”) was most generally used. Thus, for example, Hassan Ibn Thäbit describes his own poetic experience in this way:

Oft did a grave and heavy verse [the word qäfiyah does not mean, in a context like this, simply ‘rhyme’ or ‘rhyme word’ as it does in later Arabic, but it rather means words enfolded with a magical power by being uttered in poetic form—a sort of incantation, like the word carmen in Old Latin] resound at night; oft did I receive it as it came down [lit: its coming down nuzul] from mid-air.

To this we must add another important point, namely, that in the most ancient days of Arab heathenism known to us the position of the poet in the society was extremely high. A real poet was an inestimable tribal asset in peace as in war. In time of peace he was the leader of the nomad tribe, because of the supernatural knowledge he got from his Jinn. The wanderings of the tribe in the desert were regulated by instructions given by the chief shaman-poet of the tribe. In this sense, in the majority of cases shâ‘ir was almost synonymous with qa‘id (tribal leader). In war time he was considered to be even more powerful than a warrior because he had the supernatural power of disarming the enemy, even before the actual battle began, by curses and spells which he launched against the enemy in verse-form, and which, were believed to have far more terrible effects in bringing destruction and shame upon their target than arrows and spears. Such was the pre-Islamic conception of the poet although in the latter Jähiliç period just preceding the rise of Islam, the social position of the poet was no longer so high.

This makes us understand why the Prophet Muhammad was so often regarded by his contemporaries as a “poet inspired by a Jinn” (sha‘ir majnun), as we know from the Qur’an itself. The pagan Arabs stubbornly refused to see anything in Muhammad which would distinguish him from a person possessed and inspired by a Jinn. In their eyes, here was a man who claimed to have a knowledge of the ‘Unseen’ (al-ghayb), brought to him by a supernatural being coming down from heaven (muzul). Whether that supernatural being being God, an Angel or a Shaytan, there was no essential distinction at all in their conception; all were Jinn.

The Qur’an tells us that the pagan Arabs could hardly differentiate Allah from the Jinn. For instance, in the Sûrah al-Saffât we read:

They set up between Allah and the Jinn a kinship.

Al-Saffât, 37:158

In other words, in their conception both Allah and the Jinn belong in one and the same family.

Moreover, this man, Muhammad, showed in moments of prophetic inspiration evident signs of intense physical pain and mental sufferings. So here was, they thought, another sha‘ir—a man possessed by a Jinn; this was their natural immediate conclusion.

That such was the most prevalent and most widespread view among the pagan Arabs the Qur’an gives ample evidence. The very fact that the Qur’an stresses constantly that the Prophet Muhammad has nothing at all to do with demoniac possession, that he is not a man “possessed by a Jinn” is in itself the strongest evidence that such was the actual situation at Makkah.

Turning now to the Qur’anic view of the matter, we may observe that, from the standpoint of the Qur’an, the pagan Arabs who took Muhammad for a ‘poet’ committed a double mistake: first, by confusing the Almighty God with an inferior being, Jinn, and, secondly by confusing a Prophet with a poet possessed by a Jinn.

According to the Qur’anic view, the real source of Prophetic inspiration (A) is not a Jinn but Allah. And there is between these
two an absolute reference, for Allah is the Creator of the whole world, while the Jinn are merely created beings;²⁴ and they, just like ordinary human beings, will be brought forth before God on the Day of Judgment to be judged,²⁵ and Hell will be filled both with men and Jinn.

In the second place, there is also an essential and absolute difference between a Prophet and a poet. A poet is by nature an affāk:²⁶ what he says is sheer ifk, a word which does not necessarily mean a ‘lie’, but something which has no basis of haqq (reality) or ‘truth’, something that is not based on haqq. An affāk is a man who utters quite irresponsibly whatever he likes to say without stopping to reflect whether his own words have some real basis or not, while what a Prophet says is Truth, absolute haqq and nothing else.²⁷ So that the A→B relation of prophetism, although it bears an outward and formal blance to the A→B relation of shamanism, has an essentially different structure from the latter.

The word majnūn (possessed) among the Arabs of that age was applied to still another type of man: kāhin to which reference was made earlier. We must now turn to this second concept.

Kāhin (soothsayer) was also a man possessed by Jinn, who uttered non-natural words under demoniac inspiration. Kāhin had much in common with shā‘ir. Indeed, the more we go back to the ancient times the more difficult does it become to distinguish one from the other. After all, both were manifestations of shamanism, and in origin they must have been one and the same thing both in their nature and in their social function. And yet historically, there seems to have been some important points of difference.

Kāhin, in Jáhiliyah, was a man with occult powers, who exercised those powers as a profession, and received freely honorarium for his services, called hulwān. At least in the latter Jáhilī age as we know it from the old traditions, the kāhin-ship was almost a social institution. He was interrogated on all important tribal and inter-tribal problems. He acted as an interpreter of dreams, he was asked to find lost camels; he served the tribesmen not only as a medical doctor but also as a detective in matters concerning crimes committed in society.

However, far more important from a linguist’s point of view, was a stylistic feature which distinguished a kāhin from a shā‘ir. The kāhin always gave his utterances in a particular rhythmic form known as saj’. Opinion is divided as to whether this was the earliest form of poetry among the Arabs. Most probably it represents the pre-poetic form of expression: it is a form of expression which lies between regular poetry and the prose of ordinary daily conversation. Real Arabic poetry begins with rajaz, and saj’ is a stage just preceding it.

Saj’ consists in a sequence of short pregnant sentences, usually with a single rhyme. And this was the most typical style of inspiration and revelation in ancient Arabia. All speech-act that had its origin in the unseen powers, all speech-act that was not a daily mundane use of words, but had something to with the unseen powers, such as cursing, blessing, divination, incantation, inspiration, and revelation, had to be couched in this form.

The word itself saj’ (corresponding to Hebrew šag’), etymologically and originally meant the cooing of pigeons and doves. And it was associated with the purring sound of the Jinn’s voice. The Prophet Muhammad himself, in a Hadith going back to ‘Ā’ishah, describes the impression produced by the kāhin’s utterance as the clucking of a hen:²⁸ “He (the Jinn) clucks (yuqargiru) into the ear of his companion like the clucking (qarqarah) of a hen”.

As an example of this style, I will give here the very well-known prophecy uttered by a famous kāhin Sāthi, of whom it is said that in moments of demoniac seizure he folded himself up like a garment so that his whole body appeared to be boneless except his skull.²⁹

You see a black charcoal
coming forth from the darkness of night
And it lights on a land sloping towards the sea
And devours everything that has a skull

This piece of saj’ is said to have meant the impending invasion and conquest of Yemen by the Ethiopians. When pressed by the king of Yemen as to whether this prophecy was true, the same soothsayer is related to have uttered the following words, also in saj’ form.
By the evening twilight
By the darkness
By the dawn
When it breaks bright
Verily what I have told you is truth

This one example will make it sufficiently clear that the saj', as regards its form, was a kind of rhymed prose very close to real poetry by the repetition of rhyme, but different from poetry in not having meter in the sense of measures syllables. We may notice also that the saj' style of the kāhin was characteristic marked by strange oath-formulas, conjurations of nature, of which the second piece gives us some examples.

Both of these features, i.e., the repetition of rhyme which gives often the sense of haunting beauty, and the conjurations of nature are characteristic of the early Sūrah of the Qur'an. Is, then, the Qur'anic style fundamentally saj'? In some passages the Qur'anic style seems to satisfy in every respect the basic formal norms of saj', while in others particularly in the later Sūrah the usage of rhyme words deviates so far from the standard norm of saj' that we can hardly recognize there the ordinary saj'-form. But what is far more important from the Qur'anic point of view is the content itself of the message conveyed, and not the form of expression which conveys the message.

However, the pagan Arabs contemporary of Muhammad did not look at the matter in this way. Instead, most of them stuck to the stylistic point of view, and took Muhammad for a kāhin simply because of the formal, stylistic characteristics. The Qur'an of course denies emphatically the Prophet's being a kāhin:

By the grace of thy Lord thou (Muhammad) art neither a soothsayer nor man possessed by a Jinn!

Al-Tūr, 52:2931

We are now in a position to examine from our particular point of view the third—and the most important—feature which characterizes the structure of the Qur'anic concept of Revelation. In the Qur'an, Revelation as a supernatural linguistic event is a three-person-relations concept, which makes it structurally something entirely different, not only from ordinary human speech, but also from all other types of verbal inspiration having Jinn as its source.

We must begin by calling to mind that both in the case of shā'ir and that of kāhin, the A→B relation is essentially a two-person-relation. A, i.e., a Jinn establishes a close personal relationship with B, i.e., a human being: so close is this personal relationship that the Jinn who possesses the man speaks through the latter. There is no intermediary between them. We might even say that in moments of demoniac seizure, the Jinn and the man are completely united into one person. And this is the phenomenon which we generally know under the name of shamanism.

This does not apply to the Qur'anic conception of Revelation which is, as I have just said, a three-person-relation. There was, in other words, in Muhammad's prophetic consciousness always somebody, some mysterious being between God and himself, who brought down Divine Words to his heart. So that the basic structure of Revelation in the sense in which the Qur'an understands it is like this:

\[ A \to M \to B \]

We have to go on to examine this structure further in detail. According to the Qur'an itself, there are only three possible types of verbal communication from God to man. The three types are clearly stated and distinguished from each other in the Surah Al-Shūrā, where we read:

\[ \text{If not for any man that God should speak to him except by wāhy, or from behind the veil (min wārai' hijābin) or by God's sending a messenger (rasūlan) to communicate (yūhiya) by His leave what He wills.} \]

Al-Shūrā, 42:50-51 [51]
So the three different manners of Revelation are: (1) mysterious communication, (2) speaking from behind the veil, and (3) the sending of a messenger.

The first type is not elucidated in this verse, and, strictly speaking, we are left in the dark as to what is meant in concrete terms. But the word *wahy* would seem to suggest that the reference is to that sort of direct communication which, as noted above, was a special divine favor bestowed upon Moses to the exclusion of all other Prophets.

As to the second type, the expression used—“from behind the veil”—suggests that there does occur a verbal communication (not a simple ‘inspiration’ or *ilhm*); only the hearer in this case does not have any vision of the speaker himself. But, although nothing is visible to his eyes, the Prophet has the clearer consciousness of there being somewhere in close vicinity a mysterious being who speaks to him in an extremely strange way. I think we can supplement our knowledge about this phenomenon by some important informations from the Hadith.

In a very famous tradition going back to ‘A’ishah, it is related at al-Hārith b. Hishām having once asked the Prophet saying, “O Apostle of God, how does the revelation come to you?”; the latter replied, “Sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of a bell (mithla salsalati al-jarasi). And this is the most painful manner of revelation to me; then it leaves me and I have understood (wa’aiitu) from that noise what He (God) meant to say.”

Attention must be drawn to the use of the perfective aspect (wa’aiitu, “I have understood”) in the last sentence, a fact which is quite significant in this context as Ibn Khaldūn pointed out long ago. What Muhammad is trying to convey thereby seems to be that while he is actually receiving Revelation he does not have the consciousness of hearing any intelligible words spoken; all that he hears is something like a mysterious, indistinct noise (dawīyy), but the moment it ceases and he himself returns to the level of normal human consciousness he realizes that the noise has already transformed itself into distinct meaningful words.

The reading “like the ringing of a bell” (mithla salsalati al-jarasi) is not so certain as it is usually assumed. The last word, al-jarasi (“the bell”) may very well be read also as al-jarsi; then the phrase would mean “like some low and distinct sound”. Besides, there are several other variants: “like the noise of the beating of some metal”, “like the flapping of the wings of a bird”, etc. Still, what is meant is always some mysterious, indefinable sound.

Then comes the third type, that of verbal communication by means of a special messenger; here Muhammad not only hears the words spoken, but actually sees the speaker. And it is to this third type that the remaining half of this Hadith refers. There we read: “and sometimes—the Prophet goes on saying—the Angel appears to me in the form of a man and speaks to me, and in this case I understand (a’ītu) immediately what he says”. We must notice that here the verb (wa’aiitu), which has occurred in the perfective aspect (wa’aiitu), in the first half of the passage, now appears in the imperfective aspect (a’ītu). This suggests clearly that in this case, and in this case only, Muhammad hears real words spoken.

Apparently Muhammad was not only an auditory type of prophet; he was also a visual type. He had many visions at critical points of his prophetic career. And in the Qur’an itself, in two different places reference is made to the appearance of the Mighty Being who transmitted to him Allah’s words. One is 53:1-8, the other is 81:15-25.

In the former the Divine messenger is described as shadd al-qiwā (“One terrible in power”) i.e., a being glorious and majestic, who stood straight in the highest part of the horizon, then drew near and approached till he was at the distance of two bows or nearer, and transmitted the Divine message. The second passage also gives a similar picture.

This majestic and mysterious being who made himself visible to Muhammad and transmitted to him the Divine words was at first, i.e., in the Makkah period, simply called by the symbolic name of rūḥ al-quds (‘Holy Spirit’).

*Say: the Holy Spirit has brought it down [nazzala, a verbal form corresponding to *tanzil*] with truth from thy Lord, to confirm those who believe and to be guidance and good tidings to those who have surrendered (muslimin).*

*Al-Nahl, 16:104 [102]*
Linguistic Communication

It is also called al-rūḥ al-āmin, the 'Trustworthy Spirit':

And verily this is a revelation [tanzīl lit. 'sending down'] of the Lord of the Universe, which the Trustworthy Spirit has brought down upon thy heart so that thou (Muhammad) mayest be one of the warners, in clear Arabic language.

Al-Shu'arā, 26:192-195

At the same time it is strongly emphasized that it is not an inspiration coming from the Jinn (26:210-211—the word al-shayātīn, Satans, being synonymous in this kind of context with Jinn.)

Later, in Madīnah, this 'Holy Spirit' comes to be identified as the Angel Gabriel (Jibrīl or Jabrīl). And in many of the authentic Hadīths, the Divine messenger who brought down Revelation to Muhammad is said to have been from the very first Jibrīl.

So if we are to stop at this stage of analysis, we should simply say that the Revelation is a three-person verbal relation, A→M→B, in which the initial point is Allah, the final point is the Prophet, and the middle term is the angel Gabriel. And yet, to say the truth, we should not stop at this stage, because our analysis of the concept of Revelation has not yet reached its end. We must go further into the fourth stage of analysis.

At the fourth stage, the very purpose of the Divine Revelation is the main problem. As we have just seen, God reveals His will through a heavenly messenger to Muhammad. But Muhammad himself is not the final point. Revelation does not aim at the personal salvation of Muhammad. God does not speak to Muhammad in order simply to speak to him. The Divine words should go beyond Muhammad: they must be transmitted to others. In ordinary cases of speech act (A→B), A speaks to B, and the speech stops when it reaches B; if the speech is to continue, as a dialogue, then the same process reversed, B, the original hearer becoming now speaker and saying something back to A, the original speaker (A←B); this is the structure of the usual kalām. While in our particular case, B must in his turn become speaker not in the reversed, but in the same direction—or

more correctly, transmitter of what A has told him. Here arises the problems of tālīf or balāgh (transmission). And B is called rasūl (apostle) or 'messenger' precisely in the capacity of the transmitter of the Divine words.

Viewed in this light, the concept of Revelation in Islam is not a three-person-relation: it must, in reality, be considered a four-person-relation concept (A→M→B→C). According to the Qur'an itself, this C was historically the people of Makkah at first, then the Arabs as a whole, then all the so-called People of the Scripture, and then finally the whole mankind. B is not simply a man who receives Divine Revelation; he is a man who receives it and then transmits it to the people. In this sense, just as the angel Gabriel was a messenger (rasūl) sent by God to Muhammad, Muhammad himself is now a rasūl Allāh (God's Messenger), acting as an intermediary between God and the world.

O my people, there is no error in me, but I am a messenger (rasīlūn) sent by the Lord of the Universe. I convey (tuballīghu) to you message of my Lord.

Al-Arḍ, 7:59-60 [61-62]

Know that the sole duty of Our messenger is to convey (al-balāğh) clearly (the Divine words).

Al-Mā'idah, 5:93 [92]

Many other examples could be given, but the idea is so clear that it is not necessary to do so.

Linguistically this opens a very interesting and important problem. Since B is the transmitter of what A has said, B must memorize and transmit A’s speech word by word. It must be conveyed to C exactly in the words and phrases in which it has been given. Not even the slightest change or omission is permissible. In other words, the Divine words, when they reach and are received by B, must form an objective entity, an objective linguistic work—a sprachwerk, as
the Germans would say. The Divine words as an objective sprachwerk in this sense are called qur'ān. The word qur'ān, whatever its etymological meaning may be, means in this context a piece of Divine Revelation as an objective entity. Of course the whole body of the individual qur'āns may also be designated by the same word, and this is evidently the most usual sense in which the word Qur'ān (or more popularly Koran) is understood now. However, this was not its original meaning.

