
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces the students to the Islamic world and provides adequate aid to understand Islam in a brief and comprehensive way while highlighting the influence and importance of this religion. It would enable them to understand the context in which Islam was originated, to assess the role of Prophet Muhammad, to comprehend the articles of faith and pillars of faith. and to know about the main Muslim festivals and ceremonies.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Islam is the second largest and most rapid growing religion in the world. It has over 1 billion followers worldwide which is 1/5 of the world population. Islam is the name of the religion and a Muslim is the one who follows this religion. Both the names 'Islam' and 'Muslim' come from the same Arabic root word 's-l-m' which means 'peace' and 'submission.' Islam is considered one of the Abrahamic, monotheistic faiths, along with Judaism and Christianity. It teaches that there is only one God who is the origin and creator of the universe. This is the foundation of Islam, and is reflected in the famous sentence which says that, "There is no god but Allah." Islam is universally known as the religion of peace. Islam teaches that one can find peace in one's life only by submitting to Almighty God (Allah) in heart, soul, and deed. Thus the same Arabic root word gives us the universal Muslim greeting 'Salaam alaykum,' which means 'Peace be with you.'

1.2 AN OVERVIEW OF ISLAMIC ORIGINS

About 610 A.D, the angel Gabriel appeared to a man named Muhammad in the city of Mecca in the present day Saudi Arabia. Gabriel told Muhammad that God had commissioned Muhammad as His last Prophet. The revelations Muhammad received until his death in 632 constitute the Qur'an, Islam's Holy Book. Muhammad's contemporaries in Mecca worshipped many gods and

rejected Muhammad's call to worship only one God. In 622, Muhammad and his small band of believers emigrated from the northern part of Mecca to the town of Yathrib, which the Muslims renamed Medina, where he established the first Muslim community. In 630, Muhammad led the army of the growing Muslim community against Mecca, which submitted peacefully. Two years later, by the time of his death, most of Arabia had accepted Islam and become part of the Islamic community. Muhammad was succeeded by a series of rulers called Caliphs under whom Islam burst forth as a new power on the world scene. Gradually, the original unity of Islam was lost. The Caliphate fell before the Mongol onslaught in 1258. Islam continued to spread in the different centuries, but new Muslim kingdoms rose and fell. By the end of the 17th century, the military power of Islam ebbed away and by the end of the 19th and into the first part of the 20th century, most Muslim countries came under the direct or indirect control of European nations. In the second half of the 20th century, Muslim nations gained their independence.

1.3 ISLAM IN THE WORLD

There is a wrong understanding that all Arabs are Muslims and all the Muslims are Arabs. The Arabs are only 20 percent of the world's Muslims. South Asia has 300 million and the Middle East has 200 million Muslims. The two largest Muslim countries in the Middle East are Turkey and Iran which are not Arab countries. All Arabs are not Muslims but over 90 percent of Arabs are Muslims. Muslims are concentrated in a continuous band of countries that extend across North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and then to Malaysia and Indonesia in Southeast Asia. The percentage of the Muslim population in these countries, except India, ranges from 80 to more than 99 percent. (According to the survey done in 2000)

1.4 THE ISLAMIC SECTS

Islam has two main sects or branches: the Sunnis and the Shi'ites. The term 'Sunni' refers to the traditions followed by Muhammad and early Muslims. Sunnis constitute from 84 to 90 percent of the world's Muslims. After the death of Muhammad, some Muslims believed that his cousin and son-in-law, Ali succeeded him. The term 'Shi'a' refers to the party of Ali, those who believed that religious and political leadership of the Muslim community should always remain in the line of Ali and his wife Fatima. Sufis are another large group of Muslims. Sufism is Islamic mysticism, rather than a sect, like the Sunnis or Shi'ites. So, a Sufi is normally also a Sunni Muslim.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space given below for your answer.

1) Islam is a religion of peace. Explain.

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2) How will you reconcile with the incorrect notion that all Arabs are Muslims and all the Muslims are Arabs?

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3) Briefly explain about the Sunnis and the Shi'ites.

1.5 PROPHET MUHAMMAD

Prophet Muhammad is considered to be the founder of the Islam religion. He is generally believed to have been born in Arabia on 22nd April 571 A.D. and died on 8th June 632. The meaning of the name Muhammad is 'Peace be on him.' He presented a balanced personality and a noble example of human greatness. At the age of 25 he married Khadija, a 40 year old rich widow of Macca. Though he had the possibilities to acquire wealth and to lead a successful and contented life he showed no importance to them. He set forth himself in search of truth and reality. In the 40th year of his life, one day, when he was sitting in the solitude of a cave, an angel of God appeared to him in human shape and said to him, "Announce in the name of thy Lord, that He hath created – created man from a clot – Announce! And thy Lord is most generous, Who hath afforded knowledge through the pen, Afforded man the knowledge of what he knew not..." God gave him guidance and chose him as His messenger. The revelation of the Lord had been descending upon him for twenty-three long years. These revelations are later compiled as *al-Qur'an* (*Qur'an*), the Holy Scripture of Islam.

Even though Muhammad was specially chosen by God as his Prophet, he was a man just like any other men. Things of joy pleased him and the sad things made him sad. In fact, his humanness never exceeded the limits fixed by God. Later, standing in the shoes of the Prophet, Muhammad became the ruler of Arabia. He was venerated by his people as no other man was ever venerated. The fear of God never left him and he was always a model of humility and meekness. As he started to convey the command of God to His people, he faced strong oppositions from them. But till the end of his life he sternly stood for justice and rectitude. He died due an illness aggravated by poison.

1.6 THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an, the holy text of Islam literally means 'recitation.' Muslims believe that the Qur'an was 'verbally revealed' to Prophet Muhammad, not merely in its meaning and ideas. The original text of the Qur'an is in the Arabic language. The entire text is divided into 114 Suras (chapters) unequal in length. The early Macan Suras are the shortest ones and as time went on, they became longer. The early Suras are seen as voice crying from the very depths of life and impinging forcefully on the prophet's mind in order to make itself explicit at the level of consciousness. This tone gradually gives way to a more fluent and easy style as the legal content increases, for the detailed organization and direction of the nascent community state. It is a debatable issue whether the words of the Qur'an are entirely the words of God or the words of Muhammad. The Muslim authority and believers consider it as purely divine. Prophet Muhammad was only an instrument for God to reveal His message. Though the entire personality of Muhammad is involved in revelation, it would be proper to say that the Divine Word flowed through the Prophet's heart. The Qur'an is primarily a book of religious and moral principles and exhortations, and not a legal document. But it does embody some important legal enunciations issued during the community-state building process at Madina. The ban on consumption of

alcohol affords an interesting example of the Qur'anic method of legislation and throws light on the attitude of the Qur'an to the nature and function of legislation itself.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space given below for your answer.

1) Who is Prophet Muhammad? Explain.

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2) What did the angel of God say to Muhammad when he was sitting in the solitude of the cave?

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3) The words of the Qur'an are words of God or words of man. How will you explain this?

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1.7 THE ARTICLES OF FAITH IN ISLAM

The articles of faith are the sum and substance of the Islamic doctrine. The articles of faith are six in number. They are:

Belief in God (*Allah*)

Belief in God (*Allah*) is expressed in the first part of the *shahada* (profession of faith): *la ilah illa Allah* which means, "there is no god except God" (*Allah*). *Allah* is the proper name given to God. It seems, however, that the word and the belief in the existence of *Allah* existed already in pre-Islamic Arabia. Muhammad's father bore the name 'Abd Allah' which means 'God's slave.' The prophetic mission of Muhammad was not primarily to proclaim the existence of God but to show His uniqueness and to deny the existence of other minor deities (6:100-102; 6:51/53; 6:57/59). The uniqueness of God can be seen in his proper name *Allah*. No plural can be formed from the name *Allah*. Therefore, the title *Allah* has been called *ism ad-dhat*, 'the name of the nature.' All other titles, including the often-used word *rabb*, 'Lord', are merely attributes. There are 99 attributes commonly used. The most important of the 'beautiful names' in the Qur'an and in Islam are the two titles *ar-rahman ar-rahim*, often translated as 'The Compassionate, The Merciful'.

Belief in Angels (*Mala'ika*)

The word *mala'ika* is the broken plural of a semitic word *mal'ak* which means 'Messenger.' The Qur'an mentions the activity of angels very often, but says nothing about their origin and nature. The Qur'an speaks about the different duties of angels, such as, to praise *Allah* and to carry his

throne (69:39/75), to be His messenger (22:74/75; 35:1), to guard the Holy Qur'an in heaven (80:15/16), to be the guardians of man (13:11/12), to help the believers (3:125/121), to write man's deeds (82:10-12), to receive sinners and punish them (8:50/52), to guard hell (66:6; 74:31), to pray for the prophets and believers (33:56;33:42/43), and to ask forgiveness for man (4:97/99; 16:28/30). Among the many angels four are archangels. They are *Jibra'il* or *Jibril* (The angel of revelation), *Mika'il* or *Mikal* (The angel who gives sustenance), *Israfil* (The angel who will sound the trumpet on the last day) and *Izra'il* or *Azra'il* (The angel of death). According to Islamic tradition they believe that men are protected by guardian angels: ten by day, ten by night: thus there are 400 of them to guide man from birth till death.

Belief in Prophets (*Rusul*)

For Muslims the prophethood and the veneration of prophets is the heart and foundation of their religion. Through prophets God has mercifully designed to interfere in human history to guide man in all the activities towards the final election. Prophets are not always present in the world; they come from time to time. The period in between the presence of prophets is called *fatra* which means darkness. The Arabic words used to express the prophetic office are *nabi*, *rasul*, and *mursal*. In Persian the three words are invariably translated by the word *paighamar* which means 'messenger.' According to Islamic tradition there were 1,24,000 prophets and 315 apostles but the names of only 25 are mentioned in the Qur'an (6:84; 86). Nine of these messengers are given the title of *ulu l-'azam* or 'Possessors of Constancy.' They are Noah, Abraham, David, Jacob, Joseph, Job, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. Chronologically Muhammad is the last prophet but qualitatively he is the greatest, because Muslims believe that his message is the culmination of all previous messages.

Belief in Scriptures (*Kutub*)

The word *kitab*, 'Scriptures,' plays a vital role in the Muslim religion from its very beginning. Tradition says that the number of sacred scriptures delivered to man was one hundred and four. Among them ten were given to Adam, fifty to Seth, thirty to Enoch, ten to Abraham, the *Tawrat* (Torah) to Moses, the *Zabur* (Psalms) to David and *Injil* (Gospel) to Jesus. According to Islam, the Qur'an is the final scripture. In fact, nowadays it is usually interpreted that previous scriptures are null and void. This is generally known as theory of abrogation. Different reasons are given to it by different people. Some believe in *tarfi*, 'removal', i.e. the scriptures were taken up again into heaven. Others say that *tahrif*, 'corruption' took place, i.e., the previous texts were tampered with. Again others speak of *tansikh*, 'abrogating,' i.e. the previous scriptures have been superseded and replaced by the Qur'an. Finally, apart from all these, it is asserted that the Qur'an is the epitome of all truths and morals that are taught in the previous books and is the last improvement upon them. Thus the need for any other book is logically eliminated.

Resurrection and the Last day (*Qiyama*)

The day of judgement is one of the principal themes of the Qur'an and it is closely connected with the Resurrection (*Qiyama*) or the Assembly (*al-Ba'th*). On the last day the assembly will take place for the whole of Adam's offspring. The good and evil deeds will be read out. The good deeds will have a bright appearance and the evil deeds will have a gloomy appearance. When the foregoing tests are concluded, a very narrow bridge (*sirat*) has to be crossed. Everybody, both believers and unbelievers, just and unjust, must pass over this bridge (36:66; 37:23-24). Some Muslims will be saved immediately; some will fall headlong into hell and

afterwards be released depending on their deeds. The infidels will all fall into hell and remain there forever. Muslims believe in three places in the afterlife. They are Limbo (*a'raf*), Hell (*asman*) and Heaven (*al-janna*). Limbo is the veil between heaven and hell. Etymologically *a'raf* means elevated place. Hell is considered as a place where one has to undergo weeping and wailing for the sins committed. Heaven is almost understood as a garden, a paradise where one gets all the enjoyments.

Belief in the Divine Decree (*al-Qadar*)

This article of faith is a post-Qur'anic addition. The Muslims believe that Allah is the Supreme Judge who can exercise any influence on the performance of an action. Although Allah gives just retribution for human actions, nothing can make any restrictions upon the pre-temporal plans of his decrees. It brings a contradiction: how man is responsible for his action and how man can use his freedom; but the Islamic scholars argue that in actual fact, it is not a question of contradiction but of deliberate contrast. The question is approached from different angles. At one time man's responsibility is stressed and at another Allah's divine omnipotence. The texts are complementary rather than contradictory. They aim at the inculcation of man's responsibility and Allah's sovereignty into the believer's minds.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space given below for your answer.

1) List the articles of faith in Islam?

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2) According to the Qur'an, what are some of the main duties of the angels?

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3) Muslims believe in three places in the afterlife. Briefly explain them.

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8. THE PILLARS OF FAITH IN ISLAM

Like any other religion Islam demands of its believer faith (*iman*). The practices prescribed are often called *arkan ud-din* or 'The Pillars of Faith'. The five 'Pillars of Faith' are as follows.

Profession of Faith (*Tashahhud*)

The word *shahada* means 'testimony,' the statement of an eyewitness. In the religious sense it denotes the Muslim profession of faith. The act itself is called *tashahhud*, 'giving one's testimony.' The person who performs the act is called *shahid* which now means both 'witness'

and 'martyr.' The normal formula of confession is the *Kalmia*, 'Word' and consists of two sentences: "*la ilaha illa llah: Muhammadur rasulu llah*" which means "there is no God but Allah: Muhammad is Allah's messenger." The *kalmia* is pronounced on occasions such as birth, death, and at the time of ritual prayer. Besides, it is constantly on the lips of Muslims as a kind of ejaculatory prayer. To the Muslims, the mere recitation is an act of piety. Orthodox theologians give six conditions as to the manner of recitation of the *kalmia*. They are: (1) It must be repeated aloud; (2) It must be perfectly understood; (3) It must be believed in the heart; (4) It must be professed till death; (5) It must be recited correctly and (6) It must be professed and declared without hesitation.

