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**WHY  
RELIGION**

**DR. S. Z. HASAN**

**WORLD FEDERATION OF ISLAMIC MISSIONS**

# WHY RELIGION

By

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in east or in west, in up or in down, in past or in future  
goes as far as you may, it does not end. Neither sight can cover  
it nor imagination. Both must tire out without reaching its  
limits. Man stands in this limitless cosmos. He is astounded  
at its dimensions, its greatness, its immensity. He does not  
know where he came from. He does not know where to  
is going. He is bewildered. Yet he stands in it and must ask:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَعَنْدَ وَصَلَى عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ الطَّيِّبِينَ

Life means action and motion. To move about, to sit  
and stand, to eat and drink, to talk and laugh, to read and  
write, and so on, all these are its manifestations. But where  
there is action and motion, there arises also the question :

*What ought I to do and*

*What ought I to become ?*

The question arises on every occasion and at every  
step. There is no moment in our life when this question  
does not arise. At times it comes clearly before the mind;  
at others only vaguely. And not only this. We have also  
got to answer this question in words and in deeds, and have  
to abide by the answer we give. This question is the question  
of our life, and it persists throughout the whole of our life.  
It confronts every one of us. A schoolboy asks this question,  
and so does the teacher; a ruler is faced with it, and also an  
administrator. Everyone of us has a world of his own, in  
which he stands and asks : "What ought I to do and what ought  
I to become ?" The world of some of us is small, while that of  
others is larger and that of still others still larger. But there is  
a world largest of all, in which we all live and which compre-  
hends the earth and the sky, i.e., this Universe, which seems  
to have neither beginning nor end. In north or in south,

in east or in west, in up or in down, in past or in future, go as far as you may, it does not end. Neither sight can cover it nor imagination. Both must tire out without reaching its limits. Man stands in this limitless cosmos. He is astounded at its dimensions, its greatness, its immensity. He does not know where he came from. He does not know whereto he is going. He is bewildered. Yet he stands in it, and must ask:

*What ought I to do and  
What ought I to become ?*

The question is inevitable. To-day or to-morrow it must arise in a man's heart. One in whose heart it does not arise, does not deserve the name of Man; and as long as he does not get a reply to it his life remains vacant, nay, even useless and meaningless. For, as long as he is alive and is a denizen of this world, he should do something and he should become something. But he does not know what he ought to do and what he ought to become.

Man as man is in this fix. His heart is involved in this question. His salvation—the salvation of his heart—lies in a satisfactory reply to this question. He would regard that person as his true saviour and guide who could answer this question: "I am a denizen of this limitless universe; what ought I to do and what ought I to become?"

Undoubtedly I ought to do that and I ought to become that which is in consonance with the nature of this world and the nature of my own self.

But what is the nature of this world? What is the nature of my own self? Who am I? From whence did I come? Where am I going to? And, consequently, what ought I to become?

One question begets the other. But as long as these questions remain unanswered, neither the soul finds rest nor the heart peace. Life seems meaningless. Action and

motion appear in vain. The soul becomes benumbed and the heart listless.

Then, is there anyone who could answer this question:

*What ought I to do and  
What ought I to become ?*

There are two claimants to giving an answer to this question. One is Reason, the other is Revelation, i.e., one is Philosophy, the other Religion.

The claim of Philosophy stands to reason. For, man ought to use his reason. He has been gifted with reason so that he may use it. Reason guides us in all things, great and small. It is our guiding light in life. It is our eye with which we see things, and with which we penetrate their essence. The man who uses reason will have superiority over the man who does not use it. Nations who made Reason their guiding light are dominating other nations to-day. Hence the philosophers say that reason, which answers all our queries, will answer this question also. Consequently, by our reason and thought we can find out what is the real nature of this Universe and what is the essence of the Self, its Origin and its Destiny. We can, then, determine what is our place in this immense cosmos. That will make it plain what we ought to do and what we ought to become.