In any case it is the most important duty or function of a Prophet to keep in memory the revealed text literally so that he may convey it to his people without altering even a word. If any modification occurs, then the Prophet may be accused of having committed the grave sin of tahrij which means 'turning round', 'twisting', 'falsification' (the verb being harraf), although it is particularly the case when the modification has been done intentionally. In the Qur'ān we see the Jews constantly accused of having "intentionally twisted" the revealed words.

Revelation in the technical sense of the word differs essentially in respect from the non-technical, or pre-technical, concept of wa'hy which I explained above. There, as we saw, 'revelation'—if we can use this term legitimately in such a case—is a kind of prompting to action. It may not be verbal: the man who receives inspiration in this sense may not have a clear consciousness of the exact words and phrases that have being spoken to him. The main point is that he should understand the idea itself and act in accordance with it.

Take for example the following verse:

وأول isseta إلي موسى أن الله عصالة إذا هي تلفح ما يبدينون

And We revealed (awhaynā) to Moses: "Throw down thy rod!"

And (he threw it down), lo, it (immediately changed into a snake and) swallowed up what they (i.e. the Egyptian magicians) had schemed.

Al-‘adīf, 7:114 [117]

As we see, God simply commanded Moses to cast his staff and he cast it accordingly. The sole purpose of wa'hy here is to prompt certain action; it is a kind of imperative. The words themselves do not count. The purpose of wa'hy once achieved, it is no longer necessary for the words to remain permanently, as a sprachwerk.

In the case of Revelation in the proper, technical sense, every word and every phrase should remain permanently as an objective sprachwerk. Muhammad himself was keenly conscious of the extreme importance of keeping in memory, while he was receiving revelation, the exact words and phrases as they were being given. This is clearly reflected in the Qur'ān. In the Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, we see Muhammad admonished not to move his tongue in haste to follow the revealed sequence of words. For there is danger, in doing this, of Muhammad's forming unintentionally in advance the words that are about to come, instead of waiting calmly and quietly until the revelation comes to an end. But it is clear that this haste or impatience on Muhammad's part was due to his prophetic consciousness that he should not forget even a single word. God Himself assures Muhammad in the same passage that He will take care of everything, so that all Muhammad has to do is wait until the revelation assumes a definite verbal form, and follow its wording passively.

And this is one of the reasons why from the point of view of Islam the Qur'ān is 'inimitable' (mu‘jiz). And this constitutes the famous problem of the 'inimitability of the Qur'ān' (i‘jāz al-Qur'ān). Ibn Khaldūn explains the point in the following way. The Qur'ān occupies a unique position and stands alone among all the divine books, because here we have the text of revelation in its original form while in the case of the Torah and the Gospel, he says, the prophets received the revelation only in the form of ideas, which they, after they returned to the normal state, formulated and expressed in their own words.—We must observe in parentheses that this is not wholly true, because in the Hebrew prophetic books there are preserved some revelations in verse-form in their original wording, as they were given to the Prophets. But as a whole this is true, because the bulk of the Old Testament text is a work of professional writers.—Hence all the heavenly books, Ibn Khaldūn concludes, with the sole exception of the Qur'ān, do not have 'inimitability'.

The word nabī, as I have said, means, with regard to that particular aspect which is directly related to the concept of Revelation, a man specially chosen by God Himself to receive Revelation to the exclusion of all others, to make a sprachwerk out of it by memorizing the original wording to the minutest detail, and then to
transmit it to his community.

As to the origin of this Arabic word itself, the Western scholars unanimously maintain that it is a borrowing from the Hebrew nābīṯ. Here we seem to detect a confusion of ‘word’ with ‘concept’. It is true that the particular connotation of transmitter of Divine Revelation was something completely foreign to the Bedouin Arabs, who had no idea at all of what Revelation was and in this sense it certainly belonged to the circle of the monotheistic ideas, that was historically bound up with a long Biblical tradition; and so it is but natural that the word nābīṯ should not appear in the pre-Islamic poetry of the Bedouins. But this should not be taken to mean that the word itself is a direct borrowing from Hebrew. The word nābīṯ, in both its formation and its root meaning, belongs to the genuine Arabic stock. The root NB’ goes beyond Arabic far back into the Semitic antiquity with the meaning of ‘announcing’ and ‘proclaiming’. However this may be, the etymological question is of a secondary importance for our purpose. What is much more important from our standpoint is to know whether the Qur’anic concept of nābīṯ coincides completely with the Biblical concept of nābīṯ’. And for this purpose we must push our analysis a step further.

When we, trying to isolate the characteristic features of the Qur’anic concept of ‘Prophet’, examine it carefully from the semantical point of view, we find two points standing out as worthy of special attention. These two points are both of a negative nature. One of them is that the Arabic nābīṯ has essentially nothing to do with prophecy or prophesying in the sense of future-telling. A nābīṯ, in the Qur’anic conception, is not a foreteller of the future. The root from which the word nābīṯ has been derived, NB’, has, as we have just said, certainly the meaning of ‘announcing’, ‘giving news of something’ and yet it is not towards the future that the concept faces. In the Qur’an, the news brought by a Prophet is always news of the ghayb (the unseen world of God). The Prophetic activity is always centered around transmission of the Divine Will. Of course in a certain sense, the detailed description of Hell and Paradise that will be disclosed to the eyes of mankind on the Day of Judgment may be said to be a prediction of the future. But this is far different in nature from a description of some impending and imminent event which is about to happen to a definite person or definite nation as often happens with the Hebrew prophets seeing beforehand what will come to pass in the future; this is not at all part of the function of the Arabian nābīṯ. But this was not so easily understood by Muhammad’s contemporaries, as is evidenced by the very fact that he was on many occasions asked by various men to predict future events, great and small. In the minds of those people, the concept of nābīṯ seems to have been still vaguely associated and confused even with the old traditional concept of kāḥīn.

The second of the negative characteristics of the semantic structure of nābīṯ is that the words he speaks or conveys have nothing to do with magic. This is an extremely important point, because it is perhaps from this angle that we can distinguish most appropriately the Islamic concept of Revelation from all manifestations of the Arabian shamanism, like poetry and oracles.

In pre-Islamic times, the saj’ which was the style of all inspiration, and rajaz which was the first poetic form developed from the saj’, both of them are mainly used for purposes associated in some way or other with word-magic. In those ancient days, words uttered in measured lines and with recurring rhymes were believed to be endowed with strong magical powers. The Prophet Muhammad himself recognized, according to many Hadiths, the very real power the rhyme possessed. As a matter of fact Muhammad was greatly helped, in his campaign against the pagans, by his favorite poet Hassān ibn Thābit who stood in high estimation among the Muslims precisely in this capacity, despite all that the Qur’an says disparagingly about poets and their low moral standard. It is related that Muhammad once remarked to this poet:

«لَمْ يَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ أَشْتَهَى أَشْتَهُ عَلَّمَهُمْ مِمَّا وَتَقِنُّ السَّمَاءَ فِي غَيْبِ الْفَلَامَامَ».

Your poetry is much more dangerous to our enemy than arrows shot in dark of night."

Poets, in short, were venerated and dreaded in pre-Islamic times chiefly, if not solely, because of the magical release of supernatural power they commanded against their enemy, whether personal or tribal.

There is a certain respect in which the poetic use of language presents a striking similarity, both in nature and structure, to the prophetic speech which I have described above, for in the case of a
poet as in that of a prophet, the word uttered should form an objective entity—a sprachwerk. The words he utters should be memorized exactly as they fall from his lips and transmitted to others in the original form. Springing from a supernatural source, his words also should go beyond him (A→B→C). But launched against C, the poet’s enemy, his sprachwerk is no longer a linguistic phenomenon in the proper sense of the word; it is rather a magical phenomenon; the poet’s speech is here a magical force that works upon C, binds him up, and destroys him.

The same was true of the saj⁻¹-style of soothsayers. As a true poet could handle rajaz poetry in a destructive way, so a real soothsayer was able to handle saj⁻¹-prose in such a way that he could mortally wound his enemy by the magical power of the rhyme. The magical words uttered by a competent soothsayer are often compared in old Arabic literature to deadly arrows shot by night which fly unseen by their victims; the verb most frequently used in such contexts is ramā which means ‘shooting’. They are also compared to sharp, cutting spears that are poisonous, that inflict wounds from which the victims can scarcely hope to recover. What made these rhymed words most dangerous was that these curses and counter-curses, once released, had an uncontrollable activity of their own, and nobody, even the poet or the soothsayer himself who had released them could restrain the malignant and destructive forces thus released. The qawāfī once said exercised an enduring and unrestrained magical power.

It is evident that the Qur’anic Revelation had nothing at all to do this kind of release of magical power. Saj⁻¹, as we have seen, had two different aspects in the pre-Islamic age: it was, on the one hand, the language of inspiration: all supernatural inspiration, whatever its source, took linguistically this form. It was, on the other hand, a particular use of language for releasing the magical power contained in the words. This second aspect completely disappears in the Qur’anic usage of the rhyme-words, al-qawāfī. I have already shown on several occasions⁰⁹ that in the Qur’an many of the old pre-Islamic words and concepts are used with entirely new connotations; they have been adjusted to an entirely new conceptual framework. Old concepts are there, but they have undergone a drastic semantic transformation by having been put into a new system of values. Something similar happened to saj⁻¹: the old traditional form of supernatural communication is used, but it is used as a vehicle for conveying a new content. This is my answer to whether the Qur’anic style is saj⁻¹ or not, and if it is, then how we should understand this fact in terms of the fundamental difference between Jāhiliyyah and Islam. The form is still there; but it is now a pure form of supernatural inspiration. It is not used for the purpose of releasing the magical power of words, nor is it a form in which to couch prophecy in the sense of foretelling future events.

IV. Revelation in Arabic

In what precedes we have been concerned with the parole aspect of Revelation, that is to say, with the problem of the Qur’anic concept of Revelation as a ‘speech’ phenomenon. It is time now we turned to its langue aspect.

Langue is, as already noted, a system of verbal signs recognized by common consent as the means of communication among all individuals belonging to one community. It is in this sense a social fact, fait social as defined by Durkheim in his sociology. It is a symbolic system peculiar to a community, to which every member of the community must resort in talking with others if he wishes at all to make himself understood. There can be no linguistic communication less the two persons involved in speech (kalām) resort to the same system of signs.

The Qur’an shows the clearest consciousness of this fact, and it possesses most evidently the concept of language understood in the sense of this modern technical term langue. The Qur’an bases its conception of Revelation and prophetic mission on this very idea. It starts from the recognition of the fact that each ‘people’ (qawm) has its own langue, and it attaches a great significance to this fact in regard to the phenomenon of prophetic mission. Thus in the Sūrah Ibrāhīm we read:

\[
(١٤:٤)\\text{"We never send an Apostle except with the language (i.e. langue) of his people, so that he might make the message intelligible."}\\text{Ibrāhīm, 14:4}\]

⁰⁹: See n. 99.
As the peoples of the world differ in color, so they differ in language. And no adequate understanding, i.e., communication, is possible where there is no common language.

And, we are told, this is why an Arabic speaking Prophet is now sent to Arabs with an Arabic Revelation:

\[
\text{\textit{We have sent this down as an Arabic Qur'an (qur'\textquotesingle an 'arabiyyan) that you may understand.}}
\]

\textit{Hajj}, 22:2

Verily this is the revelation of the Lord of the Universe, which the Trustworthy Spirit (i.e. Gabriel) has brought down upon thy heart, so thou mayest be one of the warners, in clear Arabic language (bi lis\textquotesingle an 'arabiyyin mubinin).

\textit{Shu'ara\textquoteright}, 26:192-195

Just as Moses was given a Book in his language, so now the Arabian Prophet is given a book in the Arabic language (lis\textquotesingle an 'arabiyyan).

If we had made it a Qur'an in some non-Arabic language (a'jamiyya) they would say: Why are not its verses made intelligible? Is it non-Arabic (a'jamiyya) and Arabic ('arabiyya)? (i.e., a non-Arabic revelation given to an Arabian prophet?)

\textit{Fussilat}, 41:44

Likewise if God should reveal this Arabic Qur'an to a non-Arab prophet and let him recite it in Arabic to his people, who are of course incapable of understanding it, they would never believe in him:

\[
\text{\textit{Verily this is the revelation of the Lord of the Universe, which the Trustworthy Spirit (i.e. Gabriel) has brought down upon thy heart, so thou mayest be one of the warners, in clear Arabic language (bi lis\textquotesingle an 'arabiyyin mubinin).}}
\]

\textit{Shu'ara\textquoteright}, 26:192-195

Had We sent this down upon some non-Arabian (prophet), and had he recited it to them (in Arabic), they would not have believed in it.

\textit{Al-Shu'ara\textquoteright}, 26:189 [199].

All these verses are, as we see, based on the view that each community has its own language, and that there is an inseparable tie between a community and its language. And this is tantamount to saying that the Qur'an has the concept of langue in the modern technical sense of the word. This concept is in the Qur'an signified by the word lis\textquotesingle an (tongue).

The Qur'an itself gives a sure indication that a malicious rumor was being circulated among the Arabs at that time that the Qur'an was not a divine revelation, that, in reality, there was a man behind Muhammad, a man versed in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, who was teaching him what to say under the name of Revelation. Al-Tabari mentions several Christian slaves of foreign origin whose names were on the lips of the K\textsuperscript{\textit{afirs}} who were spreading this rumor.

However—the Qur'an argues against this accusation—the native language (lis\textquotesingle an) of the man to whom they attribute all this is non-Arabic (a'jami), while this is a clear Arabic language (lis\textquotesingle an 'arabiyya mubinun), the implication being that anyone whose language is not Arabic would be absolutely incapable of teaching Muhammad what to say in pure Arabic.

This and some other verses which I have just quoted have brought to our attention a very important word a'jami. We do well to discuss this problem in terms of the basic contrast between 'Arab and 'Ajam. In the eyes of the ancient Arabs all the peoples of the known world were divisible into two categories: the Arabs and the non-Arabs. In the latter category all the non-Arab peoples known to them were simply lumped together without any distinction. These two concepts were not exclusively linguistic, because blood, i.e. race, also played an important role, particularly in the concept of 'Arab. But the most decisive factor was undoubtedly language. This is evidenced
by the fact that even a man of pure Arab origin, if he was not able to speak Arabic properly, was very often called a'jamī.

This, by the way, has led some of the authorities to the view that there is a fine distinction between a'jamī (or 'ajam) and 'ajami. The former means, according to this view, a man who is incapable of expressing himself correctly and clearly, even if he be a real Arab racially, while the latter means a man, who racially belongs to a non-Arab people without any regard as to whether he speaks Arabic well or not. However not all lexicographers agree to this view.

In any case, it is certain that in Jāhiliyyah the root 'JM had a very wide range of application. The basic meaning seems to have been the extreme obscurity of one's speech, whether it is just a temporary casual state or a permanent state due to one's being a foreigner. The following verse by al-Husayn b. al-Humān is very interesting in this respect.

And they said: Observe well, can you see between Dārij and the rainpit of Akuff anyone crying for help that is not voiceless (a'jam)?

Here a'jam means a man who has lost his voice as a result of having been crying for help so long and in vain. And of course this extreme obscurity of speech, when it goes to its utmost limit, coincides with perfect silence. And the verb ista'jama was used just for this meaning.

We have for example in the Hadith: Ista'jama 'alayhi qirā'atuḥu, which means literally "his reading or recitation (of the Holy Book) became silent against him" i.e. the man was overcame by drowsiness while he was reciting the Book and could not continue reading it. This usage of the verb is also very old, and examples are found in pre-Islamic poetry.

Finally, the idea of linguistic obscurity may take another direction: animals, cattle and the brutes are called a'jam. I will give only one simple example from the Hadith: al-'ajmā' u jurhu-hā jubārun. The word al-'ajmā' is the feminine form of a'jam, meaning bahimah ('animal'). The meaning of the Hadith itself is: As to the brutes, injury (including death) caused by them is jubār (i.e., bloodshed which does not deserve punishment): that is to say, no vengeance

should be taken for any injury caused by the brutes.

These examples will be enough to show that anybody, or anything that is incapable of speaking in a proper human way is a'jam. This also shows at the same time that the term a'jam or 'ajam was originally a pejorative term: in other words, it implied a disparaging and contemptuous attitude on the part of the Arabs towards those who could not speak Arabic, which was in their eyes the richest, the most beautiful, and the most perfect language in the whole world. To be unable to speak this perfect language was, for them, almost equivalent to being born speechless.