Prayer (Salat)

The word *salat* is the technical term for ritual prayer. The word *salat* is probably derived from the Aramaic *selota* which means 'to bow, to bend.' Muslim scholars say that *salat* is derived from *sala* which mean 'to burn.' Hence *salat* represents the practice of prayer. All the Muslims, adult, sane and healthy, are obliged to pray five times in a day. The place recommended for prayer is the mosque but it can be said anywhere, provided the place is clean and fitting to separate oneself from the world. The position must be the *gibla* which is the direction of Mecca. Besides this, the person must observe legal purity. For all purifications water is used, judged by its colour and smell. Women say their prayers at home normally but some mosques have special enclosures for them. On Fridays the midday prayer is said with special solemnity. The leader of the prayer is known as *Imam*. There are other special prayers performed on certain occasions (e.g. Ramadan) and for special purposes (for guidance, success, rain, etc.). Another prayer which is recommended is the night vigil conducted during Ramadan and during the nights before the great feasts.

Fasting (Sawm)

The word *sawm* and *siyam* are derived from the root s-w-m. Originally the word meant 'to be at rest' but now it is simply used for 'fasting.' For a Muslim, fasting means abstaining from food, drink, and sexual intercourse. The Qur'an speaks precisely about fasting (2:83-187/179-183) but there are also many *hadiths* (traditions) about it. Fasting is obligatory for all Muslims who are adult with sound mind and body. Exceptions are given to those who are sick, travelling, and for the women who have menstruation and who are pregnant or have suckling children. But they have to make up for the number of missed fasts at another time. Fasting must be preceded by expressing the intention. For Muslims, Ramadan is a special month of fasting (2:183-187/179-183) as a preparation for 'The Night of Power.' The results of fasting are manifold. It brings blessings to the individual and to the community. Fasting strengthens the idea of God's sovereignty and man's dependence upon Him. It stimulates sympathy and solidarity with the poor, with the feeling of hunger. All the more, a feeling of unity and solidarity is fostered among the members of the community.

The Religious Tax (Zakat)

The word *zakat* has no satisfactory Arabic etymology. It is probably derived from the Aramaic *zakut* which refers to the 'purification at the increase of one's possessions.' In the religious sense *zakat* is that part of a Muslim's earnings which is payable as tax in the name of God, and is to be given to certain persons according to the rules of the Shari'a. It is prescribed by the Qur'an as a form of piety for all believers (9:5; 9:11). It is a tax on savings and not on income as it is in

other systems. The taxable properties are mainly animals (camels, cattle, sheep, and goats), grains and fruits (wheat, barley, dates, and dry grapes), metals (gold and silver), and merchandise. The beneficiaries of the tax are the poor who own less than the prescribed minimum for giving *zakat*, the destitute, people who collect the *zakat*, Muslims who are in debt, travellers whose resources are exhausted, those who are serving for the cause of Islam, slaves, and those who perform the acts of benevolence.

Pilgrimage (*Hajj*)

It is an obligation for every Muslim to undertake the pilgrimage once in his lifetime; but there are conditions. A woman may perform the pilgrimage only with her husband's permission, accompanied by her husband or a companion. A Muslim may also delegate another believer for the performance of the pilgrimage. If a believer dies without having gone on the pilgrimage, it must be undertaken by a substitute. The pilgrimage consists of travelling to Mecca, Medina, Mina, the Plain of Arafat, and Muzdalifah. The total travel time is generally five days. Newcomers to Mecca stop at Miquat to wash, pray, and put on an *Ihram*, which is two pieces of white cloth that are draped around the body. The pilgrimage is important both for the individual Muslim and for the whole Muslim community. For the majority of Muslims it is a wonderful experience to visit the sanctuary at Mecca, to sense the union of thousands of believers from different races and culture. The pilgrim receives a new dignity and status in the community. For Islam as a community and world religion, the pilgrimage is a source of unity and solidarity.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: Use the space given below for your answer.

1) What are the six conditions that must be fulfilled before recitation of the *kalmia*?

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2) What are the benefits of fasting (*Sawm*) according to Islam?

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3) Who are the people exempted from the religious tax (*Zakat*)?

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1.9 MUSLIM FESTIVALS

As for any other religion, Islam too has many festivals with deeper meanings and messages. In fixing the dates of these feasts they follow the Muslim Calendar Year, which begins with Hijra, 15th or 16th of July. Since the Muslim calendar follows the lunar year, the month and consequently the festival dates keep changing. Islam has two major religious festivals. They are *Id-al-Fitr*, and *Id al-Adha*. *Id al-Fitr*, more commonly called *Id*, is celebrated at the end of the

month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. *Id al-Adha* is celebrated at the end of the Hajj, the religious pilgrimage. Some of the other Islamic festivals are *Lailatul Qadr* (The Night of Power), *Milad-an-Nabi* (Birthday of the Prophet), *Lailatul Bara'at* (Night of Deliverance), *Lailatul Mi'raj* (The Night of the Ascent), and *Muharram* (New Year's Day).

1.10 THE CEREMONIES

Islam is characterized by a number of ceremonies and practices which are common to the whole world of Islam. The main ceremonies are connected with birth and infancy, marriage, and death. The first duty to be performed on the birth of a child is to say the *adhan* or call to prayer in the infant's right ear. This is to make the child at once familiar with the Muslim profession of faith and to preserve him/her from the influence of the evil spirits. It is a recommendable custom for Muslims to give the child a name on the seventh day, but this may be done earlier or later too. A very common practice among the Muslims is circumcision. Many consider it as the initiation ceremony to Islam. Though marriage (*Nikah*) is not a religious ceremony, and only a civil contract, it is a great event. Marriage is prescribed for every Muslim, and celibacy is almost universally condemned. *Nikah* is preceded and followed by feasts and celebrations which vary from place to place. The washing of the corpse is the first ceremony after the death of a person. The ritual prayers are said for the dead person and the body placed in front of the rows of praying people. The funeral service begins with prayers which are said in the mosque or in an open space near the house of the deceased. The male relatives and friends walk behind the bier. Carrying the bier is considered a very meritorious act. On the third day after the burial it is usual for the relatives to visit the grave and to recite certain passages from the Qur'an. On the seventh and fortieth day a meal is served to relatives and friends.

Check Your Progress V

Note: Use the space given below for your answer.

1) What are the two major religious festivals of the Muslims?

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2) Islam is characterized by a number of ceremonies. What are they connected with?

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11. LET US SUM UP

Let us conclude this section with the point that 'Islam is a religion of peace.' Islam seeks to promote peace at two levels: peace with oneself and peace with others. The former is achieved by creating harmony and balance between the emotions and the spiritual self of the person. In other words it is a balance between one's emotions and conscience. The latter is achieved by training and urging the followers to fulfill the rights to each other. It should be specially noted in this context that in Islam, salvation is not possible by just fulfilling the obligations to God; one has to also fulfill the obligations to other human beings. All the doctrines, teachings, practices, and customs are meant to lead the followers to one single aim, which is peace. For a Muslim, the

invitation to spread peace is not restricted to his or her own religion but goes beyond the walls of religion and class, which in turn would give a universal garment to this religion.

1.12 KEY WORDS

Allah : The proper name given to God in Islam

Hadiths: The Islamic traditions

Hajj : Pilgrimage

Kalmia : It literally means ‘Word.’ It is the normal formula of confession of Islam. It consists of two sentences: “*la ilaha illa llah: Muhammadur rasulu llah*”

Kutub : Scripture

Mala’ika : Angel

Nikah : Marriage

Ramadan: It is the ninth month of the Islamic year. It is the holy month of fasting commanded by the Qur’an for all adult Muslims.

Rusul : Prophet

Salat : Prayer

Sawm : Fasting

Shahada : Testimony

Suras : The chapters of Qur’an

Zakat : The Religious Tax

1.13 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 PHILOSOPHY OF ISLAM

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this paper is to make the students acquainted with the background, origin, content, and development of Islamic Philosophy. In this endeavor it will also bring out the relevant philosophical debates and its significance today by analyzing the Islamic Philosophy of God, Man and World.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Islamic Philosophy represents the style of philosophy produced within the framework of Islamic culture. The main sources of classical or early Islamic philosophy are the religion of Islam itself, especially ideas derived and interpreted from the Quran. Many of the early philosophical debates centered on reconciling religion and reason, the latter exemplified by Greek philosophy. One aspect which stands out in Islamic philosophy is that the philosophy in Islam travels wide but comes back to conform it to the Quran and *Sunna* (Islamic oral tradition).

The first of the Islamic philosophers, Abu Ya'qub al-Kindi wrote in his *On First Philosophy*, "Philosophy is the knowledge of the reality of things within people's possibility, because the philosopher's end in theoretical knowledge is to gain truth and in practical knowledge to behave in accordance with truth" (S.Strouma:1963:424). Al-Farabi, while accepting this definition, added the distinction between philosophies based on certainty (*al-yaqiniyyah*), hence demonstration and philosophy based on opinion (*al-maznunah*) (M. Mahdi 1969:153-7), and hence dialectic and sophistry, and insisted that philosophy was the mother of the sciences and dealt with everything that exists. Ibn Sina again accepted the earlier definition while making certain precisions of his own. In his *Uyun al-hikmah*, he says "*Al-hikmah* (which he uses as being the same as philosophy) is the perfection of the human soul through conceptualization of things and judgment of theoretical and practical realities to the measure of human ability" (Ed. Abdurrahman Badawi, 1954:16).

The philosophical activity in the Islamic world is not simply a regurgitation of Greco-Alexandrian philosophy which grew despite the presence of the Qur'an and Hadith. On the contrary, Islamic philosophy is what it is precisely because it flowered in a universe whose contours are determined by the Qur'anic revelation. We must note that Islamic philosophy is essentially a 'prophetic philosophy' based on the hermeneutics of a sacred text, which is the result of a revelation that is inalienably linked to the microcosmic intellect, and which alone is able to actualize the dormant possibilities of the intellect within us. Islamic Philosophy deals

with the One or Pure Being, with universal existence, and with all the grades of the universal hierarchy. It deals with man and his entelechy, and with the cosmos and the final return of all things to God. This interpretation of existence is none other than penetration into the inner meaning of the Qur'an which 'is' existence itself, the Book whose mediation provides the key for the understanding of those objective and subjective orders of existence, with which the Islamic philosopher has been concerned over the ages.

In early Islamic thought, which refers to philosophy during the 'Islamic Golden Age' traditionally dated between the 8th and 12th centuries, two main currents may be distinguished. The first is *Kalam* that mainly dealt with Islamic theological questions, and the other is *Falsafa*, that was founded on interpretations of Aristotelianism and Neo-Platonism. Attempts were made by philosopher-theologians at harmonizing both trends, notably by Ibn Sina (Avicenna) who founded the school of Avicennism, Ibn Rushd (Averroes) who founded the school of Averroism, and others such as Ibn al-Haytham and Abu Rayhan al-Biruni.

The Islamic world outlook revolves around three elements. They are:

- 1) God is Transcendental and One
- 2) Man is created by God and has a transcendental nature. He is made the centre of the Universe.
- 3) The world has been created for a purpose and is blessed with meaning. The human being is seen as the viceroy (*touglifa*) of God in nature.

Following the above essence of Islamic Philosophy, our discussion is divided into three aspects: Islamic Philosophy of God, Islamic Philosophy of Human Person, and Islamic Philosophy of World.

2.3 ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY OF GOD

According to Islam, God, known in Arabic as Allah, is the all-powerful and all-knowing creator, sustainer, and judge of the universe. Islam lays heavy emphasis on the conceptualization of God as strictly singular (*tawhid*). God is unique (*wahid*) and inherently one (*ahad*), all-merciful, and omnipotent. According to tradition there are 99 names of God (*al-asma al-husna*). All these names refer to Allah the supreme and all-comprehensive divine name. Among the 99 names of God, the most famous and most frequent of these names are 'the Compassionate' (*al-rahman*) and the 'Merciful' (*al-rahim*). According to Islamic teachings, God exists without a place. According to the Qur'an, "No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision. God is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things" (Q. 6:103). God in Islam is not only majestic and sovereign, but also a personal God: according to the Qur'an, God is nearer to a person than his jugular vein (Q. 50:16). God responds to those in need or distress whenever they call. Above all, God guides humanity to the right way, "the holy way".

Tawhid (Oneness of God)

Oneness of God or *tawhid* is the act of believing and affirming that God is one and unique (*wahid*). The Qur'an asserts the existence of a single and absolute truth that transcends the world; a unique and indivisible being who is independent of the entire creation. According to the Qur'an: *Say, He is God, the One and Only; God, the Eternal, Absolute: He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him (112:1-4). Thy lord is self-sufficient, full of Mercy:*

if it were God's will, God could destroy you, and in your place appoint whom God will as your successors, even as God raised you up from the posterity of other people" (6:133). According to Vincent J. Cornell, the Qur'an also provides a monist image of God by describing the reality as a unified whole, with God being a single concept that would describe or ascribe all existing things: "God is the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward; God is the knower of everything (Q. 57:3)" Some Muslims have however vigorously criticized interpretations that would lead to a monist view of God for what they see as blurring the distinction between the creator and the creature, and its incompatibility with the radical monotheism of Islam. The indivisibility of God implies the indivisibility of God's sovereignty which in turn leads to the conception of the universe as a just and coherent moral universe rather than an existential and moral chaos. Similarly, the Qur'an rejects the binary modes of thinking, such as the idea of the duality of God, by arguing that both good and evil generate from God's creative act and that the evil forces have no power to create anything. God in Islam is a universal God rather than a local, tribal, or parochial one; an absolute who integrates all affirmative values and brooks no evil. Muslims believe that the entirety of the Islamic teaching rests on the principle of *Tawhid*.

