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**THE**

**QUR'ANIC DOCTRINE**

**OF SIN**

**BY THE**

**Rev. W. R. W. GARDNER, M.A.**

**CHRISTIAN LITERATURE SOCIETY**

**FOR INDIA**

**MADRAS, ALLAHABAD, CALCUTTA AND COLOMBO**

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# The Qur'ānic Doctrine of Sin



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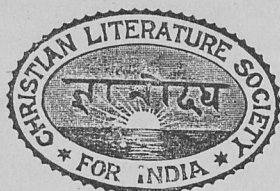


# The Qur'anic Doctrine of Sin

BY THE

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AUTHOR OF 'THE QUR'ANIC DOCTRINE OF SALVATION';  
'THE QUR'ANIC DOCTRINE OF MAN'



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# The Qur'anic Doctrine of Sin

## I

IN our consideration of the Qur'anic doctrine of sin, we shall make no attempt to trace any development of the doctrine through the various periods into which it is common to divide the promulgation of the book. Such a study of the development of the doctrine may, perhaps, be possible; and, were it possible, it would be found most interesting from an historical point of view, especially as it might throw light on the phases through which Muḥammad's ideas concerning sin passed in their relation to the history of his own life, and to his dealings with those who opposed him. But from the point of view from which we desire to consider the question, such a study would be of but minor interest.

We desire to see the final result, not the process through which that result was reached. We propose to take the various teachings of the Qur'án regarding sin, without regard to their historical settings, and see whether we can form from their study, as a whole, any general conception of what Muḥammad had in mind when he spoke of sin.

Having thus defined the object of our present study, we shall first consider some of the terms whereby Muḥammad describes wrong-doing.

A word commonly used in the Qur'án to express sin, wickedness, or evil, is *sayyiát* (plural *sayyiátun*). The word does not necessarily mean moral evil or

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wickedness; it is used very frequently to express merely injury or harm done by one man to another, as in the following passage, 'So God preserved him from the evils which they had planned.'<sup>1</sup> It may also express the evils which God brings on man to try him. Thus we read, 'And we have divided them upon the earth as peoples, some of them are upright and some are otherwise, and by good things and by evil things (*as-sayyiát*) have we proved them.'<sup>2</sup>

The word may also be used to express the punishment wherewith God chastises men, whether in this world with misfortune and calamity, or hereafter with torment and eternal damnation. Thus we find the following, 'When we cause men to taste mercy, they rejoice in it; but if evil befalleth them, for that which their hands have aforetime wrought, behold they despair.'<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the word is employed to express punishment hereafter, and the evils 'they have wrought shall rise up into their view.'<sup>4</sup>

The fundamental idea underlying the word appears to be that of misfortune or calamity, which befalls one in the course of nature through famine, drought or plague, or from the action of personal enemies, or as the direct act of God with the object of testing or punishing; and with this idea there is linked the thought that the hopes and expectations of man have been disappointed. He looked for and expected good, and behold evil.

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Mu'minún (xl) 48; cf. xvi. 47; xxxv. 11; xlii. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu'l-A'ráf (vii) 167.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'r-Rúm (xxx) 35; cf. iii. 116; iv. 80; vii. 92-3; xiii. 7; xxvii. 47; xxviii. 84, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Súratu'l-Játhiya (xlv) 32; cf. x. 28; xvi. 36; xl. 9.

The use of the verb *saá'* is similar. It expresses the evil and foolishness of men in doing that which brings upon them not good but evil,<sup>1</sup> or the folly of their judgment and reasoning when they come to a wrong conclusion as in the phrase, 'How ill do they judge!'<sup>2</sup>

The word *sayyiát* easily and naturally passes over to describe moral evil, which is the cause of calamity, misfortune, or punishment. One can see, as it were, the transition in such phrases as 'And their own ill deeds shall be clearly perceived by them.'<sup>3</sup> The original sense of the word appears still to linger in such expressions as, 'Whoso doeth evil (literally *earneth* evil) and is encompassed by his iniquity, they shall be the companions of hell fire';<sup>4</sup> or, 'as for those who have wrought out evil (literally *earn* evil) their recompense shall be the reward of evil of like degree.'<sup>5</sup>

The change in sense has become complete when instead of *kasaba* (to gain, or earn) '*amila* (to do) is employed, as in the following, 'Whoever worketh evil shall only be rewarded in equal proportion to the same';<sup>6</sup> or, 'But no repentance shall be accepted from those who do evil until the time when death present itself unto one of them';<sup>7</sup> or again, 'But unto them who do evil, and afterwards repent. . . .'<sup>8</sup>

Even to the end, however, there seems to remain a feeling that while what is described by the word *sayyiát* may be morally wrong, the word speaks of wrong where-in a man injures himself, and acts contrary to his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. v. 70; ix. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu 'z-Zumar (xxxix) 49.

<sup>5</sup> Súratu Yúnas (x) 28.

<sup>7</sup> Súratu 'n-Nisá' (iv) 22.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu 'l-An'ám (vi) 137.

<sup>4</sup> Súratu 'l-Baqara (ii) 75.

<sup>6</sup> Súratu 'l-Mu'minún (xl) 4.

<sup>8</sup> Súratu 'l-A'ráf (vii) 152.

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own best interests, rather than of that wrong wherein he transgresses divine law, and acts contrary to God's commands and the divine will. Hence we read, 'thus did they act who were before them. God was not unjust to them; but to their own selves were they unjust and the evils which they had done recoiled upon them.'<sup>1</sup>

In opposition to these evil deeds (*as-sayyiát*) are the good deeds (*al-muhsinát*) and the Prophet recognized that the habit of good deeds, and the attitude of heart and mind engendered by their performance, was a power which would assist the believer in overcoming temptation to sin. This is specially seen in what he says of the strength of purpose developed by devout prayer and the spirit of prayerfulness. 'Pray regularly morning and evening, and in the former part of the night: for good works drive away evils.'<sup>2</sup> The idea that good deeds drive away evils easily passes into a somewhat different one, according to which good deeds gain for the believer the forgiveness of sins.

In some passages there seems to be drawn a distinction between those evil actions which are described as *sayyiát*, and the greater sins which must be repented of before one can hope for the forgiveness of God. Thus we find, 'If ye turn aside from grievous sins (*kabá'ir*) of those which ye are forbidden, we will cleanse you from your smaller faults (*sayyiátikum*).'<sup>3</sup>

The next word which we shall consider is *dhanb*. It is unnecessary to discuss the etymology of the word further than to say that its primary idea seems to have been connected with injury done to a person by attack

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'n-Náhl (xvi) 35-6.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu Húd (xi) 116.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'n-Nisá' (iv) 35; cf. xxv. 70; xlvi. 15; ii. 273.



from behind; but the word has come to express the guilt or crime connected with any action occasioning such injury. Of this transition, however, nothing can be seen in the Qur'án. As used by Muḥammad, the word means simply crime or sin, and while it may describe many and diverse acts, there is always connected with it the idea that the action done involves moral guilt. The word may be used generally, 'He is sufficiently acquainted with the faults of His servants.'<sup>1</sup> It is used similarly in a general sense, 'Despair not of the mercy of God, seeing that God forgiveth all sins.'<sup>2</sup>

Under the category of *dhanb* are included those moral failings to perform a duty, which though not actively wrong in the sense of being transgressions of a command, are yet culpable. The word is employed thus 'Wherefore be steadfast thou and patient: for true is the promise of God; and seek pardon for thy fault.'<sup>3</sup> On this passage the commentators remark that the fault spoken of consisted in being backward or negligent in advancing the true religion for fear of the infidels. There is thus seen to be an advance from the idea of the word formerly examined. The action which is *dhanb* has clearly a moral quality.