The same depreciating attitude towards peoples incapable of speaking Arabic underlies the usage of the onomatopoeic word timtim, which is often used in reference to the language of the Abyssinians (timtim habashī, "an Ethiopean Timtim" or tamātim sid, "black Timtims").

It is surprising that in the midst of such a world the Qur'an took a fair and impartial attitude towards this problem. It did not see any natural superiority of the Arabic language over non-Arabic languages.

It is true that by the rise of Islam a really unique position was assigned to Arabic as the language of Divine Revelation. But this was not, properly speaking, intended to be the open declaration of the superiority of Arabic. Nor is there, for that matter, a declaration in the Qur'an of the racial superiority of the Arabs. For the famous verse quoted above (3:106 [110]) which runs, "You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind" can only refer contextually to the religious community of Muslims as distinguished from other communities of the People of Scripture and not to the Arabs as a nation.

The Qur'anic view of this problem is based on the very clear cultural consciousness that each nation has its own language, and Arabic is the language of the Arabs, and it is, in this capacity, only one of many languages. If God chose this language, it was not for its intrinsic value as a language but simply for its usefulness, that is, because the message was addressed primarily to the Arabic speaking people. We see the Qur'an itself declaring again and again that this Book was revealed in Arabic simply in order to facilitate the understanding. "We have sent this down in Arabic so that you might understand" (12:2).

And this corresponds to the more general Islamic attitude.
towards the problem of racial difference. In the very famous Sūrah 49:13 as well as in Muhammad's farewell speech it is explicitly stated that in Islam all men, whether Arabs or non-Arabs, are perfectly equal.

Where does this fundamental Qur'anic attitude come from? In order to account for this seemingly strange fact we have only to recall what was said above regarding the cultural situation in which the Arabs were living at the time when Islam was born among them. Arabia at that time was not a closed world; on the contrary, it was an open world in lively contact with other peoples speaking different languages with widely different cultural traditions.

Roughly speaking, the Arabs of that age may be divided into two different categories or types: one was the pure, genuine Bedouin type who lived in a closed society, conservative, traditionalist, reluctant to admit anything new into their mode of living and mode of thinking, and the other was a more enlightened sort, widely open to other forms of life and thought than their own, ready to accept or even ready to go out of their tribal society in search of new and higher cultural values.

The first type of Arabs were the real children of the desert, living strictly within the narrow limits of the tribal structure of society, living in the tribe, with the tribe, and for the tribe. The very basis of their sentiments, emotions and thoughts was essentially tribal. Of course even they had to come into close contact with foreigners if only for the reason that the wine-dealers were mostly Christians, Jews and Persians, and they were people who could not imagine life without wine-drinking, and we know from their poetry that they were familiar also with the devout and meditative life of the Syrian Christian monks who lived here and there in the midst of the desert and whose solitary lamps lit in the darkness served as guides to travellers by night. And yet on the whole the Bedouins were far more concerned with themselves than with other nations. Their interest was almost exclusively centered around their tribal affairs.

Compared with this genuine Bedouin type, the second type was a far enlightened one—the class of cosmopolitans of that age. And the Jāhiliyyah produced a great number of them, among whom we find some of the greatest names in the history of Arabic literature like Labīd, al-A'shā, al-Nābighah, etc.

Of course, these were also, at bottom, tribal Bedouins as regards their mode of life, their mode of thinking, and mode of reaction in general. So it is but natural that we should find them sharing with the first type many, or even most, of the mental traits which may be considered typically Bedouin. And it need cause no surprise if we find also many border-line cases, or overlapping areas between the two classes. Thus, to take one telling example, the poet al-Nābighah, who displayed a genuine Bedouin-ness in his thinking and expression, was also an outstanding figure in this second class.

And yet, as a whole, there is one remarkable feature which draws a clear line of demarcation between the purely tribal Bedouin type and the cosmopolitan type. Those who fell under this second category lived on an international level: they had a mind open to all the foreign cultures and peoples that surrounded them, that had even infiltrated deep into the Arabian Peninsula. They were the intellectuals of the age, who breathed an enlightened air, and whose intellectual horizon was not at all limited to the narrow confines of Arabia; they left their souls free to be influenced culturally by the surrounding peoples with a far higher degree of civilization. They had enough curiosity to venture into unknown worlds, learn new ideas, and assimilate them. Unlike the first type, their minds were not all confined to the tribal matters.

We see a typical example of this category in the poet al-A'shā al-Akbar who travelled all through the peninsula from North to South, went over its border and visited Jerusalem and Homs, went to Iraq, and even crossed Iraq into the Sassanian Empire of Persia and brought back from there a number of Persian words and concepts, which he put into his poetry together with some Christian ideas which he had learned from the people of the kingdom of Hīrah. He was so much interested in, and influenced by, the things he saw outside of Arabia that he almost became a Christian in his view of life and world outlook. He seems even to have travelled to Ethiopia in search of new ideas.

The state of affairs just described will make us understand why, contrary to our naive expectation, we do not find in the Qur'ān a declaration of the natural superiority of the Arabic language. The Prophet Muhammad as a man belonged to this second type of Arabs, and the Qur'ānic outlook over the surrounding world was also evidently of this second type, for it was based on the recognition of the existence of various nations and various communities on the
earth. The spirit of the Qur'an, in this respect, was a definite and daring break with the old tribal spirit so characteristic of the Bedouin Arabs.

The world in which the Prophet began to develop a new religious activity was not a closed tribal society; it was an open world of lively cultural contact and cultural competition among a number of different nations. The level of cultural consciousness on which the Qur'an worked upon the religious feeling of the Arabs was much higher than that of the Bedouins of the desert.

We must recall in this connection the above-cited verses of the Qur'an, in which a deep distrust is manifested in the Bedouin mentality as regards religious matters.

In other places we are told that the Bedouins are the most difficult people to handle in the matter of religion and belief. They are stubborn, obstinate, haughty and arrogant; and the vainglory prevents them from acquiring the virtue of humbleness which, however, is the very gist of the religious mind as Islam understands it.

All the evidence, in short, points to the fact that the cultural and spiritual sphere in which the Arabian Prophet lived and worked was essentially different from, and even diametrically opposed, in certain important respects, to the world in which the Bedouins lived. The Bedouins of the desert stood far below the level of cultural consciousness at which Islam addressed itself to the Arabic-speaking people. And on this high level of world conception, the Arabs were after all but one among many different peoples, and the Arabic language, too, was one of many different languages.

Thus we see why the Qur'an, in spite of the constant emphasis it places on its being in Arabic, does not consider itself a manifesto of the superiority of this language. Each community has its own language. So when God sent down His Revelation to the Israelites in the form of the Torah, He chose Hebrew as the vehicle of His message, because it was the language of that community. The same is true of other Revelations sent to other nations: each people of Scripture had their own kitāb in the language of the community. Likewise, all Messengers who were raised before Muhammad addressed each of his people (qawm) in their particular language. So it is now with Muhammad. Since he is primarily an Arabian prophet and Arabian apostle he is sent with a kitāb in Arabic. Otherwise, there would be no reason why the Arabic language should be preferred to other languages.

This central idea of the Qur'an was quite in keeping with the broad world outlook which I have just described in some detail. However this was not the way in which the Arabs, or to be more correct the Arab Muslims, understood the whole matter. The evident fact that nowhere in the Qur'an was the superiority of Arabic per se stated was simply ignored by them, who had always been so proud of their Arab-ness and their Arabic language.

Quite naturally, the fact that the Qur'an was revealed in the Arabic language was taken by the Arabs as the strongest evidence that it was superior to all other languages. If Arabic was chosen by God Himself for the vehicle of Revelation, it was not for any pragmatic usefulness but rather for the intrinsic virtue of this language qua language. Arabic was now the sacred language. And sooner or later the non-Arab Muslims also had to admit, because of their ardor and veneration for the Sacred Book, the natural superiority of this language. And thus the Arabic language qua language ended by assuming a high religious value. This process is admirably well depicted with all its theological implications by Fakhir al-Dīn al-Rāzī in his "Great Commentary", Majātī al-Ghayb.

This natural tendency of the Arabs, continuing to be dominant all through the Umayyad period, was pushed to its extreme and took on even an emotive nationalistic aspect in the Abbasid period when the Arab 'Asabiyah was faced with the Persian Shu'ubiyyah which claimed the incomparable superiority of the Persian culture in Islam, including the Persian language, over things Arab.

This movement which arose in the second and third centuries of Islamic history struck a fatal blow at the already declining Arab supremacy in Islam. The people who represented Shu'ubiyyah not only declared openly that all Muslims were completely equal, irrespective of race, nationality and lineage—this much was in complete accordance with the Qur'anic teaching—but went further and said that the non-Arabs were far superior to the Arabs in every respect, who were nothing but poor barbarians of the desert with no cultural background at all, and that all that was significant in Islamic culture went back to non-Arab sources.

The leaders of the Shu'ubiyyah revolt against the Arabs were naturally mostly Persians, but since the reign of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil they were joined by the Turks too. Even the last
stronhold of the Arabs, i.e., the Arabic language which as I have said, had been raised to sanctity, could not remain safe from the vehement attacks of the Shu‘ubiyyah. Enthusiastic partisans made their utmost to bring down the Arabic language from its sacred throne and run into the opposite extreme of extolling non-Arabic languages like Greek, Persian and Indian as far more perfect than Arabic, both as a tool of logical thinking and as a means of expression for poetic sentiments and emotions.

This is indeed an extremely interesting and important phase of the history of Islamic culture. But of course the problem lies beyond the confines of the present study.

V. Prayer (Al-Du‘ā’)

In the last section we have analyzed the concept of Revelation in the Qur’an. The long and short of it is that wahy in its narrow—properly religious—sense is a particular sort of verbal communication that takes place between God and man in the descending direction, from God to man. God addresses His words directly to man: directly to the Prophet, and indirectly to mankind in general.

![Linguistic Communication](image)

But this linguistic relation between God and man is not unilateral. In other words, instead of remaining always passive, man on his part sometimes takes the initiative in establishing a verbal relation with God and tries to communicate with Him by means of linguistic signs. The result is a phenomenon which structurally corresponds to Revelation in that the latter is a direct verbal communication in the ascending direction, from man to God. Like Revelation, this also can occur only in a very special form under unusual conditions. Normally, man has at his disposal no means of addressing God directly, if only for the reason that this would violate the most fundamental principle of language that there should be an ontological equality between the two parties in order that a exchange of words might occur. Only in an extraordinary situation, when man finds himself in an unusual, non-daily state of mind, when for some reason or other his mind has been strained almost to a breaking point, is he in a position to address words directly to God. In such a situation, man can no longer be a man in an ordinary sense; he is as al-Kirmānī says in the passage quoted above, necessarily transformed into something above himself. This type of linguistic event in a non-daily situation is du‘ā’ which is usually translated ‘prayer’. The immediate cause which induces man to use language in this way may differ from case to case. It may be deep and overbrimming piety towards God. Or it may be—and as a matter of fact it is the most usual case—imminent danger of death. We see in the Qur’an even the unbelieving pagans calling upon God in an emergency “making their faith sincere”.

When some misfortune visits a man, he calls upon Us for help (da‘ā-nā), reclining on his side, or sitting, or standing. But when We have removed misfortune he goes his way as if he had never called upon Us for help because of the misfortune that visited him.

Yūnus, 10:13 [12]

(At the last moment when they feel certain of their death by shipwreck) they call upon God for help (da‘ā), making their religion sincere: If thou deliverest us from this, we shall truly be of the thankful!”

Yūnus, 10:23 [22]

In any case it is clear that this kind of linguistic behavior occurs only in an extraordinary situation which puts man out of his normal daily frame of mind. In other words, for such a thing to occur, the
speaker must find himself in a ‘limit situation’ as the existentialists would say. For only in a limited situation can the human heart be completely purified of all mundane thoughts, and accordingly the language he speaks becomes heightened spiritually. Du’ā’ is the most intimate personal conversation of the heart with God that occurs only when the human heart happens to be in such a state.

The following verse shows better than anything else this basic relation of du’ā’ with a ‘limit situation’:

If the chastisement of God comes upon you, or the Hour (i.e. the Last Hour) comes upon you, will you be calling upon other than God? (Answer) if you are truthful. Nay, upon Him alone will you be calling!

Al-An’ām, 6:40-41

When this original spiritual tension becomes somewhat relaxed, and the whole thing, instead of passing away as a mere momentary phenomenon, transforms itself into a fixed, deep-rooted pious habit, then du’ā’ becomes synonymous with ‘ibādah (worshipping).

Say: I am forbidden to worship (a ‘buda) those upon whom you call (i.e. the idols) apart from God.

Al-An’ām, 6:56

Drive not away those who call upon their Lord at morn and evening, desiring His countenance.

Al-An’ām, 6:52

Set your faces in every place of worship (towards God) and call upon Him, making your religion sincere.

Al-A’rāf, 7:30 [29]

It may be well to recall at this point that Revelation, as I have explained in the preceding section, is primarily designed to elicit a human response, either positive or negative. When God sends down his āyāt, He demands man to respond to them with tasādīq and ‘belief’. In like manner, the human act of du’ā’ wants to be responded to by God. Man, in other words, addresses his du’ā’ to God in the expectation that his wish be granted. The Divine response to the human du’ā’ is signified in the Qur’an by the word istījābah meaning literally ‘answering’, ‘being ready in response’. Semantically we may describe this by saying that the concept of du’ā’ stands in correlation with that of istījābah. Unlike du’ā’, which is essentially verbal, istījābah is non-verbal.

In the Qur’an, God Himself declares positively that He is always ready to “answer” if only man call upon Him sincerely.

Your Lord has said: Call upon Me, and I will answer you.

Ghāfir, 40:60

Moreover, the Qur’an attaches the highest importance to the concept of istījābah, as is evident from the fact that it makes the incapacity for istījābah one of the most salient marks of a false god. The gods whom the Kāfirs worship apart from Allah cannot respond to their du’ā’; however much the worshippers call upon them. They do not hear the Kāfirs’ prayer, and even if they did, they
magical function of language played a tremendous role in society. But this aspect of the linguistic life of the Arabs has been explored long ago by Goldziher so fully and in such a scholarly way that there is almost nothing left for us to say.

Notes

1. The part of this chapter which concerns the problem of Revelation in the Qur'an appeared earlier as a separate article in Studies in Medieval Thought, Journal of the Japanese Society of Medieval Philosophy (Vol. V, 1962) under the title of "Revelation as a Linguistic in Islam". But the chapter is not an exact reproduction of the article, although the problems treated as well as the main arguments remain in the nature of the case substantially the same.


3. Be it remarked in passing that there is in Arabic a special grammatical means of transforming regularly such a word into a 'two-person' word. It is what is generally known under the name of the third derivative form, or the fa'ala-form. In contrast to akala (eats), akala requires two persons on the stage: somebody eats together with somebody else at the same table.

4. al-Mu'addalyyat, CXX, v. 28.


6. More literally: "as if their rocks contained characters" (Mu'allakah, v. 2).

7. al-Mu'addalyyat, XVI, v. 56. See also 'Antarah, Dīvān, p. 190, v. 7, where we read: "(as Šaimī) as characters on the parchments dating from the reign of Ksarā'."

8. Note that the Sūrah itself is entitled al-Qalam (the Pen).

9. 7:139 [143].

10. 'Alqamah al-Fahl, from the famous ode which he composed in competition with Imr al-Qays, v. 29. For Qur'anic examples of nādā see 7:42 [44], where the People of the Garden (ashab al-jannah) address words (nādā) to the People of the Fire (ashāb al-nār), the distance between the two groups being of course the longest imaginable; 7:21[24]; 5:53[58]; 68:21-24; 63:9; 49:4, etc. The only apparent exception 50:40[41], which reads:
And listen on the day when the Caller (minādî) shall call (yunādî) from a near place (makānīn qarībin). But a little reflection will be sufficient to show that precisely this combination of the seemingly contradictory concepts produces a striking stylistic effect. For the verse refers to a really ‘exceptional’ case. It describes the coming of the Day of Resurrection, when the Caller, i.e. the Angel, calls all people out of their graves to drive them to the place of Judgment. To the ears of the dead who hear the cry, the call gives an extraordinary impression as if somebody were calling them in a large voice from a distant place, which is, strangely enough, so close to them.