Essence and Existence in Islamic Philosophy

Ibn Sina, one of the prominent philosophers of Islam, stated that God is the only existing being which is necessary in itself, and everything else in existence has been brought into existence only by God. Everything that can exist is logically possible as an existent, but it needs something to move it from potentiality to actuality, and this ultimately is God. God puts in train a sequence of change which eventually results in everything which really could exist. This might seem to be wrong, since surely there are things that could exist, but never will, since they will never be moved into existence, as it were. This is certainly the case for Ibn Sina; there are possible things that remain possible forever, since they are never going to be brought into existence. To exist, a thing needs something to bring it into existence. There is an interesting similarity between this theory and that of his chief opponent, al-Ghazali, who also argues that for something to exist, something must move it into existence, and that something is also ultimately God. Both Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali make a firm distinction between existence and essence. For the former, only God has an essence that makes it inevitable that he will exist; everything else in existence has been brought into existence by something else. For al-Ghazali, there can also never have been a time when God did not exist, and everything that does exist is both brought into existence and kept in existence through the power of God. If God decide not to maintain the force for existence as it were, then the things that previously existed would go out of existence, in just the same way that if someone does not keep up the payments on a house mortgage, the house will be repossessed.

Ibn Rushd criticizes both these views. He argues that the distinction between existence and essence made by Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali suggests that something has to come from outside a thing, as it were, to bring that thing into existence. For example, when a piece of cotton wool is burnt in a flame and we get ash, something produces that ash, which ultimately is different from the cotton wool and the flame themselves. According to al-Ghazali, what creates the ash is really God, and anything could lead to ash were God to command it. But Ibn Rushd counters this with the argument that what is meant by ash is something which is produced in a certain way, so that its existence is very much part of its essence. What happens to the ash has to happen to the ash, since it is ash, and there is nothing outside it that could lead to a different state of affairs. One

cannot, except in a logical sense, distinguish between what things are and whether they exist, since whether they exist is a part of what they are.

Ibn Rushd would claim that God is responsible for the organization of the world in the first place, but that does not mean that he could have created any sort of world at all. He obviously created a world that is rational and well structured, a world that provides us with guidance as to how to live and what to believe. Could he have created another sort of world, one in which there is neither order nor a user-friendly structure? If God is really what we mean by God, he is obliged to produce a world which embodies intelligence and general benevolence; he cannot do anything else. The view of God's links with the world that Ibn Rushd has, is even more restricted than that of Ibn Sina. For the latter, God is the ultimate cause of everything which exists; but it is not clear whether, once a thing has passed the test of possibility, God can prevent it from coming into existence. God is rather in the position of a constitutional monarch, who is required to sign the legislation passed by parliament, which makes the legislation 'royal', and thus legal. But all that the Crown does in this sort of situation is to rubber-stamp, as it were, a decision which has already been taken elsewhere.

All the philosophers accept that God is a perfect agent, in that there is nothing to prevent him acting when he wishes to act, and no deficiencies of knowledge or motivation either. A divine action is perfect, in that it is carried out entirely rationally, with no desire for personal gain and in total understanding of the situation to which the action is applied. It follows that the notion of the agency that constitutes the perfect concept is in fact rather thin, since it is distant from what we would call an agency. For example, we might do something just to prove that we can do it, and since we act in a context of incomplete information, our actions are often misplaced and inefficient in attaining their ends. This is very different from God's actions, which are in complete accordance with a perfect view of the situation, and which are not restricted by problems of finitude and materiality.

Check your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for answer

1. What is the Philosophy of God in Islam?

2. What is the Philosophy of God and creation?

3. Bring out the philosophical debate between Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd in relation to essence and existence.

2.4. PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN PERSON IN ISLAM

Human Person from the Qur'anic Perspective

The story of Adam as portrayed in the Qur'an shows that in the course of his material development and physiological changes, man reached a stage where he obtained a new birth with the infusion of the Divine spirit. Then in the course of his normal development, he suddenly experienced a divine change as the result of which he was transformed into such a super being that even the angels were asked to pay obeisance and the world forces were made subservient to him. The forbidden Tree of Paradise as stated in the Bible is not that knowledge which should not be approached, but it is a tree of lust which should be controlled. It is a means by which man tests his will-power of self-control. Even man's disobedience is a symbol of the freedom granted to him by Allah. To have access to 'knowledge' is not forbidden to him; in fact, it is a gift with which he has been especially blessed. Allah taught him that which none else knew. Knowledge is one of the factors by which man gained superiority over angels.

Even Adam's expulsion from Paradise was a forerunner of a sort of self-sufficiency, the blooming of his talents and the beginning of his creative struggle. It was a stage preliminary to his self-making. Though the 'fall' came in the wake of disobedience, it did not culminate in condemnation and permanent contempt. As the result of seeking forgiveness and attaining self-consciousness, it became a matter of blessing. One of the most important sources of knowledge, and the domains of thinking, is Divine revelation. The world is not dark and void. In addition to those inner faculties with which Allah has provided man in order to help him find the truth, He has sent Prophets to guide him on the right way. The guidance does not mean forced imposition of Allah's will, nor does it mean the suppression of the creative will of man. It shows the kindness and graciousness of Allah. This guidance is a light which adds to the insight of man and does not restrict his will. Man should be benefitted by this guidance with his eyes wide open, and for that purpose, he should use his knowledge and insight. He should first think and evaluate, and only then make his choice. If even after identifying the truth he persists in his disbelief, he shall stand condemned.

Man is a part of nature, having material and natural characteristics. But he has reached such a stage of evolution that he has become fit for being gifted with the Divine spirit and supernatural values. Consequently he has acquired the faculties of free will, knowledge, and responsibility. Because of these gifts, he is neither subservient to material phenomena nor bound by genetic relationships. In contrast, he is capable of subduing nature and bringing about changes in material relationships and natural phenomena. It is also believed in Islam that man is an integral part of society and an independent being. He is not so subservient to society that he should have no personal will, freedom, or the right of choice. His conduct is not determined by society and history alone, though he cannot be regarded as being apart from society.

As the entire existence of man is not the direct result of the evolution of matter, his mental and intellectual life cannot be purely inspired by and derived from matter or from material and genetic relationships of society. Nevertheless, as he is embedded in matter and has emerged out of it, the natural, geographical, and physical conditions, and the material relationship of society are bound to affect him. The contradiction which exists within man is the outcome of the conflict between his material yearning and his celestial impulses. As man is endowed with freedom and knowledge, he should make the best use of this contradiction, and should take steps to modify all his impulses and guide them towards his own evolution, the betterment of his surroundings, the making of history, and moving it forward.

Philosophy of Soul

In Islam particular problems arose in the discussions concerning the nature of the soul. According to the version of Aristotle, which was generally used by the Islamic philosophers, the soul is an integral part of the person as its form, and once the individual dies the soul also disappears. This appears to contravene the notion of an afterlife which is so important a part of Islam. Even Platonic views of the soul seem to insist on its spirituality, as compared with the very physical accounts of the Islamic afterlife. Many of the philosophers tried to get around this by arguing that the religious language discussing the soul is only allegorical, and is intended to impress upon the community at large that there is a wider context within which their lives take place, which extends further than those lives themselves. They could argue in this way because of theories which presented a sophisticated view of the different types of meaning that a statement may have in order to appeal to different audiences and carry out a number of different functions. Although the Qur'an encourages its followers to discover facts about the world, it is through the philosophy of science that we can understand the theoretical principles which lie behind that physical reality.

Islamic Epistemology

Islam agrees that knowledge is possible. Knowledge is the intellect's grasp of the immaterial forms, the pure essences or universals that constitute the natures of the things, and human happiness is achieved only through the intellect's grasp of such universals. There are a very large number of references to knowledge in the Qur'an and the Hadith, both the desirability of acquiring knowledge and the limitations of knowledge (Nuseibeh 1996; Mohamed 2006). The Muslim philosophers consider knowledge to be the grasping of the immaterial forms, natures, essences, or realities of things. They are in consensus that the forms of things are either material or immaterial (existing in themselves). While the latter can be known as such, the former cannot be known unless first detached from their materiality. Once in the mind, the pure forms act as the pillars of knowledge. The mind constructs objects from these forms, and with these objects it makes judgment. Thus Muslim Philosophers, like Aristotle before them, divided knowledge in the human mind into conception (*tasawwur*) or apprehension of an object with no judgment, and assent (*tasdiq*) or apprehension of an object with a judgment; according to them the latter being a mental relation of correspondence between the concept and the object for which it stands. Conceptions are the main pillars of assent; without conception, one cannot have judgment. In itself, conception is not subject to truth and falsity, but assent is. However, it should be pointed out that *tasdiq* is a misleading term in Islamic philosophy. It is generally used in the sense of accepting truth or falsity, but also occasionally in the sense of accepting only truth. One must keep in mind, however, that when assent is said to be a form of knowledge, the word then is not

used in the broad sense to mean true or false judgment, but in the narrow sense to mean true judgment.

In the Islamic Philosophy, conceptions are mainly divided into the known and the unknown. The former are actually grasped by the mind and the latter potentially. Known conceptions are either self-evident (i.e., objects known to normal human minds with immediacy such as 'being', 'thing', and 'necessary') or acquired (i.e., objects known through mediation, such as 'triangle'). Conceptions are known or unknown, relative to the individual mind. Similarly, Muslim philosophers divided assent into the known and or unknown, and the known assent into self-evident and the acquired. The self-evident assent is exemplified by 'the whole is greater than the part' and the acquired by 'the world is composite'.

Source of Knowledge

There are two theories about the manner in which the number of unknown objects is reduced. One theory stresses that this reduction is brought about by moving from known objects to unknown ones, the other that it is merely the result of direct illumination given by the divine world. The former is the upward or philosophical way, the second the downward or prophetic one. According to the former theory, movement from the known objects of conceptions to the unknown ones can be effected chiefly through the explanatory phrase (*al-qawl ash-sharih*). The proof (*al-burhan*) is the method for moving from the known objects of assent to the unknown ones. The explanatory phrase and proof can be valid or invalid; the former leads to certitude, the latter to falsehood. The validity and invalidity of the explanatory phrase and proof can be determined by logic, which is a set of rules for such determination. Ibn Sina, the greatest philosopher of Islam, points out that logic is a necessary key to knowledge and cannot be replaced except by God's guidance, as opposed to other types of rules, such as, grammar for discourse (which can be replaced by a good natural mind). By distinguishing the valid from the invalid explanatory phrase and proof, logic serves a higher purpose, namely that of disclosing the natures or essences of things. It does this because conceptions reflect the realities or natures of things and are the cornerstones of the explanatory phrase and proof. Because logic deals only with expressions that correspond to conceptions, when it distinguishes the valid from the invalid it distinguishes at the same time the realities or nature of things from their opposites. Thus logic is described as the key to the knowledge of the natures of things. This knowledge is described as the key to happiness; hence the special status of logic in Islamic Philosophy.

Philosophy of Mind

Islamic Philosophy believes that above the senses there is the rational soul. This has two parts: the practical and theoretical intellects. The theoretical intellect is responsible for knowledge; the practical intellect concerns itself only with the proper management of the body through apprehension of particular things, so that it can do the good and avoid the bad. All the major Muslim philosophers, beginning with al-Kindi, wrote treatises on the nature and function of the theoretical intellect, which may be referred to as the house of knowledge.

In addition to the senses and the theoretical intellect, Muslim philosophers include a third factor in their discussion of the instruments of knowledge. They teach that the divine world contains, among other things, intelligences, the lowest of which is what al-Kindi calls the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*), better known in Arabic philosophy as the 'agent intellect' (*al-aql al-fa'al*),

the name given to it by al-Farabi or 'the giver of forms' (*wahib as-suwar*). They contend that the world around us is necessary for the attainment of philosophical knowledge. Some such as Ibn Rushd and occasionally Ibn Sina, say that the mixed universals in the imagination that have been derived from the outside world through the senses are eventually purified completely by the light of the agent intellect, and are then reflected onto the theoretical intellect. Al-Farabi's and Ibn Sina's general view, however, is that these imagined universals only prepare the theoretical intellect for the reception of the universals from the agent intellect that already contains them.

When expressing this view, Ibn Sina states that it is not the universals in the imagination themselves that are transmitted to the theoretical intellect but their shadow, which is created when the light of the agent intellect is shed on these universals. This is similar, he says to the shadow of an object which is reflected on the eye when sunlight is cast on the object. While the manner in which the universals in the imagination can prepare the theoretical intellect for knowledge is in general unclear, it is vaguely remarked by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina that this preparation is due to the similarity of these universals to the pure universals, and to the familiarity of the theoretical intellect with the imagined universals owing to its proximity to the imagination. In other words, the familiarity of this intellect with what resembles its proper objects prepares it for the reception of these objects from the agent intellect.

Philosophic and Prophetic Knowledge

The prophetic way is a much easier and simpler path. One need not take any action to receive the divinely given universals; the only requirement seems to be the possession of a strong soul capable of receiving them. While the philosophical way moves from the imagination upward to the theoretical intellect, the prophetic way takes the reverse path, from the theoretical intellect to the imagination. For this reason, knowledge of philosophy is knowledge of the natures of things themselves, while knowledge of prophecy is knowledge of the natures of things as wrapped up in symbols and the shadows of the imagination. Philosophical and prophetic truths are the same, but are attained and expressed differently. One of the most important contributions of Islamic philosophy is the attempt to reconcile Greek philosophy and Islam by accepting the philosophical and prophetic paths as leading to the same truth.

Muslim philosophers agree that knowledge is the theoretical intellect that passes through stages. It moves from potentiality to actuality and from actuality to reflection on actuality, thus giving the theoretical intellect the respective names of potential intellect, actual intellect and acquired intellect. Some Muslim philosophers explain that the last is called 'acquired' because its knowledge comes to it from the outside, and so it can be said to acquire it. The acquired intellect is the highest human achievement, a holy state that conjoins the human and the divine realms by conjoining the theoretical and agent intellects.