It is this word, therefore, which covers all those cases of impiety manifested by disbelief in the revelation of God, or by contempt shown for God's claims to worship and obedience, or by disregard to the teachings of His prophets. We find it thus, 'Every one of them did we

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Furqán (xxv) 60; cf. xvii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu'z-Zumar (xxxix) 54.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'l-Mu'minún (xl) 57.

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destroy in his sin,'<sup>1</sup> and also 'Wherefore God destroyed them for their crime.'<sup>2</sup>

The word, therefore, also covers all immoral actions; that is, all actions against the moral law and order which God has established, whether by express command, or by the 'natural law' implanted in man's heart and conscience. Thus we read, 'Who after they have committed a crime (*fāhishat*) remember God and ask pardon for their sins (*dhanb*),'<sup>3</sup> and also 'And seek forgiveness for thy sin';<sup>4</sup> or again 'Also they have a crime against thee.'<sup>5</sup>

In a general sense the word expresses all faults, crimes and sins, which are the result of culpable ignorance, or of pride, insolence, and perverseness as manifested in neglecting God, and living a materialistic life in which God and His claims are not taken into account. It is thus used to describe the sin of Muḥammad himself, 'that God forgiveth thee thy earlier and later fault.'<sup>6</sup> In the following passages the word is also used in this general sense: 'Know therefore that there is no god but God, and ask pardon for thy sin, and for believers, both men and women.'<sup>7</sup> 'We confess our sins.'<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-'Anqabút (xxix) 39; cf. Pharaoh, Haman, Qárún, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu'sh-Shams (xci) 14; cf. Thamúd iii. 9; vi. 6; vii. 98; viii. 54, 56; xl. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu Áli 'Imrán (iii) 129.

<sup>4</sup> Súratu Yúsuf (xii) 29; cf. Potiphar's wife.

<sup>5</sup> Súratu'sh-Shu'ará' (xxvi) 13; cf. Moses—the crime of murder; cf. lxxi. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Súratu'l-Faḥ (xlvi) 2.

<sup>7</sup> Súratu Muḥammad (xlvii) 21.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. believers on the day of Judgment; Súratu'l-Mu'minún (xl) 11; cf. lxxvii. 11; xlvi. 30; lxxi. 4; iii. 29.

The word thus finally comes to express all forms of unbelief, and all actions done in unbelief.

As the third word to be considered, we take *akhta'a* (to sin), and its derivatives. The root of the word expresses the idea of missing a mark; aiming at something and falling short of it. It expresses also the doing of something wrong unintentionally. Thus we find, 'It is not lawful for a believer to kill a believer, unless it happen by mistake.'<sup>1</sup> The word, therefore, includes all wrong actions which may have been done in ignorance, but with good intention. It is thus used: 'And unless made with intent of heart, mistakes in this matter shall be no crime in you.'<sup>2</sup> The criminality of the action lies in the doing of it intentionally when it is known to be wrong. The word may, therefore, describe a wrong action done thoughtlessly or through negligence, as 'O Lord, punish us not if we forget, or fall into sin (literally, make a mistake).'<sup>3</sup>

But, speaking generally, the idea is always plain that the evil actions are regarded as springing from unbelief, and it matters not whether the unbelief was in ignorance or in despite. Thus the word is used of Abraham's idolatry before he was enlightened,<sup>4</sup> as well as of the sin of the sorcerers of Pharaoh, who sinned against the light of their own knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of crime or sin, however, very easily passes into the word, so that it may be used with practically the same meaning as *dhanb*. Thus we read, 'Kill not your children for fear of being brought to want; We

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'n-Nisá' (iv) 94.      <sup>2</sup> Súratu'l-Ahzáb (xxxiii) 5.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 286.      <sup>4</sup> xxvi. 82; cf. ii. 75.

<sup>5</sup> xxvi. 51; xx. 75.

will provide for them and for you: verily the killing of them is a great sin' (*khīṭ'an kabīran*).<sup>1</sup>

The commission of a crime *dhanb*, constitutes a person a sinner (*khāṭi*). Thus, Jacob's sons say, 'O father, ask pardon for our sins (*dhumūbanā*), for we certainly have been sinners (*khāṭi'in*).'<sup>2</sup> And Potiphar says, 'O Joseph, leave this affair; and thou (O woman), ask pardon for thy crime (*dhanb*), for you are a guilty person (*min al-khāṭi'in*).'<sup>3</sup>

*Khāṭi'at* thus comes to be the general word descriptive of sin and *khāṭi* the general word employed to express a sinner, and the two are used indiscriminately whether the wrong-doing be *sayyiāt* or *dhanb*. Every sinner (*khāṭi*) may not be one who has done an *evil deed* (*sayyiāt*), or committed a crime (*dhanb*); but every one who has committed a crime (*dhanb*), or done an evil deed (*sayyiāt*) is a sinner (*khāṭi*).

We next turn to the word *ithm*, fault, injustice, crime. The primary idea of the word 'is to be sought in that of negligence, especially in going, in gait, whence *āthim*, a slow-paced camel, faltering and weary.'<sup>4</sup>

The Arabic word is used with practically the same meaning as that of the Hebrew word *asham*, and expresses to fail in duty, and thence to become guilty.

The various applications of the word stand out very clearly in the Qur'án. It is used to express fault or guilt in the attitude which one may take up towards another, without committing any overt act of wrongdoing, by entertaining unfounded suspicions or unworthy thoughts of another. Thus we see the following, 'O

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Asrá (xvii) 33.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu Yúsuf (xii) 98.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 29.

<sup>4</sup> (Ges. Heb. Dic.).

believers, 'avoid frequent suspicion, for some suspicions are a crime (*ithm*).'<sup>1</sup> Fault or guilt, however, of this kind naturally leads to the actual charge of wrong-doing against the person concerning whom the suspicions are entertained. The word may then be used to express the unfounded charge of wrong-doing brought against an innocent person. Thus it is used concerning the charge against 'Áyisha, 'To every man among them shall it be done according to the offence (*ithm*) he hath committed;'<sup>2</sup> and again we find, 'If ye be desirous to exchange one wife for another, and have given one of them a talent; make no deduction from it. Would ye take it by slandering her, and with manifest wrong (*ithman*)?'<sup>3</sup>

Wrong feelings towards another, and the thought expressed or hidden, that they have acted wrongly, readily leads to the desire to repay all the evil done, especially when it is supposed to have been done to oneself, or in violation of one's rights. The word then passes to express the action done to another in revenge or in requital for supposed injury or evil done by that person, but of which he is innocent. Thus it is said, 'Assist one another according to goodness and piety, but assist not one another in injustice and malice.'<sup>4</sup> And we find, 'Afterwards ye were they who slew one another, and ye drove out a part of your own people from their houses, ye lent help against them in injustice and hatred.'<sup>5</sup>

But harm or wrong done to another may be committed, not out of revenge, but from some other motive. The

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Ĥujurát (xlix) 12.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu'n-Núr (xxiv) 11.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'n-Nisá' (iv) 24.

<sup>4</sup> Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 3.

<sup>5</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 79.