11. Al-A’rāf, 7:19 [20]; Al-Nīsā, 114:5-6
13. I owe this methodological idea to Prof. Ernst Leisi, which he first exposed systematically in his book Der Wortinhalt, Seine Struktur im Deutschen und Englischen, Heidelberg, 1953.
16. On the problem of linguistic magic, see my Language and Magic, Tokyo, 1955.
18. Dīwān, XXXIII, vv. 32-34.
20. This reminds us of the Qur’ānic expression tanzil (sending down) of the āyāt—from the same root NzL—which we discussed in the preceding chapter.
22. 27:36. The word majnūn literally means “one possessed by a Jinn”.
24. 6:100.
25. 38:158.
26. 26:222.
27. 15:6.
28. al-Bukhārī, Bāb al-Tawhīd.
30. As regards the word ittasaqqa and its meaning, cf. the Qur’an, 84:18.
31. Also al-Hāqiqah, 69:42.
32. Sahih al-Bukhārī, I, No. 2.
33. 2:91 [97].
34. 81:19.
35. Here the words are put in the mouth of the Prophet Noah.
36. See for instance, 3:48 [46].
37. 75:16 [19]. Also in 20:113 [114], we meet with a similar admonition.
38. For a very detailed philological analysis of the word nābīr in Hebrew, see Alfred Guillaume, Prophecy and Divination, London, 1938, Lecture III.
40. See for example, Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Qur’an, chapter VII.
41. 30:21 [22].
42. 18:92 [93].
43. 46:11 [12].
44. 16:105 [103].
45. al-Mafaddaliyyāt, XII, v. 36.
46. استُفَضِّيَ عليه قراءته
47. خُصِّصَتْ حَرَّحَهَا حِيَار
49. For the religious implication of the concept of ‘thankfulness’, see Chapter 9, section I.
50. For a discussion of the meaning of this word, see the next chapter.
51. See also Ghāfīr, 40:53 [50].
52. In his study on the Hijā’ poetry in ancient Arabia, op. cit. pp. 1-105.
CHAPTER 8
Jāhiliyyah and Islam

I. Islam and the Concept of Humble Submission

In this chapter we are going to deal with the third aspect of the fundamental relation between God and man: the Lord-servant relation, God as the ‘Lord’ (rabb) and man as His ‘servant’ (‘abd).

As already noted, the conception of Allah as ‘Lord’ was not unknown to the Jāhili Arabs. Only in pre-Islamic times Allah was not the sole, absolute Lord. There were besides Him many rabbīs and rabbahs. Islam acknowledged Him for the first time as the absolute Sovereign, the Only Absolute Lord of the whole world.

This implied that all other things, not only ordinary human beings, but the Prophets and even the Angels should never be considered ‘Lords’ (arbāb) in any sense. In 3:74 [80]; 3:171 [172], for example, we are told that even “the angels who are near stationed to God” (al-malā’ ikah al-muqarrabūn) will not be allowed to disdain to be His faithful and humble servants.

The establishment of the conception of Allah as the Absolute Lord of all necessarily introduced also a radical change into the conception of the relation between God and man. A new semantic field was formed around this new idea, containing a number of most important key-terms in the Qur’an.

Since God is now the Absolute Sovereign, the only possible attitude for man to take towards Him is that of complete submission, humbleness and humility without reserve. In short, a ‘servant’ (‘abd) should act and behave as a ‘servant’ (‘abd)—hence the important semantic development shown by the word ‘ibādah, which from the original literal meaning of “serving Him as a servant”, “serving Him as behooves a servant”, eventually has come to mean ‘worship’ and ‘cult’. This association of concepts is shown very clearly in the following verse:

Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them.
So serve Him and be steadfast in His service.

Al-Tawbah, 9:68 [65]

The primary function of a servant consists naturally in serving his master faithfully, paying constant and careful attention to the latter’s wishes whatever he wishes, and obeying without murmuring his commands. This is why so much importance is attached in the Qur’an to the group of terms meaning absolute obedience, submission and humility, like tā’ah (obedience),1 gūnūt (obedience, humbleness),2 khushū’ (submissiveness),3 ṭaadarrū’ (self-abasement)4 all these stand in a sharp contrast to the attitude of stubborn refusal to obey, symbolized in the Qur’an by the image of a “hardened heart”.

But by far the most important of all the concepts belonging in this class is the concept of islām itself, not, of course, in the sense of the historical, objective, religious culture known as Islam—Islam as a result of the process of ‘reification’, to use the terminology of Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith—but islām in the original sense of the determined self-surrender, self-surrendering to the Divine Will, i.e., a decisive step taken by each individual person, as his own inner personal and existential problem, towards resigning his soul to God.5

Islām, or the verb aslama, in the sense in which it is used in the phrase aslama wajha-hu li-Allāhī, lit. “He has submitted his face to God”, means originally and primarily that one voluntarily surrenders oneself to the Divine Will putting one’s trust wholly in God. It is, in short, the kind of unconditional self-surrender which expresses itself verbally in a verse like this:

And, Lord, make us submissive to thee!

Al-Baqarah, 2:122 [128]
Now, what makes this concept particularly important among all the concepts relating to humbleness and submission, is primarily the fact that God Himself has chosen this as the name of the new Arabian religion. But it is also due to the fact that Islam, as an inner personal religious experience of each individual person, means the occurrence of an important event that marks the initial point from which real obedience and humbleness begin.

\[ \text{aslama} \]

(A) Jahili period (B) Islamic period

It marks a decisive turning point in the life of a man, a turning point in the religious sense which cuts his whole length of life into two halves \((A, B)\) that will henceforward stand diametrically opposed to each other. Grammatically speaking, the verb \text{aslama} belongs to a particular group of verbs called ‘inchoative’. In other words, instead of denoting a permanent nature, it signifies something new that comes into being for the first time; it marks the beginning of a new situation, the birth of a new nature. Only in the participial form \text{muslim} does it signify a more or less permanent attribute. But even then the implication is that it is an attribute which has ensued from the decisive step taken.

All the other Qur’anic terms meaning obedience and submission are extremely vague and ambiguous in this respect. They might give the wrong impression of obedience and humility being a natural quality of man. They do not contain in their semantic structure the moment of existential decision, of jumping into an unknown sphere of life. Only the word \text{islam} implies this. A \text{muslim} in the original sense is a man who has dared to make such a jump. Of course I am speaking of the Muslims in the earliest period of Islam as depicted in the Qur’an, when all the Muslims without exception, including the Prophet himself, had been once pagans.

It is only after a man has made this decisive jump that such concepts as ‘obedience’, ‘submission’ and ‘humility’ begin to appear invested with a truly religious significance. The words like \text{khushū’}, \text{tadarru’} etc. as key-terms in the Qur’an do not mean simple, ordinary humbleness. What is meant thereby is a particular kind of humbleness that ensues from the decisive act of \text{islam} which we have just analyzed.

As I have said, the spiritual act of \text{aslama} ushers in an entirely new period in the life of a man, and the two portions of life separated in this way by the point of \text{aslama} are of an entirely different nature from each other and are radically opposed to each other. If we call the portion \(B\) ‘Islamic’, period \(A\) may be called ‘Jahil’ period of a man. It must be kept in mind that we are now talking of the life of an individual man. ‘Islamic’ and ‘Jahil’ do not yet designate at this stage two consecutive historical periods, as they do in later Islam. ‘Jahiliyyah’ is still a personal quality, not the name of a historic age. In this original sense, ‘Jahil’ cannot properly be translated as ‘pre-Islamic’, because it means much more, as we shall see immediately. It does not mean simply a period preceding the rise of Islam; it is something positive, and positively opposed to ‘Islamic’.

At any rate, the life of one individual person is divided into two entirely different parts. From now on he is a Muslim, while up till now he has been a Jahil. What does this mean? This is the main problem which will occupy our attention in the following pages.

A man’s being a Muslim implies many different things, but from the specific point of view which is ours now, it means primarily that he is a man who has abandoned all his selfishness, all pride in human power, and stands humbled, meek and submissive as a ‘servant’ \((\text{abd})\) before God who is his Lord \((\text{rab})\) and Master. This \text{abd-ness} is the distinguishing feature of the portion \(B\) in the above diagram.

The portion \(A\) implies all the personal qualities that are contrary to this absolute submissiveness and humility, all those qualities that prevent man from being submissive and humble to God. Pride in human power, limitless self-confidence, sense of absolute independence, the unshakable determination not to bow before any authority, whether human or divine—in short, all that is contrary to \text{abd-ness}. Historically, too, this was one of the most characteristic traits of the pre-Islamic Arab mind.

In fact, the pre-Islamic Arabs were notorious for the personal qualities which have just been mentioned. But far from being moral defects, these represented in their eyes the highest ideal of human virtue, the noblest virtue of a man really worthy of the name of ‘man’, \text{al-fadl}. For these qualities were all based on, and various
manifestation of, the sense of ‘honor’ (‘ird) which was deep-rooted in their mentality, and which was, indeed, the highest regulating principle of their conduct.

This prominent Jāhili quality was variously known as anafah, literally ‘high-nosed-ness’, ibā’ (refusal, i.e. to allow one’s honor sullied), hamiyah (zeal for defending what one has to defend)—a word which occurs in the Qur’an (48:26) precisely in this sense in the particular combination of hamiyah al-jāhiliyyah (the hamiyah which is characteristic of the jāhiliyyah) and haftah “guarding jealously one’s honor”. All these words were in use then to mean the noble quality of a noble man who would proudly refuse to accept anything whatsoever that might degrade his personal dignity, a fierce passionate nature to hurl back with scorn anything which might make him feel humbled and humiliated even in the slightest way.

This fiery spirit of resistance which made man refuse resolutely to submit and surrender to the will of any other man, and to sully thereby his honor was indeed the real fountain-head of almost all Jāhili human values. This spirit found its expression in various forms everywhere in pre-Islamic poetry. Here is an example which expresses it in the simplest and most straightforward way:

ناَى عَلَى النَّاسِ المَقَادِرَ كَلِهِمْ حَتَّى نُفَوَّذُهمْ بِيَبَرٍ رَمَام

We refuse resolutely to submit to another’s direction, whoever he may be! On the contrary, we make all men obey our directions, and that without bit and bridle.

It is worthy of note that the word with which the verse begins, na‘bā, comes from the verb abā which corresponds to the above-mentioned verbal noun ibā’ (refusing proudly). A man characterized by this haughty spirit of resistance to anything that might tarnish his ‘honor’ was called abīy. An abīy was a man who could never acquiesce in being abused by anybody else, and even never allowed any of those who happened to be under his protection to be abused, as Ta’abbata Sharran says in the verse quoted earlier in connection with the problem of human destiny.

At this haughty spirit of Jāhiliyyah Islam struck a mortal blow. Or perhaps we should rather say that Islam touched on the sore point of the mentality of the Jāhili Arabs. For it demanded of them, before anything else, to abandon before the One and Only king of the whole world all pride in human power, the feeling of self-sufficiency, which the Qur’an called istighnā’ and tugḥān—from the verb taghā meaning a torrent of water rising high to the degree of overflowing (96:6-7), and to feel really humble and submissive to a Will which presides over the whole universe as the supreme Lord.

No, indeed, man tends to be insolent (yatgāhā) because he thinks himself self-sufficient (istaghnā’).

Al-‘Alaq, 96:6-7

From the Islamic point of view, everyone is a servant (‘abd) of this Lord, and it is his natural duty to manifest his ‘abd-ness in all his actions and sayings, to serve his great Lord with unbounded humbleness and docility. From the point of view of a Jāhili man, however, no one is entitled to demand of him such a thing; he is the Lord of himself. Humble and docile submission to whomsoever it may be, is in his eyes simple servitude—i.e. ‘abd-ness in the sense of being an abject slave as opposed to a free-born Arab (hurr).

Again from the Islamic point of view this refusal of self-surrender on the part of Jāhili Arabs was nothing but a manifestation of human presumptuousness, insolence and arrogance caused by man’s ignorance of himself and of God. This is why in the Qur’an the word istikbār (to be haughty)—or more literally, “to consider oneself great”—and its synonyms play such an important role in the critical description of the attitude of the Kāfirs. In fact, the overbearing haughtiness and the mocking attitude that ensues from it are described minutely and vividly everywhere in the Qur’an as the most characteristic feature of the pagan Arabs.

This is, in short, the spirit of the Jāhiliyyah to which the Qur’an refers in the Sūrah al-Fath.

When the Kāfirs set up in their hearts the hamiyah, that hamiyah so, characteristic of the Jāhili-ness.

Al-Fath, 48:26
Thus we see here before our eyes another basic conceptual conflict between two irreconcilable principles: jahiliyyah on the one hand, and islam on the other, that is, haughtiness, arrogance and insolence on the one hand, and humbleness and submission on the other, towards one and the same object—Allah. And this is undoubtedly the most ‘dramatic’ moment of the whole Qur’anic divina commedia.

It is important to remark in this connection that this radical opposition of jahiliyyah and islam, or of jahl on the one hand and muslim or mu’min on the other, was quite a new situation brought about by the rise of Islam in Arabia, as is easy to see from the very fact that the concept of muslim or mu’min itself in the religious sense had not been existent in pre-Islamic times.

In pre-Islamic times, jahl (or jahl) was sharply opposed to a different concept, viz., halim (or hilm). But again the problem is very delicate because this concept of hilm, although quite a different concept from islam, is not so different as to have nothing in common with it. On the contrary, there is even a certain respect in which we might regard it as the pre-religious, pre-Islamic form of the concept of islam itself. This is shown by the fact that when the new religion replaced the old concept of halim by the new concept of muslim or mu’min, the replacement took place gradually and as a natural process, so to speak, without causing, in this respect, any abrupt break with the old Arabian ethics. How, then, was hilm replaced smoothly by the new concept of Islam? How does this latter concept link up historically with that of hilm, as a new interpretation of an old concept? This will be our next problem.

It is a commonplace today among the Orientalists that jahl was not in pre-Islamic times contrary of ‘ilm—‘ignorance’ as opposed to ‘knowledge’—as it had been generally believed before Goldzieher published his now famous paper on this problem.8

The major points of his thesis have been summarized by many Western writers on the origin of Islam in Arabia,9 and I myself have referred to this article in my book on the Structure of the Ethical Terms and have examined there carefully all the relevant passages in the Qur’an in which the root JHL appears under various forms. It would be wearisome to go over again what has so often been discussed. Here I shall take up this problem from a somewhat different angle, trying at the same time, if possible, to push further ahead the analysis of the conceptual pair: jahl and hilm.

In Islam—or to be more exact, in the Qur’an—jahiliyyah is a religious term in the negative sense, because it is the very basis on which the kufr of the Kafirs is based. In fact, it was this haughty spirit of independence, this keenest sense of honor which refused to bow before any authority, be it human or divine, that incited the Kafirs to set up the most determined opposition against the new religion. The jahl-ness was in short, the very root and source of kufr.

In pre-Islamic times the word had no religious connotation at all. Jahl was simply a human, personal feature; only it was a very characteristic one. It was really something quite typical of the pre-Islamic Arabs. So much so that when we read pre-Islamic poetry, it is, together with its counterpart hilm, one of those concepts that we meet with almost at every step. Unless we know the exact meaning of this pair of words, jahl and hilm, we cannot hope to understand the psychological make-up of the ancient Arabs, and, consequently, in many cases we would not be able to understand why they acted and reacted as they did, for we would not see the driving motive underlying their peculiar behavior pattern.

The concept of jahl being so characteristic of the psychology of the pre-Islamic Arabs it is but natural that the word should occur very frequently in Jahlī poetry. And it is comparatively easy to isolate the basic semantic elements of this word, if we examine carefully the numerous instances of its usage in pre-Islamic literature, applying them to the method of contextual analysis.

The major semantic constituents of this concept which my own analysis has isolated may conveniently be stated in a summary form as follows:

1.—The first and the most conspicuous feature of the human nature signified by the word jahl—or rather we should perhaps say the root JHL, for jahl is merely one of the many possible forms under which the root JHL appears—concerns a particular behavior pattern.

Jahl is the typical behavior pattern of a hot-blooded impetuous man, who tends to lose his self-control on the slightest provocation, and consequently to act recklessly, driven by an uncontrollable blind passion, without reflecting on the disastrous consequence this behavior might lead to. It is the behavior pattern peculiar to a man
of an extremely touchy and passionate nature, who has no control of his own feelings and emotions, and who, therefore, easily surrenders himself to the dictates of violent passions, losing the sense of what is right and what is wrong.

It is to this aspect of jahl that the concept of hilim is primarily opposed. Hilim is the nature of a man who is able to stop the outburst of this very jahl. Halim is a man who knows how to soothe his feelings, to overcome his own blind passions and to remain tranquil and undisturbed whatever happens to him, however much he may be provoked.

If jahl is a burning flame of anger—and the image is actually used by Jahlil poets: ihtidam (the verb ihtada) meaning “to burn with a furious flame and scorching heat”—hilim is calmness, balanced mind; self-control, and steadiness of judgment.