Following the footsteps of Alexander of Aphrodisias, al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja and Ibn Rushd believe that the theoretical intellect is potential by nature, and therefore disintegrates unless it grasps the eternal object, the essential universals, for the known and the knower are one. Ibn Sina rejects the view that the theoretical intellect is potential by nature. He argues instead that it is eternal by nature because unless it is, it cannot grasp the eternal objects. For him, happiness is achieved by this intellect's grasping of the eternal objects, for such grasping perfects the soul. Muslim philosophers who believe that eternity is attained only through knowledge also agree with Ibn Sina that knowledge is perfection and perfection is happiness.

Muslims argue if there is really only God, and the world is just an aspect of his being, then what we count as knowledge is really only an aspect of what is knowledge for God, the perfect and perspicuous grasp of the nature of reality – namely, himself. The whole project of reconciling Scripture and philosophy or science is based on the notion that there is really just one truth, which may be approached in different ways.

Muslim philosophers agree that knowledge is possible. Knowledge is the intellect's grasp of the immaterial forms, the pure essences or universals that constitute the natures of things and human happiness is achieved only through the intellect's grasp of such universals. They stress that for knowledge of the immaterial forms the human intellect generally relies on the senses. Some philosophers, such as, Ibn Rushd and occasionally Ibn Sina, assert that it is the material forms themselves, which the senses provide, that are grasped by the intellect after being stripped of their materiality with the help of the divine world. However, the general view as expressed by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina seems to be that the material forms only prepare the way for the reception of the immaterial forms, which are then provided by the divine world. They also state that on rare occasions the divine world simply bestows the immaterial forms on the human intellect without any help from the senses. This occurrence is known as prophecy. While all Muslim philosophers agree that grasping eternal entities ensures happiness, they differ as to whether such grasping is also necessary for eternal existence.

Check your progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers

1. What is the philosophical status of the Human Person in the Qur'an?
2. Bring out the epistemological concept of man from the perspective of knowledge and mind.
3. How do you perceive the concept of Prophetic Knowledge in Islam?

2.5 ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY OF THE WORLD

The Qur'an vividly brings out the philosophy of the world in the following words: "Your Lord is God, who created the heavens and earth in six days. He then mounted the Throne, covering day with night, which pursues it urgently – and the sun, moon, and stars subservient, by his

command. Verily, his are the creation and the command. Blessed be God, the Lord of all being. Call on your lord, humbly and secretly. He loves not transgressors. Do not do corruption in the land after it has been set right. Call upon him in awe and eagerly. Surely the grace of God is nigh to the good-doers. It is he who lets loose the winds, bearing good tidings before his grace, till, when they are charged with heavy clouds, we drive it to the dead land and use it to send down water and bring forth all fruits" (7:54-58).

Islamic Philosophy always considered observing and contemplating nature as a very important aspect of their spiritual journey. Islam is the name of the Divine system of the universe. The Book of Islam is "the recorded Qur'an (*al-Qur'an al-tadwini*)" and the entire universe is the "Qur'an of creation (*al-Qur'an al-takwini*)". Humanity is also the Divine Book that corresponds to the Qur'an and the universe. Given this, designating the Qur'anic verse, events taking place within our souls and all phenomena occur within nature. Human life is so interrelated with natural phenomena that those who can discern them can draw absolutely correct conclusions about the world's future. In other words, the laws of history can be deduced from the laws of nature.

In Islam, day and night symbolize happy moments and misfortunes respectively, which alternate in both a person's and a nation's life. Rain, the symbol of Divine Grace, is mentioned as the grace of God, which is close to those who do well. The winds bearing the good tidings of rain correspond to the pioneers or leaders of a religion's revival, and their message is likened to heavy clouds of rain. Hearts without faith and minds without good judgment and sound reasoning resemble dead lands that need rain to be made fruitful. Just as a fertile land's vegetation emerges by its lord's leave, hearts and minds ready for the Divine Message are the courses from which faith, knowledge, and virtues radiate. However, there always will be some desert-like minds and hearts that do not receive ever, there always will be some desert-like minds and hearts that do not receive enough rain to produce any vegetation and so do not benefit from this grace.

For Muslims, revelation is inseparable from the cosmic revelation, which is also a book of God. By refusing to separate humanity from nature, Islam preserves an integral view of the universe and sees the flow of Divine grace in the arteries of the cosmic and natural order. As we seek to transcend nature from its very bosom, nature can be an aid in this process, provided we learn to contemplate it as a mirror reflecting a higher reality. In the creation of the heavens and Earth and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for people with minds, who remember God and mention His name, standing and sitting and on their sides, and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and Earth. "Our Lord, You have not created this for vanity. Glory is to You! Guard us against the chastisement of the Fire" (Quran 3:190-91).

Humankind and the Nature

According to Islamic Philosophy humankind is located at the axis and centre of the cosmic milieu. By being taught the names of all things, we receive the keys to knowledge of all things and so gain domination over them. However, we receive this power only in our capacity as serving as God's vicegerent (*khalifa*) on earth, not as a rebel against heaven. In fact, humanity is the channel of grace for nature, for our active participation in the spiritual world causes light to enter the world of nature. Due to our intimate connection with nature, our inner state is reflected in the external order. Thus, when our inner being turns to darkness and chaos, nature turns from

harmony and beauty to disequilibrium and disorder. We see ourselves reflected in nature, and penetrate into nature's inner meaning by delving into our own inner depths. Those who live on the surface of their being can study nature as something to be manipulated and dominated, while those who turn towards the inner dimension of their existence can recognize nature as a symbol and come to understand it in the real sense. The concept of humanity and nature, as well as the presence of a metaphysical doctrine and a hierarchy of knowledge, enabled Islam to develop many sciences that were influential in the modern development of science in the West and yet did not disturb Islam's intellectual edifice. Ibn Sina was a physician and Peripatetic philosopher and yet expounds his 'Oriental Philosophy' that sought knowledge through illumination. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi was the leading mathematician and astronomer of his day as well as the author of an outstanding treatise on Sufism. Muhy al-Din ibn al-Arabi was a leading personage in the most esoteric dimension of Sufism and yet explained the universe's expansion and the motion of objects. Jabir ibn al-Hayyan's adherence to Sufism did not prevent him from founding algebra and chemistry. Ibrahim Haqqi of Erzurum, a well-known seventeenth-century Sufi master, was a brilliant astronomer and mathematician as well as a specialist in the occult sciences.

Islam is the universal order, the integral religion of harmony, and the unique system that harmonizes the physical with the metaphysical, the rational with the ideal, and the corporeal with the spiritual. Each dimension of our earthly life has its own place within Islam's matrix and thus can perform its own function, enable us to be at peace with ourselves and our community and nature, and gain happiness in both worlds.

The Philosophy of Science

Islamic philosophy has always had a rather difficult relationship with the Islamic sciences, those techniques for answering theoretical questions which are closely linked with the religion of Islam, comprising law, theology, language, and the study of the religious texts themselves.

Some Muslims have argued that Islam is more compatible with science than other religions, pointing out that the Islamic world saw in the past a great flourishing of the natural sciences (Baker 1996; Nasr 1996; Shamsheer Ali 2006). According to Islamic belief, by contrast with the monolithic structure of Western science, Islamic science is pluralistic and inclusive of different approaches to scientific work. Western science is positivistic and insists on complete freedom to do as it wishes. The Western scientist is individualistic and believes that whatever she wishes to study is acceptable as an object of study. The Islamic approach, by contrast, argues that science is really just an alternative form of worship that operates within a social and spiritual context, and anything outside that context has no value. Given the principle of *tawhid*, the unity of God, there is no scope for claiming that a part of our lives (our scientific lives perhaps) is in the position of *khilafa* or trustees of the welfare of the world, as a result of our divinely sanctioned role. The point is that we are not allowed to dominate the world or treat it as an external object. On the contrary, we are obliged to treat both the world and ourselves as parts of the divine creation, so we must treat possible objects of enquiry with the respect that their ultimate nature requires. Knowledge, then, is not a neutral attempt to grasp an external object, as it is for positivistic science, but rather an aspect of worship, and an activity carried out for a purpose, which leads to the conclusion that there are forms of knowledge that are not worth pursuing.

The main point which modern defenders of Islamic science make is that both Islam and natural science rest on a particular attitude towards rationality. The sort of rationality employed by

science involves faith, just as much as does religion. At different times there are different approaches to science, and these have a lot to do with the sort of society in which science is produced. In that sense, then, science rests on nothing more secure than does religion. Both involve faith in a set of principles which in themselves lack justification. The main advantage of the notion of an Islamic science is that it is permissive with respect to methodology, and in that it broadens the concept of knowledge to allow a wide variety of different understandings of what knowledge is, so that at the same time it permits a variety of different ways of knowing. These different ways are all equally valid, even though some of them may be quite personal and apparently subjective.

It is worth being skeptical about the practical implications of the idea of an Islamic science, since the Qur'anic pronouncements on the topic are so general. Natural phenomena are signs (*ayat*) of the existence and nature of God (16:66; 41:53; 51:20-1; 88:17-20) and hence are flawless (67:3). The world is organized and has a direction (3:191; 21:16; 38:27). Human beings are God's *khalifa* (2:30; 6:165) and there are certainly warnings against waste and mismanagement of those things that God has provided. But what these directions actually mean is far from obvious.

Islamic Ethics

Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites were the two schools that shaped the Islamic Ethics. According to the Mu'tazilites, ethical meaning is entirely subjective, in that whatever meaning it has it gets from a subject, in this case, God. The only point is that acting morally lies in obeying God, and any other feature of ethics is purely superficial. That is, it might look as though there are good practical reasons for moral actions, and there could be such factors, but they are not relevant to our rationale for acting morally. These factors are what Kant called 'heteronomous', in that they appeal to a side of us that is certainly worth appealing to, but not in the ethical sense. For Kant, we should do our duty out of a pure desire to do our duty, and if we do our duty out of a desire to please God, then our behavior might be in accordance with morality, but is not done for a moral motive. The Ash'arites make a similar claim. They insist that unless a moral action is performed out of a desire to act in accordance with God's wishes, it is not moral. This is because what morality means is action in accordance with God's wishes and commands, as opposed to immorality, which is action in line with what God forbids. Unless we understand this, we really have no chance of acting from the correct motive, which is of course crucial to the nature of virtue. We would not praise someone for his or her behavior if it stemmed from incorrect motives, and even the wrong action carried out with the right motive is excusable (Frank 1996).

The Mu'tazilites took an entirely different approach. They maintained that while it is true that God commands us to do what is right, what is right is right independently of what God orders. He orders us to do what is right because it is right, and it is right on objective grounds, not because of what God orders. God could not order us to do something that was not right, since the rules of morality are not something that is under his control. He can see much better than we can why certain actions ought to be performed, and we are often obliged to look to him for guidance; but all he knows better than us is the route to virtue. He does not know what virtue is in the sense that he creates it. So the role of religion is to help us work out how we should behave. It does this by indicating forms of conduct and advising us how to think of our duties, but it does not establish the nature of our duty. This is worked out in the nature of morality itself. Suppose the case of a good person who suffers during this life. What will happen to him after his death? According to the Mu'tazilites, God must reward him for his behavior, since if he does not, he

will be acting unfairly. God has no choice but to compensate him in the next life for what he has suffered in this one and the reverse would be true of the evil person. God is thus forced to behave in certain ways, since if he is to be just (and he is by definition just), he must follow the rules of justice (Hourani 1971).

Political Philosophy

Political Philosophy in Islam looked to Greek thinkers for ways of understanding the nature of the state, yet also generally linked Platonic ideas of the state to Qur'anic notions, which is not difficult given the basically hierarchical nature of both types of account. Even thinkers attracted to Illuminationist Philosophy, such as al-Dawani, wrote on political philosophy, arguing that the structure of the state should represent the material and spiritual aspects of the citizens. Through a strict differentiation of role in the state, and through leadership by those skilled in religious and philosophical knowledge, everyone would find an acceptable place in society and scope for spiritual perfection to an appropriate degree.

Mystical Philosophy

Mystical philosophy in Islam represents a persistent tradition of working philosophically within the Islamic world. One of the main topics of concern to those interested in mysticism is the nature of *tawhid*, or unity of God. Ahmad Sirhindi (971/1564-1033/1624) with his doctrine of unity of consciousness (*wahdat ak-shuhud*) developed this philosophy of mysticism in Islam. According to this philosophy God and the world are identical, so that when we differentiate between them, we are just adopting an uncritical way of speaking which does not capture the true state of reality. According to this philosophy by contrast, that God and nature are distinct and that the latter is a reflection of aspects of the former, Shah Waliullah of Delhi (1114/1703-1176/1762), the outstanding Muslim thinker of the Indian subcontinent, argued that this debate was really more about language than about philosophical concepts, and that these two views are easily reconcilable (Kemal and Kemal 1996). However, Al-Ghazali had great influence in making mysticism in its Sufi form respectable, but it is really other thinkers such as al-Suhrawardi and Ibn al-Arabi who produced actual systematic mystical thought. They created, albeit in different ways, accounts of how to do philosophy which accords with mystical approaches to reality. Ibn al-Arabi concentrated on analyzing the different levels of reality and the links which exist between them, while al-Suhrawardi is the main progenitor of illuminations philosophy. This tries to replace Aristotelian logic and metaphysics with an alternative based on the relationship between light as the main principle of creation and knowledge, and that which is lit up, i.e., the rest of reality.

The whole point of mysticism is to provide a taste (*dhawq*) of ultimate reality, and there has been a wide variety of accounts of how to do this. One of the most powerful mystical traditions in Islamic philosophy is found in Ismaili thought, the sort of thought referred to in al-Ghazali's statement above as supporting *talim* (Nasir Khusraw 1998). The imam, the spiritual and intellectual guide of the community, is able to understand the meaning of the message of God, and communicates that meaning to his followers. There is no route to the real meaning of the message except through the imam; only he has access to the appropriate form of interpretation (*ta'wil*) which reveals its inner (*batin*) nature. Persian thinkers were often concerned to differentiate their approach to reality from Sufism; so, instead of calling their approach '*ilm al-tasawwuf*' (which would identify it too closely with Sufism), they sometimes used the expression

‘ilm al-‘irfan, the science of gnosis. The Sufis came in for a great deal of criticism for their antinomian tendencies –that is, for the idea that once one knew how to experience ultimate reality, one did not need to obey the rules and regulations of public religion. It was also brought out that Sufism is supererogatory, it goes beyond what is necessary in religion, and as such may put people off the basic set of practices and beliefs, or even encourage them in alternative beliefs and practices (Leaman 1999).