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word then conveys the more general meaning of injustice or evil done towards others and at the same time implies the idea of guilt which such action involves. We find an example of this: 'And whoso committeth a sin or iniquity and afterwards layeth it on the innocent, he shall surely bear the guilt of calumny and manifest injustice.'<sup>1</sup> Or again 'And they who shall affront believing men and believing women, for no fault of theirs, they shall surely bear the guilt of slander, and of a clear wrong.'<sup>2</sup>

The word, we now see, has come to refer to any injury or injustice done to another. It is only a step further when it is used to express any wrong which causes injury to oneself. This use of the word is seen in, 'Whoso committeth wickedness committeth it against his own soul';<sup>3</sup> and 'They will ask thee concerning wine and games of chance. Say: In both is great sin (*ithm*), and advantage also to men; but their sin (*ithm-ahumá*) is greater than their advantage.'<sup>4</sup>

The use of the word is also developed in another direction. It is employed to express the taking up of a wrong attitude towards God, as already we have seen it may express the taking up of a wrong attitude to one's neighbour. We find the word thus used. 'Surely God will not pardon the union of other gods with Himself but other than this will He forgive to whom He pleaseth; and He who uniteth gods with God, hath devised a great wickedness (*ithman*).'<sup>5</sup> The word may also express action contrary to God's due; hence to transgress, to be

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'n-Nisá' (iv) 112.      <sup>2</sup> Súratu'l-Ahzáb (xxxiii) 58.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'n-Nisá' (iv) 111.      <sup>4</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 216.

<sup>5</sup> Súratu'n-Nisá' (iv) 51.

guilty of doing what He has forbidden, or of not doing exactly what He has commanded. 'Remember God the appointed number of days, but if any haste (to depart from the valley of Miná) in two days, it shall be no crime (*ithm*) in him: and if he tarry longer, it shall be no crime in him who feareth God.'<sup>1</sup> It is employed also to express the guilt of eating what is forbidden, 'Thou shalt see many of them hastening to iniquity (*al-ithm*) and malice, and to eat things forbidden.'<sup>2</sup>

It is to be noted, however, that the simple act of eating does not involve guilt; it is the intention which makes the act wrong. Thus we read, 'But whosoever without wilful leanings to wrong (*li ithmi*) shall be forced by hunger to transgress, to him, verily, will God be indulgent, merciful';<sup>3</sup> and again in another Súra we find the words, 'But he who shall partake of them by constraint, without lust or wilfulness, no (*ithm*) sin shall be upon him for God is gracious and merciful.'<sup>4</sup>

A further step is taken when the command is given, 'Leave both the outside of iniquity (*ithm*), and the inside thereof; for they who commit iniquity (*ithm*), shall receive the reward of that which they shall have gained.'<sup>5</sup>

Thus *ithm* comes finally to express any evil, or crime, or guilt, in general. Abel is represented as saying, 'I choose that thou shouldst bear my iniquity (*ithmi*), and thine own iniquity (*ithmaka*).'<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 199.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 67.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 168.

<sup>5</sup> Súratu'l-An'ám (vi) 120.

<sup>6</sup> Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 32.

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In connexion with the use of this word also there is a distinction made between greater and lesser crimes or evils. 'To those who avoid great crimes (*ka'bá'iru'l-ithm*) and heinous sins (*wa'l-fawáhish*) (and are guilty) only (of lighter faults) (*el-humam*); verily thy Lord will be diffuse in mercy.'<sup>1</sup>

### II

IN continuing our study of some of the terms employed in the Qur'án to express sin or wrong-doing, we next take up the word *i'tada*, to transgress. The translation 'to transgress' sufficiently explains the sense in which the word is used in the Qur'án. It conveys the idea of passing beyond a certain limit which has been set. In most instances, this limit is defined in some command, or ordinance of God, whereby bounds (*hudúd*) have been set to the actions of men. We see that the transgression may be against man: 'A sacred month for a sacred month, and the holy limits of Mecca, if they attack you therein, do you attack them in retaliation; and whosoever transgresseth against you (by so doing), do ye transgress against him in like manner as he hath transgressed against you.'<sup>2</sup> In the actual action described as transgression there may be no absolute or intrinsic sin or wrong-doing, for they are commanded to transgress in the circumstances described. With regard to the transgression against one's fellowmen, the idea is rather that of simple hostile action, which, as the verse quoted shows, may be unjust and, therefore, wrong, or justified as an act in retaliation and, therefore, right.

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'n-Najam (liii) 33.      <sup>2</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 190.

The word does not, therefore, necessarily convey the idea of moral right or wrong in the action itself; it expresses, rather, the doing of an action contrary to an agreement between man and man, or contrary to the proper relations between God and man, which are determined by a command of God. The question as to whether the command deals with morality or merely with ceremonial observance, does not come into consideration. It may have to do with the one or the other indifferently.

We next take up the term *junâh*, crime. This word conveys the idea of deviation from what is considered as right conduct. It may be used with regard to such a simple matter as eating in company with women, or separately, or it may refer to the due observance of decorum and modesty in other matters.<sup>1</sup> 'As to such women as are past child-bearing, and who hope not to marry (again), no blame (*junâh*) shall attach to them if they lay aside their (*outer*) garments, but so as not to show their ornaments. . . .'<sup>2</sup>

In other respects, the use of the word agrees very much with that of the word last considered (*i'tada*), to express any deviation from a right course of action which leads to transgressing the rights of others.<sup>3</sup> And as *i'tada* may be used in reference to man's relation to his fellowmen, or in reference to man's relations to God and His ordinances, so here may *junâh*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sûratu'n-Nûr (xxiv) 60.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 59; cf. xxxiii. 55; xxiv, 57; iv. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ii. 229 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. ii. 194, 153; iv. 102-3; xxxiii. 5, 51; ii. 282; iv. 28, 127; lx. 10.

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A slightly different use of the word is seen 'In those who believe and do good works, it is no sin (*junāh*) that they have tasted (wine or gaming before they were forbidden); if they fear God. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

We must now look at the word *ḥarrama* (to forbid), and its derivatives; but our consideration of these need only be general. On the original meaning of the word it is not necessary, for the purpose in hand, to lay much stress. It goes back to the time when *taboo* held sway over the ancestors of the Arabs. What is of more interest to us to note at present, is the fact that in the use of the words *ḥarrama*, *ḥarām*, etc., there has been a change from the standpoint when they were distinctly connected with *taboo*. The words may refer to something which is forbidden, because it is wrong, or to something which is forbidden, because it is holy; for at first there was no distinction made in the region of morals. All was simply *taboo*. Such and such meats, for instance, were *ḥarām* (forbidden) and such and such places were *ḥarām* (forbidden). The former, in course of time, have come to be regarded as forbidden because they were wrong, and the latter have come to be regarded as forbidden because they were sacred.

There is, therefore, little use in trying to find out what is meant in the Qur'án by these words, by looking at their root-meaning. We could by such an investigation come to see how such and such actions, or places came to be designated by these words, but that would not throw much light on the question of how the Prophet and his contemporaries looked at the things which are

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 94.



described by them, or what exactly they meant when they used them.

It is, perhaps, better to put out of our minds altogether the original connexion of these expressions, and say simply that the words are employed in two ways. We find the following, 'Verily I am commanded to worship the Lord of this territory (of Mecca), who hath sanctified the same.'<sup>1</sup> The territory thus sanctified, became sacred or holy.<sup>2</sup> And the months during which the pilgrimage is performed are sacred months.<sup>3</sup> Even those in the territory in the sacred months, for the purpose of performing the rites of the pilgrimage are *haram*. With this side of the use of *harrama* and its derivatives we have, however, at present little to do, except in so far as by contrast it may throw light on the other side.

On this other side, the word is used to denote the forbidding of certain actions, temporarily or absolutely. It is probable that the idea of temporary restriction was the one which first arose; for it is connected with the sacred territory and the sacred rites. Such and such actions are forbidden (*harrima*) in the sacred territory, or during the sacred months. 'O true believers, kill no game while ye are on pilgrimage.'<sup>4</sup> The action may be, at other times, and in other circumstances, lawful, but not at these times, and in these circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

The idea of restriction is then conveyed to other actions and the injunction is permanent. We see this from the following verse, 'Verily He hath forbidden you

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'n-Naml (xxvii) 93.      <sup>2</sup> Cf. xxviii. 57.      <sup>3</sup> Cf. ix. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 96; cf. 97.      <sup>5</sup> Cf. ix. 5.