This contrast between jahl and hilim found its expression in a very interesting metaphor in a verse by ‘Amr b. Ahmar al-Bahili. The poet was a Jahlili, who later embraced Islam.

The first thing that attracts our attention in this verse is that it describes the cooking pots of the poet’s tribe that continue boiling and seething endlessly as if they would never calm down, a very impressive symbol of wealth and limitless hospitality. The poet produces an unusual effect by describing the pots as if they were human beings, and this by ascribing to them metaphorically, two important human qualities: jahl and hilim. For our present purpose, this verse is interesting because this metaphor of a large black seething pot over a burning fire makes us understand better than any lengthy prosaic description the nature of the concept of jahl and of its opposite hilim.

At the same time this metaphor makes us see how appropriate the word jahil is in the Qur’an in the mouth of Joseph in Egypt in describing the dangerous temptation to which he almost yielded.

"O my Lord!" he cries, "I would sooner be cast into prison than do that which these women urge me to do. Yet if Thou turnest not from me their temptation, I shall surrender myself to the surge of lust (asbu) for them and so become a jahil".

Yusuf, 12:33

The verb sabā (asbu) is worthy of note in this context. In pre-Islamic literature, it is, so to speak, a technical term in common use in love-poetry for a rushing surge of youthful passion. It means that you are overwhelmed by an unbridled passion that surges up in your heart, disturbs your balance of mind, makes you lose the sense of right and wrong, and drives you towards folly. The following verse by al-Mukhabbal is very illuminating in this respect because it shows the close conceptual relation that exists between sabā—which is, as we know from the Qur’anic verse just cited, nothing other than a different name of jahl—and hilim.

Suddenly the image of Rabab came back to his memory, and indeed the remembrance of her is an illness. It made him succumb to a surging passion of love, and once a man has succumbed to the blind passion of love, there can be no place in him for hilim.

The same negative combination of hilim with sabā is seen in the next verse from the same Diwan.:

Those nights when she tried to provoke passion in the heart of a grave and serious man with her coquetry.

With this, I think a general idea has been given of what kind of a man a jahil is, and what kind of a man a halim. Jahl, we have seen, is a behavior pattern peculiar to a hot-blooded man who tends
to lose his temper at the slightest provocation and make himself uncontrollable. At this stage, it has nothing at all to do with the concept of ‘ignorance’. A halim is a man who knows how to overcome his surging emotions and passions, who is able to keep himself tranquil and unperturbed under provocation.

I must add one more important remark regarding the meaning structure of halim and hilm. The explanation I have just given may convey the wrong impression that hilm were a passive quality, something that would remind one of the natural meekness of a lamb. On the contrary, it is a positive and active power of the soul that is strong enough to curb her own impetuosity that may drive the man headlong to folly, and calm it down to patience and forbearance. It is a sign of the power and superiority of the mind.

There can be no hilm where there is no power. It is essentially a quality of a man who governs and dominates others, and not of those who are governed and dominated. A naturally weak and powerless person is never called halim, however much he calms down his anger when insulted; he is ‘weak’ simply. Halim is a man who possesses power, power to go to all kinds of violence when provoked and yet possesses, at the same time, the power to restrain himself from doing violence.

إِنَّمِنَ الْحَلْقِ الْمَلَأَ أَنْتُ عَذَّارَةَ وَالْحَلْقُ عِنْدَمَ عُدْرَةٍ فَضَلْتُ مِنَ الْخُرُوجِ

Here the poet, Sālim b. Wābisah, after describing in detail how he always tries and succeeds to check his fits of anger and to keep himself from rushing to acts of violence, whatever those who envy him and hate him do and say against him, reflects and says proudly:

Verily, to take the attitude of humility consciously is a kind of hilm, and in fact hilm based on power (and not coming from ‘ajz, ‘natural weakness’) is a virtue characteristic of the nobleness of the soul.14

In this verse we see clearly stated that the true hilm is a ‘conscious’ effort to keep oneself calm despite the fact that one is fully in possession of qudrah, ‘power’ (to strike back). Halim is a man who forgives his enemy and shows gentleness ‘from above’, from a superior position. This will make us understand the true meaning of the word halim as applied to Allah in the Qur’an.15 God forgives sins committed by men and is gentle, but it is not a simple gentleness; it is a gentleness based on power, forbearance based on calm wisdom, which is possible only because it is coupled with an infinite power. It suggests, therefore, that there is always in the background the possibility of a dreadful and drastic punishment.

It is clear, then, that hilm is a particular behavior pattern backed by a clear consciousness of one’s own superiority and power. It is not a sign of ‘natural weakness’, ‘ajz; it is a sign of natural ‘power’ (qudrah). That is why the concept of hilm is so closely associated with waqār meaning the “dignity of manner and deportment”.

Since hilm is such a particular kind of tranquility which conceals within it a tremendous power, highly compressed inner energy, it is very difficult for it not to make itself manifest in a physical way, in deportment and outward attitude. This bodily manifestation of hilm is waqār, “grave and dignified bearing”—waqār al-hilm (waqār of hilm) as it is often called. Khalaf b. Khalīfah, a famous poet of the Umayyad period gives us an interesting example.

علىهم وقَرَ الْحَلْقِ حَتَى كَانَ أَكْبَرُ وَلاَ يَهِبُهُمْ مِنْ أَخْلَقِهِ بَيْجٌ كَبِيرٌ

All of them show a remarkable of hilm so much so that even a small boy among them looks as if he were a man of mature age because of his natural dignity.

This is of course an exaggeration, but it brings out very well an important aspect of the concept of hilm.

Waqār is a value word. That is to say, the word represents the outward attitude of a halim as something imposing and admirable. The same ‘dignified bearing’ may also be looked at with antipathy, from the standpoint of an enemy. Then it would be nothing but the bodily manifestation of sheer ‘arrogance’.

إِذْ كَانُوكَ أَحَافُهُ مَنَازِلَ النَّاسِ أَنتَ... 

When the opponent shows an arrogant attitude, swaggering about with his chest puffed out elatedly (abzāl), inclining his head on one side, perking up his shoulder.16

This a typical description of a ‘haughty’ man. The inclining of his head on one side17 was so typical of this kind of man that the
phrase istaqāma al-akhda‘u, lit. “the neck has straightened up”, meant that the man lost his self-confidence and became humiliated.

With all this, it was not always easy, particularly for those who were unable to see things hidden under the surface, to distinguish between a real halīm, that is, a man who showed gentleness and meekness because he was tremendously powerful, and a man who was, so to speak, forced to be gentle, and similing simply because he was weak. And a real halīm was often mistaken for a weak, powerless man, to whom one could do anything one liked to do without any danger of being hit back.

I think that it is my apparent meekness (hilm) that has induced my tribesmen to do all kinds of wrong and injustice to me, but even a halīm man may sometimes be forced to lose his composure and give a free rein to his ebullient anger (yustajhalu, lit.: to be forced to become a jāhil). 19

This inability to distinguish between real hilm and real weakness made itself manifest not only in the field of mundane, purely human relations, but in a certain sense at the religious level also, namely, in the attitude of the pagan Makkans towards Islam. For, as the Qur‘an shows, the disbelieving Makkans full of self-confidence and pride were induced to assume a more and more arrogant attitude towards Islam when they saw that the severe Divine punishment did not actually overtake them as promised so repeatedly by the Revelation. Seen from the point of view of the Muslims, the Makkans mistook Divine hilm for weakness and lack of power.

Before closing this part of our discussion, we must mention briefly one more important fact. The above study of the concept of jāhl will contribute toward elucidating the concept of zulm, which is another outstanding key-term in the Qur‘an. 20

If the outer manifestation of hilm is, as we have just seen, waqār, that of jāhl is zulm. In most cases zulm is nothing but a particular form assumed by jāhl when it bursts out in a physically observable form in behavior; in short, jāhl is the inside and zulm is the outside of the matter. This will, I think, make us understand immediately that zulm is not a simple ‘wrong-doing’ as the word is commonly translated. At the same time, this would seem to make it clear that the basic meaning of the word zulm, as it is used in the Qur‘an in reference to the attitude of the stubborn disbelievers, should be understood in correlation with jāhl.

Behind all their acts of zulm against the Prophet and his followers, we must see the working of the spirit of jāhl, as the very source of all these actions. By offering a stubborn and violent resistance to the Prophet and the Divine teaching, they are apparently and seemingly directing their zulm towards God Himself. But, in the Qur‘anic conception, no one in the whole world can ever direct an act of zulm towards God. So they are, in reality, doing zulm, not to God, but to themselves. This must be the meaning of the Qur‘anic expression zulm al-nafs, “doing wrong to oneself”.

In order to understand this point still better we have to remember that the concept of jāhl is a very wide one covering almost the whole range of human life. In other words, whenever a man loses his temper and his self-control, he is being a jāhil. But at the higher level of moral life, the concept acquires a very special coloring by being associated with the concept of ‘personal honor’ (‘ird). Then it is a particular type of moral indignation caused by the feeling that one’s ‘ird is being vitally involved, that one’s personal honor has been compromised or violated. This behavior pattern was, as we saw earlier, quite typical of the pre-Islamic Arabs.

In this particular context, jāhl means an attitude of stern protest against having one’s personal honor trampled under foot. It is a determined refusal to be humiliated. This, I think, is exactly what is meant by the above-mentioned phrase in the Qur‘an, hamiyat al-jāhiliyyah. It is clear from the Qur‘an that many pagan Arabs felt as an unbearable humiliation to bow before the absolute authority of God. It did not make much difference to them whether the supreme authority before whom they were commanded to bow was human or divine. The idea itself of surrendering to any superior authority and being commanded to do so was to them unbearably humiliating. They were jāhil in this particular sense.

And it is evidently this particular moral aspect of jāhl that plays a major role in the religious world-view of the Qur‘an.
We now turn to the second semantic element of jahl, and in connection with it, that of hilm, too. This second aspect is directly dependent on the first aspect and derives from it; it is the most natural consequence of jahl being such a thing as I have just tried to explain. The second aspect concerns the effect of jahl on the intellectual capacity of man. Quite naturally this effect can appear only in a negative way, i.e., destructively. The nature of jahl is such that whenever it becomes active it smothers and weakens the reasoning power of the human brain. In order to keep your steadiness of judgment, in whatever situation you may be put, you must be a halim.

Of course one may object to this and say like Ma'bad b. 'Alqamah, a poet contemporary of the Prophet:

... 

Our hands act in a jahl way, yes, but our head remains calm and halim. 21

This is possible in theory; it is easy to say this, but in practice, it is a feat rarely to be accomplished. How can one see things objectively with an undisturbed tranquility of mind when one is blind with passion? As a general rule, jahl causes the weakening, if not complete loss, of the function of reason (aql); only when coupled with hilm, is aql capable of functioning normally.

It will be easy to see, then, that hilm has in itself a latent possibility of being developed and elaborated philosophically into something close to the Hellenistic virtue of 'non-perturbation' based on the cultivation of autarchy. The Arabs did not go in this direction.

But hilm is capable also of being developed in another direction, i.e., in the direction of administrative skill and political wisdom, a remarkable show of tact and statesmanship, based on a perfect control of one's own feelings, in dealing with other people and particularly, in governing and ruling other people. This is what the Arabs did.

In Jahl, hilm was unanimously recognized, and highly esteemed, as one of the most essential, indispensable qualities of a sayyid or a man standing at the head of the tribesmen, with siyadah (tribal chieflaincy) and ri'asah (headman-ship) in his hand.

If you ever want to rule people as their chief, then rule them not with rashness and abusing (i.e. rule them with hilm). For, indeed, hilm produces a better result than jahl—you must keep it well in mind—except in your being treated unjustly with excessive hatred and enmity.
Thus we arrive at the second meaning of jähil: the incapacity of the mind for having deep understanding of things which consequently produces always shallow and rash judgments on everything.

A man who judges things only by seeing the surface (jähil) may get a wrong impression and consider them rich because of their abstinence and restraint, but thou shalt know them by their mark.

Al-Baqara, 274 [273]

But of course the Qur’an, in the majority of cases, uses this word in the sense of shallow observation and superficial judgment in reference to matters that are more properly religious. In this religious sense, jähil is the incapacity of a man to understand God’s Will behind the veil of visible things and events, the incapacity to see the natural things as so many Divine äyät. For this kind of man, the natural things are just natural things, and not symbols of anything. And since, according to the Qur’an, God sends down his äyät in the clearest and most evident way—that is, as bayyinät, ‘evident (signs)’—jähil means the intellectual incapacity to understand even the self-evident religious truth, and even the easiest part of Divine revelation. Examples abound in the Qur’an. Here I give only one of them:

Even if We should send down the angels to them, and the dead should speak to them, and We should gather all things in array before their own eyes, yet they would not be believers, unless God so willed. But most of them are just jähils.

Al-An‘ám, 6:3

Jähil is not restricted to the superficial observation of things around man; it includes also the incapacity of a man to see ‘himself’, to take the correct and exact measure of himself. He who does not know himself, who cannot see the natural limitation of his capacity, and who therefore tends to go beyond his human bounds is also a jähil. And from this point of view, words like tugýán and bagh meaning “exceeding the bounds” are often used by the Qur’an in describing the attitude of the Káfirs towards God, as a concrete manifestation of jähil.

In short, jähil in this sense is almost equivalent to mental blindness. The Qur’an brings out this aspect of jähil in a very pertinent way.

It is not the eyes that are blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that are blind.

Al-Hajj, 22:45 [46]

They are mentally blind, and mentally deaf; how, then, can we hope them to understand the religious truth?—this is the final verdict passed upon those who are characterized by jähil in this sense.

This aspect of the semantic structure of jähil makes us understand easily how its opposite, hilm, came to acquire the meaning of ‘aql (reason). Reason can only operate properly when you are calm, as long as you keep the balance of ‘aql; the latter is a narrower concept than hilm. Hilm is the very basis of ‘reason’ and ‘intellect’. To be very exact, however, it is not a perfect synonym of ‘aql, the latter is a narrower concept than hilm. Hilm is the very basis of ‘aql;
it is the unagitated state of the mind which makes the proper activity of ‘aql possible, which enables the ‘aql to operate calmly and steadily so that it may produce good and right judgments. But, practically, of course, the two come to the same thing.

In a satire (hijâ) against Banû Harith b. Ka'b, Hassan ibn Thâbit uses the word in this particular sense in an extremely interesting way.²⁵

O Banû Harith! do not your intellects (ahlâm, pl. of hîlîm) prevent you (lit: scare you back) from attacking me (i.e., by hijâ)? But (on reflection I must admit that this is demanding too much of you) for you are all hollow with nothing inside, giants with tiny brains (jumkhâr, “a man whose body is big but whose intellect is small and weak”). There is nothing wrong in people’s being tall and big, but the combination of a body as a mule and an intellect (ahlâm) as small as that of little birds (is too much!).

It is perhaps worthy to be noted that the Qur’an uses the same word in this sense in a very similar way.

This is said in reference to the inimical attitude of the Makkans towards the Prophet.

Do their intellects bid them do this? (i.e., are they acting like this in accordance with what their poor intellect commands?) Or are they (by nature) an insolent and arrogant people?

Al-Tûr, 52:32

3—It is not a far cry from this to the third meaning of the word jâhl, i.e., ‘ignorance’. Here the opposite of jâhl is no longer hîlîm, but ‘îlm (knowledge). This is, as is well known, the most usual meaning of jâhl in classical Arabic. This, however, is the least important of the three fundamental meanings of the word in the earlier period. Still, pre-Islamic poetry offers some examples though not very many. ‘ Antarâh’s Mu’allaqah, for instance, (v. 43):

The poet, addressing his beloved ‘Abîlah (Mâlik’s daughter), says: “Why don’t you ask our horsemen, if you are ignorant, about what you do not know?” meaning thereby “everybody knows how brave and valiant I am on the battle field; ask anybody you like if by any chance you do not know this.”

This meaning of “lack of knowledge”, “lack of information” does not play an important role in the Qur’an. The word is used mostly either in the first or the second sense. Perhaps we may cite as an example of this:

God shall forgive only those who do evil in ignorance (jahâlah) but then quickly repent.


II. From Hîlîm to Islam

As the word jâhiliyyâh itself shows, the word jâhl—the first and the second meaning—is one of the most important key-terms in the Qur’an. Without a right understanding of this concept we would not be able to put the new religious conception of Islam in the right place in the history of the religious thought of the Arabs. But, as we have seen, the two fundamental meanings of jâhl was sharply opposed to the concept of hîlîm in pre-Islamic times. Where is it now, this concept of hîlîm, in the Qur’anic system?