The branch of philosophy which deals with these questions and attempts to solve them by means of Reason has for long been called Metaphysics or Ontology. Great philosophers have spent their whole lives on struggling with these questions, and have produced system after system of metaphysics. Amongst Greeks, Plato and Aristotle; amongst Muslims, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd; amongst Europeans Leibnitz, Spinoza and Hegel, are names too well known to need mention. Their greatness is admitted by all and every philosopher bows before them with respect. Their achievements

in the domain of philosophy are simply great. If anyone were to dilate on their influence in the world of to-day it would invariably cover a volume. The high level of their thought, the depth of their penetration, their profoundness, their comprehensiveness and their grasp are beyond praise. The most valuable results they arrive at and the logical and rigorous manner of their arguments set one agasping. In them human reason seems to have reached its highest pinnacles. The world of to-day has caught at their skirt as it were the surest anchor.

But over two hundred years ago a thinker greater than them all was born in Germany. His name was Kant. Kant weighed the arguments of old philosophy impartially, and went deep down to its bottom. He found after discussing them fully that the arguments that had been advanced by old philosophers on these problems were, all of them, defective and none cogent—none of them led to the goal they had in view. It cannot be ascertained with certainty what the ultimate nature of the universe is nor even what is our own ultimate nature. Neither can we know the origin nor the destiny of these. Kant went still further, and he proved, by means of rational logical argument itself, that the human reason is not capable of answering these questions.

He who has understood the philosophy of Kant knows for sure that philosophy has no answer to our question: "What ought I to do and what ought I to become?"

Now the position is this: Reason cannot answer this question. But the question is there. The soul of man is hankering after an answer. Can it leave this question alone? No, in no case. The soul will rather die than live without an answer to this question.

Now, if our reason and our senses cannot lead us to a solution of the problem, there must be some other way of getting an answer. A way there is. Its name is 'inspiration' and 'revelation'. Somehow—we don't know—man gets an answer to this question. There happen to be some human

beings who possess the capacity of hearing the answer to this question from Above, and of appropriating it, and then they communicate it to their fellow-beings. Such persons are called Revelation-bearers and Prophets. They are human beings; but the springs of their hearts are opened. Other men are not like them. That is why the Qur'an says: "Say I am only a mortal like you; (but) it has been revealed to me that your God is only One God." (xviii: 110).

Except for a dark heart, it is hard to suspect them of untruth. To doubt the veracity of these personages is very difficult, indeed hardly possible. Were Moses and Christ and the other Prophets like them under a deception or could deceive others?

Look at their sincerity and see how they effaced their selfhood in the search after Truth. Look at their Faith in their mission. A mountain can be moved from its place, but not they and their hearts. They can doubt what the bodily eyes see, but not what is seen through the eyes of Revelation: "The eye turned not aside nor was overbold." (Holy Qur'an, liii: 17).

Then look at the grandeur and height of these personalities. Single-handed and alone they rise with their mission, and, lo and behold, they over-turn the whole world. Nay, their teachings were a flood which inundated the entire globe—and the earth was thirsty, very thirsty indeed; it quaffed it in like the "Elixir of Life". There are millions and millions of human beings who would stake their lives and their wealth at these personages. Other great men of the world like Alexander and Plato, Napoleon and Goethe, look like tiny nothings before them—like flickering lamps before the effulgent sun.

Then look at the Message which the Prophets brought for Man—a reply to that great question which was making his Soul restless and which Reason had failed to solve. An answer so clear, so distinct, so satisfying—did it come from

anywhere else than the great Beyond ? It was Revelation from which the world learnt what I am and from whence I come and whereto I am going; and, consequently, *what I ought to do and what I ought to become*. In other words, it was Revelation which told man that *there is a Being full of all perfections, and that He has brought me and the Universe into being from nothing. It is His will that I should attain perfection. I ought to act according to His will*. I ought to become what He requires me to become. I shall have to go in His Presence and I shall have to account for my deeds. On that day if He looks at me with approval, what an attainment ! Otherwise, it would be the most patent failure.

This is what every Prophet has taught. On principle there are no differences in their teachings. That is why Islam teaches: "We make no distinction between any of His Messengers." (ii : 285). Whatever differences there are in their teachings, they are due to gradation—gradation in the individual positions of these holy personages and the stages of the intellectual and moral development of the people concerned.

We Muslims believe that Muhammad-ur-Rasool-Allah is the last of the Prophets in both these respects, for the guidance that humanity got through him was complete. There is no need for any fresh guidance. That is why the Qur'an proclaimed: "This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed my favour unto you and have chosen for you as your religion Al-Islam." (V: 4).

No other Prophet was favoured with so complete, so detailed and so clear a revelation. Nor was any other Prophet sent to the entire humanity.