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(to eat) that which dieth of itself and blood, and swine's flesh, and that on which any other name than God's hath been invoked.'<sup>1</sup>

The word is also used to describe the prohibition of marriages within certain limits of kinship.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond these uses of the word and its derivatives there is a large class of passages where the word has apparently been employed to express prohibition, without conveying the idea of any distinction between sacred and common or profane. It is used in this way; the children of Israel were prevented from entering the promised land for forty years, for God said, 'Verily the land shall be forbidden them forty years. . . .'<sup>3</sup> And the absence of any idea of distinction between sacred and profane is most clearly seen in the following, 'And we suffered him not (*ḥarramná 'alaihi*) (to take) the breasts of the nurses who were provided before his sister came up.'<sup>4</sup>

It is by following this general use of the word in the Qur'án, that Muḥammadans have come to use the word *ḥarám* of any sin, or anything which is contrary to justice, divine or human. Yet it would hardly be fair to say that the idea of the distinction between right and wrong is by them conceived as being simply the distinction between those things which God has allowed and those things which He has prohibited. The words *ḥarám* and *ḥilál* may in their root-ideas have had something of this meaning; but they have now, and as used in certain passages of the Qur'án, had already in the

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 168; cf. v. 4; vi. 145, 152; xvi. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. iv. 27; xxiv. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 29.

<sup>4</sup> Súratu'l-Qaşaş (xxviii) 11; cf. vii. 48; ii. 79; v. 76.

time of Muḥammad, come to distinguish, between actions right and wrong in themselves; and they must be interpreted in connexion with the aspects of moral actions which are seen in the employment of the other terms already discussed. They are not to be regarded as meaning 'forbidden', and 'permitted', in the sense of expressing the result of mere arbitrary commands. This is so even when they refer to permission of what was before forbidden, or prohibition of what was before permitted.<sup>1</sup>

It is unnecessary to discuss separately the word *ḥalla* (to permit), and its derivatives. Enough has been said on this point already.

The word *sharrun* (evil), may be passed by. It is used in the Qur'án almost wholly, not of moral or ethical but of physical evil, though Muḥammadan theologians now use it in a moral sense. In Súratu'l-Infál (viii) 22, 57 the word has, perhaps, a moral meaning.<sup>2</sup>

We come now to the last word which we shall consider, *aḡlama* (to act unjustly), and its derivatives. As used in the Qur'án, the various forms which are derived from the root *ḡalama* have, to a very large extent, almost a technical meaning. The original sense is seen in Súratu Yúsuf (xii) 79. '(Joseph) answered, God forbid that we should take but him with whom our property was found; for then should we act unjustly.' In Súratu'l-Qaṣaṣ (xxviii) 59, the word is probably also used in its plain original sense.

This meaning of the word clings to it in those passages in which the word *Zálim* (an unjust person, or oppressor) is used to describe one who, prompted by

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Súra iii. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Súras xxxviii. 62; xcvi. 5; xci. 8.

whatever motives, acts contrary to his own interests. Thus we read, 'And he went into his garden, being guilty of injustice to his own soul, and said, I do not think that this (garden) will ever perish . . . .'<sup>1</sup> Non-recognition of the vanity and fleetingness of this world and the things of this world is an act of injustice to oneself.

The word, however, has passed over to express, in a general way, a wrong-doer, or wicked person, as opposed to him who doeth well (*muhsin*). We find, 'And on him and on Isaac, we bestowed our blessing, And among their offspring, some were righteous doers (*muhsinin*), and others to their own hurt undoubted sinners';<sup>2</sup> and the same general use of the word may be seen in the passage ' . . . who say, O Lord, bring us forth from this city whose inhabitants are wicked.'<sup>3</sup>

This technical use of the word is specially seen in such passages as the following, 'And who is more unjust than he who treateth the signs of God, as lies and turneth aside from them.'<sup>4</sup>

The use of these different words in no way shows any intention of classifying wrong actions; for the same action may come under several or even all of these categories. If for instance, the action which is spoken of is a crime (*dhanb*), it is certainly an evil action (*sayyiát*), entailing evil consequences, and is sin (*khati-at*), or failure to come up to what is required.

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Kahf (xviii) 33.      <sup>2</sup> Súratu's-Sáffát (xxxvii) 113.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'n-Nisá' (iv) 77; cf. xxv. 29; iv. 67; ii. 86; iii. 123; xxix. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Súratu'l-An'ám (vi) 158; cf. vi. 21, 93, 145; vii. 35; x. 18; xi. 21; xviii. 14; ii. 108, 134, etc.

Each word employed, then, does not denote some special class or form of wrong-doing, and if we desire to form any general conception of the teaching of the Qur'án from a consideration of the various terms employed to describe wrong-doing, we must review what we have said and try to see whether there is any principle underlying the whole. In closing this section, therefore, we shall attempt to summarize in a general way what we have already seen.

We have seen that some of the terms are at times employed in such a way as to suggest that the actions which they describe are considered evil or wrong because of the evil consequences which they bring on the doer of them. Such actions are against the interests of the sinner himself, and entail on him loss and injury when he expected gain and advantage. This may be said to be the lowest view that we find in the Qur'án, yet it is a perfectly correct view in so far as it goes, and when we remember that it does not stand alone as a complete doctrine of sin, there can be no objection to its presence. Sin is the doing of what is contrary to one's own interests, or the not-doing of what is for one's best interests either in this world or in the world to come. The motive of the action and the morality of the action scarcely come into consideration at all, or, if they do, the judgment on the action depends not on the motive which led to it, but on the consequences which resulted from it. From this point of view sin is the outcome of foolish ignorance; but ignorance in such matters is culpable, and is in fact only another name for unbelief.

But again, there are passages in which actions are spoken of which are considered wrong or sinful, because





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they are contrary to the interests of one's fellowmen, or to the rights of the Deity. From this point of view the nature of the action comes clearly into consideration, and the principle of sin is seen to be selfishness. Sin is selfishness or self-assertion without regard to the rights of others who have also a claim on one's consideration.

In other passages actions are regarded as sinful, because they imply and arise from a mistaken view of man's relation to God. Man is God's creature and subject, and a failure to realize this relation makes it impossible for man to come up to the required standard of service and is therefore sinful. There may not be any want of disobedience or any conscious despite to the Sovereign Lord of all, but there is a failure to yield to Him what is His due. Sin, from this point of view, is a failure to take up a right attitude towards God. The evidences of the Creator's existence are so many, and the proofs of man's dependence on Him are so varied and numerous, that to fail to recognize the attitude which one should assume towards God is blameworthy and deserves condemnation.

Or again, sin may be something more positive than this simple failure on the part of man to realize his true relation to God. It may be the result of taking up a false or wrong attitude towards Him; and this may lead a man to actions which one in his position has no right to do; actions which are contrary to that system of law and order which God has determined for the guidance of men in the sphere both of morality and of ceremonial observance. From this point of view sin is opposition to God, whether it takes the form of refusing Him

obedience or of transgressing His direct commands. In either case the spirit which is manifested is that of self-confidence and self-assertion whereby he sets himself and his judgment in conscious opposition to God and His will.

Or finally, sin is the non-recognition of the ultimate nature of things—the putting of that which is false and perishing before that which is real and eternal.

Through all these views or aspects of sin there ever can be seen the thought, sometimes scarcely perceptible yet nevertheless present, at other times plain and clear, that all these actions have one and the same origin or fount. This one origin of sin is unbelief. In committing any or all of these various sinful actions, man is showing a spirit of unbelief in God, who, even apart from the revelation, or revelations which He has given of Himself and His will, has not left Himself without witness in the world of nature, and in man's conscience.