Check your progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers

1. How man is an integral part of Nature – Discuss.
2. How are science and ethics philosophically correlated in Islam?
3. Bring out the philosophical significance of mysticism in Islam.

2.6 LET US SUM IT UP

Our discussion in this chapter has been concerned primarily with Islamic Philosophy. This discussion also took into consideration what the Greeks had comprehended in terms of philosophy. Philosophy is the knowledge of all existing things *qua* existents (*ashya’al-maujudah bi ma hiya maujudah*). Islamic philosophy, like everything else Islamic, is deeply rooted in the Qur’an and Hadith. Islamic philosophy is Islamic not only by virtue of the fact that it was cultivated in the Islamic world and by Muslims, but because it derives its principles, inspiration, and many of the questions with which it has been concerned, from the sources of Islamic revelation despite the claims of its opponents to the contrary. With this understanding we discussed Islamic philosophy under three aspects: Philosophy of God, Philosophy of the Human Person and the Philosophy of the World.

Speaking on the philosophy of God, Islam pronounced the Oneness of God (*tawhid*). This doctrine of Unity lies at the heart of Islamic philosophy. Despite debates, the Qur’anic doctrine of Unity so central to Islam, has remained dominant and in a sense has determined the agenda of the Islamic philosophy. It is also the Qur’anic doctrine of the creating God and *creation ex nihilo*, with all the different levels of meaning which *nihilo* possesses, “that led Islamic philosophers to distinguish sharply between God as a Pure Being and the existence of the universe is always contingent while God is necessary (*wajih al-wujud*). Under the philosophy of

the Human Person we discussed that the human beings are vicegerents, only next to God. Man is given the gift to live in this world. He has reached such a stage of evolution that he has become fit for being gifted with the Divine spirit and supernatural values. Consequently, he has acquired the faculties of free will, knowledge, and responsibility. Man, as in the Qur'an, despite his being an integral part of society is an independent being. His conduct is not determined by society and history alone, though he cannot be regarded as being apart from the society. While discussing the philosophy of the world, we brought out how God is integrated with human beings and nature. Islam is the name of the Divine system of the universe. The Book of Islam is "the recorded Qur'an (*al-Quran al-tadwini*)" and the entire universe is the "Qur'an of creation (*al-Qur'an al-takwini*)." Humanity is a Divine Book that corresponds to the Qur'an and the universe. Many Qur'anic verses designate how human life is so interrelated with natural phenomena that those who can discern them can draw absolutely correct conclusions about the world's future.

We summed up our discussion by stating that Islam is the universal order, the integral religion of harmony, and the unique system that harmonizes the physical with the metaphysical, the rational with the ideal, and the corporeal with the spiritual. Each dimension of our earthly life has its own place within Islam's matrix and thus can perform its own function, enable the human kind to be at peace with one self and community and nature, and gain happiness in both worlds.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Aql-al-awwal : first intellect, **aql-al-fa'al** : active intellect, **ayat** : signs, verses of the Quran, **dhat** : essence, **dhikr** : remembrance, **falsafa** : philosophers, philosophy, **hadith** : Tradition, report of something said by the Prophet or his companions, **hikma** : wisdom, philosophy, **khalifa** : vicegerent, Sufism : Islamic Mysticism.

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UNIT 3 ZOROASTRIANISM & TAOISM

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- 3.0 Objectives
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- 3.2 Zoroastrianism: Origin and Background
- 3.3 Concept of God
- 3.4 Cosmology and Eschatology
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- 3.10 Alchemy and Longevity
- 3.11 Understanding of God and Human
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- 3.13 Key Words
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

Zoroastrianism is believed to have originated in the proto-Indo-Iranian culture of southern Russia, and was to become the state religion of the Iranian people until the arrival of Islam. The real significance of Zoroastrianism is in the major influence it has had on other religions of the Middle East and Mediterranean area. It is arguably the oldest monotheistic religion in the world. During the Persian era, Judaism adopted many new concepts that had existed in Zoroastrianism for many centuries. The objective of this article is to instill in the students a basic idea of this religion, its origin, growth, and its different aspects. These include God, angels, Satan, and heaven and hell. Their basic teaching, (practice of righteousness and doing good to fellow human beings), is useful for students as well as for all humanity.

Taoism, one of the major religious traditions of China had tremendous influence on the people of China as well as the world. The thought and practise of Taoism is described in this article. Taoists teach that Tao (the Way) is the force that existed before all other things. Taoists teach that a person should leave things alone and let nature take its course through *wu wei* or not doing. In addition, a person should not try and manipulate others' thoughts but instead they should be allowed to find their own way based on their faith in the Tao. Taoists are also encouraged to take care of their physical health and longevity so that they can be in harmony with Tao. Such a teaching should be of great help for anyone even today. Therefore the objective of this paper is clear; that students have an understanding of this religion and it can be of some help to them in their life.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Zoroastrianism is a prophetic religion and philosophy based on the teachings of Prophet Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra). It has a history of some three thousand years. It might be one of the ancient living religions of pre-Islamic Iran. Although this religion is considered to be old, it enters recorded history only in the mid-5th century BCE. Zoroastrians believe that there is one universal and transcendental God, Ahura Mazda. But it is in a way equated with other major religions of the world, such as, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Some concepts, such as, sacrificial rituals, conflict between good and evil, creator God, judgment day, resurrection of the dead, archangels, heaven and hell, five daily prayers, etc., have similarity with those religions. The term Zoroastrianism is, in general usage, essentially synonymous with *Mazdaism* (the worship of Ahura Mazda, exalted by Zoroaster as the supreme divine authority). Zoroastrians most commonly refer to themselves as Zartoshti (Zoroastrians), *Mazdayasni* (Wisdom-Worshippers), and *Behdini* (Followers of the Good Religion). In India, they are known as *Parsis* (People from Pars, which refers to the Persian heritage of the group).

Taoism is one of the great and indigenous religions of China and of the world. It has had a profound influence on Chinese traditional culture for thousands of years. Although what has prevailed in traditional China is Confucianism, Taoism nonetheless has its unique value that cannot be underestimated, and as the whole society is concerned, Taoism and Confucianism complement each other. As China enters the 21st century, it is an era calling to build a harmonious society. It is said that the ethical thought of Taoism may play an important role in the building up of a harmonious society in contemporary China.

3.2 ZOROASTRIANISM: ORIGIN AND BACKGROUND

According to Mircea Eliade (Encyclopaedia of Religion) Zoroastrianism originated in the eastern and south regions of the Iranian world, between the great mountain ranges of the Hindu Kush and Seistan, an area that today is divided between Iran and Afghanistan. According to tradition, Zarathushtra the founder, left home at the age of twenty, and at thirty he was subject to a revelation which was an intense and powerful inspiration and a vision. Later Zoroaster was a prophet who was speaking to God and hearkening to his reply. He is called the friend of truth as he honours God and he becomes an enemy to the followers of the Lie (*Druj*). As a prophet he is chosen by God and he consents to the choice. Zarathushtra chooses for himself the Spirit which is the most holy. Therefore the relationship between God and his Prophet is one of freedom. In this free interchange between God and the Prophet, the general relationship of the deity to the human race is reflected. Zarathushtra's first attempt at reaching the masses was not successful, and his teachings were highly ridiculed. Even his family and servants distanced themselves from him, and it is said that evil powers plotted to silence him. By the order of King Vishtaspa, he was eventually placed in a prison, although through his faith he was able to miraculously escape. Only after ten years did he succeed in converting a cousin of his. He was even persecuted and then he had to take refuge in the court of King Vishtaspa, who was converted to Zoroastrianism along with his wife and caused many in the kingdom to follow suit. The circumstances of Zoroaster's death are unknown, for the original biographical texts have been lost. Due to its great antiquity, Zoroastrianism was tremendously influential on the history, culture, and art of Persia. According to scholars, Zoroastrianism was the first religion to believe in angels, a day of judgment, a Satan figure, and an ongoing battle between forces of light and darkness in the

cosmos. These ideas later influenced the theological development of Judaism and, by extension, Christianity and Islam.

3.3 CONCEPT OF GOD

The Prophet Zarathushtra sets his teachings by advocating strict monotheism, insisting that worship be dedicated solely to Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord), in the *Gathas* (they are 17 hymns believed to have been composed by Zarathushtra himself. They are the most sacred texts of the Zoroastrian faith). *Ahura Mazda* is described as the creator of everything that can and cannot be seen, representing all that is eternal and pure. *Ahura Mazda* serves as the keeper of *asha* (truth, order, righteousness, or holiness). He is the creator of heaven and earth, day and night, and light and darkness (*Yasna*) as well as the ethical context in which Zarathushtra conceived his answer to the problem of evil. Thus we see that the prophet was an original thinker and a powerful religious figure.

According to the Avesta (the sacred text of Zoroastrians), the *Gathas*, and the *Yasna*, there are various characteristics to *Ahura Mazda*. Zarathushtra addresses Ahura Mazda with the following terms: Truth, Good (or Best) Thought, Devotion, and Power. Other qualities associated with God are: Wholeness and Immortality, as well as the Wise Lord, or beneficent spirit. Although the supremacy of *Ahura Mazda* suggests a monotheistic worldview, later Zoroastrianism, seen in the *Yashts* (a collection of twenty-one hymns; each of these hymns invokes a specific divinity or concept) also includes some polytheistic elements. Their cosmology is extended to include several other personalized deities, including two *Mainyus* and demonic creatures called *daevas*, all of which are thought to exist beneath *Ahura Mazda*. *Spenta Mainyu* (Holy Spirit) and *Angra Mainyu* (Evil Spirit) are described as the progeny of the supreme *Ahura Mazda*, which accounts for the existence of good and evil in the physical world. *Spenta Mainyu* is thought to be hypostatically indistinguishable from *Ahura Mazda* and is conceived of as an augmenting force for the latter's power, one which aids in the continual cosmic creative process and leads toward the eventual purification of the world. Conversely, *Angra Mainyu* is the antithesis of *Spenta Mainyu*, and continually attempts to undermine humanity's understanding of truth. The *Mainyus* are engaged in a constant battle, although the power of *Ahura Mazda* will ultimately allow the Holy Spirit to triumph. The *daevas*, meanwhile, are demonic beings whose sole purpose is to corrupt the moral law: as they were created, the Evil Spirit compelled them and they "rushed together to violence, that they might enfeeble the human world."

Later Zoroastrian thought also postulates the existence of angelic beings called *Amesha Spentas*, who are seen as emanations of *Ahura Mazda*. While the Wise Lord is seen to dwell within each of these beings, they all retain their own individual natures and lives. Each of them is believed to be a personified attribute of *Ahura Mazda*, although modern scholars of religion theorize that they may be re-conceptualizations of pre-Zoroastrian deities. These *Amesha Spentas* are known as *Vohu Manah* (Good Mind), *Asha Vahistah* (Truth), *Khshatra Vairya* (Good Dominion), *Spenta Armaiti* (Devotion), *Haurvatat* (Wholeness and Health), and *Ameretat* (Immortality). These beings, through their characterizations, suggest the qualities one must cultivate if they wish to enjoy the fruits of salvation.

3.4 COSMOLOGY AND ESCHATOLOGY

Zoroastrian cosmology is dualistic. Everything has a dual nature, namely, the spiritual aspect called *menog*, and the material aspect called *getig*, where the spiritual state is the

ontological precedent of material existence. As the balance between good and evil evolves on an individual scale within human beings, it also progresses on a cosmic scale. The choice of good urges creation towards its renewal, where humanity and the physical world will be fully perfected by *menog*. The eschaton itself will be marked by fire (*atash*), which is considered to be the offspring of Ahura Mazda and the paramount instrument of *asha* (The energy of the creator is represented in Zoroastrianism by fire and also by the sun, since both are enduring, radiant, pure, and life-sustaining). A river of molten lava will separate good people from the evil. In the *Gathas*, Zarathustra claims that the order of creation will be refurbished at the end of time when the *Saoshyant* (a messianic saviour or bringer of benefit) returns to the physical world. All those who are on the 'good' side of the lava river will benefit from the *Saoshyant*'s return. Zoroastrian cosmology is also highly original in its speculations concerning the afterlife. It is written in the *Avesta* that the soul can ascend to heaven by proceeding through a three-step succession of celestial bodies that are linked to certain actions. Through good thoughts they can attain the stars, through good words they can attain the moon, and through good deed they can attain the sun. In order to undergo this journey, the soul must first cross the *Chinvat* Bridge, or 'the Bridge of Separation.' Souls judged to be just by *Mithra* or *Sraosha* are allowed to cross and meet their *daena*, an image of their own self, who is disguised as a nubile teenage girl. Evil souls, meanwhile, meet with their *daena* in the form of a haggardly old woman and are then plunged into hell. An intermediate, limbo-like area (*Hamistagan*) also exists for those whose benevolent and malevolent acts in life are equally weighted.

Zoroastrian eschatology is the necessary and consistent conclusion to the story of creation. The end of individual life is the reflection and conclusion of the course of human existence; the eschatological period marks the resolution of the cosmic struggle, and brings to fruition the effort of Ahura Mazda, assisted by the other deities and humanities, to bring about the victory of the powers of good. It serves both as a mirror-image of the religious and moral life on earth, and as a court of justice where rewards and punishments are allotted and carried out. The most prominent aspect of the eschatological descriptions is the allotting of reward or punishment in two ways, through a verdict reached by divine judges and through automatic determination of a person's merit by an ordeal type of judgment. In every case, the eschatological situation constitutes a reflection of the person's worth, and is final in the sense that what was entirely the person's responsibility while he was alive is no longer in his hands after death. Beyond the satisfaction of seeing justice done, the righteous rewarded and the wicked punished for their actions, stands the more general view that the end of the world is the stage where the cause of Ahura Mazda is vindicated. The human being thus is but a tool in the hands of the supreme powers.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What is Zoroastrianism?