These points require detailed discussion, for which the present is not the proper occasion. I have mentioned them here only to draw attention to the need of Revelation and Religion. Religion is the answer to that great question :

"*What ought I to do and what ought I to become ?*" And this answer man gets through Revelation.

The object of Religion is to make my life in complete accord with the Will of the Ultimate Reality of the Universe. And this is what *Islam* means. This is *Lillahiat* (Godliness) which is the gist of the teachings of Islam and which is described in the verse: "Say: Lo! my worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are all for Allah, Lord of the Worlds." (vi: 162). The mystics of Islam call it *Rida* (i.e., being pleased with God) and consider it to be the highest stage of human development. The Qur'an says: "Allah is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him. That is the great achievement." (v: 122). And this it is that is called *Uboodiat* (Absolute Submission to Allah). And, where this *Uboodiat* reaches its perfection, Religion reaches its completion ; and the man in whom *Uboodiat* reaches its perfection will be the most perfect of men and the best of them and will be at the stage of *Mahboob* (Beloved of God).

The phase of *Uboodiat* reached its consummation in the person of our Holy Prophet to an extent as is not to be found in any other founder of Religion. That is why, in the language of mystics, he is at the stage of *Mahboob*. Because he was just as God wants man to be, he was God's beloved. It is the coming into being of such a Personality which is the real purpose of this world. So it was said : "But for thee (O Muhammad!), I would not have created the Universe." (*Hadith Qudsi*). And as all his deeds were in complete accord with the will of God, they were described by God Himself as His own deeds:—"And thou (Muhammad) threwest not when thou didst throw, but Allah threw....." (Holy Qur'an, vii 17). And it is because of the same reason that he is *Rahmat-ul-lil-Alameen* (Mercy into the World) : "We sent thee (Muhammad) not save as a mercy for the worlds". (xxi: 107). For, the object of Creation is *Uboodiat* : "I created the jinn and humankind only that they worship Me" (li: 56), and his person is the pattern, nay, the embodiment of it. So his

person is the source of guidance and salvation for the whole creation; it is God's *Rahmat* (Mercy). And because of his grand personality—his perfect *Uboodiat*—, his life, his deeds and acts are the pattern for us. God says: "Verily in the Messenger of Allah ye have an excellent Exemplar for him who looketh unto Allah and the Last Day, and remembereth Allah much," (xxxiii: 21). These good ways and these high morals are the purposes for which Prophets are sent: "We prophets are sent to perfect morals." (*Hadith*). And the Holy Prophet was the mirror in which these high morals and perfect *Uboodiat* found its undistorted reflection: "And most surely thou conformest to sublime morality" (Holy Qur'an lxciii: 4).

Now a word about features of this perfect *Uboodiat*. One of them is his Humanity as opposed to Divinity; the other is his Truthfulness.

In the person of Prophets an element of divinity gets mixed up because of Revelation; and if men are not fully warned in this behalf, it eats up the very roots of religion. So it is binding that it should be kept clear as day that the Prophets are men; they are mortal beings. For, only as such they can be patterns for us. We have to follow in their footsteps. They are the embodiment of the teachings received by man in reply to that great question: What ought I to do and what ought I to become? The Holy Prophet showed us the way by himself becoming what we ought to become. He was the living picture of the virtues which the Qur'an teaches. Hazrat Ayesha said: "His character was the Qur'an itself." So the negation of the aspect of *divinity* and the affirmation of the aspect of *humanity* is of paramount importance. And it is present in the person of the Holy Prophet with such completion as is hardly to be found in the person of any other founder of Religion.

He has so positively denied divinity in his person that it is difficult to find a parallel in the history of religions.

Take first the *Kalimah Shahadah* (Article of Faith), and there you will meet a most explicit denial of divinity: "I bear witness that there is no deity but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His Servant and Apostle." Then take the Qur'an. You will find that the miracles of other Prophets are mentioned at several places. But when a miracle is demanded of him, there comes the humble reply that miracles are only with God, and that he himself was only a man to whom the Truth had been revealed. This does not mean that he was not given miracles. It only shows his intense anxiety to avoid all possible misunderstanding regarding his *divinity*.