### III

WE must now pass on to consider the teaching of the Qur'án on sin, from another standpoint, one from which we can see the conception which Muḥammad had of sin, from the way in which he speaks of the actions of sinners—their motives and feelings when they sinned.

In the first passage we shall take up the story of the sin of Satan (Iblís). 'And when we said unto the angels, Bow down and worship Adam, then worshipped they all, save Iblís. He refused, and swelled with pride,

and became one of the unbelievers.'<sup>1</sup> It is worthwhile quoting also another account of the same story: 'When thy Lord said unto the angels, I am about to make man of clay; and when I have formed him and breathed my spirit into him, then worshipping fall down before him. And the angels prostrated themselves, all of them with one accord, save Iblís. He swelled with pride, and became an unbeliever. O Iblís, said God, what hindereth thee from prostrating thyself before him whom my hands have made? Art thou elated with vain pride? Or art thou one of exalted merit? He answered, I am more excellent than he; thou hast created me of fire, and thou hast created him of clay.'<sup>2</sup>

This passage is an important one in our investigation, for it gives us not merely the Qur'anic idea of the origin of sin, but throws light on what Muḥammad considered to be, so to speak, the essence of the sin of Iblís.

It should be noted that what the angels are commanded to recognize, is that Adam (man) is spiritually their superior, having been created partly by the in-breathing of God's Spirit into him. This acknowledgement of man's superiority is to be shown by their bowing or falling down before him. The word that is employed is *sajada*, to prostrate oneself, not *abada*, to worship.

These passages are sometimes regarded as showing that the Qur'án represents God as contradicting Himself in that He claims sole worship for Himself and yet commanded the angels to worship Adam. This mistaken interpretation of the passages is due entirely

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 32.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu Šád (xxxviii) 71-7; cf. vii. 10-12.

to the double meaning of the English word worship and, for the sake of clearness, it would be preferable to translate *sajada* by some such word as to reverence. It is readily admitted that this reverence (*sujūd*), may form a part of worship (*'ibāda*); but it is not in itself worship. Iblīs refused to show this reverence to Adam, because he considered himself as being superior to Adam, who was formed from clay, while he himself was created from a subtler element, fire. The root of the sin is described in the Qur'án as being pride, which led to the assertion of self in opposition to the direct command of God, and it is because it is not fitting that one, who sets himself up in proud, insolent opposition to God, should remain in paradise, that Iblīs is cast out and driven away. '(God) said, Get thee down hence; from Paradise; it is no place for thy pride: Get thee gone then; one of the despised shalt thou be.'<sup>1</sup>

This same thought that the root of sin is pride and insolent opposition to God is brought out with great frequency, and remarkable clearness, in many passages in the Qur'án which speak of the sinfulness of man. Thus we read of Haman, Pharaoh's general: 'And he and his hosts behaved themselves proudly and unjustly on the earth, and imagined that they should not be brought back to us . . . .'<sup>2</sup> We read again (of the people of *Thamúd*) 'Said the chiefs among his people, puffed up with pride, said unto those who were esteemed weak, even to those of them who believed, What! know ye not for certain that Saleh is sent by his Lord? They answered, We do surely believe that wherewith he hath

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-A-ráf (vii) 12.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu'l-Qaşaş (xxviii) 39.

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been sent. Then said those proud men, Verily we reject that in which ye believe.'<sup>1</sup>

Without in any way unduly over-emphasizing the teaching of the Qur'án on this point, it may be said that one of the main ideas underlying Muḥammad's conception of sin, and one of the foundation stones on which he built his doctrine of sin, was this idea that the root of sin lay in pride and insolent opposition to God. Yet, at the same time it is necessary to state that in saying this we do not assert that in his own mind Muḥammad had any very clear conception that this was so. Few of us trouble to examine our own beliefs, or the foundations of our own teachings so minutely as to have a very clear idea in our own minds of what lies assumed as their basis or foundation, though there must necessarily be a foundation on which we build, whether we realize what it is or not. This is specially so in the case of a poet, such as Muḥammad undoubtedly was by nature and temperament.

In all the passages referred to above, the idea is prominent that at the root of sin there lies opposition to the divine will; and that this opposition has as its basic principle an assertion of self in proud arrogance—a self-satisfaction with one's own powers of judgment as to the fitness of things, which leads to resistance to God's will and command. We may note, however, that this opposition is not spoken of or described as opposition to a holy will, employing the word holy in a moral sense. It is insolence to a proper authority or ruler; not self-will in opposition to a loving father.

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-A'ráf (vii) 73-4; cf. xxxix. 60; viii. 86; vii. 23; xxv. 23; xxxix. 58-60; xl. 37, 39, 62, etc.



It is the opposition and ingratitude of the rebellious subject, not the disobedience and unthankfulness of the erring child.

Further, it is the spirit of this selfish, arrogant, self-satisfied pride, which is the root of that sin for which there is no forgiveness. A soul filled with this spirit cannot be touched by the grace of God, and the Qur'an, therefore, represents the existence of this spirit as the reason why effectual grace cannot be bestowed on some of mankind. 'I will turn aside from my signs those who behave themselves proudly in the earth, without justice; for even if they see every sign, they will not believe them; and if they see the way of righteousness, they will not take it for *their* path; but if they see the path of error, for *their* path will they take it. This (shall come to pass) because they treated our signs as lies, and were heedless of them.'<sup>1</sup> A hard saying this, doubtless; yet it reminds us readily of the words '... but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.'<sup>2</sup> In both cases, to see the signs of the manifestation of God's Spirit, and to accuse them of falsehood, or to attribute them to evil powers, shows a condition of heart and mind which grace cannot touch. Nor, as we read the above passage from the Qur'an can we forget the words of St. Paul, '... and the rest were blinded (according as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear :) unto this day.'<sup>3</sup>

This opposition to God, according to the Qur'an, may

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-A'ráf (vii) 143-4.    <sup>2</sup> Matt. xii. 32.    <sup>3</sup> Rom. xi. 7-8.

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take the form of a denial of His existence ; or it may resolve itself into the worship of others along with the one true God ; or, again, it may manifest itself in practical opposition to God and His claims, while accepting and acknowledging the fact of His existence. This latter form or manifestation of opposition to God's will and revelation, shows itself in the assertion, avowedly by word, or virtually by deed alone, that man is not responsible to Him for his actions, that there is no resurrection, and that consequently there is no day of judgment. We deem it unnecessary to quote passages from the Qur'ân in support of the foregoing statement ; for the book is so full of this thought that any one who intelligently reads it, even casually, cannot but be struck by the important place which this truth holds in the teaching of Muḥammad.

The necessity for a belief in God, as sole Creator and Ruler of the universe, is by all recognized as the main point on which Muḥammad insisted ; and without this faith in Him, he argues it is impossible to please Him. And as this is the first and foremost requisite for religion, so the absence of it is the spring and fount of all sin. But along with this belief in God, there must be something more—submission to Him, that is, a general resolve on the part of the believer to direct his conduct, alike in matters of ceremonial as in matters of faith and morals, by God's will, in so far as it is known. And it is claimed that this is sufficiently, nay, fully known in the Qur'ân. These two—faith in God, and submission to Him—were enough to transfer one from the class of unbelievers to the class of believers, using the word in a general sense.

Yet this was not all that was considered as necessary to man's salvation in its full meaning. After this stage is reached, a man's salvation, or rather the degree of reward to which he shall attain hereafter, depends very largely on the extent to which he succeeds in overcoming the tendencies towards evil which weigh him down. Thus we read: 'But whosoever shall do good works, *being a true believer*, shall not fear any injustice; or any diminution of his reward from God.'<sup>1</sup> This point must be considered in detail in discussing the Qur'anic teaching on salvation.<sup>2</sup> We bring it up here merely to throw a side-light on the teaching of the book on sin. For from this it is evident that no act or word, which does not involve the denial of God's existence, or a final and absolute opposition to God's will, can exclude a man from the category of the believer. Hence sin is really, in essence, unbelief in God and determined opposition to His will.