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2. Who is the founder of Zoroastrianism? Briefly sketch his life.

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3. What is the understanding of God in Zoroastrianism?

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4. Explain briefly the eschatology of Zoroastrianism.

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3.4 FATE AND FREEWILL

Human is Ahura Mazda's own creature and belongs by birthright to the kingdom of good. But God has created him free and endowed with the power to choose between right and wrong. His own salvation and his share in the ultimate victory of good will depend on his choice. Every good deed that human being does increases the power of good; every evil he commits augments the kingdom of evil. Hence human ought to choose the good and support the hosts of heaven in the struggle to conquer the legions of hell, then the Saviour will appear, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment will take place, the good kingdom will be established, and the world will be renovated. Zarathustra was firm in his stand on the absolute freedom of the freewill, but this did not prevent fatalism from creeping into his religion in the Sassanian (The Sasanian period marks the end of the ancient and the beginning of the medieval era in the history of the Middle East, 224-637 AD) and post-Sassanian period. As an example the quotation substantiates, "When fate helps a slothful, wrong-minded, and evil man, his sloth becomes like energy, and his wrong-mindedness like wisdom, and his evil like good: and when fate opposes likewise, a decent and good man, his wisdom is turned to unwisdom and foolishness, his decency to wrong-mindedness; and his knowledge, manliness and decency appear of no account." This is not what was meant by the prophet, but crept in eventually.

3.6 RITUALS AND FESTIVALS

Prayer and Worship

Despite its original antiritualistic character, Zoroastrianism soon became a religion in which ceremony played a leading role. The importance of prayer was always fundamental. The main

prayers are Ahuna Vairya (the most sacred of the Gathic hymns of the Avesta), Airyema Ishyo (It is for the brotherhood of man), Ashem Vohu (during the initiation ceremony), and Yenhe Hatams (repeated several times at the end of many *haitis*). A pious Zoroastrian has five prayer periods a day. Zoroastrians believe in the sacrificial rituals called *Yasnas* as an important part of their life, as this is a means of communicating with God and His entities. The rituals purify the world and the human beings who participate in them. Zoroastrians pray at *Agiary* or fire temples. They respect fire because it is the symbol of Ahura Mazda. But Zoroastrians never worship fire. Fire (*Atash*) is the purest of all elements on earth; indeed, it transcends all other elements. It is the seventh and final creation of Ahura Mazda, after the creation of the human being. Fire dispels darkness, which is the realm of Ahriman, the evil spirit. When the sun has set, and the cold, dark night begins its reign, then the fire/light is lit.

Navjote (Initiation)

Navjote is the initiation ceremony of the Parsi child into the fold of Zoroastrianism. The ceremony of the initiation consists of the investiture of the child with a sacred shirt called *sudre* and a sacred thread called *kusti*. A Zoroastrian may put on any dress he likes, but he must put on the sacred shirt and the thread as the symbol and badge of his religion. Seven is the age at which it is enjoined to initiate a child. The child is made to go through a sacred bath or a kind of purification, known as *Nahan*.

Priesthood and Ritual

In religious matters the priesthood was supreme in authority, and the sacerdotal order was hereditary. The name for priest, *athaurvan*, in the Avesta corresponds to *atharvan* in India; the Magi were a sacerdotal tribe of Median origin. The high priest is called *dastur*. In acts of worship (Avesta, Yasna) animal sacrifices were sometimes offered, especially in ancient times, but these immolations were subordinate and gave place to offerings of praise and thanks-giving accompanied by oblations of consecrated milk, bread, and water. The performance of these rites was attended by the recitation of long litanies, especially in connection with the preparation of the sacred drink, *haoma*, made from a plant resembling the Indian *soma*, from which an exhilarating juice was extracted. The *haoma* twigs can be paired with different *baresman* (sacred bundle of twigs) twigs to produce blends with specific healing and health giving properties.

Funeral ceremony

Zoroastrians strongly connect physical purity with spiritual purity. Therefore washing is such a central part of purification rituals. Conversely, physical corruption invites spiritual corruption. Decomposition is traditionally viewed as the work of a demon known as *Druj-I-Nasush*, and the corrupting influence of this process is viewed as contagious and spiritually dangerous. As such, Zoroastrian funeral customs are primarily focused on keeping contagion away from the community. Because of this reason there is an elaborate process for funeral rites. The body is traditionally moved within one day to the *dakhma* or Tower of Silence. A pair of priests conducts prayers, and then all present bow to the body out of respect. They wash with *gomez* (cow's urine) and water before leaving the site and then take a regular bath when they return home. At the *dakhma*, the shroud and clothes are removed with the help of tools rather than bare hands and are then destroyed. Corpses are left on the platform to be picked clean by vultures, a process which takes only a few hours. This allows a body to be consumed before dangerous corruption sets in. Prayers are regularly said for the dead for the first three days after death, for this is the

time that the soul is understood to remain on earth. On the fourth day, the soul and its guardian (*fravashi*) ascend to *Chinvat*, the bridge of judgment.

Festivals

Zoroastrianism has according to their calendar, numerous festivals and holy days. The seasonal festivals, called *gahambars* (proper season), occur six times a year. They are related to reflect the six primordial creations of Ahura Mazda, otherwise known as the *Amesha Spentas*. The six festivals are: *Maidyozarem Gahambar* (mid-spring feast), *Maidyoshahem Gahambar* (mid-summer feast), *Maitishahem Gahambar* (feast of bringing in the harvest), *Ayathrem Gahambar* (bringing home the herds), *Maidyarem Gahambar* (mid-year/winter feast), *Hamaspathmaidyem Gahambar* (feast of 'all souls', literally 'coming of the whole group'). Each of these festivals is celebrated over five days. Eleven divinities of the Zoroastrian pantheon have both a day-of-the-month and a month-of-the-year dedicated to them. A special *Yasna* or *Jashan* (worship or oblation) service is then held in their honour on those day/month intersections.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1. What is the significance of free-will Zoroastrianism?

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2. Briefly explain some of the rituals and festivals of Zoroastrianism?

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3. Briefly explain *Navjote*.

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4. Explain briefly the funeral ceremony of Zoroastrians.

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3.7 TAOISM: ORIGIN AND BELIEFS OF TAOISM

Taoism (or Daoism) refers to a variety of related philosophical and religious traditions that have influenced Eastern Asia for more than two millennia, and have had a notable influence on the western world, particularly since the 19th century. Tao means 'the Way' or 'Way of Life.' Lao - Tse is the supposed author of the *Tao Te Ching*, a small book containing the main tenets of Taoism. He was a contemporary of Confucius, who visited him several times and who was deeply impressed by the spirituality and humility of Lao - Tse. Taoists believe that 'all things originate from Tao, conform to Tao, and to Tao they at last return.'

Taoists emphasize various themes found in the *Daodejing* (Book of Dao) and *Zhuangzi* (one of the first and foremost texts on philosophical Daoism) such as naturalness, vitality, peace, non-action (*wu wei*, or effortless effort), emptiness (refinement), detachment, flexibility, receptiveness, spontaneity, the relativism of human ways of life, ways of speaking, and guiding behaviour. Tao can be roughly stated to be the *flow of the universe*, or the force behind the natural order, equating it with the influence that keeps the universe balanced and ordered. It is often considered to be the source of both existence and non-existence. Tao is also associated with the complex concept of *De*, 'power; virtue; integrity', that is, the active expression of Tao. *De* is the active living, or cultivation, of that way. The goal of *wu wei* is alignment with Tao, revealing the soft and invisible power within all things. It is believed by Taoists that the masters of *wu wei* can observe and follow this invisible potential, the innate in-action of the Way. It asserts that one must place his will in harmony with the natural universe. Thus we need to see things as they are. *Pu* is about this, that everything is seen as it is, without preconceptions or illusion.

3.8 TAOIST CONCEPTS AND SYMBOLS

Tao is the first-cause of the universe. It is a force that flows through all life. The Tao surrounds everyone and therefore everyone must listen to find enlightenment. A believers' goal is to harmonize themselves with the *Tao*. The priesthood views the many gods as manifestations of the one *Dao*. There is no god (as in other religions) to hear the prayers or to act upon them. They seek answers to life's problems through inner meditation and outer observation. Time is cyclical. Taoists strongly promote health and vitality. Five main organs and orifices of the body correspond to the five parts of the sky: water, fire, wood, metal and earth. Each person must nurture the *Ch'i* (air, breath) that has been given to them. The Three Jewels to be sought are compassion, moderation, and humility. One should plan in advance and carefully consider each action before making it. Taoists believe that people are compassionate by nature and left to their own devices they will show this compassion without expecting a reward.

The main symbol in Taoism is *Yin Yang* representing the balance of opposites in the universe. When they are equally present, all is calm. When one is outweighed by the other, there is confusion and disarray. One source explains that it was derived from astronomical observations which recorded the shadow of the sun throughout a full year. The two swirling shapes inside the symbol give the impression of change, the only constant factor in the universe. One tradition states that *Yin* (the dark side) represents the breath that formed the earth. *Yang* (the light side) symbolizes the breath that formed the heavens. The most traditional view is that 'yin' represents aspects of the feminine: being soft, cool, calm, introspective, and healing, and 'yang' the masculine: being hard, hot, energetic, moving, and sometimes aggressive. Another view has the 'yin' representing night and 'yang' day. Ultimately, the 'yin' and 'yang' can symbolize any two

polarized forces in nature. Taoists believe that humans often intervene in nature and upset the balance of *Yin* and *Yang*.

Check your progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer.

1. What is Taoism?

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2. What do the Taoists believe in?

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3. What are the main concepts and symbols of Taoism?

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3.9 TAO RITUALS AND CEREMONIES

There are Taoist temples, monasteries and priests, rituals and ceremonies, and a host of gods and goddesses for believers to worship. These are as vital to the survival of Taoism as individual understanding and practice. The temple is the centre of worship for Taoism. Another ritual among Taoist devotees, which is done on Wednesdays and Sundays, is the climbing of its 81 steps (representing the 81 chapters of Taoist scriptures) to light joss sticks and have their fortune read by the monks. Taoism's rich palette of liturgy and ritual makes the *Tao* more real to human beings and provides a way in which humanity can align itself more closely to the *Tao* to produce better lives for all. Most Taoist temple practices are designed to regulate the relationship between humanity and the world of gods and spirits, and to organise that relationship and the relationships in the spirit world, in harmony with the *Tao*.

In Taoism rituals are meant to bring harmony to the universe, the world, society, and individuals. They pray to deities and there are ceremonies of purification, meditation on talismans, and making offerings to deities as well. Usually priests and their assistants perform Taoist rituals as they are complicated. They chant, dance, and play percussion and wind instruments. The *chiao (jiao)* is an important Taoist ritual for cosmic revival and consists of various rituals. In this case each family brings offerings to the deities and they are dedicated to them through a ceremony by a Taoist priest. The ceremony also involves rituals asking for order, for the universe and for the village. Through temple rituals, Taoists seek to stabilize the *yin* and *yang* for individuals and the community as a whole. *Feng shui*, which is an ancient Chinese system of aesthetics believed to

use the laws of both Heaven (astronomy) and Earth (geography) to help one improve life, and fortune telling are also part of Taoism.

3.10 ALCHEMY AND LONGEVITY

The practice of alchemy in Taoism has two forms. There is external alchemy, which involves creating and ingesting herbal or mineral elixirs, in support of improved physical health and longevity. The practices of the inner alchemy (such as visualization, breathing control, different types of contemplation, etc.) are much older than the techniques of the laboratory alchemy. This involves the cultivation and circulation of the Three Treasures of *jing* (reproductive energy), *qi* (life-force energy) and *shen* (spiritual energy). In internal alchemy practice, it is the body of the Taoist practitioner that is the laboratory, and the refined energy produced there, the elixir. They compose the very core of the mainstream of the Daoist practical methods and techniques. This inner form (*neidan*) framed its practices in part by drawing from meditation methods and from some techniques for nourishing life (*yangsheng*). The latter term refers to a large variety of methods that share a physiological foundation, including *daoyin* (a form of gymnastics), breathing, and sexual practices. In alchemy and several other traditions, the purpose of the practice is to acquire transcendence or immortality.

3.11 UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AND HUMAN

In Taoism there is no supreme God. *Dao* (the Way) is the core of Taoism (Daoism). It is said that *Dao* is the origin of the universe, the basis of all existing things, the law governing their development and change, and the ultimate force of Daoism. The concept of Virtue (*De*) is closely related to *Dao*. Everyone respects *Dao* yet values Virtue. Virtue has different connotations, meaning that Virtue is the specific manifestation of *Dao* in specific things. Taoists understand that the universe flows with purpose, and human beings should go with the flow of destiny or fate in order to have a fulfilled life. To maintain or recover a natural alignment between humanity and the world, many performed self-cultivation techniques. Such techniques could improve one's health, and potentially even lead to immortality. They also promoted order and harmony within the community. If humans deviate from the natural order, they bring destruction upon themselves and those around them. Concepts of human nature in Taoism are thus intimately connected with the body. Therefore an individual's body is also the body of the world. Thus the purpose of existence, for everyone, is to improve oneself — physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for the benefit of all.

Check your progress IV

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What are the important rituals and ceremonies of Taoism?

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2. Briefly explain the practice of alchemy in Taoism.

3. What are the main ideas about God and the human being?

3.12 LET US SUM UP

Zoroastrianism has to a great extent vanished from the world today. But the teachings of the Prophet live on to some extent. It is said that India has the largest population of Zoroastrians in the world. We see how there is a massive socio-cultural interchange between various religions in India. This interchange has given us our national culture which is a complex pattern into which have gone many diverse elements, foreign as well as indigenous. Zoroastrianism has thus become part of Indian religion. The modern Zoroastrian community is characterized by its lack of a proselytizing impulse. This attitude is probably due to the reason that there might be the fear of an influx of lower caste communities. Historically they have never shown an interest in conversion, except in the earlier times. They show great interest in the study and interpretation of their millenarian religious traditions. What the world today needs is the Message of *Asha* (truth, order, justice) once again; and it is the hope of every follower of Zarathushtra, and of every person of the land of the Prophet, that a revived Zoroastrianism be privileged to give this Message of God's Love, of the brotherhood/sisterhood of humans and of the Path of *Asha* once again to the world. Such is the hope. 'Let the Lord interpret as He will'.