Once the Holy Prophet asked a Companion of his about a certain undertaking and its chances of success. The Companion said in reply: "Yes, it will succeed if God and His Prophet will." On hearing this the Holy Prophet turned pale, and in a directly upset mood rejoined: "Say if God *alone* wills; the Prophet is nobody." Great God! Look at this sense of *humanity*.

This was not the aspect of divinity but of humanity that the fear of God was always uppermost in his mind. He regarded himself only as a creature of God who, in spite of his sinlessness, was accountable for his deeds before Him like other creatures. Consequently, when he came to know from God that his last moments had come, he felt great anxiety lest any rights of others may have been transgressed by him. Because of this anxiety he got it announced to the beat of drum, calling upon people to come forward and take from him anything that was due from him, and take their revenge if he might have hurt anyone, or in the alternative, forgive him in the name of God, so that he may not have to account for it before Him. Thereupon a man appeared and said, "O Messenger of God! once you were riding a horse whom you struck with a whip and the whip struck me." The Holy Prophet said: "O brother! I did that unknowingly by mistake. Kindly forgive me for the sake of God." The Prophet was severely ill at that time. The man said: "I will not forgive."

So the Holy Prophet sent for a whip and said: "All right, you too give me a cut." That man said: "O Messenger of God, when you hit me with the whip, my back was bare." Hearing this the Prophet removed his shirt and bared his back, so that he may hit him on his bare back and have his revenge.

Mark, please, this intense sense of being human, this consciousness of human rights, and this fear of accountability before God! Consider the grand position with God and man and the unlimited power wielded by Muhammad-Rasool-Allah, think of his physical frailty at that moment, imagine the scene when he bared his back so that he may be struck with a whip because of the injury which the other man happened to receive at his hand unintentionally, so that he may not be held accountable before God before whom he had to go and to answer for all his deeds.

The other feature which is eminently prominent in the person of the Holy Prophet is his Sincerity and Truthfulness. This truthfulness is the characteristic of *Uboodiat*—of being God's true servant. For God says about His beautiful servants: "Lo the righteous will dwell among gardens and rivers, in the seat of Truth, with the Mighty King." (Iv: 54-55).

Truthfulness is the highest moral quality; it is really the root of all moral virtues. Every religion regards one of the virtues as fundamental and lays emphasis upon it. For instance, in Christianity it is Humility, in Judaism it is Law, in Zoroastrianism it is probably Cleanliness, in Buddhism Self-Effacement, in Jainism Harmlessness, in Hinduism *Dharma*.

Islam has made the virtue of *Sidq-o-Safa* (Truthfulness and Purity) its distinctive characteristic.

The noble personality of the Holy Prophet was the perfect exponent of this great virtue. It is wonderful that he made such a tremendous, such a revolutionary, and for

the Arabs, such an upsetting claim; and the Arabs opposed him tooth and nail, plotted against his life and waged wars against him. But no one ever had the courage to aver that he was a liar or a fabricator. The Qur'an has described all the charges which they laid against the Holy Prophet. They called him mad, they called him poet, they called him sorcerer; but never did they call him a liar or a fabricator. O Allah! Thy Blessings and Mercy and Peace be on Muhammad!

So deep was the impression of the truthfulness of the Holy Prophet upon their hearts that when someone asked Abu Jahl—Abu Jahl, who was his bitterest enemy:—"Tell me truly what dost thou think of Muhammad. Is he a liar?"

Abu Jahl said: "By God! Muhammad is a truthful man. He never told a lie." This very Abu Jahl said on another occasion: "O Muhammad! We do not hold that you are a liar; but we only hold that your teachings are false". Similar is the story of An-Nazr bin Haris. When the infidels of Mecca held a consultation meeting for damaging the credit of the Holy Prophet and some suggested that the Holy Prophet be defamed as a liar, An-Nazr got infuriated. He leapt up and said: "No, by God no, liar he is not." Mind that An-Nazr was the man in whose heart the enmity of the Holy Prophet was very deep-seated, so much so that he was one of those selected ones who had come to assassinate him on the night of Hijra!

This was the condition of the foes. And what about the condition of friends? The distinctive mark of a good man is that the more you know him the more you respect and trust him. Let us keep this standard in mind and see what has actually happened. When the Holy Prophet received the Revelation for the first time in the cave of Mount Hira and Gabriel appeared in his full glory and addressing him said: "Read: In the name of the Lord who createth, createth man from a clot. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous, who teacheth by the pen, teacheth man that which he knew not" (vvi: 1-5), the Holy Prophet was simply stunned to see it all. Awe filled his soul, and his body began to shiver.