Hence, too, springs the division of sins into great and little. This distinction, as we have seen, is clearly found in the Qur'án, and though it may not be clearly defined and developed so as to distinguish unmistakably which sins are great and which are little, the Muḥammadan theologians are undoubtedly following in the footsteps of the Prophet when they distinguish between great and little sins. Whether their classification is correct from the point of view of the Qur'án is another question which does not come up for consideration here. This much, however, may be said with confidence: determined unbelief is recognized in the Qur'án as a sin

<sup>1</sup> Súratu Ṭá Há (xx) 111.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Qur'anic Doctrine of Salvation* (C.L.S.).

which absolutely puts a man where he can have no hope of salvation; and further, the continued commission of little sins by one who professes to believe, which shows that there is no true desire to submit to the will of God, is also clearly a good reason for considering such a man as practically an unbeliever. For, continually to commit the smaller sins shows a want of true purpose and endeavour after righteousness.

The position of the true believer is thus regarded very much in the same way as that in which the Old Testament regarded the man whose heart was right with God. Such an one was not a man who never sinned, but one who, with honest purpose after doing the will of God, directed his life in accordance with his knowledge of that will. Whether he succeeded or whether at times he failed, sometimes even lamentably, did not come into consideration from this point of view.

He was one who believed in God, and who, with true and full purpose of heart, sought to please Him. This, as we say, is practically the position of the Qur'án. Not those who believe in God, but those who believe in God and do righteousness are the true believers. In opposition to these are the sinners, who believe not in God, and whose unbelief is the cause of all their failing to attain righteousness; that is, of all their sin.

Again, we shall change our standpoint, and shall now consider the manner in which Muḥammad spoke of sins that were transgressions of the ceremonial law. Many have come to the conclusion that practically no distinction is made in the Qur'án between ceremonial impurity and moral obliquity as grounds for condemnation; for the denunciation of the former is often seen



to be as strong as the condemnation of the latter. We desire to point out clearly, before proceeding further, that, in regard to this point, as in regard to all others treated of here, we are not studying the teachings of the Muḥammadan theologians, nor do we pay any attention to the traditions of what Muḥammad said, nor are we considering those forms of Muḥammadan belief and practice which are the common inheritance of all orthodox Muslims; but we are trying independently to gain some insight into the teachings of the Qur'ān as it stands before us with its record of what Muḥammad himself taught. Thus, though it may be true that according to orthodox Muḥammadan doctrine, moral failings and ceremonial shortcomings stand equally marked down as sin, we have nothing to say on this point here. We desire to see simply whether the same is true of their treatment in the Qur'ān, and if it be true, whether we can see any ground why Muḥammad regarded a breach of the ceremonial law as being equally heinous in the sight of God, as a transgression of the moral law.

We shall quote only the following passage which gives a fair idea of the teaching of the Qur'ān on sin in general. 'Man truly is by creation hasty; when evil befalleth him, impatient; but when good befalleth him, tenacious; not so the prayerful, who are ever constant at their prayers; and of whose substance there is a due and certain proportion for him who asketh, and for him who is ashamed to beg; and those who sincerely believe the day of judgment, and who dread the punishment of their Lord, for there is none secure from the punishment of their Lord—and who control their desires save with their wives, or the slaves whom their right hands possess,



for there they shall be blameless ; but whoever indulgeth their desires beyond this are transgressors ; and those who are true to their trusts, and their covenant ; and who witness uprightly and who strictly keep (the hours) of prayer, these (*shall dwell*) amidst gardens, highly honoured.'<sup>1</sup>

The observance of prayer is a duty along with the other duties mentioned. And this observance includes the ceremonial purification which must precede the actual act of devotion. With regard to the actual act of prayer, it is not the mere repetition of the words which is commanded. The inner devotion of the heart is essential. 'Carefully observe the (appointed) prayers, and the middle prayer, and be assiduous (therein) with devotion towards God.'<sup>2</sup>

Further, the words must be repeated decorously ; not too loudly, with ostentation ; nor in too low a voice, mumbling in careless indifference. 'Pronounce not thy prayer aloud, neither pronounce it with too low a voice, but follow a middle way between these.'<sup>3</sup>

As for the preparatory purification, it is the outward sign and symbol of the desire of the believer to approach God in reverence and purity. The outward purity is to be the sign of the inward purity which God bestows on the true suppliant that his prayer may be acceptable. The washing with water is not after all what is supposed to make the believer pure, for when water is not available pure sand may be employed and the cere-

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Ma'árij (lxx) 19-35 ; cf. vi. 91 ; xxiii. 1-9 (where Sale also translates 'and who observe their appointed times of prayer').

<sup>2</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 239.      <sup>3</sup> Súratu Buní Isrá'il (xvii) 110.



monial may be curtailed. It is God Himself who purifies the believer, yet the believer must come seeking this purity and by sign and symbol manifest his desire for it and acceptance of it. Thus we read: 'But if ye be sick or on a journey . . . and find no water, take fine clean sand, and rub your faces and your hands therewith; for God would not put a difficulty upon you, but He desireth to purify you, and to complete his favour upon you, that ye may give thanks.'<sup>1</sup> The real purity of heart with which the believer is to approach God is His gift.

The ceremonial and the moral law are two distinct things. That is certain; but to break what is regarded as a ceremonial duty may display an immoral intention on the part of the transgressor. It is not the action in itself which counts, so much as the intention of the doer.<sup>2</sup> To him who thinks it is sin it is sin. It shows a disrespect to God, and is an outrage on His dignity and holiness. We must look at the question not from our point of view, but from Muḥammad's. This is not to say that the ceremonial and the moral law are alike in value, but it is to say that by a breach of the ceremonial law a man according to his own views may be guilty of gross disrespect to God which is of the essence of sin. Hence the extreme penalty is denounced on those who transgress even the ceremonial law. The transgression of it—not ignorant transgression, but deliberate and conscious transgression—shows that same spirit of unbelief and insolent opposition to God, of which we have already spoken, and which we have seen to be, according to the Qur'án, the root of sin.

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Má'ida (v) 9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Súra v. 5.

## IV

AGAIN we must move on and look at the subject from another point of view; for much may also be learned as to Muḥammad's ideas on sin, from those passages which speak of the characteristics of those who shall find free and full entrance into the abode of the blessed, even those who are pleasing to God.

The expression 'the righteous' (*al-abrār*) is used in the Qur'án in a general sense, for the most part to designate those who have that standing with God which ensures participation in the joys of heaven. Thus we find it used in such passages as the following. 'Verily the righteous (shall dwell) among delights. . . .'<sup>1</sup> 'The just (shall) surely (be) in a (place) of delight; but the wicked (shall) surely (be) in hell.'<sup>2</sup> The righteous are those who possess righteousness or who have done righteousness, and this righteousness does not consist simply in outward observances. 'There is no piety in entering your houses at the back, but piety consists in the fear of God.'<sup>3</sup> 'There is no piety in turning your faces toward the east or the west, but he is pious who believeth in God, and the last day, and the angels, and the Scriptures, and the prophets; who giveth money for God's sake unto his kindred, and to orphans, and the needy, and the wayfarer, and those who ask, and for ransoming; who observeth prayer, and payeth the legal alms; and who is of those who perform their covenant when they have covenanted, and patient under ills and

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Muḥaffifín (lxxxiii) 22.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu'l-Infítár (lxxxii) 13

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 185.

hardships, and in times of trouble ; these are they who are just, and these are they who fear God.'<sup>1</sup>

The first fundamental is faith—belief in God—and all the attributes or qualities or characteristics of the righteous man spring from this. The righteous man is considered in the foregoing passage from three points of view. First, comes his relation to God; he must believe in Him and accept His revelation and all that is therein contained. Second, he shows his desire to please God by taking up a certain attitude towards his fellow-men. He must show generosity, kindness and helpfulness to them because of his desire to please God ('aláhubbihī). Third, he must direct his own life in accordance with the principles of religion, being regular in the performance of his religious duties, and he must show by his conduct and behaviour in all circumstances, in adversity as well as in prosperity, that he is submissive to the will of God. This attitude to God must also be shown by his thankfulness to God, of which duty the Qur'án has much to say.