Apparently the word hîlîm no longer appears on the stage in an important role except when it is used in reference to God Himself. “Allah is Hâlîm”—this seems to be the only form under which the concept occurs in the Qur’an in a truly significant way. The hîlîm that used to be one of the most conspicuous features of the pre-Islamic mentality, that used to appear almost everywhere in pre-Islamic poetry whenever the poets sang in praise of themselves or others, seems to have ceased to play any decisive role, as a human attribute. What does this mean? Does this mean that the concept, which had
once been so important in the ethical life of the Arabs disappeared completely with the rise of the new religion? My answer to this question is in the negative. The explanation I have given of the pair, jahl-hilm, will have made it clear that the idea of hilm itself continues to live in the Qur'anic conception of human nature. It is still palpably there, not as a definite concept, but diffused throughout the Qur'an. In a certain sense, the Qur'an as a whole is dominated by the very spirit of hilm. The constant exhortation to kindness (ihsan) in human relations, the emphasis laid on justice ('adl), the forbidding of wrongful violence (zulm), the bidding of abstinence and control of passions, the criticism of groundless pride and arrogance—all are concrete manifestations of this spirit of hilm.

But there is something far more important than this. This particular pattern of human behavior called jahl is now in the Qur'an directed toward God Himself. Hitherto in the pre-Islamic conception jahl had nothing at all to do with God or gods. It was concerned exclusively with human beings in their relations with each other; that is to say, jahl was a peculiar attitude of a man toward another man or other men. In short jahl, whether good or bad, was exclusively a matter of man-to-man relation.

But now with the rise of Islam in Makkah we witness a different and quite a new situation arising among the Arabs. As noted above the concept of jahl is the center of an important network of concepts intimately associated with each other, such as pride in human power, limitless self-confidence, self-sufficiency, refusal to bow before any superior authority, keen sense of honor, haughty attitude of mockery toward one's inferiors, etc. The whole network of these concepts is now in the Qur'an directed toward the Prophet Muhammad and the Book revealed through him, the Divine iyyat, and consequently and ultimately toward God Himself.

In other words, the Qur'an interprets the attitude of hostility shown by the pagan Arabs toward Divine guidance (huda) in terms of this conceptual network of jahl. According to the Qur'an the pagan attitude of hostility is nothing but a concrete manifestation of this jahl-mentality which has been so characteristic of the pre-Islamic Arabs.

But we must notice that, if interpreted in this way, jahl is no longer what it has been; a radical shift of emphasis has occurred in its structure. For in this interpretation, jahl is no longer a 'horizontal', i.e. human relation (Direction I); it is a relation between man and God. Here we see pagan Arabs taking the attitude of jahl toward God (Direction II), which is, from the point of view of the Qur'an, an incredible presumptuousness on the part of man, for man is essentially an 'abd ("absolutely humble servant"), and should be nothing else. So jahl in this sense must be banished from the presence of the great Lord. What will remain behind? Quite naturally the opposite concept of hilm. And this is the only logical consequence, for, in general, when the concept A and the concept B stand opposed to each other, the negation of A logically means the affirmation of B. And as a matter of fact, in pre-Islamic times, there was between jahl and hilm precisely such a relation.

But in the new Islamic conception, this relation does not hold between the two concepts when they are directed toward God. As long as jahl has been a purely human behavior-pattern, its negation has always meant hilm. In such a situation, when you are told that you should not act toward your brethren in a jahl way, it necessarily implies that you should act in a hilm way. But here in the presence of the great Lord, where man is His 'abd, and should act as behooves an 'abd, this either-jahl-or-hilm formula is no longer valid. As an attitude of man toward God, his Lord, jahl is of course out of question, but for that matter hilm is equally out of question, because, as we have already seen, hilm is essentially based on the concept of 'power' (qudrah). As conscious control of one's own feelings and emotions, as forbearance, and patience, outwardly it looks like mere meekness and calmness, but behind it there always is the clearest consciousness of one's own superior power which may at any moment transform itself into a terrible outburst of anger.
This is certainly not the proper attitude for man to take toward God who is his Lord. This cannot be the attitude of an ‘\textit{`abd}.

As noted above, the Qur’an interprets the Kāfīr’s attitude of hostility and non-submission as an extreme case of human arrogance stemming from the hamiyah al-jāhiliyyah. In short, Kāfīr dare to take this incredible attitude of jāhīl toward God. This does not imply, however that a real believer should take the alternative attitude of hilm toward God (as shown in the Diagram). For in the Qur’ānic view, hilm would be no less an outrageous act of going beyond the bounds of man than taking the attitude of jāhīl.

A real believer, i.e. a real ‘\textit{`abd} (servant) in the fullest sense of the word, should go far beyond the degree of hilm in the direction of humbleness and humility before God. All consciousness of self-sufficiency and power should be abandoned; absolute submission is what is required of him. But when ‘humbleness’ reaches this degree, it is no longer hilm; it is islām.

Thus we see how the concept of islām is historically affiliated with, and yet at the same time clearly distinguished from, the old concept of hilm. From the Qur’ānic point of view, islām in the sense of absolute submission and self-surrender was not a simple downright negation and rejection of hilm; it was rather a continuation and development of hilm. The new conception pushed ahead and brought this time-honored virtue of the Arabs to its extreme limit, which was so extreme, indeed, that the concept had to go beyond its original boundary and transform itself into something quite different from it: islām. The concept of islām was, in this respect, a radical modification of the concept of hilm, which was necessitated by the very fact that now the object with which man was confronted was no longer an ordinary person, but the majestic figure of his own Lord.

This is what I meant earlier by saying that in a certain sense hilm was the pre-religious, pre-Islamic form of Islam. But of course the concept of hilm itself had to disappear from the stage as a basic religious attitude of man toward God, for in a ‘servant’ serving his master sincerely, there should not be even the slightest sense of self-sufficiency and superiority. But the concept of hilm cannot subsist if it is deprived of this latter element. In the Qur’ānic conception, only God is fully entitled to be halīm—toward His servants, not vice versa.

The fact that the concept of hilm as a human attribute ceases to be active in the Qur’ān suggests that here a new conceptual organization is under way, a new ‘articulation’, to use one of the technical terms which I explained earlier, of the human reality. According to this new conceptual articulation, the vast field which was once covered by the concept of hilm has to be entirely reorganized: new lines are being drawn, and new sections are coming into being.

Once the opposition was: jāhīl . . . halīm.

Now in the Qur’ān, the concept of hilm as the opposite of jāhīl is giving place to a number of new concepts, the most important of which is islām with all that is implied by the word.

At the same time, the concept of jāhīl itself, which still plays a considerable role in the Qur’ānic world-view as a typical attitude of the obstinate and stubborn unbelievers, is being superseded by a still more important concept—that of kāfīr, again with all that the word implies. And this brings into being, a new opposition: kāfīr . . . muslim.

This teaches us that behind these two terms we have to read all the religious, and ethical implications of the old contrast between jāhīl and halīm, but in an entirely new light coming from the drastic reorganization of the concepts.

III. The Conception of Religion (\textit{Dīn}) as ‘Obedience’

It is not without some hesitation that I take up this problem for discussion in this place, because the whole matter is wrapped in philological uncertainties that are almost hopelessly difficult to clear up. The major argument of this section must necessarily be highly problematical because the key word \textit{dīn} (religion) which forms the very center of the whole discussion is itself problematical as regards its original meaning.
If, in spite of all this, I have decided not to renounce wholly the attempt to analyze the meaning structure of this word, it is mainly for a reason that is of particular relevance to the topic of this chapter, the Lord-servant relation between God and man: namely, because the meaning of the word *din* contains, among others a remarkable semantic element of 'obedience' (*tā'ah*) and 'servant-ness' (*'ubūdiyyah*). To be sure, it is not certain whether the meaning of 'religion' may be traced back to that of 'obedience' and 'servant-ness'. But this is not an impossibility. Besides, the Qur'an, as we shall see presently, consciously connects these two concepts with one another.

*Din* is certainly one of the most controversial words in the whole Qur'anic vocabulary. The trouble with us, however, is that we cannot in any way lightly pass over the difficulty by simply disregarding the word, because it is an extremely important key-term in the Qur'an. In any case, we must begin by admitting that it is one of the most difficult Qur'anic key-terms to handle semantically. The etymology itself is uncertain, to begin with. Outwardly we have before our eyes one simple monosyllabic word; but it is quite possible that we have, in reality, more than one word under exactly the same form. That is to say, two or more independent words going back to different sources may have come to assume in course of time one and the same form. Besides, there is also possibility of some at least of its various meanings being of foreign origin.

The word *din* has two important meanings distinguishable in the Qur'an: (1) religion and (2) judgment. According to some scholars, these two fundamental meanings, the first *i.e.*, 'religion' is of Persian origin, *den* in Middle Persian meaning roughly 'systematic' religion', and the second, that of 'judgment' goes back to Hebrew; the Hebrew word *din* means 'judgment'; moreover the particular combination 'Day of Judgment' (*yavm al-din*) is so typically Jewish.

Thus we are here faced with a very complex and complicated problem. As regards this foreign origin theory I fully admit that it is not impossible, but at the same time I cannot help feeling somehow that this is simplifying the matter too much. Before resorting to this kind of explanation, we should, I think, first try to see whether it is not possible to explain the word within the confines of Arabic itself. By this I do not of course imply that there should be one original meaning attached to the root *DYN* to which all the various meanings might be reduced. This is quite impossible linguistically. In a case like this a modern linguist assumes from the very beginning the existence of more than one independent root under one common form. The phenomenon is one of 'pure polysemy'.

With this in view, let us begin by noting that an examination of pre-Islamic literature brings to light the three following root meanings: (1) 'custom', 'habit', (2) 'requital', and (3) 'obedience'.

The first of these three would be simply dismissed as of no relevance to our present topic, if it were not for the fact that there is a possibility of our deriving the meaning of 'ritual practices' attached as an important semantic element to the word *din* from this root meaning of 'custom'. But this is capable also of being explained as a case of 'reification' of the more fundamental concept of 'religion' in the sense of 'personal faith'. However this may be, I must content myself here with giving one example from *Jāhil* literature.

This is part of an elegy which a poet of the Hudhayl tribe composed bewailing the death of a dear friend.

All those around me have fallen asleep, and once again there comes back to me my sorrow that renews itself. There comes back to me again my habitual state (*din*), and I feel as if between the ribs of my breast (*i.e.*, within my breast) there were a string of lute fully stretched (*i.e.*, my breast resounds with sobbing like the sound of a stretched string of a musical instrument).

Turning now to the second root meaning, 'requital', we may do well to remark at the outset that the word *din* with this meaning is also found very frequently in pre-Islamic poetry. Here is a typical example of it out of a great number.

(We had borne their wrong very patiently), but when their wrong became so evident, and began to show itself so nakedly that there
remained nothing but our taking an offensive attitude on our part, we (rose up) and required (dinā, a verbal form corresponding to din) them as they had required us (i.e., as they had done wrong to us—the last expression is what is known in rhetoric as mushākalah, the phrase being equivalent to dannā-hum ka-mā faʾalā).

The Qurʾān, too, uses the same word in a verbal form—passive participle—with exactly the same basic meaning in the Sūrah al-Ṣaʿfāt:

What! (the unbelievers ask sarcastically) when we are dead and have become dust and bones, shall we then be required (madīnūn).

Al-Ṣaʿfāt, 37:16

It is quite significant for our present purposes that this is said precisely in reference to the concept of the Day of Judgment. That is to say, the Day of Judgment (yawm al-din) is exactly the day on which all men without exception will be required (madīnūn) each according to what he has done in the present world. And this is the meaning of din in this particular combination.

As is evident, the meaning of ‘requital’, i.e. ‘judgment’, in this context is of supreme importance in the world-view of the Qurʾān. But its proper place is in the semantic field of eschatology. It is not of direct relevance to our present topic. What is directly relevant to it is the third root meaning of din.

The third root meaning of the word din is, as we have indicated above, ‘obedience’. To be very strict, this understanding is not exact because ‘obedience’ represents only one aspect of the matter. Properly speaking, din (or the verb dāna) belongs to that large category of words known as addād, i.e. words having two contrary meanings.

In other terms, the word din has two opposite faces, one positive and the other negative. On its positive side, it means “to subdue, oppress, govern by power”, and on its negative side it means “to submit, yield, to be obedient and submissive”. There is nothing surprising about this. As many other words of this category, the particular perspective crystallized in this word represents a global view of the matter which enables us to consider the same thing from both ends.

This is why in many cases the same word din is capable of being interpreted as both qahr (exercise of superior power in subduing others) and tāʿah (obedience), without our being able to tell which of these two possible ways of interpretation is right. The truth of the matter is that both are meant at the same time without distinction, the concept of din being comprehensive of these two contrary directions.

The classical example of it is provided by a verse by `Amr b. Kulthūm:31

We have inherited the glory of (one of our forefathers) `Alqamah; it is he who has made lawful to us (i.e. who has conquered for us) many strongholds of glory by force (dinān=gahran)— or reducing them to the state of absolute obedience and submissiveness (dinān=tāʿatan).

The word seems to show the same conceptual ‘ambivalence’, when Zuhayr b. Abi Sulmā, describing the actual situation of his tribe which is in complete disorder and confusion, says:

The din is in utter confusion.

This must mean that the tribe is in the state of anarchy so that nobody is certain as to who is to rule and who is to obey.

The same is probably true of the expression fī dīnī fūlān12 which is very common in pre-Islamic poetry, “in somebody’s din”. The expression belongs, in my opinion, to this category, although the old
scholiasts almost unanimously take this word in the sense of ‘obedience’. Here is a typical example:

The poet here threatens a man of Banū Asad who has done him wrong, and says:

[The poisoned arrow of my satire (hijā’) will reach you and overtake you] even if you (flee from me and) settle down in the Wādī Jaww among Banū Asad in ‘Amr’s din, and even if Fadak separates between us.

‘Amr referred to in this verse is the famous king of Hīrah, ‘Amr b. Hind b. al-Mundhir Mā’ al-Samā’ and the phrase fi dinī ‘Amr means in this context your becoming a subject of ‘Amr and thereby putting yourself under the “protection of his power”. Thus the concept of din here comprises both ‘obedience’ (ta’ah) and ‘authority’ (sultān). In other word, the same thing is being looked at from two opposite sides:

| Amr | authority or protective power | obedience and submission | the man |

Looked at from the side of King ‘Amr, it is his sultān, ‘authority’ or ‘protective power’, but from the side of the man who shelters himself behind the royal influence, it is ta’ah (obedience) to the king.

This interpretation must, I think, be applied to the Qur’anic verse 12:76, where we are told how Joseph in Egypt succeeds, by a clever trick, to detain his younger brother Benjamín in custody.

(Thus We contrived for Joseph’s sake); he could not have kept his brother in the din of the Egyptian king, except that God willed.

Yūsuf, 12:76

This phrase is usually taken to mean “according to the king’s law” (fi dinī al-Malik=fi shar’i al-Malik, or fi qānūni-hi). This is, I think, one of the instances of reading into the Qur’an a later conception that could only arise after the concept of shar‘ as ‘religious law’ had been well established.

In the same way, the word din may be taken in the sense of both “humble obedience” and “absolute rule” in 16:54 [52], an exceedingly beautiful passage which describes how all things in the heavens and the earth are “making prostration before God” expressing thereby profound humility and absolute obedience.

To God belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth. His is the din forever!

Al-Nahl, 16:54 [52]

The word din in this verse has—if the above interpretation is right—a double meaning. On the one hand, it means the absolute Sultān of God, and, on the other, i.e. if looked at from the side of His creature, it means “absolute obedience”.

Very often, however, the word is used in pre-Islamic poetry in the more specified sense of ‘obedience’, ‘being ruled’ and ‘being a servant’.

They refused to be ruled by the kings, for they were so filled with self-confidence:

(laqāh is the infinitive of the verb laqīha meaning to ‘conceive’, ‘become pregnant’, here in the metaphorical sense of ‘being pregnant with self-confidence’).

We may do well to compare this with verse 25 of the Mu‘allaqah of ‘Amr b. Kulthūm where exactly the same thought is expressed by means of the verb dāna itself:

We used to disobey the king in those days for fear of becoming his slaves.
Similarly in the following verse by an anonymous poet:

إذا أتى واحظ إلى السيف كان له شؤون الرجال خضعت للطاغي

Whenever he attended the tribal gathering or girded on a sword, even the haughtiest men became humble to him just like many camels obey docilely the man who smears them with pitch.35

The reference is to the fact that the many camels show themselves passively obedient to the man who smears their bodies with ointment, because it makes them feel pleasant.