When Gabriel disappeared, he came home from Hira. He was still shivering because of what he had experienced, and a sort of fever took hold of him. As he reached his home; he laid himself down in bed and said to his wife Khadija: "Cover me with a blanket, cover me with a blanket; I am feeling cold." So Khadija came and wrapped him in a blanket and sat pressing him. He was a human being. All of a sudden the doors of a new world were opened to him, the world of Power and Majesty, to see which human eye is not fitted.

If the whole thing was true, if he was truthful, his condition ought to have been exactly this. After a while, when he felt a little easier and Khadija enquired about his condition, he told her all the facts. His statement gave her the impression that perhaps he was in doubt and thought that all this may have been a mere illusion.

All this is so human, so utterly human, that it makes his truthfulness brighter. You know what that lady said to him—the lady more than whom none else knew him in this world. She said: "O husband, be happy; God has appointed you to the task of prophethood. You are always good to your kinsmen, you are always benevolent to your neighbours, you are always kind to strangers, you are always benign to the poor, you are truthful and you side with truth. Allah will never put you in a delusion." And that lady was the first to believe in his prophethood. She was a great personage—very wise, very sagacious, very clever in judging men, highly discreet, capable of discriminating truth and falsehood, firmly truthful, ripe in age and well-to-do. Islam has given her the title of Khadija the Great (God be pleased with her!).

Next in the house was a young boy, whose bright intelligence, sparkling genius and profundity of judgment has taken the toll of recognition from the whole world, and whose purity of soul has made him the Imam of spiritualists. The boy was a cousin of the Prophet; he lived with the

Prophet, and know his character intimately. He was the second person who believed in his prophethood. His name is Ali Murtaza, the King of Saints (God be pleased with him!).

The third person was a servant, who fully knew the life, habits and character of the Holy Prophet. He was out on an errand. When he returned and learnt the facts, he accepted his prophethood without the least demur. His name was Zaid bin Haris (God be pleased with him!).

All these three, who knew him most, did not feel the slightest doubt in his truthfulness.

The fourth man who knew him closely was an old dear friend. He was at the time away from Mecca in connection with business. Someone told him: "Have you heard what your friend Muhammad says? He says that he has been raised to prophethood and that he has become the recipient of Divine Revelation." The friend, as soon as he heard this, said without any hesitation: "True says Muhammad; he must have received revelation; he cannot assert anything but truth." The name of this friend was Abu Bakr (God be pleased with him!). He rose to the highest stage of spiritual perfection and is called Siddiq-i-Akbar (the Great Truthful).

It was not only that those who knew him intimately believed in him without any doubt or suspicion, but also the faith of these first believers kept increasing, and they remained devoted to him and to his teachings to the end of their lives. There came times of the greatest hardships, of the greatest trials, of the greatest dangers, of the greatest setbacks; but never did their steps waver. They never felt any doubt about his truthfulness—that is, they never felt any doubt about his prophethood. And, in truth, this has been the case of all his Companions. — Once anyone accepted Islam, he never turned back upon it and never doubted the truthfulness of the Holy Prophet. And mind, the number of Companions amounted to hundreds of thousands; and only

those were called Companions who were in very close contact with him.

In the history of Religion, this is a unique example of *Sidq* (Truthfulness). No better evidence can be advanced in support of the Truth of a founder of religion.

**O ALLAH! BESTOW THY BLESSINGS, THY MERCY AND THY PEACE ON MUHAMMAD!**

## Introducing the Author

**Prof. Dr. S. Z. Hasan**

*This illustrious son of Islam was one of the greatest acknowledged philosophical thinkers of this age. The first Asiatic to get D. Phil. in Philosophy from Oxford, his great work on "Realism" (published by the Cambridge University Press) was hailed as a classic on the subject unsurpassed to this day. In that book he founded a new school of Philosophy in conformity with Islamic norms, which he later developed in his book on Philosophy of Religion completed shortly before his demise in Pakistan in 1948. He was Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at the Aligarh Muslim University for decades and also held the honours of being Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Emeritus Professor of Philosophy there. He was also one of the inspirers of the World Federation of Islamic Missions.*

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