Along with the outward or intellectual acceptance of the truth, there must be a moral attitude of the soul which is the fruit of a sincere inner conviction. 'Nearer were some of them on that day: nearer to unbelief than to faith; they spake with their lips what was not in their hearts; but God knew perfectly what they concealed.'<sup>2</sup> Even when the acceptance of the truth is sincere, and the desire to please God and to submit to Him is in the heart, much yet remains before a man can be considered

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Baqara (ii) 172; cf. xxiii. 1-10; xxvi. 181-4; lxxvi. 7-10; xcii. 17-21.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu 'Alí 'Imrán (iii) 161.

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a full grown believer. He has to learn the lessons of obedience and submission till they become ingrained in the heart, otherwise, till they are assimilated, and he has become changed in heart and disposition. 'The Arabs of the desert say, We believe. Say thou: Ye believe not; but rather say, We profess Islám; for the faith hath not yet entered into your hearts.'<sup>1</sup> And in the performance of the duties of the believer, the mere outward act of obedience is not sufficient to justify the judgment that the observance has been properly performed. There must be an inward piety which is represented by these outward acts, of which they are but the outward embodiment and expression. Those who perform the outward acts, but have not the inward disposition, cannot find acceptance in God's sight. 'Say: Make ye your offerings willingly or by constraint; it cannot be accepted from you, because ye are a wicked people. And nothing hindereth the acceptance of their offerings, but that they believe not in God, and His Apostle, and perform not the (duty of) prayer but with sluggishness; and make not offerings but with reluctance.'<sup>2</sup>

For even sacrifice offered to God is but a symbol of obedience, and is not acceptable unless offered with a believing penitent heart. 'And they who respect the rites of God (perform an action) which proceedeth from piety of heart.'<sup>3</sup> Of the camels offered in sacrifice to God, we read in verse thirty-seven of the same Súra, 'Their flesh is not accepted of God, with their blood; but your piety is accepted of Him.'

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'l-Ḥujurát (xlix) 14.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu't-Tauba (ix) 53-4.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'l-Hajj (xxii) 33.



Even in the performance of duties, such as almsgiving, it is the spirit of the giver, the self-sacrifice involved, which is what makes the deed of any value. 'Ye will never attain to righteousness, until ye give in alms of that which ye love. . . .'<sup>1</sup> In another passage the preaching of Shoaib is quoted with approval. This preaching was a demand for a practical religion which manifests itself in just dealing between man and man, and an upright walk and behaviour. 'Fill the measure, and be not of those who minish; weigh with an exact balance, and defraud not men in their substance, and do no wrong on the earth by deeds of license, and fear Him who made you, and the races of old.'<sup>2</sup>

Kindness, sympathy, and help to the needy and the helpless are demanded as evidences of a true faith in God, and a true desire to please Him; and these must be shown with no thought of worldly gain or advantage, but solely out of a desire to obtain His favour. 'They who fulfil their vows, and fear the day whose woes will spread far and wide, Who though longing for it themselves, bestowed their food on the poor, and the orphan and the captive, saying: We feed you for the sake of God, we seek from you neither recompense nor thanks; a stern and calamitous day we dread from the Lord.'<sup>3</sup> And again we read, 'But the God-fearing shall escape it—who giveth away his substance that he may become pure, and who offereth not favours to any one for the sake of recompense, but only as seeking the face of his Lord, the Most High: and surely in the end he shall be well content.'<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Súratu 'Alí 'Imrân (iii) 86.

<sup>2</sup> Súratu'sh-Shu'ará (xxvi) 181-4.

<sup>3</sup> Súratu'l-Insán (lxxvi) 7-10.

<sup>4</sup> Súratu'l-Lail (xcii) 17-21.

Similar acts may have different moral values in different cases because of the *intention* of the worshippers. And, in the performance of acts which are in themselves commendable, it is the condition of the heart of the believer which makes the act an act of true obedience and worship. All moral and ethical and humanitarian actions must spring from a true recognition of who God is, and what one's personal relation to Him ought to be; and they must be performed out of a desire to please Him, and so to comfort oneself before Him as to be worthy of His acceptance. They must be done, in other words, out of regard to Him, and from a desire to meet with His approval. And by contrast, we draw the conclusion that, according to Muḥammad's teaching, what is displeasing to God is the want of this desire to please Him, especially that attitude of heart which sets a man in opposition to Him.

Thus, from a consideration of the characteristics and qualities of the man who is pleasing to God, we come again to the same conclusion which we formerly reached; that, so far as any principle can be said to underlie the Qur'anic conception of sin, it is a spirit of rebellious self-sufficiency which either ignores God and His claims, and sets itself in opposition to Him in overweening pride and insolent self-satisfaction. Sin may thus be said to be a certain attitude of the heart, a rebellious act of will, which leads a man to resist his rightful Lord and Master; and all actions done by one who takes up this attitude, whether they be in outward conformity to the divine commands or not, are sinful. Obedience without that inner submission of the heart is not righteousness, but sinful hypocrisy.

We now pass on to consider what the Qur'án teaches as to the position or condition of man with regard to sin, and ask, does the Qur'án teach that man as man is sinful? I have shown<sup>1</sup> that the teaching of the Qur'án on the nature of man leads to the conclusion that in Muḥammad's eyes, mankind did not fall in Adam. Man's nature as inherited is not sinful; it is simply weak and readily gives way to evil. Mankind, by nature, is not in a state of sin, and there is nothing in his nature, even as he now inherits it, which necessarily shuts him out from God's favour. He has lost paradise, but he is not *estranged* from God. The Muḥammadan theologians have had recourse to tradition to explain why all men are sinners, not having found in the Qur'án itself anything which clearly teaches that men are by birth and nature sinful. Sin is not then a *state* into which man is born. He (the soul) is born pure and upright, but is weighed down with a body whose appetites and passions are a constant drag to his higher and purer aspirations. He is weak and easily falls into sin, but this weakness and liability to sin does not, in the Qur'anic teaching, involve any personal guilt. By proneness to sin we have already seen is meant simply the fact that sin is an evil ever-present, and a supremely powerful temptation. All men are sinners, not because they have been born under sin, but because, being born weak, they have all as individuals fallen and become guilty. Yet even thus, it hardly appears to be the fact that the Qur'án knows anything of a sinful *disposition*. Sin is an *attitude* of the heart and soul towards God, not a disposition of mankind. The rebellious thought is hardly

<sup>1</sup> In the *Doctrine of Man* (C.L.S. Islám Series).

a sin, but only a temptation to sin. There is no sinful bias in human nature which needs to be counteracted. There may be a sinful *habit*; but it is a habit of the individual, not of the race. Nay, it is an acquired habit and not an innate disposition.