This concept of absolute obedience and humble submission with a tacit understanding that there is behind the stage someone exercising an overwhelming power and domination may very well have been the origin of the important meaning of ‘religion’ attached to the word dīn. And if this is so it would be quite unnecessary to go beyond the limits of Arabic and seek its origin in the Persian word dīn (MP *den*, Avest. *daena*). The formal coincidence might have been purely accidental.36 I think this is quite possible and probable, because this conception of religion based on the image of a submissive servant ruled absolutely by a powerful king is quite in line with the typically Semitic mode of thinking.

I do not think it a pure accident that in the Qur’an, in two crucial passages, the word dīn is virtually defined in terms of ‘abada, i.e. ‘to worship God’ in the sense of ‘serving Him as a humble servant who obeys his master’.

O men, if you are in doubt of my religion (dīn), then (I declare that) I serve (a’budu) not those whom you serve (ta’budūna) apart from God, but I serve (a’budu) God.37

Yānis, 10:104

O unbelievers, I serve (a’budu) not what you serve (ta’budūna), nor do you serve what I serve. And I shall never serve what you serve, nor will you serve what I serve. To you your religion (dīnu-kum) and to me my religion (dīnī).

Al-Kāfīrūn, 109:1-6

Equally remarkable is the combination in the following verse38 of the verb ‘abada with the expression “making the religion (dīn) sincere” with which we are already familiar:

I have been commanded to serve (a’budu) God making my religion (dīn) pure and sincere.


The combination of dīn with ‘abada in the passages just quoted cannot possibly be merely contextual. It is understandable only on the supposition that there is a profound inner connection between the two concepts. These passages can be taken almost as a definition of the word dīn suggesting how it should be understood rightly.

It is worthy to be pointed out, too, that, at a more formalized level, the same word dīn is also associated in the Qur’an with the word islām. We must remember in this connection that, as we have seen above, the concept of islām was, originally at least, based on the conception of man’s being a ‘submissive’ servant of God.

Verily, the (true) religion (dīn) with God is Islam.

Āli ‘Imrān, 3:17 [19]

This day I have perfected your religion (dīn), and completed My favor unto you, and I have approved Islam for your religion (dīn).

Al-Mā’idah, 5:5 [3]
According to Dr. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, the word 'religion' in general may be taken in two different, although closely related, senses: one is 'religion' as a deep personal matter; the existential act of each individual person of believing in something, that is, in short, 'faith'; and the other is 'religion' in a 'reified' sense, i.e. as something common to a community, an objective communal matter, comprising all the creeds and ritual practices shared by all members of that community. Both of these meanings are found in the Qur’an and this double usage of the same word seems to go back to Jahiliyyah, although in Jahiliyyah, except perhaps in Jewish and Christian circles, 'religion' as a personal existential act does not seem to have been clearly formulated and clearly distinguished from 'religion' in the sense of a whole body of ritual practices. Perhaps we should rather think that such a distinction itself was something quite alien to the religious consciousness of the pre-Islamic Arabs. Perhaps in looking for such a distinction in jahiliyyah thought we are unconsciously trying to read into it a conception which is a product of later ages.

When for example, the poet al-Nabighah says, in reference to the Christians of Ghassăn, dinu hum gawimun we cannot decide definitely whether he means that their faith is steadfast or their religion, Christianity, is an upright religion. Likewise when the Hanif poet Umayyah calls his standpoint din al-hanifiyyah, "the Hanifist religion", it is not clear whether what is meant is 'reified' religion on a non-reified personal faith—perhaps both at the same time, we should say, if we are to stick to this basic distinction.

As to the meaning of din as a system of ritual practices it is quite certain that the concept was firmly established in the mind of pre-Islamic Arabs. I will give here a most interesting example.

The poet is taking leave of a beautiful girl who is trying to tempt him, and declares that he has now more serious things to be concerned with than love-making. Wadd, by the way, is a pagan idol mentioned also in the Qur’an (71:22 [23]).

May Wadd give you a long life! (i.e. fare you well!) for dalliance with women is no longer lawful to me, since I have firmly made up my

mind to concentrate upon din.

The context shows clearly that 'religion' (din) in this verse refers to the pagan, pre-Islamic custom of pilgrimage to Makkah. The poet says that now that he has made up his mind firmly and seriously to make his pilgrimage to Makkah, sporting with women is harām. The point of immediate relevance to our present topic is that here we have a case in which the word din is used clearly in the sense of hajj, i.e. 'pilgrimage' as a ritual.

This particular usage of the word din by al-Nabighah would seem to suggest that when the pre-Islamic Arabs used the expression din al-nasārā ("the religion of the Christians"), for example, they presumably meant thereby 'religion' as something reified, an objectively established thing, i.e. a whole system consisting of a certain number of creeds and ritual practices that are shared by a community.

The Qur’an uses the word obviously in the reified and non-reified senses. The best and the simplest example of non-reified type is supplied by the expression "making the din sincere", where the word din cannot but mean personal faith in God, whether it be just momentary or permanent. As an example of the reified use, we may cite 3:66 [73], where the Jews are depicted saying among themselves:

Do not trust except those who follow your religion.

Ali 'Imrān, 3:66 [73]

In the verse already quoted above (verse 5 [3]) which runs, "This day I have perfected your religion . . . and I have approved islam for your religion", din seems to mean almost an objective, reified 'religion'.

If we go still further in this direction i.e. the direction of reification, than the concept changes into milhah, which is religion as an objective 'thing' in the full sense of the word, a formal system of creed and rituals which constitutes the principle of unity for a particular religious community and works as the basis of its social life. Unlike the word din which still retains the original connotation of personal—existential, we might say—faith and belief however far
we may go in the direction of reification, millah connotes something rigid, objective, formal and it reminds us always of the existence of a society based one common religion.

The relation between these two key-terms may be shown by this simple diagram:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{din} \\
\text{millah}
\end{array}
\]

process of reification

or \text{din} completely reified

\text{Din} originates from a purely personal 'obedience', as we have seen. It goes on being reified; in the last stages of this development approaching more and more the concept of millah, \text{din} becomes almost synonymous with the latter. This point will become clear if we compare 3:66 [73] which we have quoted above with 2:114 [120] where exactly the same situation is referred to by means of millah instead of \text{din}.

Neither the Jews nor Christians will ever be satisfied with thee, unless thou follow their religion (millah).

\textit{Al-Baqarah, 2:114 [120]}

The synonymy of \text{din} and millah appears more clearly in 6:162 [161] where we read:

As for me, my Lord has guided me to a straight path, a right religion (\text{din}) the religion (millah) of Abraham who was a man of pure monotheism.

\textit{Al-An'âm, 6:162 [161]}

It is significant that we see here three important concepts equated with each other, straight path=right \text{din}=millah of Abraham.

But if we retrace our steps towards the starting point (\text{din}), then we will see \text{din} and millah becoming more and more clearly dis-

tinguished from each other, and therefore, non-interchangeable. For example, in 39:2 we read:

Verily, we have sent down to thee the Book with truth. So worship (\text{u'bud, "serve as a servant") God, making the \text{din} sincere for Him.

\textit{Al-Zumar, 39:2}

Here God addresses these words directly to the Prophet Muhammad and exhorts him to serve God as behooves His servant. It is evidently impossible to replace the word \text{din} in this context by millah. For here the matter concerns the religious attitude of each individual person, and not the objectively formalized system of religion. Millah is essentially a matter of ummah, while \text{din} in its original, non-reified, phase, is a matter of each individual believer.

Notes
1. 5:93 [92].
2. 2:110 [118].
3. 57:15 [16].
4. 6:42 [43].
5. Like most of the Qur'anic key-terms, islām, or at least its verbal form aslama, has its pre-Islamic history. In Jāhiliyyah the word meant "giving over" in general. To be more precise, aslama means that a man gives over something which is particularly dear to him, precious to him, something which is difficult or painful for him to abandon, to somebody who demands it. This precious something may be his own self, which is of course, in most cases, the most precious possession a man has in his hand; (in which case it means naturally total submission, self-surrendering), it may also be somebody else, one of his dear friends or his tribesmen (in which case it would mean betrayal). In any case the basic meaning is that of giving over one's precious possession to somebody else.
7. Cf. also what Prof. M. Watt says on these two words in his \textit{Muhammad at Mecca}, pp. 66-67.
8. "Was ist unter 'al-Guhilijja' zu verstehen?" (Muhammandanische
9. See among others, for example, the excellent summary by Prof. A. J. Arbbery in his The Seven Odes, pp. 251-253.
10. For example, al-Hamāsah, DCCLXVIII, v. 3.
15. For instance, 3:149 [155]:

Verily God is All-forgiving, Hašm. Examples abound in the Qur'an.
18. akhda' properly means "the occipital artery".
20. The concept itself has been subjected to a detailed semantical analysis in my Structure, pp. 152-159.
26. Also 6:54.
31. Mu'allaqah, v. 61.
32. في دين طلائِن
34. 'Abīd b. al-Abras, Dīwān, VI, v. 2.
35. al-Hamāsah, DCCLIX, v. 1.
36. Contrast this with an adverse view advocated by Dr. Wilfred C. Smith in his book, The Meaning and End of Religion (pp. 98-102), according to which the Arabic word dīn was a local variety of an 'international term' of Persian origin, dīn or den, which had spread widely over the countries of the Middle East.
37. a'budu, ta'budūna: from the root 'BD, from which comes the word 'abd (servant, slave).
38. It goes without saying that in this and similar contexts “making the religion sincere” does not imply at all ‘momentary sincerity' as it does in the case of Kāfirīn.
40. Quoted above, see Chapter 4, section IV.
41. al-Nabighah, Dīwān, p. 142, v. 3. This famous and extremely important verse has long been misunderstood in various ways in the West. For the details, see C. A. Nallino, "Il verso di an-Nabighah sul dio Wadd", in Raccolta di Scritti, Vol. III, VI. In the Dīwān, the second word wadd is replaced by rabbī (“My Lord”). That this is not the original form is known from Yaqūt’s Geographical Dictionary Mu'jam al-Buldān (ed. Wüstenfeld IV, 913).
42. Theodore Noldeke in his Beiträge zur Kenntniss der Poesie der alten Araber (Hannover, 1864), p. 52, cites from al-Aghānī an interesting verse in which a Jew contemporary of the Prophet uses the expression dīn Muhammad in reference to Islam.
CHAPTER 9
Ethical Relation Between God and Man

I. God of Mercy

We have, in what precedes, dealt with three different aspects of the basic personal relation between God and man. In this chapter, we turn to the fourth—and last, according to our classification—relation between them i.e. the ethical relation. It is one of the most conspicuous features of the religious thought that has originated in the Semitic world, whether of Judaism, Christianity or Islam, that the concept of God is essentially ethical. And since, in this view God Himself is essentially ethical, the relation between God and man must also be of an ethical nature. In other words, God acts towards man in an ethical way, that is, as God of Justice and Goodness, and man, correspondingly, is expected to respond to this Divine initiative also in an ethical way. Whether man really does respond in the right ethical way, is a crucial and decisive moment in the structure of a religion like Islam. It is not a mere matter of human goodness or badness as it used to be in pre-Islamic times; ethics is now an integral part of religion; the whole religion is involved in it, and is indeed dependent on the ethical response of man.

From this point of view, the God of the Qur'an shows two different aspects that are fundamentally opposed to each other. For a pious, believing mind, these two aspects are but two different sides of one and the same God, but for the logic of ordinary reason, they would seem contradictory, and, in fact, many thinkers have been at pains to reconcile these two aspects with one another. The problem is common to both the Qur'an and the Old Testament.

In one of these two aspects Allah reveals Himself as God of infinite goodness and benevolence, God of unfathomable love and mercy, a gracious, a merciful and forgiving God. This aspect of God is referred to in the Qur'an by such key-words as ni'mah (favor), fadl (bounty), rahmah (mercy), maghafirah (forgiveness) and the like.

The problem has been so much discussed and so fully dealt with by all those who have studied the Qur'an and Islam from the religious point of view that I have almost nothing more to add.1

Only one point must be mentioned here, which is more directly relevant to the purpose of the present study. The fact that God acts towards man in such a gracious way and shows all sorts of goodness and kind consideration in the form of āyāt (signs)—this initial fact already determines the only right response possible on the part of human beings. And that response is ‘thankfulness’ or ‘gratitude’ (shukr), thankfulness for all the favors He is bestowing upon them. But as I have said before, this response is conceivable only on the basis of a right understanding and estimation of the Divine āyāt. Thankfulness in this sense is possible only when man has grasped the meaning of the āyāt.

This is the typical scheme of the conceptual associations relating to this phenomenon. And thus, for the first time in the history of ideas among the Arabs, shukr (thankfulness) became a religious concept. The tremendous importance of this new concept will be seen from the fact that it is, so to speak, the human counterpart of the initial Divine Goodness, and is, in this way, inseparably linked with one of the most characteristic aspects of the Divine nature, and also from the fact that from ‘thankfulness’ to ‘belief’ or ‘faith’ it is merely a matter of one step, so much so that in many cases shukr is in the Qur'an almost synonymous with īmān (belief). This we saw already when we discussed the concept of āyāh.

The opposite of shukr is kufr, the proper meaning of which is ‘ungratefulness’ or ‘ingratitude’. Without any further explanation it
will be quite easy to see how this concept of ingratitude, which before Islam, had nothing at all to do with religion, came to assume in the Qur'anic system a peculiarly religious significance.

But before it began to be understood in this religious sense, the conceptual structure itself was there in Jāhiliyyah firmly established. And no wonder, for even in ordinary mundane relations among men the human ethics everywhere demands the actualization of this structure. When somebody has shown you some special favor, that is, has conferred upon you a ni'mah, your natural reaction to it should be gratitude and thankfulness. This is one of the most basic laws governing the ethical relations among men. But it is also an undeniable fact that there is an alternative reaction, which violates this very basic moral law. And unfortunately, the human nature seems to incite and instigate man to act very often in this way. As the Qur'an itself says:

Verily man is very ungrateful to his Lord!

Verily, man is clearly ungrateful!

Thus, whether religious or non-religious, 'ingratitude' or 'ungratefulness' is the name of this way of responding on the part of a man to goodness shown by someone else. This structure itself remains the same regardless of whether the ni'mah (favor) that has been conferred upon him be of a secular nature or of a religious nature. And the pre-Islamic Arabs also used to live according to the dictates of the supreme moral rule: "shukr for ni'mah". The following verse by a poet of the Hudhayl tribe brings out this conceptual structure in a very clear and concise form:

If you thank me, (it is but natural, for by so doing) you would be showing gratitude to me for a favor (ni'mah) I have conferred upon you, but if you take the attitude of kufr to me, I will never force upon you gratitude to me.\(^3\)

And Salamah b. al-Khurshub, referring to a mare whose unusually swift legs saved the life of a man out of the danger of death:

Praise her well with a praise which is fitting, and be not ungrateful (takfuran) to her, for there can be no good future for the ungrateful (kāfir).\(^4\)

And 'Antarah, still more tersely:

Never be ungrateful for a favor.\(^5\)

The Qur'an takes up this structure just as it is and raises it up to a religious level, as it does in many other cases. The conceptual structure or formula is still exactly the same, but now it is made to work on the higher level of spiritual relation between God and man, the ni'mah being in this case the Divine favor to which man responds either rightly with shukr or wrongly with kufr.

Quite naturally, the concept of shukr (gratitude) in this particular semantic field develops easily into that of sincere 'faith' (imân), and correspondingly, kufr, losing rapidly the original connotation of 'ingratitude', transforms itself into the concept of 'disbelief', and thus comes to stand in direct conceptual opposition to imân.

How shall God guide people who turn to disbelief after having believed?

'Āli 'Imrān, 3:80 [86]

\(^3\) Q. 100:6

\(^4\) Q. 43:14 [15]

\(^5\) Q. 3:80 [86]
Those who are haughty say: As for us, we disbelieve in that which you believe in.

Al-'Arâf, 7:74 [76]

This semantic transformation of kufr from ‘ ingratitude’ to ‘disbelief’ was effected more completely than that of shukr from ‘gratitude’ to ‘belief’, because in this latter case the existence of the very word imân made unnecessary, or rather prevented, the growth of another word which would replace it. While in the case of ‘disbelief’, there was no such pre-existent word for the concept, and so kufr just came in, so to speak, and took the vacant seat.

II. God of Wrath

To those who take kufr instead of shukr or imân, that is to those who stubbornly refuse to humble themselves before God, and also to those who are naturally careless and frivolous who spend their time in jesting and playing, laughing, and merry-making, never thinking of the Hereafter, in short, ‘indifferent’ and ‘careless’ people (ghâfîlân)—to those people God shows his other face.