Taoism may be understood as more than just a philosophy or a religion. It should be understood as being: it is a system of belief, attitudes, and practices set towards the service and life of a person's own nature. The aim of Taoism is to build a perfect world of peace and tranquility. It advocates loving others as well as loving oneself, and encourages everyone to accumulate merits and become a virtuous man. The Taoists attach great importance to beneficence, which is regarded as critical to the realization of the perfect world. Taoism was banned by the Communists in 1949. The Communist regime destroyed Taoist temples and viciously ransacked them, and persecuted and killed many believers. Temples were used as government offices, schools, and dormitories. Today it is hard to gauge the number of practising Taoists because Taoism is a personalized religion and philosophy that does not require attendance at formalized meetings or temples.

3.13 KEY WORDS

<i>Agiary</i>	Parsi term for a Zoroastrian place of worship, a fire temple
<i>Ahuna Vairya</i>	The holiest Zoroastrian prayer, equivalent to the Lord's prayer in Christianity

Amesha Spenta	Holy Immortals, a term for one of the divine beings of Zoroastrianism evoked by God
Ashem Vohu	Prayer during the initiation ceremony
Atash Bahram	A sacred fire of the highest grade
Mazdaism	The worship of Ahura Mazda
Urvan	Soul
Chi	Air, breath
De	Power, Virtue
Jing	Reproductive energy
Tao Te Ching	A small book containing the main tenets of Taoism
Tao	Way

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UNIT 4 CONFUCIANISM AND SHINTOISM

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit gives a brief picture about the eastern religions of Confucianism and Shintoism

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Confucianism is a complex religious, ethical, and political system built up on the ancient Chinese traditions, and had tremendous influence on the people of China up to the twentieth century. Confucianism had its glory and fall during the reign of different dynasties of China for almost two millennia until it was subdued by the rise of communism. Shintoism is such a religion of the people of Japan. It is a way of life rather than a set of religious concepts or dogmas.

4.2 CONFUCIANISM: AN INTRODUCTION

Confucianism has come to mean “The School of the Scholars” and is an ethical and philosophical system gradually originated from the teachings of Confucius in the Eastern part of Asia. It is a complex religious, ethical, and political system built up on the ancient Chinese traditions, and had tremendous influence on the people of China up to the twentieth century. Confucianism had its glory and fall during the reign of different dynasties of China for almost two millennia until it was subdued by the rise of communism. But there seems to be a recent revival of Confucianism as primarily derived from the neo-Confucians in the mainland China and the neighboring East Asian countries. To give a more comprehensive metaphysical concept, neo-Confucianism has come to integrate the Taoist and Buddhist ideas into their own like never before, despite the fact that many forms of Confucianism has come to express their reservations

against the Buddhist and Taoist traditions, irrespective of their importance and popularity to the Chinese life.

4.3 THE RELIGIOUS FRAMEWORK

As a religion, it is one without positive revelation, with minimum doctrinal dogmas, in which the worship is centered more on the offerings to the dead. The notion of duty lies much beyond the proper morals to include almost a detailed account of everyday life. The ancient times of China, during the life of Confucius, saw the prevalence of a nature-worship trending towards a monotheistic tradition and it is to this following that Confucius adhered to. While the nature gods were all respected and worshipped, the four quarters of the heavens, the moon, and the stars were all under the direction of the supreme-heaven god *Tien* or the *Shangti* (supreme Lord). The other spirits worked under him in this framework like ministers, in complete obedience.

The supreme lord, exercising a benign providence over men, upheld moral law, being aware of everything done even those in secret. He dictated punishments to the evil doers by natural calamities, or premature death, or by forcing misfortune on the impure and thus asserting moral order. The tradition of a strong patriarchal system was an offspring of the religious belief that the happiness and glory of the patriarchs depended to a great extent on the right conduct of their living offspring. It was considered the duty of the living descendants to contribute to the glory of their dead ancestors by right conduct. Though Confucius himself did not disregard this as a motive for rightful living, he stressed more on love or the doing of virtue for its own sake, in the lines of the Kantian concept of goodness. The principles of morality and their application to concrete human situations in varied relations as envisioned by great sages of the past, though not revealed, have been embodied in the sacred texts. The religion lacks positive divine revelation and thus is more of a wisdom that was providential, as promulgated by the sages who were born with the wisdom of the heavens to instruct men in good will.

Following the path of rightness, as laid down by these sages, is humanly possible considering the basic good nature of man which was not irreversibly corrupted by vicious influences. Confucius considered men to be good in nature and did not heed much even to the natural tendency for evil. Evil was considered to be an influence of the bad environments and an over impressive giving in to the appetites of the nature. But at the same time, these were something that the human will could easily afford to take control off. There are no references in the writings about any externally caused downfall of man and hence humanity standing in need of a redeemer to take him to his days of past glory, thus lacking any history of salvation. Though there is a mention of prayer at a few instances in the scriptures, no obligation is made as to the compliance of having everyday prayers. The Chinese notion of sacrifice is just the offering of food expressing the reverent homage of the worshippers, and the concept of propitiation through blood is not relevant. In honor of the spirit guests who are invited and are thought to enjoy the entertainment, solemn parties are held. This is celebrated with a variety of food and drinks accompanied by vocal and instrumental music and pantomimic dances. The officiating ministers in all these

practices are not priests but the head of families, feudal lords, and atop of it the king, as Confucianism lacks a class of priests.

Confucianism not only heeds to the immediate teachings of Confucius but also the pre-existing writings to which Confucius gave his approval. Thus, the sacred books as considered in Confucianism is a collection of sacred writings, including those venerated even in the days of Confucius, on traditional records, customs, and rites sanctioned under the patronage of Confucius. There are two categories of writings: the 'King' (Classics), and the 'Shuh' (Books).

The Five Classics are:

1. *Shu Ching* (Classic of History) - collection of documents and speeches dating from the Later Han Dynasty (23-220 CE)
2. *Shih Ching* (Classic of Odes) - collection of 300 poems and songs from the early Chou Dynasty (1027-402 BC)
3. *I Ching* (Classic of Changes) - collection of texts on divination based on a set of 64 hexagrams that reflect the relationship between Yin and Yang in nature and society
4. *Ch'un Ching* (Spring and Autumn Annals) - extracts from the history of the state of Lu 722-484, said to be compiled by Confucius
5. *Li Ching* (Classic of Rites) - consists of three books on the *Li* (Rites of Propriety)

The Four Books are:

1. *Lun Yu* (Analects) of Confucius
2. *Chung Yung* (Doctrine of the Mean)
3. *Ta Hsueh* (Great Learning)
4. *Meng Tzu* (Mencius)

4.4 A RELIGION OF VIRTUES (DE)

More than the making of virtuous men, Confucianism looks upon the formation of men of learning and good manners who combine the qualities of a saint, scholar and gentleman. By the religious practices, more of a comprehensive development of the humanness rather than a religious formation was envisioned. Hence, rite or rituals in the Confucian tradition has a different meaning of purpose than found in other religious traditions. It cannot be separated from the everyday life of man and from practices other than in his religious life. Though the books promoted rituals strongly, Confucius was for taking it more in their spirit, often even compromising them when necessary. Rite stands for a complex set of ideas and its Confucian meaning ranges from politeness and propriety to the understanding of everybody's correct place in society. This character of rites could even be traced to the religious meaning of sacrifice. Ritual has a twofold goal: at the external front, it is a way of letting people be aware of their status as to their societal set up and their relationships; from an internal point of view, it is to remind people of their duties amidst others and what is to be expected from them.

Formalized behavior becomes progressively internalized, desires are channeled, and personal cultivation becomes the mark of social correctness. The most powerful way of cultivating oneself in right living is the very sincere and obedient adherence to the rituals. Rituals can be seen as means to find the balance between the opposing qualities that may otherwise lead to conflicts. Rituals, by assigning status to everyone based on the situations and by creating a hierarchy of sort in relationships through protocols and ceremonies, divide people into their rightful groups. Confucianism believes in the basic goodness of man. Developing virtues in one's life is to be of ultimate importance, and there needs to be love for this exercise. Right knowledge and anything conducive to the development of the virtues has to be eagerly sought after. And in the line of Socrates, Confucius also made the same conclusion — that vices sprang from ignorance. The whole of the ethical teachings comprise of the following concepts in Confucianism.

Ren (Benevolence)

Ren is translated broadly into benevolence, goodness, or humanness. From the words of Confucius, it becomes clear that by cultivating goodness or humanness in oneself and assisting others in the same procedure one can be called humane. "As for humaneness—you want to establish yourself; then help others to establish themselves. You want to develop yourself; then help others to develop themselves. Being able to recognize oneself in others, one is on the way to being humane." [*Analects*, 6:28 (SCT, 50)] Benevolence as a fundamental virtue in Confucianism is a kind regard for the welfare of others in need and the willingness to help them out. In the whole frame of an ideal man, this is considered to be a cardinal trait. In 'Analects', XV, 13, there is repeated mention of the golden rule of Confucianism, about the most fundamental source of all virtues. It is read thus — when a disciple asked him for a guiding principle for all conduct, the master answered: "Is not mutual goodwill such a principle? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others". Confucius had a positive approach to dealing with injustice rather than just dealing with it in consideration and kindness. He taught to "Requite injury with justice, and kindness with kindness" (*Analects*, XIV, 36). He seems to have viewed the question from the practical and legal standpoint of social order. "To repay kindness with kindness", he says elsewhere, "acts as an encouragement to the people. To requite injury with injury acts as a warning" (Li-ki, XXIX, 11). Thus, the proactive positiveness of dealing with injury rather than passively letting it happen and not letting the mind to take an offence due to the same, has to be emulated if the society had to be good and striding towards better life.

Li (propriety)

It is translated to be propriety, reverence, courtesy, or ritual and is another virtue of supreme importance in Confucianism. It is associated with the propriety rites or good manners. Confucius says, "Look at nothing contrary to ritual; listen to nothing contrary to ritual; say nothing contrary to ritual; do nothing contrary to ritual." [*Analects*, 12:1 (SCT, 55)]. The concept of rites and ritual takes on a wide array of meanings in Confucianism, unlike the other religions, to include a holistic aspect of human life. Embracing the whole spectrum of human life, it promulgates man to do the right thing always at the right time and place. It is interesting to see how it enlarges its sphere to encompass Chinese etiquette in the vast number of conventional customs and usages, rather than limiting itself to religious rites or the moral conduct. Hundreds of rules of ceremony

were distinguished even in the times of Confucius; all of which one had to be well aware of in order to disperse the duties rightly, and more importance was given to the spirit of these rules than the blind following of the same. The sense of obligation to the conventional usages and the rules of moral conduct rested mainly on the sanction and authority of the saintly kings, and as a final resort like in any other religious set up it looked up to the will of heaven. The different rites in Confucianism like capping, marriage, mourning rites, sacrifices, feasts, and interviews have to be completed with the maximum of sincerity and loyalty as the omission of them itself is considered to be a thing of imprudence and vile.

Zhong (Loyalty)

Zhong or Loyalty is all about the Confucian Moral Hierarchy. In the moral hierarchy established with the purpose of constructing a moral structure for society, everyone is assigned to a particular role depending on how one is related to others. One's moral duties are defined in terms of the roles one plays in the political/social hierarchy. It keeps shifting as the same person comes into various roles of life in relation to others. But what is important is the loyalty with which he delivers what is expected of him. The position on the hierarchy hardly matters, be it the king or the minister or a normal citizen; the underlying principle remains the same, accounting for the realization of one's duties. The virtue of Loyalty is not a devotion directed specifically toward one's superior. Rather, it is directed toward the role one plays—being loyal means doing one's best in whatever one does. Thus, it becomes more of a moral assignment than a social assignment as *zhong* is doing just what one is expected to do in his present situation in life or according to the position that he/she is placed at in the society at that point of time. Loyalty, as applied in a deontological sense in the Confucian moral hierarchy, comprises a moral theory that focuses more on moral duties or obligations, rather than on rights or entitlements. It constitutes a basic tenet of Confucianism, which is an ethics built on demands on oneself rather than on others. Sincerity was much more than a mere social relation and extended up to include one's being truthful and straightforward in speech, faithful to one's promises, conscientious in the discharge of one's duties to others and even more. A loyal man in Confucian vision was a man whose conduct was rooted in the love for virtue without fail. From this innate goodness emulates right conduct towards others thus making him/her a right person, irrespective of the fact whether one is alone or in the company of others.

Shu – (Empathy)

Though Confucianism remains a deontological moral set up, coming to the very practical level of it, there needs to be some motivation as to why one should be good. Here is the importance of empathy popping up and Confucius pictures this beautifully in the promulgation of the virtue of empathy. It is in the lines of the supreme moral principle of Christianity like 'do to others what you wish them do to you'. Confucius, on being asked what was that single word which could propel people to do good for the entire life, replies it was *shu* or empathy and went on to elaborate thus, "Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire". Every person in the Confucian set up is bound in a multi-layered web of mutual relationships and is expected to dispense befitting duties in lieu of the position that he/she is at a particular point and place. It is here that empathy comes into play as the constituting principle of the Confucian moral life. In

the moral hierarchy, one is expected to be loyal to his/her role, and by intermixing this loyalty with the virtue of empathy one comes to know what the other expects of him. Thus with the combined force of loyalty and empathy, *zhongshu*, one comes to the awareness of the desire of the other in the opposing role and discharges now what becomes a duty with utmost sincerity and loyalty. Thus, a perfect picture of a rightful society takes form in the teachings of Confucius, in which the union of *shu* and *zhong* becomes indispensably interconnected.