In fact, the Qur'án, while it speaks, as we have seen, of the necessity of giving more than outward obedience, yet appears to convey the feeling that sin has to do with concrete acts, rather than with inclination and disposition. Perhaps the nearest approach to be found in the Qur'án to a more spiritual teaching on this subject, is the following passage from which Joseph says, 'Yet I hold not myself clear, for the heart is prone to evil, save those on whom my Lord hath mercy.'<sup>1</sup> It may be said that these words, which are quoted with evident approbation, show that sin is considered as more than 'outward act'; but even if this be so, it is still a long way to the position that sin is a *state* or *disposition* of the heart. What the verse refers to is the mental or ethical *act*, the willing desire to evil. The temptation has been overcome, but it was not resisted from the first with absolute purity of will and heart; but there is in this no teaching that sin is a *state*. Sin, as we have already said, is an attitude, not a disposition of the heart. Hence, when we look at the results and consequences of sin as described in the Qur'án, we find that these are solely punishment and loss, and ensue not so much because of what sin is as because of the absence of what sin shows to be wanting. It is not because of the heinousness of sin that its results are so far-reaching; but because where there is sin there cannot be obe-

<sup>1</sup> Súratu Yúsuf (xii) 53; cf. xxxiii, 53.

dience. And it is the absence of obedience rather than the active presence of sin which entails condemnation and judgment. We have already seen that the repentance of Adam takes the form of regret that he has done what has caused him the loss of so much, and the same idea is conveyed by the teaching of the Qur'án in many other passages. Repentance for sin is simply the resolve to do better in the future accompanied by regret for the loss which sin has brought on oneself. There is in it no thought of the estrangement which sin has caused between man and God.

There yet remains one other point which we desire to take up before we close this consideration of the teaching of the Qur'án on sin, and it is best referred to by the expression 'conviction of sin' or 'sense of sin'. We cannot help asking ourselves whether Muḥammad had any real conviction of sin, and whether he sought to arouse in others a sense of sin.

This is a most important question, and one which must certainly be discussed in any consideration of the teaching of the Qur'án; yet it should be realized that while it has an important bearing on the value of the teaching of the Qur'án on sin, it is a question apart from the actual *doctrine of sin*. A man may have a true and adequate *doctrine* of sin, and yet have no *sense* of sin, no heart conviction of sin. The two do not necessarily go together. And, on the contrary, a man may have an incomplete doctrine of sin, and yet have a great sense of sin. A conviction of sin is not dependent on holding any particular views as to the nature of sin; it is much rather connected with the opening of the heart and conscience to a realization of the holiness of God.



That any very deep conviction of sin was felt by Muḥammad does not appear from the pages of the Qur'án. He marvels at the wickedness of men and their foolishness in opposing God, and in setting Him at defiance by word and by deed; yet while he calls to humble repentance and true faith in God, he nowhere explains the need of a broken and a contrite heart. All through the Qur'án, the message is that while repentance must be sincere, it is a very easy matter, while forgiveness is a question scarcely worth troubling about, so simple is its attainment. Muḥammad nowhere displays anguish of heart and contrition in the sight of a pure and holy God, and therefore does not demand that others should experience that of which he himself had no knowledge. The nearest approach to a demand for contrition of heart is to be found in such a passage as: . . . 'Your God is one God; wherefore resign yourselves (wholly) unto Him. And bear thou good tidings to those who humble themselves; whose hearts, when mention is made of God, thrill with awe'.<sup>1</sup> . . .

Many of the early Muslims laboured under an overpowering sense of the terrors of hell, and in the *Ihyá'w'l-'Ulüm* (in the section on *shaddatu'l-khauf*) we see how many of them, at one time or another, expressed the longing that they had been created birds of the air, or beasts of the field, or even inanimate objects, so that they might not be accountable to God. Others, when the reality of the other world and all the sorrows that lay beyond the grave came home to them from time to time, fainted. The sense of the fleetingness and unreality of this world, and of the supreme reality of the

<sup>1</sup> *Súratu'l-Ḥajj* (xxii) 35-6; cf. xxi. 90.

other was ever present with some. As may be seen from the literal translation of the passage given in the Appendix, this was the experience of such believers as Abú Bakr, Abú Darr, 'Uthmán, 'Áyisha, and 'Umar, believers noted as leaders in Islám, and looked up to in later years as patterns of what the believers ought to be. Throughout the whole account of Ghazálí we look in vain for any mark which denotes that they had a real conviction of sin. What they felt seems rather to show simply that the new religion brought no real comfort to the heart and soul; for there was never any personal sense of assurance that they had been forgiven and would therefore escape the dread punishment of hell. A gloomy despair arising from an ever-present realization of the threatened torments denounced on the damned is not a conviction of sin.

In any case, with regard to the Qur'án and its teaching, all we can say is that we can see nothing in the book to justify us in believing that Muḥammad himself had any deep conviction of sin or demanded that believers should experience it. His teaching is rather that sin, though a great offence against God, is not something which puts a man where he needs *redemption*. God does not redeem man. He simply forgives him when he repents, for God is easy and merciful to men whenever they turn towards Him. Muḥammad's message to mankind on this matter was contained in words such as the following: 'Say, O My servants who have transgressed to your own hurt, despair not of God's mercy; for all sins doth God forgive. Gracious and merciful is He'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Súratu'z-Zumar (xxxix) 54; cf. xv. 55-6; xxix. 22; lx. 13.

## APPENDIX

THE following quotations from Ghazálí's *Ihyá'u'l-'Ulúm* (Cairo, Maimaniyya Press, A.H. 1322) will give an idea of this noted theologian's position on this point.

'And a certain Shaikh saw Bishr bin Haratha in his sleep, and said, "What have Abú Naşri't-Tammár and 'Abdu'l-Wahhábi'l-Warráq done?" And he said, "I left them this hour (just now) in the presence of God, eating and drinking." I said, "And you?" He replied, "God knew my small desire for food and drink, so He gave me the vision of Himself".'

'And (it is related) of 'Alí binu'l-Muwáffağ, that he said, "I saw in sleep as if I had entered Janna (Paradise), and I saw a man standing at a table and two angels at his right hand and his left, feeding him with (giving him mouthfuls of) all the good things, and he was eating; and I saw a man standing at the gate of Janna, examining the faces of the people, and letting in some, and turning away others". He said (He went on to say), "Then I passed the two of them to the sacred enclosure, and I saw in the tent of the throne (Sará-diqu'l-'Arsh), a man who had turned his sight to look at God (may He be exalted), and he never glanced aside;" and I said to Rađwán, "Who is this?" He replied, "Ma'ráfú'l-Karkhi 'Abdu'lláh (he is doing it); not from fear of His fire (hell fire), nor from love of His Janna, but for love of Him. And He has permitted him to have the vision of Him till the day of resurrection".' (iv, page 221.)

Ghazálí quotes (iv. page 222) the following anonymous verse, and comments on it thus:—

‘Absence from Him is greater than His Fire,  
And being with Him is better than His Janna.

And he did not mean by this anything more than to give precedence to the pleasures of the heart in the knowledge of God (may He be exalted) over the pleasures of eating and drinking and sexual intercourse; for Janna is a place of enjoyment of the senses (a place of sensuous enjoyment); but the pleasure of the heart is the meeting of God only.’

On page 221, Ghazálí argues that the pleasure of the knowledge of God (of which the vision of God hereafter is but the culmination) can be understood only by those who have experienced it, and whose natures and characters are such that they could find pleasure in such knowledge. ‘And so he who knows not God in this world, how shall he see God in the other world?’ (iv. page 223.)

‘And every one who has not known God in this world, shall not see Him in the world to come. And he who has not found the pleasure of the knowledge (of Him), in this world, shall not find the pleasure of the vision in the other. . . . But the best of Janna is that every one shall have in it that which he desires, and he who desires nothing but to meet God, shall not find pleasure in anything else.’ (iv. page 224.)

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