Here Allah is God of stern unrelaxing justice, the unrelenting Judge on the Day of Judgment, terrible in retribution (shadîd al-'iqâb), Lord of vengeance (dhâ intiqâm), whose anger (ghadab) will hurl anybody into ruin on whom it alights.6

This aspect of God has also been fully discussed by all those who have ever studied the Qur’an from the religious point of view so much so that it would seem unnecessary even to mention it now. So here I will only take up the human side of the matter, the problem, that is, how according to the Qur’an, man should respond to this aspect of God.

The pivotal point of all this is the eschatological concept of the Day of Judgment, with God Himself presiding over everything as the stern, strict and righteous judge, before whom men stand only in silence with bowed heads. The image of this decisive day should be held up constantly before the eyes of men in such a way that it might lead them to absolute earnestness, instead of levity and carelessness, in life. And this is the dominant note of the Islamic piety. All readers of the Qur’an cannot fail to notice, that this note of absolute earnestness in life coming from the consciousness of the impending Day of Judgment is particularly strong in the Makkah period. This is taqwâ in its original sense.

The word taqwâ lost its extremely strong eschatological coloring as time went on and finally came to mean practically the same thing as ‘piety’. But it denoted originally a very peculiar mood connected directly with the concept of the Judgment Day.

Fear God, for surely God is severe in punishment.

Al-Mâ‘idah, 5:3 [2]

The combination of the three words ittiqâ (fear), Allâh and ‘iqâb (punishment) in this short sentence brings out very clearly the basic structure of the Qur’anic taqwâ in its original form. The taqwâ in this sense is an eschatological concept, meaning as it does “eschatological fear of Divine chastisement”. From this original meaning comes the meaning of ‘pious fear (of God)’, and then finally, ‘piety’ pure and simple.

Now what did the word taqwâ (or rather the verb ittaqâ) mean in Jâhiliyyah? We must remark in the first place that in pre-Islamic times the word was not commonly used in a religious sense at all, except perhaps in the particular circle of the Hanâfs and those who were consciously under the influence of Judaism like the poet Zuhayr b. Abî Sulmâ. The word muttaqi (from taqwâ), ‘pious believer’ (in the monotheistic sense) occurs, as we saw earlier, in the poetry of the Hanîf poet, Umayyah b. Abî al-Salt; also in the Dîwân of Labîd, whom I regard as almost a Hanîf in his religious outlook. Here I give an extremely interesting example from the Dîwân of Zuhayr b. Abî Sulmâ.

The taqwâ is of his nature. It is Allah Himself who guards him from all fatal false steps and then (the principle of never breaking) ties of blood.7

That this was not normally the meaning of the word in
Jāhilīyyah must be clear to all readers of pre-Islamic literature. And fortunately enough for our purpose, the verb ittaqā was one of the favorite words of the pre-Islamic poets. We meet with the word almost everywhere, always with exactly the same basic conceptual structure, and we have a great number of examples at hand. They show definitely that the word did not carry any religious connotation, let alone, the meaning of ‘piety’.

What is, then, the basic conceptual structure disclosed by these examples? Nothing is more illuminating in this respect than the formula given by al-Tibrīzī in his commentary on Dīwān al-Hamāsah which runs:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{انتِ إلى مَعَتْحِي مَعَتْحِي مَعَتْحِي} & \\
\text{وَمَعَتْحِي مَعَتْحِي مَعَتْحِي} & \\
\text{مَعَتْحِي مَعَتْحِي مَعَتْحِي} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

Ittaqā means that you place between yourself (A) and something you are afraid of (B), something (C) which might protect you by preventing it (B) from reaching you.

In short, it means self-defence by means of something. The general situation is this: A man (A) perceives something (B) coming towards him, which looks dangerous, destructive, or at least harmful. He does not like it to reach him; he must stop it before it reaches him and does harm to him. So he puts between himself and the thing (B) something (C) which is strong enough to stop its oncoming. All the pre-Islamic instances of this verb, however complex and complicated in outward form, are capable of being interpreted in terms of this basic formula. Here are a few typical examples. The first one is from the Mu'allaqah of 'Antarah:

When (my comrades) put me between themselves and the spears of the enemies, (that is to say, when my friends pushed me ahead in front of them so that they might protect themselves behind me, I myself being their shield), I did not flinch at all; but—so he adds—(to my regret) I could not in any case advance very much because there was no more place left in front of me (i.e. there were so many enemies in front of me).

The situation is evidently like this:

(B) enemies

(C) his comrades

(A) 'Antarah

The next one, from the Mu'allaqah of Zuhayr, discloses exactly the same pattern:¹⁹

He said (to himself): I will satisfy my desire (i.e. I will kill the man who has killed my brother), then I (A) will defend myself (attaqā) against the enemies (B) who will surely come to take revenge with one thousand horses (C) all bridled in support of my cause.

The next example is somewhat more complicated, albeit with exactly the same underlying structure. It comes from Dīwān al-Mufaddaliyyat. The poet is al-Marrār b. Munqīdih¹¹ who, although of the Umayyad period, composed his poems in the typically Jāhili spirit:

This is part of a description of the she-camel of the poet. My she-camel, he says, guards herself (attaqā) from being hurt by the stony ground with her hard hoofs. Literally: “She puts between herself and the ground and sharp flint stones a hard one (i.e. hard hoof) which is compact and with its ring of hair still intact.”

The Qur’an, too, offers an extremely interesting example in which the verb ittaqā is used in exactly the same physical, and not spiritual, sense.

Is a man who, on the Day of Resurrection, can only guard himself against the evil of Divine chastisement with his face... Al-Zumar, 39:25 [24]

The ironical implication being that on that day his hands, with which he ordinarily defends himself against danger, are tied up to his neck so that he has only his face to defend himself with. The sentence itself is left unfinished; the full meaning is somewhat like this: Is
such a man the same as those who are completely safe from chastisement?

But this is rather an exceptional case in the Qur’an; there itiqā occurs almost always in contexts of a religious nature. In ḥahiliyyah, on the contrary, the verb is mostly used in a physical or material sense. The utmost to which ḥahiliyyah goes in this direction is represented by those cases in which the word is used in a moral sense, i.e. a degree more spiritualized than the purely physical and material sense.

The following example\(^\text{12}\) is of particular interest in this respect, because it discloses the basic structure of this concept as applied to the moral sphere of life:

\[
\text{وَمَنْ يَعْفَفُ عَنْ غَرْمٍ فَهُوَ أَحْسَنُ مَنْ لاَ يَتْقَوْا الْحَقَّ}
\]

He who puts acts of generosity between his personal honor and (the possible reproach by others) will make his honor increase more and more, while he who does not guard himself (yatqaq) in this way against invectives will only be reviled.

It is interesting to note that the first half of the verse forms a kind of structural definition of the concept of itiqā. Exactly the same thought is expressed in the following hemistich much more tersely:

\[
\text{وَكُلُّ كُرُومٌ يَنْتَقِي الدِّمَ بِالْقَرْحِ}
\]

Every man of a noble nature guards himself against blame with hospitality.\(^\text{13}\)

That is to say, he puts between himself, i.e. his personal honor, and the possible blame by others his act of spending his wealth in limitless hospitality.

We may rightly regard these cases in which the conceptual structure under discussion is applied to the moral sphere as an intermediate stage between the purely material itiqā and the purely spiritual, religious itiqā.

The Hanffite conception, to which belongs the Qur’anic thought, goes a step further and completely spiritualizes this conceptual structure. And yet the formal structure itself does not change. Here the possible harm (B) is no longer an ordinary physical danger, but an eschatological danger, i.e., the severe merciless punishment by God Himself to be inflicted upon those who refuse to surrender and to believe. In this context itiqā means that one guards oneself against the imminent danger of Divine chastisement by putting between it and one’s own soul a protective shield of pious obedience and belief. This interpretation is confirmed by the view taken by the authors of Tafsīr al-Jalālayn, according to which the verb itiqā means “That you guard yourself against the ‘iqāb (Divine chastisement) by putting between it and yourself the turs (shield) of ‘ibādah (worship—lit. ‘abd-ness”).

This basic structure is apparent in verses like the following:

\[
\text{إِنا نُتْبِعُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَنَعْقُ الْأَسْرَاءَ رَأْسَةً أَعْلَمَتْ لِلنَّفْسِ}
\]

\text{Beware of the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones (i.e. idols), the Fire prepared for the Kāfirs.}

\text{Al-Baqarah, 2:22 [24]}\(^\text{14}\)

\[
\text{إِنَّا نُتْبِعُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَنَعْقُ الْأَسْرَاءَ}
\]

\text{Beware of a day when no soul shall take another’s place.}

\text{Al-Baqarah, 2:45 [48]}

Psychologically, this is a particular kind of ‘fear’ (khaf)—an eschatological fear, as is shown by some verses, such as:

\[
\text{وَإِنَّ مَنْ يَعْيَضُ عَنْ إِنْفَكَانِ غَرْمَ عَذَابٍ عَدَّلَ الْأَخْبَارُ}
\]

\text{Surely therein is a sign for him who fears (khāfa) the chastisement in the Hereafter.}

\text{Hūd, 11:105 [103]}

\[
\text{وَإِنَّ مَنْ أَحَافَ إِنْفَكَانَ غَرْمَ عَذَابٍ عَدَّلَ الْأَخْبَارُ}
\]

\text{Say: Surely I fear (akhāfu), if I should disobey the command of my Lord, the chastisement of a dreadful day.}

\text{Al-An’ām, 6:15}
The next verse is particularly important in this respect in that it shows the intimate semantic relationship that exists between the psychology of fear and taqwā.

There shall be dark overshadowings of Fire above them, and beneath them too (similar) overshadowings. That is, God frightens (yukhawwifatu, causative form of khawf) therewith His servants: O My servants, therefore fear (ittaqā) Me!

Al-Zumar, 39:18

However, in course of time, this intense eschatological coloring becomes lighter and lighter until at last the meaning of taqwā reaches the stage, at which it has no longer any apparent connection with the image of the Day of Judgment and its horrors, and becomes the nearest equivalent of 'piety'. At this stage, taqwā has little or nothing to do with the concept of 'fear' (khawf). This is why, in the Qur'ān, the word muttaqī—the participial form of ittaqā—is often used in the sense of a 'pious believer' standing in opposition to kāfir.15

The muttaqī at this stage is given a definition in the Qur'ān itself, which does not differ substantially from that of muslim or mu'min. In the Sūrah al-Baqarah the muttaqī is defined as "a man who believes in the Unseen, performs the prayer regularly, expends of that which God has provided him, who believes in what has been sent down to the Prophet Muhammad and what has been sent down before Muhammad, and has a firm faith in the Hereafter".16

It is very interesting to observe that this is reflected in the non-Qur'ānic literature of the earliest Islam, 'Abdah b. al-Tabib, one of the contemporaries of the Prophet says in a poem:

أوْصِيًّكِم بِقَبْلِ الْأَخْرَى وَلَا تَغْفِرُوا لِلْقَارِعِ بِمَثْنَاهَا وَتَسْمَعُوا

I enjoin upon you the tawāf (=taqwā) of God, for it is He who gives to, and withholds from, whomsoever He likes all things that is valuable and desirable.17

Here as we see, taqwā has nothing at all to do with eschatology and the fear of punishment. This is clear from the very fact that Divine goodness and favor are mentioned as the reason for which man should have taqwā of God.

III. Wa'd and Wa'īd

We have seen in the preceding that in the Qur'ān God shows to men two entirely different faces according as men are good or bad in the religious sense: (1) a smiling face foreboding a bright future, pleasant things to come and (2) a dark angry face foreboding something gloomy and fatal. In this sense the problem is directly connected with the communicative aspect of the relation between God and man.

God communicates to man by these two different faces two different things concerning the ultimate destiny of man. This aspect of the matter is dealt with in the Qur'ān in terms of four mutually related key-words.

(I) wa'ida

(II) bashshara

The conceptual structure of the first pair (wa'ida-aw'ada) may be analyzed in the following way. (1) There are on the stage two persons A, B (two-person-relation word). (2) A tells B something. This means that the concept under discussion is a linguistic one. Furthermore, it is not an ordinary linguistic concept, but a weakened form of 'oath'. (3) The content of this information concerns something which A will do and which will bring about some new crucial situation into which B will be forcibly and unavoidably put. This information is given in a conditional form: if B does (or does not) do such and such a thing, then such and such a thing shall happen to B. (4) If this new situation happens to be something pleasant, delightful and agreeable from the point of view of B, then it is wa'ida (nominal form: wa'd); if, on the contrary, it is something harmful
destructive and disagreeable, then it is aw'ada (nominal form: waʿʿid).

In the concrete Qur'anic context, the first pair concerns the action of God Himself. In other words, A who informs B of all this happens to be God.

The second pair is of quite a different nature from this. A simple analysis of its basic structure will make it clear at once.

(1) There are on the stage three persons A, B and C (third-person-relation word). (2) The general situation, as far as concerns the basic relation between A and B, remains exactly the same. Only, A, in this case, does not inform B directly of what will happen. There is no direct connection between the two. The task of establishing a connection is given to another person C. C knows the actual situation; he goes from A's side to B as a 'messenger' and tells him that such and such a thing is sure to happen to B. In the Qur'an, C is of course the Prophet. In this respect the Prophet appears on the stage in the capacity of either bashir or nadhir, according as the news he conveys is something good for B or bad. In the Qur'anic conception, this is an extremely important point regarding the function of a Prophet. The Qur'an insists constantly that Muhammad is only a 'warner'.

Say: Verily I am the clear Warner (nadhir).

Al-Hijr, 15:89

Thou art only a Warner (nadhir).

Hūd, 11:15 [12]

His function consists in warning unbelieving people that there will be Judgment followed by a dreadful punishment in the Hereafter. The same is true of the concept of bashir. Only, there seems to be a slight difference between bashir and nadhir. According to the analysis done by Ibn al-'Arabī (author of the book Ahkām al-Qur'ān),18 al-bashārah is not only an information given about something desirable but, the bashir should always be the first person to convey the good news, awwal al-mukhbirin bi-l-mahbūbī, while al-nadhrārah is an information given about something unpleasant and anybody who imparts this information is nadhir, the concept does not contain the condition of the informant being the first person to do it.

The following verse of 'Antarah19 is interesting in that it presents the most important of the related concepts gathered in one place.

What the poet wants to emphasize is that the future is essentially unpredictable so that it is absolute folly to be worried about what is yet to come. "How many times", he says "has a warner who has come to bid us be on our guard against something bad turned out ultimately to be a messenger of delightful things bringing a good news".

It goes without saying that the second pair is most intimately related to the first pair and is based upon it. The following verse20 brings out this connection very well.

Very often a mighty Lord of a kingdom has threatened (aw'ada) me, and warnings from him have reached me before he came to me himself.

We may notice that in the verse that follows this immediately (44), the poet describes this mighty king as choking with rage just as the eyes of a leopard in anger are kindled with fire, which shows the situation very clearly.

As regards the contrast between wa'ada and aw'ada, we must remark that in Jāhiliyyah, the distinction is sometimes strictly made, sometimes not.

My nature is such that when I have threatened (aw'ada) him or promised (wa'ada) him something good, I am inclined to leave unfulfilled my threat (I'ād=waʿʿid), but bring to pass my promise (mawʿʿid=waʿʿid).21
In this verse which has been attributed also to Tarafah, the most definite distinction is made between the two, while in other places the two verbs are often used indiscriminately. Likewise, in the Qur'an, the distinction is rather loose. Just to give one example:

الله المستحبين، والمسلمين، والكفار، نار جهنم

Allah has promised (wa'ada) the hypocrites, men and women, and the disbelievers the Fire of Hell.

_Al-Tawbah_, 9:69 [68]

And the Kāfirs of Makkah say sarcastically to the Muslims in reference to the Day of Judgment:

مَنِيْلَوْنَ مَنِيْلَوتِنَا هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنَّ كُلَّمَا صَادِقُونَ

*When will this promise (wa'ād, meaning wa'ādī) come true, if what you say is true?*

_Yā Sīn_, 36:48

As is well known, this distinction develops into an exceedingly important theological problem in early Islam, as is witnessed by the rise of a sect in the Mu'tazilah school of theology known under the name of ahl al-wa'āด (People of Threat) or al-Wā'ādīyyah headed by al-Jubbātī. Semantically, this is a very interesting problem, but here we must leave the subject untouched because a discussion of problems of this sort would take us far beyond the scope of the present study.

Notes

1. For a philological analysis of the key-terms of this field, see Dāūd Rahbar, _op. cit_, chapter XIII and chapter XVIII.
2. *kanūd* is a synonym of *kafūr*.
5. _Dīwān_, p. 46, v. 3; _nu'mā-ni'māh_
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