***Xiao* (Filial Piety)**

Filial piety, as goes its literal meaning, shows how the childlike reverence and respect has to be expressed to the elderly, extending even to the bygone ancestors. This has been considered supreme of all virtues and is analogically extended to the five relationships that a society has to take care of for its further functioning. In the following list of relationships envisioned, except for the relation in a friend to friend, all stand for the emphasis on respect to the elders that basically derived from a son's duties towards his parents. One of the most important virtues of Chinese life, filial piety, is considered to be the source of all other virtues and is given great emphasis in Confucianism. It is this virtue that prompts a man to pour forth love and respect towards his parents, contribute to their comfortable life, and bring honor and glory to their life by being successful in life. Being considered the supreme of all virtues, this had bias as well. At times, the son was to lead a slave-like life until his parents lived, with the supreme goal of pleasing them. The reciprocity could be manipulated by compelling the son to be good and obedient, and at the same time giving almost a free hand to the father. The son was to follow the words of his father in filial obedience and love, no matter how wicked he was.

4.5 RELATIONSHIPS IN CONFUCIANISM

Confucianism has a distinct and unique way of assigning importance to relationships. The hierarchy of status assigned to individuals, and the reciprocal obligations and benefits attached to them, by all means envision a just society and rightful living. The relationships as proposed in Confucianism have far reaching influences on ethical and social living. As the rituals and rites are mostly societal in nature, the hierarchy of relationships comes into focus too. Thus religious practices and the rightful living of the society remain inseparable, the affinity one has to others cannot be assigned to the social life alone. There is the government, when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son. (*Analects* XII, 11)

- Ruler to Subject
- Father to Son
- Husband to Wife
- Elder Brother to Younger Brother
- Friend to Friend

The same individual stands in several of these relationships simultaneously, discharging duties in different aspects of life. As reverence is expected of the juniors in the hierarchy towards the seniors, in its differing meanings the same nature of benevolence and concern was a right of the juniors in all walks of life. This sense of mutuality is well prevalent and works as a binding force

of relationships in many of the societies in the East Asian countries to this day. Specific duties were prescribed to each of the group, befitting their social standing and relation to others. The importance given to the social harmony of the people is what is to be seen in the relationships. The same filial love that binds a father and son duo is expected of the king and the subject. The beauty of life in its most sublimity becomes visible here. Even the law has to take its course depending on the position of the offender to the defendant. It is important here for us to note that this setup did not end with the stories of the living but extended up to the world of the dead, wherein the living were expected to carry out their filial duties toward their ancestors. This led to the veneration of the dead, which forms the most important part of the life of these people and the foundation of their religious practices.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space given for your answers

1. Give a brief account of history of Confucianism.

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2. What are the ethical virtues in Confucianism?

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4.6 SHINTOISM: AN INTRODUCTION

People in every culture have a way of living and a set of concepts about nature and life. The religious practices and beliefs of these people are to a great extent influenced and affected by this view about life. The outlook towards the world and dealings with nature often turn out to be religious principles and rituals attired in the mysterious beauties of religion. When religion is a transformation from or the modification of a particular way of life of the people, it will encompass their entire life. More than the mysterious and transcendental concepts, religious life then becomes grounded in the reality and closer to nature and other beings out there. Shintoism is such a religion of the people of Japan. It is a way of life rather than a set of religious concepts or dogmas.

4.7 ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF SHINTOISM

Shinto or *Kaminomichi*, or the way of the *Kami* or the gods, is the religion of the Japanese people, which they have been practising since time immemorial. Unlike the other major religions of the world, Shintoism did not have a founder; it did not develop any theological text or ethical codes. The systematic formulation of Shintoism as a religion can be traced to the sixth century CE when the local practices and beliefs were threatened by the invading foreign religions like Confucianism and Buddhism. The people led a normal life unconcerned with the speculative and complex ideas of a systematic religious life until then; their life was their religion. Being the original way of life of the people of Japan, Shintoism fused both the material and spiritual aspects of their life.

In no way, did the primitive non-sophistry and minimalism in Shintoism nor the excessiveness of ideological and systematic complexities of the invading religions drain the original nature or the import of this tradition. The internal transformation that Shintoism took upon itself as a task to be fulfilled on the face of danger being imposed by the superiority of the external religions and the systematization of external religious icons, have stood the test of time through the danger of being consumed in the other religions. After the sixth century, though Shintoism got itself attired in the garments of a proper religion in the strictest sense with small and large temples and other prescribed rituals and ceremonies supervised by a designated priestly class, the basic naivety and the primitive uniqueness did not get considerably diluted. The Japanese being a comparatively more conservative society, preserving its music and art forms in the chest of its culture did well assist them in the preserving of the original beauty of their religion and spiritual beliefs and values. We should also take into account that the religion of these people was intermingled with their life and its daily practicability.

4.8 MYTHOLOGY AND BELIEFS

Much of the mythology that had heralded the arrival of a new religion of Shintoism, the stories of the origins of the world and gods, can be traced from two great works from the eighth century: the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*) and the *Nihon shoki* (*Chronicles of Japan*). It describes how *Izanagi* and his mate *Izanami*, the divine couple, created the islands of Japan followed by the creation of the myriad of gods and goddesses. *Amaterasu*, the sun goddess, is the chief among them and it is the descendants of the sun goddess that rule the earth to this day.

The Japanese world view was not particularly anthropocentric as it included the active interaction and sustenance of nature as a whole. It was characterized by the common perception of the spiritual forces animating and pervading the entire universe, both plants and animals. Having been blessed with marvelous landscapes, natural resources, a fertile ocean, and mild weather, the ancient Japanese rarely felt the need to imagine a happier world awaiting them to satiate all that they longed for and was not given in this world, as it happens with the other religions or ideologies. The emphasis on this-worldliness is one of the themes running through these narratives. The other worlds, like the High Plain of Heaven and the Dark Land which is an unclean land of the dead, get mentioned distinctly as a proof of their speculative nature of thinking taking them above the clutches of this world.

Another important theme spanning across the mythology is the close association between the gods, the nature they created, and the human beings. The sense of harmony ruling the cosmos and the intimate relation of the human, divine, and natural elements is very clear. Human nature is considered to be basically good, against which no war was to be fought. The origin of evil is thought to stem from the individual's contact with external forces or agents that pollute our pure nature and cause us to act in ways disruptive of the primordial harmony. Unlike in some of other religions, the clash between the creator and the created does not exist in the Shinto mythologies. It may be due to them not requiring an explanation as to their perilous state of affairs in life, which was the very reason in the other religions, for people to search for an explanation of the suffering and an end to the same, bringing them unending happiness. We should consider that the better living conditions and happy life in a way saved the Japanese from speculating the possible nature of a happier eternal life and how to torment their already terrifying life more, in a visible attempt at attaining the lost paradise or as a way of hiding the pains of this life with a hope of a life eternal wherein the beauties and joys that were missing in this world was aplenty.

4.9 THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP

Shinto theology has its base in the belief in an Absolute Universal Self, corresponding in concept to the *hiranyagarbha* or the *sutratman* of Hinduism. Through the mysterious creating and harmonizing power (*musubi*) of *kami*, the visible world (*ken kai*) and the invisible world (*yu kai*) come into existence: Principle of Creation, Completion and the Controlling Bond between the spiritual and the material, the invisible and the visible, the real and the ideal. These attributes are to be understood only in the functional module, as the supreme self remains untouched by these contradictory attributes, strikingly similar to the attributeless Absolute (the *nirguna* Brahman). As *kami* transcends the cognitive faculty, the believers do experience *kami* through faith.

The celebration and enrichment of life being the ultimate aim of this tradition, Shintoism had an attraction towards the brighter aspects of life, the sun goddess being the main protagonist of divinity. At the same time, it is not that the people were unaware of the dark forces in nature and in man, and did not give due consideration to the other side of life. The Shinto deities are addressed as *kami*. Though it is translated into god or gods, it lacks the prime flavor of a god concept as in the western religions, transcendence and omnipotence not being the quintessential of being considered God. A *kami* could, in the most naturalistic terms, do anything that was superior to human reach and control, inspiring awe and fear; the spirits of the ocean, forest, or the animals were worthy of the name.

The *kami* could be localized as well, in the sense that it could be the guardian *kami* of particular locales and clans. They also considered exceptional human beings as *kami*, including Japan's long line of emperors, the descendants of the sun goddess. At the utmost abstract levels, the *kami* get denoted by the abstract, creative forces of nature. The concept of evil spirits is much milder as none of them were beyond the touch of reform. Though a *kami* may seek attention through cruel and unacceptable behavior, finally they end up being sustainers and protectors. Like in any other naturalistic religion, the worship in Shintoism is carried out as a thanksgiving event for the blessings received in the recent past and petitioning for future favors. These events are usually related to the agrarian setup, the festivities falling in place related to spring planting, or the fall

harvest. The larger communal celebrations occur at fixed times of the year or in remembrance of the particular happenings in the history of a shrine, the festivities continuing for days together. The festivals could also be lighter and celebrated at individual capacities of the people, conducted at their homes as a private affair. Irrespective of the nature of the celebration, three things most importantly mark Shinto festivals: the act of purification, offerings made to the *kami*, and the presentation of petitions. The act of purification is made complete with the use of water and offerings made mainly in terms of money. Future favours are sought for the continued wellbeing of the people and nature. The Shinto shrines where the worship is performed, other than at homes, is noted for the serenity and beauty of the place, the shrines being the abode of the *kami* rather than shelters for the worshippers, justifying the beauty and the glamour of these shrines. The *torii* represent the gateway of a Shinto shrine, which is often used to symbolize a shrine, or Shinto itself.

4.10 RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Shintoism transmits its teachings and practices through festivities and rituals rather than systematic studies or sermons. The physical features of the shrine are used in the continued safeguarding and transmission of the characteristic attitudes and values of these people. Most prominent among these are a sense of gratitude and respect for life, a deep appreciation of the beauty and power of nature, a love of purity and (by extension) cleanliness, and a preference for the simple and unadorned in the area of aesthetics. Also, as this religion lacks the complex nature of other religions like scriptures, dogmas, and creeds, the place worship is given in the religion is very important.

The ceremonies are intended at exploring the *Kami* for the benevolent treatment and continued sustenance and protection. The traditional worship consists of purification, offering, and prayers. A typical Shinto family may have two family altars: one, Shinto, for their tutelary *Kami* and the goddess *Amaterasu Omikami*; the other for the family ancestors, more in the Buddhist tradition. But more emphasis is given for all the practices to be held in the Shintoistic way, to keep up the purity of tradition and culture. The shrines are visited at the convenience of the people, though the concept of a daily visit to the shrine to pay homage is not alien to them. The celebrations are conducted on various occasions of importance.

The entry into the temple is preceded by the symbolic ablution at the entrance of the shrine, by the washing of the hands and the rinsing of the mouth. The visitor then may make an offering at the oratory and pray on his/her own, or ask the priest to make a special prayer for him/her. The initiation (as a new adherent) of a newborn baby to the tutelary *Kami* takes place 30 to 100 days after birth. The children (boys at the age of five and girls at the age of three and seven) come to the shrine to offer their prayers of gratitude for protecting them through their turbulent childhood and to ask for continued protection in the days to come. The Japanese have their wedding style in the traditional Shinto way and pronounce their wedding vows to the *Kami*. Due to Shinto concern for ritual purity, funerals are not so common and are usually conducted in the Buddhist style.

There are other Shinto ceremonies as well, related to the different happenings in the daily lives of its people. They include the ceremony of purification of the building site or new building before moving in, the purifying ceremony for the machinery of new establishments, or a launching ceremony of a new ship. Thus, the Shinto religion covers all aspects of a man's life with all its complex happenings, but at the same time not making it more complex with religious rituals and dogmas. Being a beautiful way of living, with love for nature and its blessings, respect for the basic good nature of man, and respect and reverence for the society, Shintoism remains a religion propagating the goodness of man and nature to be emulated at a time of tyrannizing religious impositions and blinding dogmas, and the corrupt and superfluous religious practices.

4.11 LET US SUM UP

Confucianism sometimes viewed as a philosophy, sometimes as a religion, is perhaps best understood as an all-encompassing humanism that neither denies nor slights Heaven. Confucianism as followed by the people of China deeply influenced the spiritual and political life of the people of this nation. Confucius, though considered the founder of Confucianism, cannot be one in the same sense of what Buddha is to Buddhism. Confucius was someone who tried breathing fresh vitality into a system already existing, by rationalizing the practices and analyzing the meaning, and in the process making it more systematic and rational. He had profound love for the tradition and considered himself a master who was supposed to take the lead in preserving the culture and advancing it. Confucianism is a way of life encompassing all of human life rather than limiting itself to the religious values and practices. The socio-political aspects of one's life was taken into good account along with giving due importance to the rituals and religious traditions. The making of a true human being becomes the ultimate aim of codifying all these traditional values and customs for the people to learn and follow. Confucianism in this sense can be considered a great moral motivator in the formation of rightful living and a just society. The values with their deontological outlook have to offer what humanity is in need of – a true sense of religious life enshrined in the attires of spiritual and moral values.

Shintoism is an indefinable, universal way that is all-pervading. The way of the *kami* or *kaminomichi* or Shinto is the name of the religion formed out of the life of the Japanese people from the great past. This was codified into a religious format at the face of the threats posed by the invading religions, with an intention of organizing their codes and places of worship. Shinto, by implying the spontaneous following of the way of *kami* or god, differs from other religions as it is but a way of living and has still come to this day without much damage to its uniqueness and naivety. Understanding the religion of Shintoism, though it is not an 'ism', will grant one a clearer understanding of the Japanese culture and the nation. Shintoism is devoid of the complex philosophical debates over grand dogmas and the imposing nature of the rituals. Shinto is a natural and real spiritual force which pervades the life of the Japanese; a religion of the heart.

4.12 KEY WORDS

Zhong : Loyalty

Shu : Empathy

musubi : the mysterious creating and harmonizing power of *kami*

ken kai : the visible world

yu kai : the invisible world

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